

*Framing the Islands: Knowledge and Power
in Changing Australian Images of
“the South Pacific”*

Greg Fry

A new and powerful set of images of the South Pacific, and of Pacific Islanders, has recently come to prominence in Australia. The images are embedded in a forthright salvationist message that describes a region in danger of “falling off the map.” It warns of an approaching “doomsday” or “nightmare” unless Pacific Islanders remake themselves—just as Australians have had to. Such a remaking, it is asserted, will require sacrifice: a change in cultural practice, the taking of hard decisions, and the changing of unsound behaviors. Yet, not only can the nightmare be avoided through right action, dreams can be realized. These ideas, of the kind more generally associated with millenarian movements or nineteenth-century missionaries, are coming from a most unlikely quarter. This is not yet the imagery of Australian popular culture, which still holds to the idea of paradise, but that of the heartland of “rational” thinking—the intersecting worlds of the bureaucrat, the politician, the foreign affairs journalist, and the academic economist.

This new doomsdayism¹ depicts a region that is failing to become part of the Pacific century. In the dramatic imagery associated with this conception, the South Pacific is the “hole in the Asia-Pacific doughnut” or “the eye in the Asia-Pacific cyclone.” It draws attention to what is seen as a series of grim trends: a history of failure in development as measured by growth in gross domestic product; “soaring” populations; unsustainable

exploitation of resources; the marginalization of island economies in a changing global trading order; and a “fatal farewell” by old and powerful aid donors following the end of the cold war. It asserts that the Pacific Island countries are on a path to a future nightmare of overcrowding, poverty, mass unemployment, serious environmental degradation, and a decline in health standards. The only hope to avoid this future, it is contended, is to open the island economies to the global market, effect structural change, jettison where necessary customary land tenure and inappropriate traditions, and connect with the dynamism of Asia.²

Like earlier Australian depictions of the Pacific Islands, the new doomsdayism provides an interesting sounding of how Australians see themselves. At the center of such conceptions has been an unquestioned, and often unacknowledged, belief that Australia has a right, or even a duty, to speak for the inhabitants of this region, to represent them to themselves and to others, to lead, and to manage them. This belief was asserted long before Australia had the power to enforce it, indeed even before Australia was formally established in 1901, a tendency that Bismarck labeled the Australasian Monroe Doctrine in the late-nineteenth century³ and one its adherents saw as a form of “manifest destiny” (Thompson 1980, 25, 224). Australian policymakers continued to assert this belief over the next century, particularly at the end of the two world wars, and even more strongly from the mid-1970s, when Australia saw itself as the natural leader of the postcolonial South Pacific (Fry 1991, 1992). Although a familiar tendency in white Australia’s approach to Aborigines (the parallels are striking),⁴ the islands region has been the only area outside the continent where Australians have imagined themselves as colonizers and civilizers.

Such images do not simply provide interesting insights into the Australian imagination; they affect the lives of the people they depict. It has mattered for Pacific Islanders when, at various times over the past two hundred years, influential Australians have viewed them collectively as savages, noble savages, children, or full human beings, and whether the region was depicted as a defense shield, a frontier, vulnerable, empty, or unstable. Each of these lenses allowed or encouraged different Australian behavior toward Pacific Islanders: from colonial control and exploitation, to protection, development, and the encouragement of self-determination. Although some of these agendas have been developmental and benevolently intended, and others dominative and exploitative, I contend that they all form part of a long-standing Australian practice of “framing” Pacific

Island peoples in three senses: first, drawing geographical boundaries around them for purposes of making generalizations; second, intending to shape the lives of the people so bounded; and third, in the colloquial sense, setting them up for outcomes not of their making.

The doomsdayist conception appears to continue this practice. It is intended to transform Pacific societies and, given the context in which it is put forward, has the potential to significantly affect the parameters within which future possibilities are worked out. Australia is, after all, the largest aid donor to many island countries, as well as the principal funder of the regional institutions.⁵ Moreover, the continuation of Australian aid has been explicitly linked to the adoption by island governments and regional institutions of the policies associated with this new depiction (Bilney 1994b, 5; 1995b, 8).⁶ The doomsday conception also has the authority of “knowledge.” It is not suggested simply as a possibility, but with certainty and confidence about “how it is,” on the basis of academic inquiry and the hard-headed realism and rationalism of the key areas of government and of the disciplinary focus of economics and demography. As Epeli Hau‘ofa has noted, such authoritative depictions not only influence the behavior of the powerful; they have also in the past affected the self-image of “subordinates,” whether images of darkness prior to Christianity being brought by the missionaries, images of inferiority captured, for example, in the term *boy* to refer to an adult man, or the image of “small is powerless” promoted by social scientists, consultants, international agencies, and metropolitan governments in the postcolonial period (Hau‘ofa 1994, 149).

The proponents claim that the depiction, and policy recommendations flowing from it, have already been accepted by many of the key officials and politicians in the area and that it has provided the basis for a reshaping of the regional agenda “which marks a watershed in the evolution of regional cooperation” (Bilney 1994b, 6; Callick 1994b). Whether or not these claims are fully justified, it is certainly the case that the message has been welcomed by some prominent island economists and officials. Sir Mekere Morauta, then governor of the Bank of Papua New Guinea, for example, stated at the launching of the Australian National University’s Pacific 2010 project in June 1994 that “the doomsday scenario . . . is not surrealistic. The seeds and signs of that scenario have been planted in every Melanesian state, and are growing daily” (1994, 1). The notion has provided the foundation for a number of regional initiatives through the

South Pacific Forum. Its potential influence is also suggested by the rejection of its more extreme claims by several Pacific prime ministers, including Sitiveni Rabuka, Geoffrey Henry, Paias Wingti, and Solomon Mamanoni; by President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara of Fiji; and by the rejection by the Japanese, South Korean, and Malaysian governments of the doomsdayists' portrayal of their respective countries.⁷ The new depiction has also begun to influence the way the region is represented farther afield. The *Los Angeles Times*, for example, drew on the doomsday conception in its feature, "Heart of Pacific Awash in Poverty," reproduced in the *Honolulu Advertiser* (Wallace 1995).

I propose to consider the question of how the exercise of power inherent in this new Australian representation of the Pacific Islands should be judged. Is it subordinating? Does it amount to a form of cultural imperialism or hegemony? Does it matter if it does? These questions can be given more definition by considering particular issues raised in Epeli Hau'ofa's essay, "Our Sea of Islands" (1994). Although Hau'ofa was concerned about the belittling tendency in past western conceptions of Pacific Island societies and its subordinating impact on the self-image of Pacific Islanders, the more recent "smallness" notion was of particular interest to him because of its contemporary significance in shaping how the postcolonial Pacific has been seen by both outsiders and those who live there. The "smallness" notion, he argued, underlay the social science understandings of Pacific reality that he had himself been promoting to young Pacific Islanders as a teacher in the regional university. What distressed him was the disempowering effect of this conception: its determinism, he contended, perpetuated dependency and subordination. His central theme was the need to move beyond the belittlement associated with this dominant conception. He ended with a plea to Pacific Islanders to never "allow anyone to belittle us again." This suggests a more specific focus to my question about the new Australian representation: would it satisfy Hau'ofa's concerns for knowledge that would move beyond the subordinating effect of the policy-related social sciences in the postcolonial period of the 1970s and 1980s?

The proponents of the new doomsdayism claim that it does. Far from seeing their conception as inherently subordinating, they regard it as liberating. They assert that the adoption of their characterization of Pacific reality and of their prescriptions to avoid doomsday *will* lead to "self-reliance" and engender Islander agency and responsibility rather than contin-

uing the acceptance of the structural obstacles of smallness (Callick 1994e, 55). Its critics, by contrast, are portrayed as patronizing and as seeking to keep Pacific Islanders in subservience (Callick 1994b, 1994d). They also claim benevolent intent, as a defense against claims of hegemony, captured in the headline of Rowan Callick's article defending the Australian campaign to make the new doomsdayism the basis of a new regional order: "How Bilney, a Decent Man, Now Hopes to Make Island Life Better" (1994e).

