

## 14. “He was a very dangerous man”

Following the conclusion of the *Bosevakaturaga* at Mualevu in January 1881, chiefs from that district and from Lomaloma assembled for the *Boseniyasana*, held as usual after a meeting of the Great Council. Almost no record has survived of the *Bose*, whose purpose, as always, was to acquaint the *turaga ni koro* and other lesser chiefs with the resolutions of the *Bosevakaturaga* and to consider matters of local concern. When the *Xarifa* reached Lomaloma on 11 January, having sailed up to Mualevu the previous day,<sup>1</sup> it probably returned Ma`afu to his home after some two months of prolonged chiefly deliberations, interspersed by several days of giving evidence at hearings of the Lands Claims Commission.

Almost one month later, SS *Ocean Queen* arrived at Levuka from Lomaloma with the news that Ma`afu was dead. He had become ill soon after the close of the *Bose* and since there was no medical practitioner on Vanuabalavu, urgent notification was sent to Levuka. According to John Thurston it was Siale`ataogo, conveying a load of copra which Thurston suspected was stolen, who brought news to the capital that his father was very ill and suffering from a greatly swollen leg. Since the *Ocean Queen* was about to sail from Levuka, the Governor instructed Thurston to change her course and convey to Lomaloma Dr Carmelo Ghio, a Maltese practitioner who had been in Fiji only two months. When the doctor arrived on 6 February, he found Ma`afu *in extremis*. The Roko Tui Lau died about two hours later.

There were conflicting reports concerning the cause of death. According to Thurston, seemingly on Siale's information, a horse had trodden on Ma`afu's foot “severing one toe, and I believe another nearly”, a report repeated in the press announcement of the death.<sup>2</sup> Another version, apparently unsupported by contemporary evidence, was that Ma`afu was visiting Mago when his boat grounded on a reef. In the act of assisting his men to push her off, Ma`afu cut his foot on some coral.<sup>3</sup> Yet another oral tradition suggests that he cut his foot on a nail while at Mago. Thurston's account is the most credible, written as it was only 12 days after Ma`afu died and apparently based on Siale's account. Thurston also read Dr Ghio's report, which indicated “that for carelessness and want of cleanliness gangrene ... set in”, while Ma`afu seemingly also suffered from erysipelas, an acute streptococcal infectious disease of the skin, characterised by fever, headache and vomiting.<sup>4</sup> Had medical advice been available, there is a good chance Ma`afu would have survived.

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1 William Hennings (?), Diary, 10–11 Jan 1881, HP.

2 John Thurston to Lord Stanmore, 18 Feb 1881, FCSO; FT, 9 Feb 1881.

3 R.A. Derrick, “Ma`afu”, *TPFSSI*, Vol. 2, 107–116.

4 Thurston to Stanmore, 18 Feb 1881.

Immediately following Ma`afu's death, a delegation of local chiefs requested the *Ocean Queen's* captain to return directly to Levuka to inform the Governor. The captain complied, reaching Levuka at 3 p.m. on 8 February and leaving again at 6.30 p.m. to convey the Native Commissioner, David Wilkinson and the Roko Tui Tailevu, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, to Lomaloma, where they represented the Governor in paying respects to Ma`afu's remains.<sup>5</sup> Pending funeral arrangements, Ma`afu's body was encased in sandalwood chips, which act as a preservative as long as the body is kept above ground. There existed an oral tradition, recorded in the early twentieth century, that the question arose of conveying Ma`afu's body to Tonga for burial.<sup>6</sup> Had that occurred, most Tongans resident in Vanuabalavu were supposedly ready to return to Tonga as well. Again, contemporary evidence for this claim is lacking. The Governor, Sir William Des Voeux, wanted the body preserved until a message came from Tupou, although what that message was, if it ever came, is unknown.<sup>7</sup> In any case, according to Buli Mavana from Vanuabalavu, it was the wish of Elenoa and the chiefs of the island that Ma`afu should be buried in Lakeba, the customary seat of power in Lau.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, on 19 February Ma`afu's body was conveyed thence on board the *Thistle*. "All the leading chiefs in the district and many white residents accompanied the remains".<sup>9</sup>

