This volume is the first generated from a series of research projects focused on the development prospects for the Pacific Islands up to the year 2010 done by the National Centre for Development Studies, Research School of Pacific Studies, at Australian National University.

The tone is gloomy. The back cover flags "a Doomsday Scenario"; the front merely challenges the future. Once inside, doomsaying really takes over with a fanciful chapter by Rowan Callick, in which his worst nightmares for the region are spelled out. Serious readers may prefer to begin at the sections beginning on page 43, where qualified demographers and statisticians, several of them Pacific Islanders, discuss population projections for seven of the independent countries in the island Pacific.

Some depressing views of the population and development situation in the region have originated from Australia and New Zealand in recent years. *Pacific 2010* adds to the list. Previous visions would include that of John Connell who, in a prolific series focused mainly on employment, development, and migration, concluded that the future of peoples in the Pacific must lie in greater self-sufficiency and a move away from aid and trade (not to mention migration and remittances) (Connell 1987). To be inferred is that the future for Pacific Islanders is limited and that a reliance on rural village dwelling and continued dependence on low-productivity agriculture are all that they should expect.

Very different are the views of Bertram and Watters, who coined the term MIRAB to describe the way economies of some Pacific island countries have developed (1984; 1985). In their view migration, remittances, aid, and bureaucracy (inflated administrations) have recently dominated the development process of many countries in the Pacific. This situation is likely to continue as long as the donor countries, notably New Zealand and Australia, stay with their current policies toward the region, which they should be encouraged, pressured, or embarrassed into doing because the prospects for socioeconomic development using only local resources are miserable. The implication here is that the island countries are so peripheral and resource poor, but also so minuscule, that it is not worth trying to further their development in the conventional way. Nevertheless, the problems are sufficiently minor that metropolitan sponsors can solve them by throwing money at them or, in the instance of surplus populations, by physically removing them. This casting of the island countries as international welfare cases does not sit well with most of the island leaders.

*Pacific 2010* presents a third contrasting view, in which the region’s population is described as now "careering . . . beyond control" (8). Before contact, the region was “eco-
logically self-balancing” (it would be interesting to test this notion on a moa if one could be found), but the situation has deteriorated. The outlook is for almost vertical slopes to come under cultivation in Papua New Guinea (6) and for Micronesian lagoons to become so polluted that people are prohibited from using them (9). We wait until page 14 to discover, in the chapter by Ken Gannicott, that the rate of population growth now is 2.2 percent annually, a rate described as “relatively high,” on a base of “fewer than 4.5 million” in the seven selected countries. Given that it has been possible to find island populations increasing at rates between 3 and 4 percent since the 1920s, this disclosure is something of a letdown.

Professor Gannicott’s opening sentence, “It is hardly surprising that population growth has received relatively little attention in the South Pacific” (12), is enough to raise doubts about the institutional memory informing this volume. Has the work of Australian National University demographer Norma McArthur in the 1950s, which first showed Polynesian populations, not to mention Fiji and Kiribati, to be growing at rates that make 2.2 percent look like an unattainable dream, been forgotten so soon? Have the editors never heard of Gerry Ward? Or Oskar Spate? Or Mick Borrie? Or Harold Brookfield? All these distinguished members of the Institute of Advanced Studies were writing on Polynesian or Melanesian populations in the 1950s and 1960s. There are now at least three thousand titles on the topic of population in the Pacific Islands.

Since the 1950s some positive changes have occurred in the demography of these islands. Most gratifying is that there are now several Pacific Islanders working in the field. Dr Kesaia Seniloli, a contributor to this volume, who now heads the demography unit at the University of the South Pacific, is the first PhD in demography from the region.

All twenty-one Pacific Island countries are far into a mortality transition, and all now have shown declining fertility levels. Those with the highest levels, Marshall Islands and Solomon Islands, show unmistakably that they have passed their peak and are heading downward. Fears that Papua New Guinea may still see its fertility rise seem to have been removed by the results of the 1990 census, imperfect as that was. By 2010, to judge from the rapidity of change so far, most of these populations will be near completing their demographic transitions and other dramatic and positive changes in their demographic and socioeconomic characteristics may be expected to follow.

Some other matters might have been given greater weight before embarking on this fright-inducing exercise:

It is difficult to generalize, particularly numerically, about the region if Papua New Guinea is included, as it unduly dominates the picture.

The countries that now show the highest population growth are mainly in western Melanesia and eastern Micronesia. The Melanesian countries have large areas, diverse resources, low population densities overall, and some areas are so empty that they have scarcely seen any development.

Although the Micronesian countries
are not among the chosen, they are still wards of the United States, which is well able to assist them in doing what they have to do (previous experience to the contrary).