A further strand, implicit throughout the doomsdayist writings and in the way the conception has been promoted, might be termed the "certain knowledge" or "claim to truth" defense. The new conception, and the policy changes based on it, have the status of "knowledge" and the certainty of science. They are said to face the unpleasant facts. The need for a dramatic revision of the way the region is understood, its proponents assert, arises because there is a new reality in the islands region as a result of global changes following the end of the cold war and the advent of a new trading regime (Bilney 1994a; Callick 1993). Thus it becomes a duty to reveal this knowledge to those affected and to make it clear that, whether anyone likes it or not, nothing short of full acceptance is acceptable if doomsday (predicted by science) is to be avoided. This, it is implied, is not belittlement but rather telling it how it is.

I contest these claims. I develop the proposition that, while superficially the new doomsdayism constitutes a departure from the belittlement associated with earlier Australian conceptions of the postcolonial Pacific, in essence it is continued in the unacknowledged preconceptions on which the new knowledge is built. For this reason I contend that the new conception does not meet Hau'ofa's concern for moving beyond the subordinating knowledge associated with the "smallness" notion of the cold war years.

THE ETHICS OF REPRESENTATION

In thinking about the foundations on which judgments about the exercise of power inherent in this new Australian representation of "the islands" might be based, my theoretical point of departure is influenced by Edward Said's classic study of western conceptions of the orient (1978). Although he focused on British, French, and American representations of the Middle and Far East, Said's ideas are relevant to other contexts in which

peoples are grouped together and represented by outsiders who wish at the same time to manage, control, or prescribe for the peoples they are depicting. Said was ultimately concerned with “how one can study other cultures and peoples from a libertarian, or a non-repressive and non-manipulative, perspective” (1978, 24, 328). The foundation of his ethics is a liberal humanism (Clifford 1988, 263–264). His judgments about western knowledge of the orient, or of any knowledge by one group about another, are based on whether it contributes to belittlement, to dehumanization, to suppression of the diversity of human experience, and to an entrenchment of a subordinating relationship.

Said’s central thesis is that, in the case of Europeans and Americans depicting the orient, this has never just been a harmless imagining about far-off places: it contributed to, and became part of, the structure of power. Said did not claim this hegemonic practice to be a particular vice of westerners; nor, he contended, should it be seen as a practice that necessarily accompanies the generation of knowledge about other cultures (1978, 326–328). But, given western dominance in world politics over the past several hundred years, he did see western knowledge of the orient as a primary site for understanding cultural imperialism in contemporary world politics. Said’s other major proposition about this knowledge was that the depictions tell us more about European self-identity and self-image than about any real orient or oriental. He argued that the orient became the big “other” in the European imagination, against which Europeans defined themselves, an invention for Europeans reflecting their dominant ideas about themselves.

Said’s method for assessing whether knowledge practices might be regarded as inherently subordinating was to examine the unacknowledged epistemological premises, the subtle but powerful preconceptions that become part of the structure of power over another people through such things as images, construction of categories, and who is left in and out. He was particularly concerned with what he contended were two features of the orientalist knowledge system: first, the tendency to create a mythical collective identity—the orient—and a mythical essentialized person—the oriental—whom it then becomes possible to characterize, and second, the tendency to consistently promote belittling, negative images of these identities. This knowledge has an impact on the people so depicted, he argued, not just because it informs and justifies colonial or neocolonial practices through providing the lenses through which Euro-

peans see the orient, but because it begins to be taken on as a self-image by those so depicted.

In adopting such an approach to judging contemporary Australian representations of the Pacific Islands, however, I am mindful of several key issues raised by Said's critics. The first is the trap of "occidentalism" (see Clifford 1988, 271), which Said himself warned against (1978, 328). While attempting to retrieve nonwestern diversity and humanness from the impact of orientalists, Said's approach encouraged an image of an undifferentiated totality called "the west"—a reverse orientalism. This simply does not reflect the complexity of western approaches to the nonwestern world. As Nicholas Thomas has persuasively argued, "colonialism's culture," and by extension, one could argue, contemporary imperialism's culture, was or is not only a plural society, varying over time and according to agent and location, but there were or are also benevolently intended colonial projects. These approaches were nevertheless hegemonic in promoting essentialist collective identities and, for Thomas, their (negative) impact can still be felt today in liberal discourses on indigenous peoples in their exclusion of the experiences of many indigenous people (Thomas 1994, 1-32).

A study of Australian conceptions of the islands could easily fall into the occidentalist trap, both in terms of assuming a homogeneous "Australia" and in seeing its framing practices as necessarily concerned with domination. I attempt to avoid this trap by making clear that I am focusing only on certain sectors of Australian society: the media, the policy-related social sciences, and the policymakers. Although I am aware that there are different conceptions of the South Pacific at any one time within these policy-related sectors, it is a central premise of this argument that one can detect a dominant shared conceptualization among them that quickly takes on the status of knowledge in a particular period. Thus, when I use the shorthand "Australian depiction" I am referring to the characterization of the South Pacific prevailing in these influential sectors. This is not to deny the possibility of contending and influential conceptualizations of the Pacific Islands elsewhere in Australian society, for example, in corporations, churches, the humanities, or popular culture. I also begin with the assumption that not all of these Australian depictions are intended to promote domination.

There is a related issue. The imaging of one group by another is not, of course, a process that is confined to Europeans, or more particularly in

this context, to Australians, a point recognized by Said (1978) and Hau'ofa (1994, 149). In the Pacific context, Rarotongans have been known to characterize their compatriots from the northern Cook Islands in this way; Papuans to speak disparagingly of Simbu; Polynesians of Melane- sians; Solomon Islanders of the Gilbertese community in Honiara, or Fijians of Indo-Fijians and vice versa. Pacific Islanders have also been known to hold images of "the European"—the *pālagi*, the *papālangi*, *dim dim*, or *haole*—that have sometimes been otherworldly, sometimes dis- paraging, sometimes ridiculing (Hereniko 1994, 411). The crucial ques- tion is whether such imaging occurs in a context of unequal power. Where it does—and many of these situations are not devoid of unequal power—I am assuming that ethical questions are raised concerning the contribution of knowledge practices to the dominance of one people over another.

A second issue raised by Said's critics concerns his ambivalence on the question of whether a critique of orientalist practices implies that there is a true orient that is missed by the distorting lens of European preconcep- tions. James Clifford has argued that although Said in his Nietzschean and Foucauldian moments denied the possibility of there being a true orient, he nevertheless implied that there is when he sought to demonstrate that orientalism misrepresents Arab peoples, Islamic societies, or the nonwest more generally (Clifford 1988, 260). This is an important issue and a dif- ficulty that is constantly present in taking this approach to Australian conceptions of the Pacific Islands. In examining the certainty with which such conceptions are put forward I am proceeding on the assumption that what is interesting is not whether the knowledge-makers got it right, but the fact that they think there can be one true reality.

A third set of issues is raised by Aijaz Ahmad, who began from a more antagonistic position to Said's overall project. He argued that Said and his followers were involved in romanticism, a form of third worldism in which disaffected intellectuals in the diaspora construct a new subju- gation of the east by the west, one that masks their own complicity in the exploitative and ruthless relations within third world states and their own positions as privileged people. Following this line, the critique of western representations of the non-European world becomes a new form of dependency theory, an attempt to place the blame for wrongs firmly on the outside world rather than to sheet responsibility home to local elites (Ahmad 1994, 165–167). In the South Pacific context, this takes the form

of a contention that to critique the new Australian depiction, which reveals corruption and mismanagement in the islands, is to protect local scoundrels. I proceed on the assumption that this does not necessarily follow. It is, nevertheless, a powerful critique that at the very least should draw attention to the pitfall of shifting responsibility totally from indigenous elites to western cultural imperialism. At the same time, to fully adopt Ahmad's perspective is to lose sight of outside knowledge as an important influence of the parameters within which societies make choices.

Drawing on Said's general approach, I propose to explore four epistemological premises underlying contemporary Australian representations of the South Pacific. These will form the bases for judgment about whether these representations are potentially subordinating. The first is the degree to which a mythical Pacific Island person and society are created, and diversity suppressed. To presume the existence of something called "the South Pacific" need not necessarily lead to stereotyping of the peoples and societies within it. The extraordinary diversity—of cultural and linguistic forms, of resource endowments and geographical features, and of colonial experience—has been, after all, a major attraction for many of those calling themselves Pacific scholars. In such an approach, the region becomes a handy comparative frame as long as the basis of its construction is remembered. In contrast, the move concerned with personifying the South Pacific, and the accompanying tendencies to create a mythical Pacific Island state, person, and society, and consequently to suppress diversity, raises important issues. If the knowledge it is built on bears little resemblance to the experience of any society, this has implications for the claim to truth. If it proceeds on the basis of generalizing from one or two known experiences, it also excludes the experiences of others who do not fit the stereotype. Furthermore, it introduces essentialism. As soon as characteristics are attributed to these mythical categories, this knowledge not only produces the deduction that any particular Pacific Islander has these characteristics, but that they have them *because* they *are* "Islanders."