There was another oral tradition to the effect that Ma`afu, during a visit to Tonga, bemoaned the fact that he would likely leave his bones in exile. Tungī Halatuitui`a corrected him: "Not so, if you leave your bones with Tui Nayau, he is one of us".<sup>10</sup> It would be as Tungī suggested. While preparations were made for the requisite Fijian and Tongan ceremonies attending the interment of a great chief, the Europeans too enacted the rituals of bereavement. Queen Victoria, having been informed of the death, sent the Governor a message asking that her appreciation of Ma`afu's loyalty and "the services which he has rendered" be conveyed to his widow and relatives.<sup>11</sup> In Tonga, the Premier, Shirley Baker, formally acknowledged on behalf of the King a message of condolence from the British Vice Consul, Henry Symonds.<sup>12</sup> The funeral took place on 17 May 1881, with Des Voeux sailing down to Lakeba from Rotuma on board HMS *Miranda*. He was unable to attend the ceremony as planned, owing to seasickness and the affects of the heat of Rotuma. Remaining on board ship, Des Voeux sent his ADC, Captain Herbert, to represent him, in company with David Wilkinson and

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5 FT, 19 Feb 1881; *Published Proceedings of the Native Council or the Great Council of Chiefs from September 1875*, Ba 1881, 11 Nov 1881, 15.

6 T.R. St Johnston, *South Seas Reminiscences*, London 1922, 124.

7 Sir William Des Voeux to SSC, 17 Feb 1881, FCSO.

8 Tui Mavana, Lau Report, *Proceedings...*, Ba 1881, 15.

9 FT, 23 Feb 1881.

10 Pers. comm., Hon. Ve`ehala to A.C. Reid, quoted in Reid, *Tovata I and II*, Suva 1990, 66.

11 CO to Des Voeux, 26 May 1881, CO 83/419; *Proceedings...*, Ra 1881, 5 Nov 1881.

12 Shirley Baker to Henry Symonds, 7 Apr 1881, IC 1878-1944, WPHC.

the Commissioner for Lau, Charles Swayne. During the ceremony, the *Miranda* fired a salute of minute guns, after which Wilkinson, a fluent Fijian speaker, addressed the chiefs and people, before the usual exchange of presents.<sup>13</sup> With no press reporter in attendance, it appears that no detailed report of the funeral ceremonies has survived.

Following the funeral, Siale`ataongo proceeded to Tonga with a letter from Tui Nayau for the King, who replied,

I thank you Tuineau, your family and your people for arranging the burial of Ma`afu. Was this not fitting and right, when our people leave here to go to you, or when yours come to us here, that when misfortune occurs you and your people would do the same in similar circumstances? Has this not been the case from time immemorial?<sup>14</sup>

Tupou had also conveyed to the British Vice Consul in Tonga his appreciation of the "respect" accorded Ma`afu's remains and the "prompt medical attention" provided on news of his illness, and for furnishing a copy of the official medical report.<sup>15</sup> In time, Ma`afu would be joined in his final rest by his grandson, Jone Vaubula, son of Siale`ataongo, by his two eventual successors as Tui Lau, Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna and Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, and by holders of the Tui Nayau title. His tombstone, ordered from Auckland, was erected in 1935 in the presence of Queen Sālote of Tonga, whose visit to Lakeba coincided with celebrations to mark the centenary of the arrival of the first European missionaries in Fiji.<sup>16</sup>

Although Tupou had been right to remind Tui Nayau of the long-standing links between Tonga and Lakeba, those links had been under strain long before Ma`afu's death. With their Tongan Roko no more, the Fijians' dislike for the Tongans in Vanuabalavu and elsewhere in Lau soon manifested itself. Dr Reginald St Johnston, writing in the early twentieth century, quoted the draft of "a characteristic petition sent in by Fijian natives to the Government after Ma`afu's death":

We want you to understand the true mind of all the towns. Ma`afu we liked, and he liked us. He was strong. We plotted against him, and failed. And Ma`afu is dead. If another Tongan is now to be made Roko, we will succeed to Bau or Cakaudrove. This is our true mind...<sup>17</sup>

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13 William Des Voeux, *My Colonial Service*, Vol. 2, 33; *FT*, 21 May 1881.

14 George Tupou to Tui Nayau, 13 Jul 1881, contemporary copy of original, used by kind permission of the late Dr Elizabeth Wood Ellem.