All Pacific island countries have well-established ties with metropolitan sponsors or international aid agencies. The treatment of this matter in the work can be described only as odd. Callick in his "doomsday scenario" describes the French as "the sole surviving colonizers of the Pacific" (4) and implies that they will continue to pour aid (not to mention their superior civilization) into their colonies, which will become magnets for thousands of Islanders seeking work and prosperity. What happened to the Americans? If he imagines that the Micronesians and the Samoans are going to let them off the hook he will be much mistaken. A similar fate awaits the ex-colonizers, Australia and New Zealand. At this time only the United Kingdom looks as if it may skip home free.

Most of the chosen countries are very under-urbanized and urban growth has slowed in the last decade. Only Fiji has an urban system that is at all developed.

The editors are not at home with South Pacific Microstates. The notion of population density. It is not useful to compare South Tarawa, which is an urban area and capital of Kiribati, with Bangladesh, a large and predominantly agricultural country (14). It would be more useful, but not much, to compare it to another urban island, Manhattan, to which it would come a poor second. As with all urban areas, the actual density is not usually the problem; it is how the services necessary for urban populations are provided that causes the difficulties. Tarawa may have more than its share of problems but reducing population density will not solve them. It may even make them more expensive to rectify.

Rowan Callick's nightmare is not about to come true; the Pacific Island countries are not about to join the fourth world. The year 2010 should see most of them at the top end of what remains of the "developing world" or out of it altogether. If this prediction proves incorrect, the present and future leaders of these countries, along with those of Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and a few others, should hang their heads in shame, for the possibilities are there and the present trends are positive.

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References


The core of this book consists of seven chapters outlining the results of population projections up to about the year 2010 for Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Western Samoa, and Tonga—mainly carried out by student demographers in the National Centre for Development Studies graduate program in demography. Unfortunately this section of the book does not start until page 43. Before reaching the demographers’ statistics, the reader must work through a pathetic piece of futurology by journalist Rowan Callick entitled “A Doomsday Scenario,” and a detailed technical analysis of some of the potential economic consequences of future population growth in the Pacific Islands by Ken Gannicott. The serious reader might have preferred to read the population chapters with an open mind before proceeding to the particular interpretations of them offered by these authors. Presumably the objective in presenting the interpretations before the data was to ensure that an atmosphere of impending crisis was established before the reader had a chance to absorb the demographic information and form an independent opinion of its significance. There may also have been some concern that the book’s target audience (Pacific politicians, planners, and aid administrators) would be unlikely to wade through ninety-seven tables of demographic statistics before reaching the book’s central message.

The book’s structure, and the selection of Rowan Callick as the key commentator on its content, reveals its tendentious purpose: to persuade readers of the need for “economic restructuring” in the Pacific Islands along the general lines of the World Bank’s structural adjustment program. The components of that program—deregulation of the labor market; floating currencies; tariff reductions; privatization of public enterprises; redirection of aid to private sector projects and away from direct budget support; removal of governmental intervention in, and regulation of, commercial markets; free movement of foreign investment and foreign skills; and so forth—
will be familiar to most readers. Less well known will be the argument that these structural reforms are necessary to avert the “nightmare” of future population growth.

Economic restructuring, according to Cole, Callick, and Gannicott, is the “appropriate response” to the data generated by the demographers. But whatever one’s views on the need for such restructuring to promote economic growth, there is nothing inherent in the projections that necessarily calls for such a “response.” Perhaps this explains why the editor did not call on one of the experienced, world-class economic demographers based at the Australian National University to write an interpretive chapter for the benefit of those unfamiliar with this complex field. Such a chapter would inevitably have revealed the diversity of economic structures under which transition to low rates of population growth has occurred in both the developing and the now-developed world. As a general proposition, a free-market economy is neither a necessary, nor a sufficient, condition for the achievement of slow population growth.

The argument that free-market economies rather than state population policies (with their implication of coercion) would provide the solution to third world population problems was one of the components of the Reagan administration’s 1984 Mexico City Declaration (since rescinded by President Clinton). In a reversal of Marx and Engel’s dictum that population growth was only a problem under capitalism, the Reagan administration declared that population growth was only a problem in the absence of capitalism. Like a shooting star in its dying moments, this radical theory arrived in the Pacific (via World Bank and Pacific 2010) just as it had become a spent force in its place of origin. Once again, the Pacific Islands serve as an intellectual dumping ground for theories long past their “use by” date.