The second premise concerns how Pacific Islanders and their societies are imaged. To what degree are such depictions consistently dehumanizing and belittling? The denial of humanity implicit in the folding of all Pacific Island persons into one identity, and the attribution of an essentialist character to that identity, is magnified if that depiction is consistently disparaging or belittling. Imagery can set people up for particular

outcomes not of their making and yet may be unacknowledged and unquestioned by those employing it. It becomes the handy summary about a place or people that becomes the unexamined starting point for policy-makers. Said built his case against orientalism largely by showing the consistently negative imagery applied to the orient, imagery that reinforced the idea of a superior Europe and an inferior orient and denied the normal range of human character and abilities. This was seen by many critics as ignoring the many scholars of the orient who did not indulge in racist or other types of imagery enforcing a superior–inferior divide. I am persuaded by those who, while sympathetic to the issues Said raised, are starting from the premise that the west, like the orient, is a more complex place. I therefore pose the question in an open-ended way: to what extent does the imagery associated with the new doomsdayism reinforce an implicit subordination of Pacific Island peoples?

A third line of inquiry focuses on the relationship that the framers of the knowledge define between themselves and the frame. In particular, the construction of a division between a superior “us” and an inferior “them” is accentuated by the degree to which there is a denial of *shared* humanity on the part of the framers, in the sense of a preparedness to place their own experience and problems up for depiction alongside the others about which they are constructing knowledge. In the case of Australians depicting the South Pacific, because of the geographical location of Australia in relation to the region they are characterizing, this attitude may be expressed by whether or not they place Australia within the boundaries of “the South Pacific.”

Finally, I consider preconceptions concerning certainty of knowledge and the claims of science. To what extent do Australian representations claim to provide *the one true* reality of Pacific Island experience rather than a perspective built on particular epistemological and ideological preconceptions? Before exploring these unacknowledged preconceptions embedded in the new doomsdayism, I shall sketch the origins and development of the conception, its main tenets and normative underpinnings.

THE DOOMSDAY DEPICTION

The doomsday image was initially sketched in 1993 by Rowan Callick, a prominent economics journalist and Pacific commentator who was asked by the Australian National University’s Pacific 2010 project to draw a

word-picture of the South Pacific fifteen years out, based on the projections of the Pacific 2010 researchers (Callick 1993). In summary form, as it appears on the cover of the first Pacific 2010 publication, the “doomsday scenario,” said to arrive by 2010, is:

Population growth in the Pacific Islands is careering beyond control: it has doubled to 9 million: malnutrition is spreading and is already endemic in squatter settlements. . . . there are beggars on the streets of every South Pacific town. . . . levels of unemployment are high. . . . expenditure on education has tripled, although there are still no government welfare payments. . . . deaths from AIDS, heart disease and cancers have greatly increased, government services have been privatized or in many cases have lapsed. . . . aid donors have turned their attention elsewhere. . . . crime has increased. . . . trade in narcotics, marijuana, kava and betel nut has produced its first island millionaires. . . . pollution and land degradation has spiralled. . . . much of the surviving rainforest has been logged. . . . coastal fisheries have been placed under threat from over fishing . . . skills shortages in the labour market yawn wide. (Cole 1993)

Although it is the image of a *future* nightmare that captures attention, Callick also painted a graphic picture of the contemporary South Pacific on its way to this future. He described the “grim trends” that are the “signs and seeds” of the doomsday scenario: population growth “career-ing . . . out of control,” the lack of structural adjustment in island economies in the face of a changing economic and strategic order, and serious environmental problems. The image is of an island region not facing up to its responsibilities at a time when outside interest in the Pacific Islands is waning and the impact is being felt of “the frenetic globalization of economic life.” Callick did not, however, see the doomsday scenario as inevitable if Pacific leaders were to take urgent action “before looming disasters impose their own grim patterns” and “the nightmare becomes reality.” The “essential joint ingredients for solutions to the South Pacific nightmare,” he claimed, lie in economic restructuring and appropriate population policies and “an active strategy on the environment.” The focus, however, was on structural adjustment:

The required reforms may best be delivered together, for presentation purposes, as a single package. They may ultimately involve tighter budgetary discipline, measures to enhance competitiveness, corporatization and privatization, reform of the financial sector, adjustment of exchange rates, alteration of the way wages are determined and reorganization of government priorities so

that a greater proportion of the budget is spent on education, health and infrastructure. . . .

The success stories, economically and politically, will be those emphasizing openness and links—trade, investment, even the movement of skilled workers, foreigners and nationals, in and out of the country—rather than those emphasizing a defiant independence.

A greater focus within the region on free trade would help to frame the right mentality. (Callick 1993, 10–11)

The Pacific 2010 project, of which this was a part, was financed by the government's aid delivery body, the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (later called AUSAID). Its purpose was to set before Pacific leaders the research findings on the major trends in their societies and the implications for policy to the year 2010. The project has had a high profile. It was launched at Parliament House, and its various studies have been widely disseminated in the region. The new conception had been raised to a high rung of influence when its themes were taken up by Minister for Pacific Islands Affairs the Honorable Gordon Bilney, in his address to the Foreign Correspondents' Association in Sydney in June 1994 (Bilney 1994a). Broadcast by satellite to Pacific Island representatives assembled in island capitals, the speech was intended as a landmark statement setting out the broad assumptions of future Australian policy toward the region. It focused on what the minister regarded as "a number of key factors which must be addressed by island governments with a sense of urgency if sustainable development is to be achieved in the South Pacific." Despite the minister's claim that he was not seeking "to paint a picture of a region in a state of crisis," he gave the impression that such a crisis was imminent unless urgent action were taken along the lines he sketched. The air of impending doom was given further embellishment in the newspaper headlines: "Visions of Paradise Blur as South Pacific Sails off the Map" (Wright 1994); "Pacific Islands Face Nightmare without Change, Says Bilney" (Gill 1994); "Pacific Islands Face Nightmare Future" (Perry 1994); "South Pacific Policies Not Working: Bilney" (O'Callaghan 1994a); and "Paradise Lost in the South Pacific" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 June 1994).

Later in the year, Australia's Prime Minister Keating and Minister Bilney vigorously promoted the new conception as the underlying rationale for a new regional economic order at the South Pacific Forum in Brisbane (Fry 1994). The resultant reform agenda focused on rationalization of the

regional airlines, public sector management, and the issues of sustainability and returns in the timber and fisheries sectors. The media again took up the themes of a failed region heading toward a grim future, most influentially perhaps in the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's *Lateline* television program, "Pacific Nightmare," in which three Pacific prime ministers were questioned on what they were doing about this new Pacific "reality" following an introduction featuring Callick's doomsday scenario (ABC 1994). If anything, the Australian government's resolve to promote these ideas strengthened in 1995. They were expressed multilaterally in the efforts to implement some of the regimes and other decisions resulting from the Brisbane Forum in such areas as civil aviation rationalization, public sector finance, sustainable forestry and fisheries management, as well as in attempts to take the reform agenda further at the Madang Forum in September. They were also expressed in the intense campaign to have an Australian gain the position of secretary-general in the South Pacific Commission, thereby reversing a long-established convention that the post be filled by a Pacific Islander (Fry 1997).⁸

What had emerged by 1995 was a shared depiction in key areas of academia, government, and media about the South Pacific and its future. This shared conviction was not due simply to the common appeal of some persuasive ideas. These were not entirely watertight sectors of Australian society. Importantly, Rowan Callick, a key maker of the images of the new doomsdayism, and its strongest and most consistent defender, had a significant role in each sector: as part of the Pacific 2010 academic project, as a member of the minister's aid advisory council, and as the main interpretative media commentator, in both the most influential financial newspaper in Australia and the main monthly reaching island elites. Callick was not simply acting as a scribe drawing out the implications of the Pacific 2010 research. It is evident from his other articles, before and after the Pacific 2010 chapter, that he was a major independent force in developing the new doomsdayism conceptually and presentationally. It also mattered that the Pacific 2010 academic project was AUSAID-financed in terms of the authority given its findings in the minister's approach and in the publicity given to its findings.