15 Shirley Baker to H.F. Symonds, 20 May 1881, IC, WPHC.

16 Fiji Secretariat, Grave of Ma`afu and Tui Nayau Lakeba, FCSO.

17 St Johnston, 123.

Tupou intended writing to Des Voeux to request the return to Tonga of all expatriates in Fiji except those holding Government office “or who are married to Fijian women and settled in the Colony”.<sup>18</sup> In November, the Governor chartered a vessel to convey to Tonga a group of 54 Tongans “living at Lau for some time past without any visible ... means of support”, while any further Tongans found in a similar situation would be liable to be prosecuted for vagrancy.<sup>19</sup> Officials in both Levuka and Lomaloma were adamant that the days of Tongan hegemony in Lau were over, as Swayne recorded almost three years after Ma`afu’s death:

It is perfectly well understood by the chiefs of Lau that the day has gone by when Tongans could be fed by daily magiti and encouraged to remain idle ... The number of Tongans at Lomaloma has very largely decreased. Those who now remain here have with few exceptions been a long time in ... Fiji. A number of them have never seen Tonga. That floating population of idle lazy bullies for which Lau was remarkable some years ago is no longer to be seen nor would they be endured by the people...

Thurston considered these changes “very satisfactory ... the bouncing, lazy, bullying Tongan has disappeared from the province”.<sup>20</sup> In 1885, none other than Semisi Fifita reappeared in Fiji “to make a list of all the Tongans ... who can be got to return to Tonga”. With Fifita intending to meet Tongan taukeis at Lakeba, Swayne, who described Fifita as “an untrustworthy schemer sent to Fiji ... to recruit tax payers for the King of Tonga”, was apprehensive “of the Colony losing many useful and loyal Tongan taukeis”. Fifita however informed Swayne that “he had received very few applications to leave Fiji”.<sup>21</sup> Swayne’s concern that valuable Tongans were leaving Fiji is a measure of the changes to the Tongan community in Lau during the five years following Ma`afu’s death. By 1887, the acting Colonial Secretary was bemoaning “a great tendency to oust settled Tongan occupation and disallowance of [land] claims”, with resultant “wholesale disturbance of present possession”.<sup>22</sup> SM Basil Thomson, at Lomaloma, wrote that the remaining Tongans felt themselves “unfairly treated in respect of lands granted to them by Ma`afu”, which he saw as “an outcome of a general tendency to bully the Tongans, whose prestige has been declining ever since Ma`afu’s death”.<sup>23</sup> The wheel seemed to have turned full circle.

Ma`afu’s widow Elenoa Gataialupe remained at Lomaloma for more than four years after his death, on one occasion visiting Mago and staying with the family

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18 C.R. Swayne, Report for Lau for April 1881, minute by Thurston, 26 May 1881, FCSO.

19 Thurston to Chief Secretary, Tonga, 9 Nov 1881, WPHC.

20 Swayne to Col. Sec., Suva, 28 Nov 1883, minute by Thurston, 20 Dec 1883, FCSO 83/3271.

21 Swayne to acting Col. Sec., 1 Apr 1885, Reports on the Province of Lau 1875–1906, FCSO.

22 Basil Thomson to Acting Col. Sec., 24 Mar 1888, minute by J.B. McGregor, 25 Jun 1887, FCSO.

23 Thomson NSM Lomaloma to Col. Sec., 24 May 1886, IC FCSO.

of James Borron, who had purchased the island from the Ryder brothers in 1881.<sup>24</sup> Elenoa finally sailed to Tonga in June 1885, seeking to visit the grave of her son Siale`ataongo, who had died in Nuku`alofa in May 1883. Although she supposedly intended returning to Fiji, she apparently never did.<sup>25</sup> While the date of her death seems not to have been recorded in Tonga, there is an oral tradition that she was interred at Lo`āmanu burial ground on the island of Falevai, Vava`u.<sup>26</sup> Siale`ataongo's voyage to Tonga with Tui Nayau's letter was unauthorised in that he sailed in the *Uluilakeba*, which he had requisitioned without its owners' approval.<sup>27</sup> After John Thurston observed that "Charley Ma`afu ought to be in gaol",<sup>28</sup> Siale was taken into custody when he returned to Fiji with the stolen cutter. Held for several weeks with his family at Draiba, Siale petitioned the Governor for permission to return to Tonga, claiming that the King had appointed him Governor of Vava`u. While David Wilkinson believed that Siale should be allowed to leave and not permitted to return to Fiji for at least two years, the Governor was less charitable: "Let the first opportunity be found for removing this man and his family to Tonga ... and let them be forbidden to return here". Thurston, having arranged for "the transport of the vagrant Tongan at Lomaloma", agreed with Sir William Des Voeux: "[Siale] is a frightful liar ... He will never leave Fiji as long as he can live in it".<sup>29</sup>