Turning to the population projections themselves, they add little to what is already known by Pacific demographers and planners. Over the years all of the countries included here have had access to any number of projections. These are rarely published, but most development plans contain them, and recent monographs on the population of Fiji and Vanuatu, for example, contain chapters outlining prospects for future growth. The Papua New Guinea projections, for example, employ little new demographic knowledge beyond what was available in 1985, when the last set of projections was done by the National Statistical Office, and the results hardly differ from what those projections showed. It is perhaps not well understood that population projections reflect simply the mathematical working out of a set of assumptions about possible future patterns of fertility, mortality, and migration. The assumptions used in this book are generally defensible and for the most part err on the side of caution. Other demographers may well have chosen different assumptions. I found it curious, for example, that only Kiribati was assumed to reach replacement level of fertility (2.2 children per woman) by 2010 under the low fertility assumption. In Fiji, the low projection suggests that fertility would still
be above replacement by the year 2010, fifty years after a family planning program was introduced into the country.

Aside from the question of economic restructuring, the other main issue raised by this book is whether the prospects for population growth in the Pacific warrant the alarmist treatment presented by Callick and, to a lesser extent, Gannicott. Callick's chapter is little more than a random mix of potential social and economic maladies that might afflict the Pacific Islands as the population grows into the twenty-first century. It would be easy to construct such "scenarios" for any country—even one with zero population growth. Although Callick mentions familiar issues such as increasing population density and urban squatters, it is not clear what the causal links might be between population growth and the slump of commodity prices, the "islamicization" of the culture, the adoption of spicy foods, the loss of overseas trade concessions, the collapse of public education, and the poor quality of Port Moresby's water supply.

Yet according to the editor, Callick's "grim and challenging picture" is "disturbingly close to the drier portrait available from the data" generated by the demographers. I would argue that there is no such relationship. Callick suggests, for example, that the population of the Pacific (excluding the French territories and Micronesia) will double to 9 million by 2010. Such a growth pattern implies an average annual growth rate of 4.1 percent, a figure that appears nowhere in the following chapters and is almost twice the current rate. Weighting by population size, the projections in fact suggest that the rate of population growth in this subgroup of countries over the next two decades will fall within the range of 1.6 percent to 2.5 percent annually—well below the rate implied by Callick, even at the high end of the range. None of the projection chapters supports Callick's contention that the "region's population growth rate is careering . . . beyond control" (8). In the first place, the projections do not cover the Pacific region but only the seven countries lacking historical ties to New Zealand, the United States, or France. Second, all of the labor force and school-age projections are based on the assumption that birth rates will decline, as they have done in most Pacific countries over the past decade. Third, demographers do not characterize population change in terms of degrees of "control."

By contrast with Callick's chapter, that by Gannicott, "Population, Development and Growth," deals with genuine issues in an intellectually responsible fashion—even if his recommendations, like Callick's, slavishly follow the World Bank's. With regard to education, Gannicott's argument is that a growing school-age population accompanied by low or stagnant economic growth, constant per capita costs of education, and increasing school enrollment, will result either in total education costs increasing to an unprecedented proportion of gross domestic product or in large numbers of children being denied access to schooling altogether.

This argument is far too mechanical: the conclusion follows simply from
the assumption that per capita costs of schooling will remain constant as enrollment rises. As the detailed empirical studies conducted by T Paul Schultz of Yale University have shown (1987), education expenditures per child have indeed declined in the developing countries over the past three decades, while enrollment rates have risen steadily; this is because teacher salaries have dropped and student-teacher ratios have risen. Although there has been some decline in the quality of schooling, this does not reduce the quality of the labor force as is often believed. Labor force upgrading occurs so long as those entering the labor force on average have better education than those leaving it. This is likely to be the situation in the Pacific for some time to come.

Gannicott's assumption that per capita costs of education will remain constant follows from his belief that "there are no economies of scale ... in this region of scattered population settlement and village schools" (17). But one obvious source of cheaper schooling is urbanization. All the projections in this book assume that urbanization will continue apace, with Papua New Guinea 43 percent urban and Solomon Islands 32 percent urban by 2010. Improvements in rural infrastructure, especially transport and communications, should also help to reduce schooling costs significantly. One can agree with Gannicott that a faster rate of economic growth would make the financing of schooling easier (other things being equal), but it does not follow that there are no economies left in Pacific education systems. Indeed, one of Gannicott's recommendations is that ways should be sought to reduce unit costs of education in the Pacific, and I would certainly endorse it.

Overall, this book has an arriviste flavor. It seeks to give the impression that the economic consequences of population growth in the Pacific have only recently come to the attention of planners, social scientists, and politicians, which is quite incorrect. By contrast, the theoretical approach is already passé. Gannicott's chapter reads very much like the last gasp of the "investment diversion" hypothesis first developed in the late 1950s and dressed up again in the 1984 World Development Report by the World Bank. More recent studies suggest that public investment in education and health have little to do with the age structure of the population or its rate of growth. There is no doubt that the populations of most Pacific Island countries will continue to grow over the next thirty to forty years, largely because of falling death rates. There is also no doubt that this growth will present challenges for the governments of these countries, as Pacific 2010 argues. Whether this book provides the right policy tools to assist them in their important task is doubtful.