The new doomsdayism is as much a picture of the contemporary South Pacific as it is of a possible future scenario. This picture can usefully be considered as comprising three constitutive images. The first is that of the failed region. Here, the picture is one of an economically stagnant region.

It draws its intellectual authority from the World Bank's recent assessments of the South Pacific condition, and particularly from its notion of "the Pacific paradox" (World Bank 1993, ix, 1). As described by Minister Bilney, the paradox is that "over the past decade most Pacific Island countries have achieved only slow growth in real per capita incomes despite a generally favourable natural and human resource endowment, high levels of external assistance and generally sound economic management" (1994a, 5). He went on to claim that the World Bank's 1993 report estimated that "real gross national product in Pacific Island countries grew by an average rate of only about 0.1% annually over the previous ten years." (The Bank's actual figure was 2.1 percent. The figure of 0.1 percent referred to gross domestic product per capita). Again following the World Bank, the comparative "success" in growth terms of other island countries in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean was introduced as evidence of South Pacific failure.

The emphasis on economic growth was tempered, however, by a concern with sustainability. The doomsdayists, like the World Bank, present a picture of failure on this score, particularly in the forestry and fisheries sectors. In the case of timber, attention is drawn to "the pressing risk of blanket destruction [of] the region's rare and diverse forests [due to] rapacious exploitation for profit by unscrupulous foreign operators" (Bilney 1994b, 12) and the connivance on the part of corrupt politicians in these activities. Again echoing the bank's broadened interests in recent years, the doomsdayist depiction presented a picture of serious environmental degradation. The minister, for example, listed a catalogue of environmental problems that he felt the region needed to face up to: "deforestation, coastal pollution and degradation, depletion of inshore fisheries and damage to coral reefs, inadequate watershed management, a shortage of clean drinking water and effective waste management facilities, all underpinned as it were by the possible effects of global climate change" (Bilney 1994a, 8). It was also contended that in the case of tuna, there has been a failure to obtain sufficient return, particularly from Japan, Korea, and Taiwan.

Other areas of failure contributing to the poor overall economic performance, it was argued, include an inefficient and bloated public sector, "stop-gap measures" and "haphazard and uncoordinated development efforts," corrupt leadership, inefficient regional structures, "extravagant national symbols" (Bilney 1994a, 14), and, in particular, inefficient and costly national airlines whose combined losses in 1994, it was claimed, totaled more than Australian aid to the South Pacific in the same year.

Although the traditional constraints operating on small island states were recognized in passing, the explanation for failure was put more in terms of inappropriate policy frameworks and cultural practices, and an inflexible customary land tenure (Bilney 1994a, 6, 13). The 1994 formulations emphasized inappropriate policy frameworks as the problem, and island economic management, following the World Bank report, was judged to be “generally sound” (Bilney 1994a, 5), yet a few months later Bilney was describing island management as “muddling-through” and was arguing that “the overall record of economic management and performance is *poor* and the Pacific tendency towards pragmatism and the Australian equivalent of ‘she’ll be right mate’ mentality, cannot mask these problems indefinitely” (1994b, 3).

Callick also shifted from a focus on inappropriate policies to a failure in leadership. He began to point to specific shared characteristics of island leaders, who “have a tradition of agreeing, then doing the opposite, or more likely, nothing. . . . And even minor multilateral progress leads to more, practically, than local measures—more prone to backflips, inaction and sheer bribery” (1995). This had become a failure born of the essential nature of Pacific Islanders rather than inappropriate frameworks, a departure from the World Bank picture.

A second image is that of a region whose population is “soaring” (Costello 1995, 8). On the basis of the projections of the Pacific 2010 demographers, Callick suggested a near doubling of the population of “the islands” (leaving aside the French territories and Micronesia) to nine million people. Of the situation as he wrote, he claimed, again on the basis of Pacific 2010 research, that “*the region’s* population growth is careering, albeit happily for now, out of control” (Callick 1993, 2, 8; my emphasis). Professor Ron Duncan, the director of the National Centre for Development Studies (the source of Pacific 2010) was reported as saying that “the Pacific Islands are at a stage where population growth means that their standard of living has fallen below what it was in the 1980s” (Wallace 1995, A7). This Malthusian picture was also a central aspect of Bilney’s depiction of the region (1994a, 9).

The third image is that of the marginalized region (Bilney 1994a, 4) or, as put more graphically by some, a region that is “falling off the map” (Wright 1994; ABC 1994, 3). Several propositions underlie this picture. The starting point is the claim that, following the end of the cold war, great power interest is waning or will wane. This is a tendency referred to by Rowan Callick as “the fatal farewell,” to indicate that just as the coming

of the colonial powers in the nineteenth century might be described as a “fatal impact,” their departure is causing fatal consequences of a different kind (1994e, 55). He had in mind the departure of the economic assistance, trade concessions, and investment that, he contended, kept the island countries afloat during the cold war. In support of his claim he cited the closing down of the US aid offices in the South Pacific, British withdrawal from the South Pacific Commission, and the end of Russian involvement in the region. This, it was argued, creates a very different situation in which island states can no longer rely on external subsidies to make up for their own inefficiencies.

The picture of a marginalized region also drew on a contention concerning the implications of a changing global trading regime following the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. It has been argued that the island economies will fall increasingly behind in a liberalized trading order unless they make the necessary reforms. A pertinent example of such marginalization was given in the erosion of the value of trade preferences for island countries under the SPARTECA trading arrangement with Australia. There was also the claim of marginalization within the dynamic Asia-Pacific economy, represented as resulting from a failure to make appropriate domestic adjustments to “capitalise on these new trade openings” and also as a failure “to make the necessary connections with the larger nations of the Asia-Pacific rim” (Bilney 1995b, 9).

I have shown that Callick, in his original statement of the doomsday scenario, saw the answer to this post-cold war vulnerability in the application of Australia’s domestic reform strategy writ large, in particular, public sector reform and private sector development in an open economy. Minister Bilney went a little further, suggesting that island leaders may need to consider the appropriateness of maintaining “extravagant national symbols” such as airlines, of traditional land use patterns where they are incompatible with the needs of investors, and of sheltering behind a “fortress of tradition” (1994a, 13–14; 1995, 10). “Island countries,” Bilney argued, “may need to ask themselves, as Australians have had to do in recent years, whether some old social and economic habits and attitudes might need to be adapted or even abandoned” (1994a, 7). Callick also saw cultural change as crucial: The South Pacific “standing on its own two feet means, above all, accelerating the conceptual shift on the part of the region’s decision makers, from a traditional emphasis on the importance of distribution of wealth . . . to an emphasis on production” (1993, 7).

This element of social change can also be seen in Callick's suggested solution to the perceived population problem: It "entails, above all, convincing islanders that their country's economic future is bright, and they will not need to rely on a large number of children as their only route to long-term security" (1993, 8). At heart, this conception is informed by the neoclassical model of development. This was not a new emphasis for the National Centre for Development Studies, which since 1987 had been the most influential academic voice attempting to move the conceptualization of Pacific Island development away from the assumptions of "smallness" and toward World Bank thinking. What was new was the dramatic imagery and the air of crisis about what would happen if structural adjustment were not implemented.

The new depiction of the South Pacific has been accompanied by ambivalent images of "Asia" and "Asians." On the one hand, as I have shown, Asia is seen as the source of dynamism with which the islands must engage, and as a model of success. On the other hand, the doomsdayists promote a very strong image of Asians as predators, as unruly capitalists and exploiters, to be controlled and guarded against. The critique of Malaysian logging firms shades into a critique of the Malaysian government, and of Japanese and Korean tuna boats into an attack on the Japanese and Korean governments, and in some accounts, all of this becomes unwanted "Asian" involvement, to be warned against. During the Brisbane Forum, for example, Prime Minister Keating was reported as having "attacked Malaysian, Japanese, Indonesian and Korean companies for their rampant exploitation of the South Pacific forests and fisheries" (O'Callaghan 1994b, c) and Callick referred to "the *Asian* fleets plundering the resource for tiny bilateral licences" (1994c, my emphasis). "Asia" has been presented as providing both threat and opportunity. Despite Callick's call for open economies that will connect with Asian capitalism, for example, he viewed the first significant evidence of such a connection as one of the major "headaches" for Minister Bilney. He described the headache as "our new Asian chums are starting to rampage through the region's resources in a freebooting style similar to that of the European pirates of a century ago" (1994a). He also made Asian involvement in the region part of his "nightmare" scenario for the year 2010: "The region's increasingly close integration into East Asia has led to a change in diet, with more spices now used in cooking, and to a greater number of Asian workers arriving. Some artisans stay on after being

engaged on aid projects. Mosques are now found in almost every island capital” (Callick 1993, 5).