Having apparently remained in custody at Draiba, Siale wrote again to Des Voeux six months later, seeking permission to return to Lomaloma to visit his mother and collect his father's property. Permission was denied, with Thurston commenting that this "sudden burst of filial affection" was prompted by Siale's wish to sell his father's possessions and to turn his mother out on to the *rara*.<sup>30</sup> He was finally deported in July 1882, with a warning not to go ashore en route. He did seek to land at Moala, but was refused. Siale died less than a year later, on 28 May 1883, still aged under 40. Although the cause of death is not stated in the Tongatapu burial register, as was the custom,<sup>31</sup> we are entitled to speculate that his alcoholism, lasting for many years, might have contributed to his demise. He was interred in Mala`e `Aloa in Kolomotu`a, near his grandfather Aleamotu`a. Although Siale had fathered several children with various women, none was eligible to succeed to the Tongan throne by reason of their illegitimacy. The King accordingly issued a proclamation in November 1885 to the effect that, if

24 Adi Elenoa Ma`afu to J.M. Borron, 12 Jun 1884. In 1959 a descendant of Borron presented this letter to the Fiji Museum, where it has since been lost.

25 *FT*, 11 Jul 1885; Swayne, Monthly Report for June, dated 5 Jul 1885, FCSO.

26 Dr Mapa Puloka and Prof. William Dickinson, pers. comm.

27 Thurston to Symonds, 9 Jul 1881 and 12 Aug 1881, IC, WPHC.

28 C.R. Swayne to Col. Sec., 3 May 1881, minute by Thurston, FCSO.

29 Siale`ataongo, petition to HE George William Des Voeux Governor of Fiji, 18 Oct 1881, minute by Wilkinson 14 Nov 1881, minute by Des Voeux, undated, FCSO 82/36.

30 Charles Ma`afu to Governor Des Voeux, 11 May 1882, minute by Thurston, FCSO 2804/82; Swayne to Col. Sec., 28 Jul 1882, minute by Thurston, FCSO 1934/82.

31 Tongatapu Births and Deaths Register 1867–1907, Ministry of Justice, Tonga, PMB 1095.

the line of Tevita `Unga also failed, the throne would pass, on the King's death, to Tungī Halatuitui`a and his lineal descendants born in wedlock.<sup>32</sup> Through an irony of history, the present King, Tāufa`āhau Tupou VI, who succeeded in 2012, is, through his mother Queen Halaevalu Mata`aho, a great-great-grandson of Siale`ataongo.

Ma`afu's death was not unwelcome to Tonga's Premier, Shirley Baker, who wrote that there would be consequences for the kingdom, since outsiders would no longer be able to use Ma`afu "for political purposes and as a source of continual discord and annoyance".<sup>33</sup> Baker had seen Ma`afu and his Tongan supporters as a potential threat to his plans for the throne to pass to descendants of Tevita `Unga. In Fiji, Sir William Des Voeux rather blandly observed that that the way in which Ma`afu had performed his duties "has been warmly appreciated by Sir Arthur Gordon and myself". More importantly, replacing the Roko Tui Lau would be "a matter of extreme difficulty".<sup>34</sup> As so often, the most pertinent comment came from Thurston, for so long an unswerving opponent of Ma`afu. He wrote to Gordon,

As you know I was never particularly fond – politically speaking of Ma`afu. I believe he was a very dangerous man – one who had missed his `coup' and yet had come out better than he had any right to expect.

I believe also ... that he authorised – or shut his eyes to great oppression by Tongans in Lau – in fact the Fijian soul in Lau is now lifted up and asserting itself by talk as to the propriety of driving all the Tongans out of the country – This is of course mere ebullition of temper and will come to nothing.

Still for all this – and for the sake of Tongan affairs I would gladly have seen Ma`afu holding his place for another ten years. I am very sorry also that the poor fellow should have come – after an active and chief-like career to such a melancholy end...<sup>35</sup>

Whether or not "the Fijian soul in Lau" was indeed "lifted up", it was in Lau that Ma`afu's legacy has inevitably been most profound. Two American anthropologists working in Sawana in 1964/5 found that a Sawanan of that time would "usually admit that although his own ancestor came with Ma`afu, the ancestor of other Sawanans came to Fiji under different circumstances". Some other people in the village were suspicious of relatives' claims that their common ancestor came with Ma`afu, believing that the ancestor really came

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32 George Tupou, Royal Proclamation, 20 Nov 1885, *Tonga Government Gazette*, Vol. II, No. 35E, 16 Dec 1885.