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Reference
BOOK REVIEWS

Where goes the global village? As we approach the end of the twentieth century, as we worry about the continuing population “explosion” in the Pacific Islands, about migration to the Pacific rim, about migration within these islands to the urban areas, do we see economic and social collapse coming? Rodney Cole, editor of Pacific 2010: Challenging the Future, and his colleagues see much to worry them and us. The question is, Is their concern warranted?

The book is basically a series of “student” papers brought together with a summary statement and a “doomsday scenario,” which selects from some of the work in the later chapters of the book and adds an interesting spin as well. The individual papers are good, the authors clearly told to stay within a very confining structure, and most of them doing just that. The effect of reading them straight through is a bit numbing. It is pleasant to see that some of the authors are Pacific Islanders themselves (and that, in one case—Kesaia Seniloli—the writing is elegant as well). But only two of the authors give conclusions to their chapters, and one author drops the section on urbanization as well. You can go through the chapters (as Ken Gannicott has done in the book itself) and select items for cross-country analysis. How far you get with the projection parts of these exercises depends on what you believe about the future of natural growth and migration in these islands.

As for the doomsday scenario, this book has been written to scare. And it does scare. If the Pacific Islanders expect a certain level of resources and a certain level of labor force participation and, then, a certain higher standard of living, then either changes will have to be made, or the kind of scenario Rowan Callick describes may very well be inevitable. But we must take some other, very Pacific-like considerations:

What happens to subsistence? Subsistence is difficult to define, and even more difficult to quantify. When a worker goes for paid employment, you can clearly measure how many hours worked, on how many days, and how much per hour. You cannot do this with subsistence because when people have enough fish, they stop fishing. While the resources are limited, whether fish or taro or bananas, those limits, too, are hard to judge. However, while the current taro blight may wipe out taro production in Western Samoa and elsewhere, humans have always been resourceful, and other strains may find their way into production. How do we measure a qualitative change, whether that change is technological, or movement to some other source?

Many Pacific Islanders want jobs, not careers. Much of the analysis in this book is based on labor market considerations—rightly so, since money is the root of all purchasing. Still, most measures, both in the book and by formalist economists elsewhere, are predicated on the necessity of western economic development (and, concomitantly, western lifestyles and standards of living). Many Pacific Islanders like to move into and out of the paid labor force, working to earn enough money to buy a house or a car or a videocassette recorder and then
resting for a while, whether for a funeral or marriage or other traditional activity, or because they simply want to take a break. Economic strategies to accommodate this type of activity do exist, even in some of the Pacific countries discussed in the text, but they are seldom the focus of much discussion.

Do Pacific Islanders want education or training for jobs? Here we have another problem. Basic education must be provided, not only for training for jobs, but to become good citizens—to learn to vote wisely and participate in the workings of government and society. (The recent introduction of the teaching of traditional skills in the classroom setting, at least in the American Pacific, is not a particularly good sign—why not let the students go home early and learn from workers doing subsistence?) In fact, a point here is that much education can come from on-the-job training. To say that you first have education and then have a job may be unrealistic in the contemporary Pacific. As workers move in and out of jobs, they may also become educated to do various activities.

Fertility does decrease, and decreases rapidly, where economic incentives are present. Although I am not very familiar with the island nations presented in the book, both Palau and the Northern Mariana Islands have seen enormous fertility decline in recent years, mostly related to increased economic activity. Some of the authors do speculate on precipitous decreases in fertility, and they may not be far off the mark, assuming that these areas do have economic growth. Fertility decline is one thing for Palau or the Northern Marianas, relatively tiny populations having the enormous resources of the United States available. It is something else for other, relatively large populations to cope with declining economic activity while trying to control fertility.

Finally, will emigration cease? Some of the island nations, as noted in the book, have little out-migration. Those that do are threatened, according to the scenario described, with having that migration cut off. I think the jury is still out on this. It is not clear whether, over the long term, Pacific rim countries will reject a source of cheap, enthusiastic labor.

For the book itself, what we read is a series of exercises somewhat disguised by the form of presentation. The indentation for paragraphs is very strange, with paragraphs starting nearly halfway across the page. The little logo, Pacific 2010, in the upper left-hand corner of the even-numbered pages, and the Challenging the Future on the odd, give a feeling of slickness not really essential to the works themselves, and, in fact, distract.

Nonetheless, as a source for discussion, this book succeeds. And, as a source of well thought out population projections, it succeeds even better.

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