The negative portrayal of Asia is accentuated by a curious silence in the doomsdayist depiction. In all the talk of resource depletion, environmental degradation, and corruption there is no mention of the largest involvement of outside capital in Pacific resources, that of Australian company investment in mining.

The proponents of the doomsdayist characterization claimed it to be a significant departure from the dominant Australian depiction of the South Pacific during the cold war years in several ways: It is focused on the economy rather than on security, and sees the developmental answers in outward-looking strategies rather than the inward-looking policies of the past. It sees itself as moving beyond the idea that “small is powerless,” that island states are victims of the world system, and that they constitute a unique case. Under this characterization all island states can achieve good growth figures; it is just a matter of employing the right policy settings. The task the Australian Labor government had set itself, according to Callick, was “to transform the old post-colonial focus on equity into one of governance” (1995). Callick also argued that the new conditions necessarily involve the jettisoning of “old concepts of sovereignty” (1994d). By contrast with earlier conceptions, the South Pacific referred to is the independent Pacific only, that is, the fourteen island member countries of the South Pacific Forum.

At a general level, the normative concerns underlying the depiction—“sustainable development,” “making island life better,” “good governance,” “self-reliance,” and an “end to mendicancy”—are all goals that in one form or another have been espoused by all sides of the development debate in the South Pacific. Many of the problems described—corruption, deforestation, pollution, population pressures, employment, and obtaining a decent return on the fisheries—are issues of concern to most participants in the debate. The differences emerge in relation to how these participants characterize the contemporary situation and how they see Pacific societies proceeding from that situation to these desired ends. Rather than exploring the critique that these other development perspectives might offer in regard to the explicit tenets of the new doomsdayism, I now develop a critique at the level of preconception, or unquestioned assumption.

FRAMING AND DIVERSITY

The first of these preconceptions concerns how the category of “region” is conceptualized. In this, the new doomsdayism is unequivocal. It is built on an undifferentiated notion of region. In a process described by Cook Islands Prime Minister Sir Geoffrey Henry as having “thrown a net across the Pacific” (*Pacific Report*, 15 Aug 1994, 5), the new doomsdayism reduces the complexity and diversity of this area to simple depictions of “the South Pacific,” “the Pacific Island state,” “economy,” or “leader.” Whether in the general statements of the Pacific 2010 project, ministerial statements, or the main newspaper and television commentary, “the region” has been spoken of without recognizing any categories of difference. This implied uniformity predisposes those receiving these authoritative depictions to imagine each island country as having a rapidly disappearing forest as a result of irresponsible management of the timber industry (when most island countries do not even have a timber industry or substantial forest to exploit); as having a poorly managed airline running at a substantial loss; as being led by “corrupt” and inept leaders who “say one thing and do another”; as exhibiting a “muddling-through” style of management; as never having attempted public-sector reform or export-led development; as having a very high population growth and a stagnant economy. Yet this general picture does not fit the experience of any particular country.

The depiction of the situation regarding population is a particularly pertinent example because perceived high population growth was what prompted the Pacific 2010 project’s doomsday scenario. The region is depicted as becoming overcrowded, and the individual Pacific Island country’s population as “soaring.” A closer look at the research on which the doomsday scenario is based reveals that what was being talked about were seven countries out of the fourteen in the islands region: Fiji, Western Samoa, Tonga, Kiribati, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands. In two of these cases—Western Samoa and Tonga—it was concluded that net population growth is quite low. The South Pacific generalization, and the image of a mythical Pacific Island state, was made on the basis of projections for five countries.

This problem is underlined by contrasting the doomsdayist imagery of an overcrowded South Pacific with the image presented by Professor R G

Ward in his article entitled “Earth’s Empty Quarter” written four years before the Pacific 2010 doomsday scenario (1989). Ward argued that the problem for the South Pacific is an emptying out of the islands. In the text he was explicit that his conclusions were drawn mainly from an assessment of Micronesian and Polynesian countries (about two-thirds of the region’s countries), but in the heading and general argument the impression was given of a generalization for the whole South Pacific entirely at odds with the picture presented by the Pacific 2010 project:

However, perhaps 100 years hence . . . almost all of the descendants of today’s Polynesian and Micronesian islanders will live in Auckland, Sydney, San Francisco and Salt Lake City. Occasionally they may recall that their ancestors once lived on tiny Pacific Islands. Even more occasionally they may visit the resorts which, catering for scuba divers, academic researchers, or gamblers, may provide the only permanent human activities on lonely Pacific Islands, set in an empty ocean. (Ward 1989, 245)

One possible explanation of the generation of the region-wide generalizations in the new doomsdayism is that they reflect an Australian official, academic, and media perception of Papua New Guinea writ large. As a massive assistance-giver and with, to this point, most going as budgetary aid over which Australia has no say, this could reflect Australian frustration with problems in Papua New Guinea and a feeling that Papua New Guinea is wasting Australia’s money. A second explanation is a slightly expanded version of the first. It reflects a perception of the Melanesian countries writ large to cover all island countries of the Forum region. Helen Fraser has claimed that “Australian officials have acknowledged privately that the [Bilney] speech was written primarily with Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, and Vanuatu in mind (‘the countries that are important to Australia’ as one official put it)” (Fraser 1994, 3).

She asked, “What does this imply about the importance to Australia of its relations with nine other Forum member countries?” Her view is supported by the generalizations made about population growth that were mainly drawn from Melanesian experience, and the preoccupation with timber, a Melanesian resource. But there is the anomaly of Papua New Guinea having a 14 percent economic growth rate in 1993, the highest in the world. This was not generalized to the region, though the mismanagement associated with the Papua New Guinea economy was. This suggests a third way in which such generalizations are generated—taking a worst

case in a given area and generalizing from that: South Tarawa for overcrowding, the Marshall Islands for polluted lagoons, Polynesian Airlines for airline mismanagement, and so on. The abstract Pacific Island state and the mythical Pacific Island person thus become a composite of worst cases. The denial of diversity is also encouraged by the ideology underlying the doomsdayist depiction. Central to that ideology is the assumption that all are equal under the market, and that whatever the starting place, the solution is the same.

In this preconception, the new doomsdayism continues the approach of the previous dominant depiction of the postcolonial period. In their efforts to create the idea of the South Pacific as a strategic entity, development unit, and management area during the 1970s and 1980s, Australian policy-makers and policy-related social scientists tended to reduce the wide variety of regional circumstances to a simple stereotyped island society, and a unidimensional native person. Particularly during the cold war, which dominated the thinking of 1976–1988, Australian policy approaches were built on extremely generalized images of the region and on the existence of a typical Pacific Island state, economy, and leader. While the academic development literature had admitted some diversity in resource endowments and potential, it adopted a more general proposition stifling diversity as part of the main discourse and imagery of the South Pacific—that of nonviability and vulnerability for all island states. This was particularly so in the strategic studies literature, which was the discipline closest to the depictions prominent in media and government circles (Fry 1993, 231–232).

This type of framing dominated in Australian policy circles for much of the postcolonial period, except for a brief period, from 1988 to 1993, when some questioning of this premise occurred. Under the leadership of new Foreign Affairs Minister Senator Gareth Evans, and reflecting a view already held in the Pacific Islands branch of his department, there emerged an official recognition of the diversity and complexity of the societies and peoples of the South Pacific. This was first set out in the doctrine of “constructive commitment” announced by Evans in September 1988. In his speech to the Foreign Correspondents’ Association, shortly after becoming minister, Evans reported on his recent travels through the islands:

I saw for myself the real individuality of the countries of the South West Pacific, an individuality which underlined the error of some past Australian

perceptions of the region as a group of friendly, uncomplicated—and indistinguishable—islands. . . .