33 Shirley Baker to Captain von Zembsch, Imperial German Consul, Apia, Samoa, Tonga Government Letterbook, PMB 1089.

34 Des Voeux to SSC, 17 Feb 1881, FCSO.

35 Thurston to Stanmore, 18 Feb 1881.

from Tonga at a later time.<sup>36</sup> In Moala, a local man named Semiti, of Tongan descent, claimed to the distinguished anthropologist Marshall Sahlins that he was a direct descendant of Ma`afu. Later, the Tui Moala refuted the claim to Sahlins, referring to Semiti as "a great liar and `very ambitious'".<sup>37</sup> Many decades after Ma`afu's death, with Tui Lau no longer within living memory, people still sought to associate themselves with his power and prestige.

The origins of that power and prestige lay in the special status Ma`afu had brought with him from Tonga in 1847. A kinsman of Tui Nayau and cousin of Tupou, Ma`afu was seen as a chief who, in addition to his own rank, shared some of the *mana* of his cousin. We have seen that Ma`afu was neither an agent for Tupou on a mission to conquer Fiji nor an exile excluded from the prospect of power at home. The treaty between Lakeba and Tonga in 1865, followed four years later by Tupou's formal cession of power in Fiji to him, served to enhance his status as an envoy and confidant of the King. Tupou's appointment of Ma`afu as joint governor of the Tongans in Fiji in 1853 revealed a confidence in his younger kinsman which was further articulated in his address to the Tongatapu chiefs at the *fono* of January 1856 and in his statement in 1875 that it had long been his wish to name Ma`afu as his successor. Ma`afu's achievements in Lau rested on the foundation of his cousin's patronage and approval.

Following Ma`afu's death, Sir William Des Voeux observed that that his "loyalty" was all the more creditable in that with the advent of British power in Fiji, "Ma`afu's ambition was thwarted just when it was on the point of gaining its object".<sup>38</sup> The truth was that the loyalty which Des Voeux saw, late in Ma`afu's life, had come about precisely because of the thwarting of his ambition, which was indeed on the point of being realised. Yet his ambition, great as it was, would have counted for little without his talents for intrigue and statecraft. His intervention in defence of persecuted Christians, such as those in Dama and on Vanuabalavu, became a characteristic *modus operandi*, an integral part of his strategy to gain the ascendancy, not only in Lau, but in Cakaudrove, Bua and Macuata as well. He was able to present himself as protector of the weaker side in a conflict, intervening with superior military tactics so as to exploit the weakness to his advantage, with the consequence that both victors and vanquished usually came within his control. Another successful tactic, one which attracted contemporary comment, was his use of Tongan teachers throughout much of Fiji as sources of local intelligence and promoters of his cause. Because of his chiefly rank, and his status as Tupou's envoy, the teachers were bound in custom to perform his bidding. Ma`afu was also adept in

36 Alexander and Phyllis Lessin, *Village of the Conquerors. Sawana: A Tongan Village in Fiji*, Eugene OR 1970, 24–25.

37 Marshall Sahlins, *Moala: Culture and Nature on a Fijian Island*, Ann Arbor 1962, 323–324.

38 Des Voeux, *My Colonial Service*, Vol. 2, 339.

using subordinates to achieve his ends by military means, while often himself remaining absent from the action. The ferocity of the Tongan campaign in Macuata in 1859 was widely condemned, and yet Ma`afu was able to distance himself, literally and metaphorically, far enough to evade undue censure. This policy proved to be an effective insurance in 1862, with the defeat and death of his lieutenant Wainiqolo at the hands of Tui Cakau's forces at Wairiki, a defeat which was a major setback for Ma`afu's long-term plans. When Ma`afu, absent in Tonga, claimed that Wainiqolo had acted without his authority, he could not be contradicted.

Much of Ma`afu's military success arose from the Tongans' practice of using Fijian allies, often from the last village taken, as frontal assault troops to bear the brunt of the fighting. In a wider context, the tightly-knit Tongans overcame Fijians often divided against themselves and with no tradition of unity of command. Ruthlessness and savagery also played their part, evidenced by the detailed if vague oral tradition of Ma`afu suffocating a number of Fijians in a cave near Lomaloma, an echo of the murders committed in a New Hebrides cave during Ma`afu's youth.<sup>39</sup> Although there is no contemporary reference to Ma`afu's participation in the battle of Kaba, Berthold Seemann was informed in 1860 that Ma`afu and his countrymen "had prominently distinguished themselves" at Kaba five years earlier.<sup>40</sup> While we lack a portrait of Ma`afu as a warrior in the thick of battle, his innovative military strategy, allied with the ferocity, when required, of his warriors, helped to promote his influence throughout eastern and northern Fiji.

