

Doomsday postponed?

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The question of the validity of the doomsday scenario for 2010 has been an intriguing and problematical issue since it was first summarised by Callick (1993). The forecast has been elaborated by subsequent predictions into a much larger 'globalisation and doomsday' scenario (van Fossen 2005), which extends far beyond 2010. This scenario is a major contribution to thinking systematically about the Pacific—as indicated by the intense debate among scholars about its significance and plausibility. Since Callick reports regularly (currently in the Murdoch press) on his experiences in the Pacific, the scenario has a running autobiographical or personal element that the other four major scenarios lack.¹ Callick's journalism provides opportunities (as regional traveller and insider on the spot) to show how he views the scenario as being confirmed, while generating new publicity for it.

Yet popularity, liveliness and repetition are not the same as validity. The scenario makes a good story (Callick pictures it with unusual vividness), but is it true?

One problem is that Callick is attempting to back away from at least some of his significant 1993 forecasts for 2010. He claims

that the 1993 forecasts were 'deliberately exaggerated', but he still asserts that: 'Dire forecasts made in 1993 are coming true; sometimes it's not nice to be proven right... Many of those... "doomsday" projections have become reality in 2010' (Callick 2010d). In one place, Callick states that in Papua New Guinea (the principal focus of his regional scenario), '[t]he perception is growing, not fading, that the country... is sliding deeper into ungovernability' (Callick 2010c). Yet elsewhere, Callick (2010a) concedes that Papua New Guinea has 'muddled through'. Which is it?

Callick (2009, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d) continually uses the United Nation's Human Development Index (HDI) to bolster his case that the 1993 forecast has been confirmed in 2010. The 1993 forecast was based on processes that had been observed over some time. Callick (2010b) states: 'Since Papua New Guinea became independent in 1975... PNG has slid in that time from 77th in the UN's Human Development Index, which rates living standards, to 148th.' It would not make such a good story if Callick had added that the United Nation's HDI was available for only 88 countries in 1975, when Papua New Guinea ranked seventy-

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seventh, while it included 182 countries in 2007—the year in which Papua New Guinea ranked 148 (UNDP 2009).

Papua New Guinea and Samoa are the only two Pacific island countries for which HDI data are available since 1990, although data for both go back to before that year (Tables 1 and 2).

Papua New Guinea was tied with India for the fourteenth-highest growth rate in the HDI between 1990 and 2007; its 1.32 per cent annual HDI growth was only somewhat below eleventh-ranked China's 1.40 per cent, and tied with Guatemala. At the other extreme were the worst performers, where HDI declined: countries of the former Soviet Union (the Russian Federation, -0.03 per cent; Moldova, -0.12 per cent; and Tajikistan, -0.16

per cent) and southern Africa (South Africa, -0.13 per cent; Zambia, -0.17 per cent; and Swaziland, -0.47 per cent) (UNDP 2009).

The results of the United Nation's HDI are certainly far more favourable for Papua New Guinea (and perhaps less favourable for Samoa, which is often seen as having gone further in free-market reforms) than Callick's 1993 scenario for 2010 would lead us to expect.

Judging the 1993 forecast in the cold light of HDI evidence, 2010 has been an anticlimax. The 1993 forecast for 2010 was designed to influence policymakers, yet the future of the Pacific is expressed in more varied ways than ever before. The globalisation and doomsday scenario has more competition now and its advocates

Table 1 Human Development Index for Papua New Guinea and Samoa, 1980–2007

	Papua New Guinea	Samoa
1980	0.418	..
1985	0.427	0.686
1990	0.432	0.697
1995	0.461	0.716
2000	..	0.742
2005	0.532	0.764
2007	0.541	0.771

.. not available

Source: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2009. *Human Development Report*, United Nations Development Programme, New York. Available from <http://hdrstats.undp.org> (accessed 15 November 2010).

Table 2 Average annual growth rate in the Human Development Index for Papua New Guinea and Samoa, selected years (per cent)

	Long term 1980–2007	Medium term 1990–2007	Short term 2000–07
Papua New Guinea	0.95	1.32	..
Samoa	0.53	0.59	0.55

.. not available

Source: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2009. *Human Development Report*, United Nations Development Programme, New York. Available from <http://hdrstats.undp.org> (accessed 15 November 2010).

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have a struggle ahead of them to try to maintain its dominance where that exists (specifically, in Canberra).

The 'migrant remittances, aid and bureaucracy' (MIRAB) scenario holds greater sway over the Pacific islands policies of Wellington, Washington and Paris, and increasingly over Beijing, Taipei and Tokyo. The MIRAB scenario is less dramatic than the globalisation and doomsday scenario (or, for that matter, the other three major scenarios), since it predicts that MIRAB is likely to continue to unfold slowly, recurrently and tediously. This rather boring progression is perhaps best captured by Bertram and Watters when they compare a growing number of MIRAB countries with suburbs of their metropolitan patrons such as New Zealand (Bertram 1999; Bertram and Watters 1984), but its influence over policy is, if anything, increasing. Clearly, the globalisation and doomsday scenario is more dramatic, but will that be enough to maintain or extend its influence?

The possibility remains that the time frame set in 1993 might have been wrong; the year 2010 was not sufficiently far away. Forecasts for 2010 already seem obsolete. Yet it is clear that the globalisation and doomsday scenario will have an ongoing presence, even as it will have to contend with competing visions of the future of the region.

Note

¹ Callick, Helen Hughes, Ron Duncan and Rodney Cole have been most associated with the globalisation and doomsday scenario (predicting disaster for countries not fitting into inevitable free-market globalisation). There are four alternative scenarios for the region. 'MIRAB'—developed most prominently by Geoffrey Bertram and Ray Watters—predicts that increasing numbers of South Pacific countries will have economies based on 'migrant remittances, aid and

bureaucracy'. 'Dependency and world-systems'—expressed most powerfully by Michael Howard—foresees greater integration of the region into global capitalism on inferior, exploitative terms. 'Oceania and empowerment'—inspired by Epeli Hau'ofa—forecasts deepening and benign regional integration and self-realisation. 'Asianisation and ethical decision'—elaborated by Ron Crocombe—predicts that the South Pacific's future will be shaped primarily by the intelligence, energy and (most of all) the moral character of the region's leaders in the face of continuing Asianisation. For extensive comparisons of these scenarios, see van Fossen (2005).

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