Too often the very real differences between, for example, even such near Polynesian neighbours as Tonga and Western Samoa, or such near Melanesian neighbours as Vanuatu and the Solomons, have been overlooked in generalised, not to mention romanticised, views of the Pacific. (Evans 1988, 347)

Although Minister Bilney claimed in 1994 that the government's new policy approach was a continuation of the constructive commitment doctrine, with appropriate adjustments for the global changes that have occurred since the Evans statement (1994a), the new conception in fact constituted a return to the dominant Australian mode of framing the islands through stereotype.

FRAMING AND BELITTLEMENT

In relation to the second preconception, concerning the degree to which Pacific Islanders are consistently belittled in the imagery associated with the depiction, the evidence is more mixed. On the one hand, it contains an egalitarian image of “the Pacific Islander” and the Pacific Island state. This was advanced by Minister Bilney and by Rowan Callick as a positive departure from previous depictions. No longer are island countries to be seen as restricted by the paternalistic notion of “smallness”; rather they should all be seen as having equal potentiality to develop if they change themselves and jettison old notions of sovereignty and restricting traditions. These images, however, like earlier missionary images, are concerned with *potential* equality *if* Pacific Islanders do what Australians advise.

The doomsdayist images of Islanders *now*, and in the recent past, tell a different story. As I have shown, these are consistently disparaging and employ many of the familiar stereotypes. The general picture is that Pacific Island leaders are corrupt, “muddlers-through,” administratively incompetent, irresponsible, duplicitous, uncaring about their children's futures and that they have failed to deliver “development.” In the two key doomsdayist documents, Callick's doomsday scenario and Minister Bilney's address to the Foreign Correspondents' Association, there are no positive images of the current or past leadership. All development efforts of the past decades have simply failed. The presentation of various Australian proposals for regional and national strategies—for example, on fisheries, public-sector reform, privatization, export-oriented development, and con-

nections with Asian economies—as new, reinforces the image of nothing having been attempted in these areas before. There is even a hint of the long-standing image of the childlike Islander in Bilney's speech, where he argued that “spoon-feeding will no longer get island countries where they want to go,” and in Keating's surprise in speaking of the capacities of the island leaders in the 1994 South Pacific Forum: “And the thing that impressed me, I must say, particularly, was the political will that they all showed in seeking to meet those challenges and their willingness to *actually* grasp the nettle on big problems” (Keating 1994, 2; my emphasis).

The doomsdayist imagery is not just consistently disparaging and negative; it is also imagery that is exaggerated and otherworldly. Even those institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, that share many of the same concerns, do not use this sort of imagery, preferring the normal terms used to describe perceived problems in other parts of the world (for example, Brown 1995, 1–2). While embracing the doomsday imagery, newspaper editors, television producers, and speech writers have not been able to let go of the paradise image. Minister Bilney, for example, after describing the “dismal result” of island development in the past decade, added “Paradise it's not” (1994b, 21); a *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial was headed “Paradise Lost in the South Pacific” (29 June 1994, 10); Kerry O'Brien, in introducing the “Pacific Nightmare” *Late-line* program, referred to “the fading image of South Pacific paradise” (ABC 1994, 1); and *Meet the Press* presenter Barrie Cassidy introduced the topic of the evening as “troubles in paradise” (Network Ten, 1). The impression was given that paradise was some actual recent past state rather than an invention of the European imagination. The fall to a nightmare state seems greater when the move is from paradise—from one mythical and otherworldly extreme to another—than if societies with various problems were said to move to a situation where some problems were accentuated and others declined. Ultimately the fall is from the paradise of the European imagination.

In this respect, the new doomsdayism is a continuation of the imagery of the cold war period. The advent of a postcolonial South Pacific did not put an end to depictions of Pacific Islanders as inferior in Australian official discourse, media imagery, or strategic studies. Indeed, cold war lenses, and the Australian government's developing self-image as leader (for the first time) of the region, encouraged the continuation of belittling images, and a sidelining even of images of potential equality. A geopolitical con-

ceptual approach meant that, as in the nineteenth century, there was a tendency to view the region through a “balance of power” lens, in which Pacific Islanders were largely absent as a serious presence. Where Pacific Islanders and Pacific Island states appeared in this depiction, they were seen as vulnerable to entreaty, with the potential to inadvertently upset the balance through ignorance or inexperience.

Implicit in Australian policy and media opinion was the image of the island state as only worthy of second-class citizenship in international society. Australian governments under Liberal and Labor parties attempted to apply a disciplinary regime that expected behavior of island states not expected of Australia. For example, trade or fishing agreements with the Soviet Union were considered taboo, as was the establishment of a Soviet embassy in the islands region. The approach by the Soviet Union to Kiribati was assumed to lead inexorably to a military base. The Kiribati leadership was assumed to be gullible and easily manipulated. Independent or nonaligned talk, common throughout the third world, was viewed as pro-Soviet rather than as issuing from the independent capacity of island leaders to have their own opinions and agendas. Pacific Island states, and Pacific Islanders, were portrayed as passive and childlike. A Pacific strategic personality, influenced by the Grenada episode of 1983, was married to the already existing notion of the Pacific economic person developed in economics, and to the “smallness” notion dominant in development studies. The imagery applied to the region as a whole was dramatic and exaggerated and bore little resemblance to the actual experiences of any part of it (Fry 1992).

The imagery associated with Evans’s constructive commitment doctrine at the close of the cold war constituted a departure from this tradition. Not only did it reestablish a visible Pacific Islander and a Pacific Island state through its emphasis on diversity and complexity, it also introduced empowering images. No longer were Pacific Islanders portrayed as passive or childlike. There was a recognition of sovereignty. This was a product of a reevaluation of Australia’s role because, although Australia had still seen itself as leading the South Pacific toward the end of the cold war, the island states were no longer following. In Evans’s 1988 idea of “partnership” and denial of “hegemony” was an implicit recognition of equality, although, as I have argued elsewhere, there were in his 1989 regional security policy still vestiges of the Australian Monroe Doctrine that implied an inferior island region (Fry 1991). Again, then, the new dooms-

dayism represented a return to the subordinating images of the cold war and a departure from the Evans era.

THE FRAMER AND THE FRAME

The third epistemological premise concerns the relationship the framers assume between themselves and the frame. In the cold war years, Australia (whether in government, academe, or media) continued to place itself firmly outside the region in its conceptions of “the South Pacific.” While it aspired to leadership of the islands area, it viewed itself as quite distinct from “them.” Cold war thinking accentuated this self-image of being outside the framed region (while seeing itself as manager of it). As seen from Canberra, “the South Pacific” (not Australia) was seen as vulnerable and potentially unstable and its economies as nonviable, and therefore particular standards should be expected of island state international behavior not expected of itself or other western nations. Although the notion of “one strategic entity” was promoted by Australian defense planners, it was evident that they had in mind a two-tier region with Australia (and New Zealand) having different rights and obligations (Dibb 1989, 66, 70).

Increasingly in the 1980s, Australia began to place itself inside the regional frame, but only for certain purposes. It did so particularly on nuclear issues, where it began to speak of “we” in the South Pacific. This was reflected in Australia placing itself within the regional boundary of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty and placing its east coast in the South Pacific’s antidumping regime under the Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific. When Senator Evans became foreign minister he attempted to make this conceptual shift a more conscious move. In his speech to the Foreign Correspondents’ Association in September 1988, significantly titled “Australia in the South Pacific,” he explicitly acknowledged the need for Australia to be part of a regional identity, as part of moving away from the hegemonic approaches of the past (Evans 1988).

The new doomsdayism appeared at first sight to continue the trend established by Senator Evans, and the more consultative approaches to conceptualizing regional security toward the end of the cold war (for example, Polomka and Hegarty 1989). As I have shown, Minister Bilney couched Australia’s right to speak on Pacific Island futures on the fact that Australia has had to adjust to global change and take the hard road

of structural adjustment. This seemingly placed Australian experience in the frame. But what was put in were the successes, not the failures or continuing problems. The whole tenor of the new doomsdayism is that it is “we” in Australia who have succeeded who are depicting “you” in the South Pacific who have failed. The return to the “them” and “us” of the cold war period is symbolized in the title of the minister’s address to the Foreign Correspondents’ Association: “Australia’s Relations with the South Pacific.”⁹ The speech was subtitled “Challenge and Change,” but significantly contained no changes or challenges for Australia, in stark contrast to the self-reflective Evans address of 1988. It was a speech about how “we” are seeing “your” problems. When “we” is used inclusively to mean “we in the South Pacific” it is only in the context of what “we” have to do about “*your*” problems.