When in 1870 Ma`afu reminded an audience of Europeans that "The sea is white with the sails of white men's vessels", he was speaking after more than four decades of exposure to European ways. Among all the chiefs of Fiji, Ma`afu best understood European culture and, more significantly, European thought processes. There was no better illustration of this understanding than the social ease apparent when he dined at the Governor's table in Levuka, where his grace, intelligence, charisma and ease in conversation were often mentioned in the journals of his fellow guests. Although this acculturation process, begun so long before in the missionary school in Nuku`alofa, might have alienated him from Tongan ways, Ma`afu remained all his life a Tongan chief. While he valued his friendship with Europeans such as Robert Swanston and William Beddoes, he was never loath to berate the white community for "their everlasting talk and bluster" or, a theme he often adopted, their discrimination towards Tongans

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39 "Sundowner", *Rambles in Polynesia*, London 1897, 45–46.

40 Berthold Seemann, *Viti; An Account of a Government Mission to the Vitian or Fijian Islands*, London 1862, 244–245.

and Fijians because of the colour of their skins. When he raised the spectre of racism, he stood defiantly with his Fijian hosts, with whom he was often otherwise at odds, against the Europeans.

Ma`afu's life on the fringes, and later within, a European *milieu* had predisposed him towards familiarity with the money economy. As John Young has observed, Ma`afu's fondness for yachts and cutters hastened the end of the *drua* as a vessel for voyaging within Fiji and between those islands and Tonga.<sup>41</sup> Yet for all his economic savvy, Ma`afu would remain a fellow traveller with the money economy, rather than a full participant. His perennial debts arose partly because of his fondness for European chattels and partly through his need to maintain the style and substance of a chief in an environment very different from those his chiefly forbears had known. For Ma`afu, as a great chief, matters of personal debt and monetary obligations to people outside the Tongan and Fijian hierarchy were beneath his notice. He entered into his various contracts, such as that with Frederick Hedemann for the rifles and ammunition, with no intention of honouring them. During his final years as Roko Tui Lau, many bulis deposited money with the Commissioner for Lau, Charles Swayne, for safekeeping, rather than entrusting it to the Roko.<sup>42</sup> Ma`afu's attitude to money was nicely stated, only three days after his death, by trader Christian Hennings in a letter to his brother William: "Ma`afu. I'm afraid there will be some difficulty about collecting his account".<sup>43</sup> Things had ever been thus.

Much of Ma`afu's familiarity with European ways arose from his lifelong contact with missionaries. After his death, the Wesleyan missionaries in Lau praised their former chief: "He was always the friend of the missionary, and a liberal supporter of our church. We never asked him a favour which he did not cheerfully grant".<sup>44</sup> As we have seen, there is ample evidence from Lakeba and Vanuabalavu, during the second half of Ma`afu's adult life, to show that this was indeed the case. Yet Ma`afu's support for the mission and its cause poses a dilemma: did he, a baptised but apathetic Christian, possess a genuine wish to see the Christian ethic prevail among his people, or was he seeking to exploit the mission's great influence over both the Fijians and Tongans in Lau as a means to sustain his own power? By the 1860s, missionary teachings had come to permeate all aspects of Lauan life and were to be enshrined in the law of the land under British rule. With missionary support, Ma`afu was able to use the Wesleyan church to effect a greater measure of social control over his people.

41 John Young, "Lau: A Windward Perspective", *JPH*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 1993, 168.

42 C.R. Swayne, Report for Sep 1881, 6 Oct 1881, FCSO 81/1911.

43 Christian Hennings to William Hennings, 9 Feb 1881, HP.

44 William Bromilow and William Rosewarne, Lakeba and Lomaloma Circuit Report 1881, MOM 20.

When he set a chiefly example through the generosity of his donations to the mission, he was helping to ensure that the Lauan people continued to render allegiance unto Caesar as well as unto God.

Ma`afu's chief legacy to Lau was his land reforms, which bore fruit in the division of lands. They were never without controversy: as Roko Malani on Lakeba, speaking in the early twentieth century of the "notorious" disputes involving land on that island, recalled:

in the time of Ma`afu, before the days of the matanitu, it was not always so. When Ma`afu first ruled here there arose the origin of much land-quarrelling, and the Tongans always secured the best pieces ... before that, in the times of Tui Nayau there were no incessant squabbles as to land.<sup>45</sup>

Ma`afu's division of lands into *magimagi* and their careful allocation to men who could work them productively was done to ensure a regular income, in produce and cash, for himself and his administration, in place of traditional forms of tribute owing to a chief. In this way, the usages and benefits of a European money economy were grafted on to custom. The tenant, whether Tongan or Fijian, enjoyed greater security than under the customary system, so long as he continued to pay his taxes. Yet disputes arose, both during his rule and after his death, precisely because his division of lands involved the cessation of *taukei* rights. The lands involved, whether held as *magimagi* by Tongans or Fijians, or as leasehold by Europeans, denied customary rights to the *mataqali*. The European concept that land was vested in the Crown, which in the Lauan context effectively meant Ma`afu himself, was one which he was astute enough to realise would suit his purposes very well. Even though Ma`afu's right to dispose of Lauan lands was always acknowledged, his innovations inevitably resulted in *mataqali* disaffection. Yet his wishes remained the final arbiter for disputes after his death: when, for example, the Lands Claims Commission disallowed a settler's claim for the island of Munia in the Vanuabalavu lagoon, they did so on three grounds: the *taukeis* had not been consulted and were removed by force, the title of the first European "owner", George Matthew Henry, was found to be "fraudulent and fictitious" and above all, "the acquiescence of Ma`afu in the claim was obtained by gross intimidation".<sup>46</sup> Residual Tongan claims survived, despite the departure of so many Tongans from Lau during the 1880s, until their formal recognition in 1939 by Ma`afu's successor as Tui Lau, Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna, who was then also Commissioner for Lau. As an earlier Lau Provincial

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45 St Johnston, 134.

46 LCC R960 Munia; Minutes, Executive Council Meeting, 27 April 1881 Nasova, CO 85/4.

Council had resolved, at a meeting on Matuku in 1902, "It will be remembered that Ma`afu made a distribution of the land in Lau and it is a tribute to his ability how his work has stood the test of time among a conquered people".<sup>47</sup>

Ma`afu, of course, moved on a bigger stage than Lau, a stage where his talent for statecraft would enjoy a freer rein. His creation of the *Tovata ko Lau*, a step along the road to Bau, was an attempt to create a second locus of power in Fiji, one which rested on a firmer foundation than did Cakobau's precarious ascendancy. The *Tovata's* intended metamorphosis into a *matanitu* encompassing all of Fiji was thwarted by the European settlers and their creation of the Kingdom of Fiji. As Viceroy of that dubious realm, Ma`afu claimed, often through his superb oratory, to be a loyal supporter of his nominal master, King Cakobau. Yet he was, in the words of John Thurston, "playing a double game all round". When, in the face of an overweening ambition recognised by most of his contemporaries, he eventually agreed to Cession, he was making a virtue of necessity. Accused, with reason, of being "a renegade to his sworn fealty" and of displaying moral perfidy, Ma`afu had sought to use his vice-regal position as yet another buttress for his ambition to become "chief at Bau". In a career marked by much disappointment and frustration, Ma`afu, in his angst-ridden submission to the inevitability of Cession, underwent the most severe humiliation of his life. As he observed to Commodore Goodenough, with uncharacteristic frankness, he could overcome Cakobau with ease, if the British did not interfere. When that interference came, Ma`afu's chance to attain the mastery of Fiji was gone forever. He had to be content with the mastery of Lau, where the modern Lauan state, indisputably his creation, and despite the survival of some traditional links between Vanuabalavu and Cakaudrove, has lasted into the twenty-first century.<sup>48</sup>

The final stage of Ma`afu's career, the bitter fruit of his humiliation at Bau, came with his appointment as Roko Tui Lau. Compensations for that humiliation included his inflated salary and his apparently free hand to manage the internal affairs of his *matanitu*. His administration effectively proscribed the place of lesser chiefs in the new province of Lau, in a sense reinventing chieftaincy by setting limits to its authority and curtailing the chiefs' use of force. Ma`afu also used his authority to ensure the succession of his own men as bulis and *turaga ni koro*. His successful introduction of European methods of land management and tax collection resulted in better protection for his people, Tongan and Fijian, from settler exploitation, a protection that enabled him to exploit them in his own way. His practice of resuming land titles in default of rent or tribute, as well as his system of leasehold, caused much hardship for the taukeis. That

47 Lau Provincial Council Meetings and Resolutions, 1893–1908, 109.

48 According to the TR, Lakeba *yavusa*, all of Lau became subservient to Tui Nayau after Ma`afu's death, except for Vanuabalavu and Moala, although both those islands remained part of Lau.

hardship, the darker side of Ma`afu's rule as Roko Tui Lau, was not reflected in his participation in the annual *Bosevakaturaga*. There, despite the power of his oratory, Ma`afu's reticence and lack of frankness amounted at times to dissimulation and outright deception.