Yet many of the problems the doomsdayists draw attention to in “the South Pacific” are common in Australia. While Minister Bilney was pointing the finger at “expensive national symbols” in the region, and in particular at the national airlines, the Australian National (shipping) Line was running at a massive loss, and it was clear that the government was not prepared to make the hard decisions about it (Verrender and Davies 1994; Millett 1994). The attack on public authority mismanagement in the island countries was launched after Australia had just been through a series of high profile revelations about public authority mismanagement and failure in Western Australia, South Australia, and Victoria, contributing to a change of government in each of those states. The continual cry of the minister, and Callick and other journalists, that the island leaders were selling out their future generations by not achieving higher returns on the tuna fishery looked curious against the knowledge that, compared to the Pacific Islands, Australia was receiving less return from the Japanese fleets fishing for tuna off its east coast (Warnock 1995). Drawing attention to the impact of climate change as an issue the Pacific Islands would have to confront, when Australia was a significant contributor to the problem (Riley 1994) and had worked against a meaningful global regime, was disingenuous. Deforestation, and the failure of governments to implement control policies, could have applied to Australia as much as to the Solomon Islands. And finally, environmental problems in areas such as coastal management, coral reef, and land degradation are at least as serious in Australia as in the Pacific Islands.¹⁰

This is not to suggest that the existence of serious, and in many cases

worse, difficulties in similar areas in Australia makes problems in particular island countries any less serious. It should, however, introduce a little humility and perhaps a caution about the way these issues are described. For example, it is not commonly assumed in Australia that because the Australian National Line has been poorly managed all public sector management is poor throughout Australia, or further, that this is due to some essential quality of being Australian. Moreover, it would be less distancing, less sustaining of the division between “we” the successful managers and “you” the failed Islanders, if Australian problems were also invoked. This might also act as a reminder that many of these problems are endemic to the modern development process wherever it occurs.

The issue of inclusion also arises in relation to the extent to which, and how, the doomsdayists encourage the participation of representatives of the societies they are framing in the making of this new conception of their reality. The total exclusion of Pacific Islanders from such a role was a defining element of colonialism, and it remained remarkably intact as a preconception of knowledge-making through the cold war years of the postcolonial period. Although there was constant dialogue through the South Pacific Forum, it was generally conducted within parameters already established in an Australian conception. This presumption gradually came under challenge from Pacific leaders. The acceptance of this challenge was at least implied in Evans’s idea of “partnership” from 1988, although there were still indications that he intended a partnership in which Australian conceptual influence would remain dominant.

At one level the new doomsdayism appears to be a development of the partnership notion. Minister Bilney, Callick, and the Pacific 2010 project organizers were adamant that they are not seeking to prescribe, but just to put facts before decision makers (Bilney 1994a). This suggests that they envisage maximum participation by those whose past and future are being conceptualized. They would argue that the ideas were discussed by the leaders at the Forum or at conferences organized by Pacific 2010. But this is misleading. What Pacific Island leaders were asked to participate in was devising the strategies to deal with “the facts” established by the Australian framers. The agenda was set. Thus, for example, although the organizers sincerely envisaged Islander involvement, the three or four island officials asked to the launching of the Pacific 2010 project were asked to respond how they would deal with the facts established by the project. In *Lateline*’s “Pacific Nightmare” program, the Pacific prime min-

isters were asked how they were going to avoid “the nightmare.” The conception of Pacific reality already has the status of *knowledge* in the minds of the Australian media, policymakers, and academics. Not only do the framers exclude their own experiences from the frame, they also exclude Pacific Islanders from participation in the framing of the new conceptions of their past and future. This, I would argue, marks a continuation of a long-standing practice that supports the subordination of those depicted by the knowledge.

FRAMING AND CERTAINTY

Finally, there is the question of the degree to which the doomsdayists presented their perspective as the one true Pacific reality. Australians, like other Europeans, have nearly always presented their conceptions of the island world with great confidence. The conceptions of Pacific Islanders as inferior races, or as doomed to extinction, were presented not as contingent beliefs but with certainty based on science, or simply the given starting point—that which is known. Although the nature of the characterizations and conceptions of the island region changed over time, the assumption was that some external reality had changed rather than the premises of the knowledge makers.

I have already asserted that such a claim to truth is a central feature of the way the new doomsdayism has been promoted and defended. Much of its power and legitimacy is tied up in its presentation as unassailable fact and authoritative knowledge. In the Pacific 2010 objectives, and when the minister was downplaying the Australian desire to impose on island societies, the stated aim was simply to put the facts before island leaders so that they could make up their minds about the best course of action (Bilney 1994a, 13). In their more explicitly prescriptive moments, where, for example, the minister or Callick set out what must be done if certain doomsday were to be avoided (and, sotto voce, Australian aid to be continued), they spoke with great certainty, as if there were no competing perspectives. As I have already demonstrated, this claim to truth is built on shaky foundations in its assumption of an undifferentiated region, in its construction of a fictitious island state and person, and in its assumption that it is only describing a changing reality “out there” in the Pacific, when the depicted reality is as much about a changing Australia.

This presumption of truth, underpinned by “indisputable facts,” can

also be challenged in several other ways. The way in which some facts are derived and represented is highly questionable. These are not just any facts but those that provide the foundational evidence for the overall depiction, those concerning economic growth and demographic patterns. In their account of growth in gross domestic product, the new doomsdayists repeated the distortion in the World Bank's representation of the experience of some island countries (excluding Papua New Guinea, for example) as that of "the Pacific Islands" as a whole. Following the World Bank, they also relied on averaging across the region (or six countries in the region) over a decade. The conclusion drawn by the doomsdayists of failure by all (or any one) of the island countries, on the basis of this measure, simply does not follow. To see the absurdity of this, one need only ask what would have happened if this same averaging had been done for 1993 and had included Papua New Guinea. In 1993 Papua New Guinea had the highest growth in gross domestic product in the world (14 percent). Its inclusion would have given a completely distorted view of the South Pacific average, but presumably on this basis the South Pacific could be represented as a successful region heading toward paradise! Nor can the central assumption of "poor economic and financial management" be regarded as an indisputable fact. The World Bank, for example, in its original statement of the Pacific paradox, referred to Pacific Island management of the 1980s as "prudent."

In relation to the demographic projections, I have already exposed the distortion introduced by representing the population growth rates of five countries as the experience of the whole South Pacific. Some Pacific demographers have also mounted a substantial critique of the conclusions drawn from the quantitative data in the doomsday projections and in other similar regional studies (Hayes 1994, 1995; Pirie 1995a, 1995b; Underhill-Sem 1994). Geoffrey Hayes, for example, has argued that there is no relationship between Callick's doomsday scenario and the demographic projections on which it is claimed to be based. The fundamental assertion, that the population of the Pacific will double to 9 million by 2010 implies, Hayes argued, "an average annual growth rate of 4.1 percent, a figure that appears nowhere in the following chapters [where the demographic studies are presented] and is almost twice the current rate." Hayes also challenged the claimed causal link between population growth and the projected maladies that form part of Callick's doomsday image: "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" (1995, 193). Peter Pirie labeled the doomsday scenario "fanciful," drawing attention to the failure of its creators to appreciate that the Pacific Islands "are far into a mortality transition, and all now have shown declining fertility levels," and further "that those with the highest levels, Marshall Islands and Solomon Islands, show unmistakably that they have passed their peak and are heading downward" (1995b, 188, 189).

A second challenge to the presumption of certain knowledge concerns the appropriateness of the facts assembled as evidence of the correctness of the depiction of the development situation. The problems of relying on growth in gross domestic product as the indicator of island development have been raised by Claire Slatter in her critique of the World Bank approach (Slatter 1994) and by the Pacific prime ministers in their comments on the doomsday picture in the ABC *Lateline* program. The reliance on an analysis centered on growth in gross domestic product meant that the doomsdayists did not count the important subsistence sector; they also missed the informal extraregional nature of island economies described by Hau'ofa (1994).