As he so often did in his public life, Ma`afu played to his audience at the *Bosevakaturaga*. To read the published accounts of his speeches, to observe, often between the lines, his manoeuvrings, his silences and his absences is to see nothing, but to suspect much, of the rotten state of Lau, where the double burden of onerous taxation and grasping Tongans ground down the taukeis. As he had always been in dealing with his European contemporaries, so he proved himself to be in his relations with his fellow chiefs: untrustworthy. Ma`afu's charisma, his mien as "every inch a chief", characteristics noticed by many almost to the end of his life, could not prevent his downward slide into alcoholism. Just as he circumscribed the powers of the lesser chiefs of Lau, so was the Roko Tui Lau restricted by the tightening rein of colonial bureaucracy. His unilateral action in freeing the prisoner at Lomaloma was a doomed attempt to break free, to reassert the chiefly privileges in which he had been nurtured. The inevitable ignominy of a fine in the Levuka magistrate's court was but another humiliation.

Ma`afu's life was, in many respects, the story of what might have been. Following the death of Tupou's son Vuna in January 1862, Ma`afu appeared as the most likely successor to Tupou. The King had publicly expressed his confidence in his kinsman six years earlier at the *fono* of Tongatapu chiefs held following his long visit to Fiji. By 1862 Ma`afu, through his achievement of power in Fiji, had evinced sufficient statecraft and chiefly wisdom to be considered worthy to become Tu`i Kānokupolu in the fullness of time. His position as second in order of preference at the Tongan Parliament held a few months after Vuna's death, second only to the august Tungī Halatuitui`a and two places in front of Tevita `Unga, reinforces the impression that if Tupou had then chosen a successor, it was likely to have been Ma`afu. The King said, in 1875, that had established Tongan custom not been supplanted by the European notion of primogeniture, Ma`afu would have been his choice to succeed him as King. Yet Ma`afu claimed not to want the throne, even stating to missionary James Calvert that he would much rather live in Fiji than in Tonga. For lack of evidence, his attitude to the apparent plot by the chiefs of Vava`u in 1877 remains unknown. The opportunity never arose, of course, because of Ma`afu's early death and Tupou's extraordinary longevity. There seems little doubt though, that had Tupou died in the early 1860s, following Vuna's passing and before Shirley Baker could establish his dubious ascendancy, Ma`afu would have been chosen as Tu`i Kānokupolu and King of Tonga.

One key to Ma`afu's career in Fiji lies in the fact that he was "a chief by ascription [and] also ... a big man by achievement".<sup>49</sup> While the first of these characteristics ensured his welcome at Lakeba in 1847 and indeed his future status as Viceroy and Roko Tui Lau, it was his achievements, above all else, which ensured for him a basis of power which could not be gainsaid. He was an opportunist, ever alert to the main chance, always willing, however reluctantly, to concede power when there was no alternative and nothing loath to demand concessions when they lay within his grasp. Ma`afu's genius lay not in making war, but in statecraft. He successfully exploited his chiefly status and his profession of Christianity to attain a position which would have indeed seen him become "chief at Bau", had not his rise to power in Fiji confronted the insurmountable barrier of European expansion. Yet for all his charisma, his chiefly presence, his undoubted intelligence, his skilful administrative abilities and, when he chose to exercise it, his immense personal charm, Ma`afu was a man essentially devoid of moral probity. He remained a great chief intent on playing those most fundamental of political games, such as he had known from his childhood: the acquisition and consolidation of power. To visit his grave on Lakeba, as I did in the company of his great-great-great-grandson, is to risk being lulled into a belief that all was well with this great chief, and his people. The peace of the remote Lauan island, and of the graveyard, *tabu* to all except chiefs and those who have gained their leave to visit, belies the turbulence, the anguish and indeed the triumphs of the extraordinary life of the first Tui Lau. Ma`afu achieved much, and might have achieved more, had he not faced the twin obstacles of an unfavourable moment in history and his own moral shortcomings. Because of the *milieu* in which he lived, and his own calculated reticence and reserve, we can only rarely see inside his mind. Yet he lives on, often in myth, in the minds of the Tongan and Fijian people, a chief unique in the history of the Pacific, a man who, for all that he was "a big man by achievement", was never able to drape across his powerful shoulders that most desirable, and most elusive, of all garments that chiefs aspire to wear: the cloak of greatness.

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49 Colin Newbury, *Patrons, Clients and Empire: Chieftaincy and Over-rule in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific*, Oxford 2003, 222.

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