To see how contestable are the conclusions the doomsdayists asserted as certain knowledge, one need only imagine what the Australian conception would have looked like if it had been built on the assumptions of the United Nations Development Program's *Pacific Human Development Report* (1994) instead of those employed in the World Bank reports (1991, 1993). The *Pacific Human Development Report* accepted many of the same tenets about problems in population growth and low economic growth, but placed them in a different context. First, it did not see development only in terms of crude growth. It valued other achievements, and other indicators, of Pacific Island life. Second, it looked at the diversity of experience across the Pacific. Third, it valued community participation in development processes, and fourth, it placed value on equitable distribution. The result is an image of Islanders and island societies that is a mixed report card, but one that did not resort to the reductionist and alarmist approach of the Australian conception. It demonstrated achievements as well as problems. It showed that some island countries are relatively high achievers on some indicators, pointing, for example, to the dramatic increases in life expectancy that have been achieved in many of

them over the past decade. It did not present customary land tenure or traditional family systems as a problem to be overcome if development were to proceed, but as a source of strength. It also recognized the substantial obstacles facing island countries (UNDP 1994).

The United Nations Development Program's quite different depiction of the past and present development picture in the South Pacific was embraced by all Pacific Island leaders in 1994, when the Human Development Declaration, based on its conception, was signed by all leaders at the Brisbane Forum. Its picture of island development was also cited by President Ratu Mara of Fiji, a critic of the doomsdayist characterization of past development achievements. He regarded the following account as a useful corrective to the images of total failure associated with the doomsdayists:

Considerable progress has been made in improving the quality of life and well-being of people in the Pacific. There is generally a stable and secure civil environment; people are living longer; opportunities for learning, improvement in literacy and enhancement of human capabilities have increased; the subsistence sector continues to support an adequate level of living for most of the people; cash-earning opportunities have been generated in both the formal and informal sectors of the economies. (UNDP in Mara 1994, 38-39)

The certainty with which *solutions* were put forward can also be challenged. Although the economic rationalist nostrums were presented as uncomplicated, universally applicable strategies, there was silence on the downside of the success stories elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region or the Caribbean that were held out as models, for example, in the environmental areas held to be important in the doomsdayist position. There was also no recognition of the incompatibility between objectives. The ideal was held to be export-oriented industry like Western Samoa's automotive parts factory. If Kiribati, for example, were successful in attracting such investment to Tarawa, which would be very difficult, the impact of overpopulation around the capital and environmental problems in the lagoon would be increased, not reduced. The advocacy of a strategy of moving away from customary land tenure, large families, and traditions incompatible with capitalism, did not recognize that this is a gamble that only pays off if the investment comes, the jobs are equitably distributed, and the state redistributes to the needy, looks after the aged, and so on. It also assumed that investment capital would not move on as lower cost sites

were found (as when the automotive parts factory moved from Mr Bilney's electorate to Western Samoa). In the face of such uncertainty, the presentation of such strategies as the only way to proceed was disingenuous. There are implications for equity. To achieve a higher crude growth rate would not necessarily raise most people's living standards, and Pacific Islanders would have to exchange a system of security that has served them well—for an uncertain future.

CONCLUSION

For several generations Australians have generated powerful depictions of a region they have variously called "the islands," "the South Seas," or "the South Pacific," and of the peoples who live there. I have proceeded on the assumption, following Hau'ofa, that this has mattered for island societies. I have suggested that it is, therefore, important to think about how such conceptualizations are generated and to ask what ethical judgments might be made about the exercise of power inherent in this long-standing practice. I have focused on the conception dominant in contemporary media, policy, and academic representations as a window onto this practice.

There have been a variety of motivations involved in Australian framings of the Pacific Islands: some have intended domination, others have attempted to advance self-determination and development. The new doomsdayism falls within the stream of thought motivated largely by benevolent concern with raising living standards and self-determination, although other interests to do with "regional stability" can also be discerned in the background. In this sense, it falls among missionary approaches to the islands—whether Christian, Marxist, or liberal. But, as I have implied throughout, benevolent intent should not be the final word in the ethical justification for hegemony. In the case of the new doomsdayism, the thrust of my argument is that benevolent intention is belied by the subordinating assumptions embedded in the way in which this knowledge is constructed. The doomsdayists, like earlier Australian framers of the islands, are engaged in a system of knowledge that implicitly denies self-determination while claiming to advance it, and promotes superiority and exclusion while claiming to advance equality. At the heart of the new doomsdayism is the assumption of a special right to manage, steeped in old racist premises, which are the most difficult to acknowl-

edge. For these reasons, I would also contend that the new conception does not represent the departure from the earlier representations associated with the “smallness” notion that Hau‘ofa desires. Although its new images of the region and of the potentialities of its inhabitants might at first sight appear to mark such a departure, the underlying preconceptions continue the subordination inherent in the development and security discourses of the cold war era.

Nor is it sufficient or appropriate to base the ethical defense of hegemony in the claim to truth and the duty of sharing that truth. I have attempted to show that such claims in the case of the new doomsdayism are fundamentally flawed. The certainty with which the new depiction has been put forward, the evangelical tone with which it has been promoted, and the dramatic and exaggerated imagery associated with it, suggest that the answer may lie as much in a changing Australian imagination as in a changing reality “out there.” Second, the conception is built on unacknowledged assumptions about an abstract region and the existence of an essential island leader. Third, it denies whole aspects of Pacific Island experiences. This is not to deny the existence of significant problems in particular places of the kind described in the general portrait. Nor is it to deny the right of Australians to speak and represent island life. But if Australian knowledge of the South Pacific is to avoid the charge of hegemonic and belittling thought, there will have to be recognition of the subordinating preconceptions that continue to underlie Australian framings of the Pacific Islands.

* * *

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Notes

1 I use the term *new doomsdayism* to distinguish this from earlier doomsdayist depictions of the Pacific Islands: by missionaries, by those concerned with what was seen as the dying out of the native races, and more recently by those drawing attention to the possible plight of some atolls if climate change predictions come true.

2 The most important expressions of the doomsdayist characterization include Rowan Callick's "Pacific 2010: A Doomsday Scenario?" (1993). See, in particular, Cole 1993, and Cole and Tambunlertchai 1993, the speeches and interviews of Minister for Pacific Islands Affairs the Honorable Gordon Bilney (especially Bilney 1994a, b, and 1995b); and Rowan Callick's articles on these themes in the *Australian Financial Review* and *Islands Business Pacific* (1994a, b, c, d, e, and 1995).

3 See Tate 1961; McQueen 1970, 61-67; Thompson 1980.

4 See for example, Briscoe 1993 and Rowley 1972.

5 In 1993-94 Australia gave \$339 million to Papua New Guinea, constituting 24 percent of total Australian official development assistance. It also gave \$126 million to the other Pacific Island countries (Fiji, \$23 million; Vanuatu, \$16 million; Solomon Islands, \$14 million; Western Samoa, \$12 million; Tonga, \$11 million; Kiribati, \$7 million; Nauru, \$3 million; Tuvalu, \$3 million; other and regional, \$37 million (Bilney 1995a, table 1).

6 I explore the influence of the regional reform agenda promoted by Australia on the basis of the doomsdayist conception in Fry 1994 and 1997.

7 For the rejection by the three prime ministers of the extremes of the doomsday scenario see the Australian Broadcasting Commission's *Lateline* program (1994); for Geoffrey Henry's more extensive criticism see *Pacific Report*, 15 August 1994; for Mamaloni's criticism see O'Callaghan (1994b). For Ratu Mara's skepticism about the doomsday depiction see Mara (1994, 37-43). Mahathir's objections are in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 August 1994, 23 ("Mahathir Hits Back at Keating on Logging"); the Japanese Embassy's publicized concerns were reported by Craig Skehan in Prime Minister Billy Hilly's press conference at the South Pacific Forum, Brisbane, 2 August 1994; and the South Korean government's objections were in a statement handed out at the South Pacific Conference, Vila, October 1994 (Keun 1994).

8 A change of government in March 1996 did not affect the regional reform strategy or the dominant imagery employed in the approach of the key sections of the government or academia. If anything, the new conservative government of Prime Minister Howard pursued the regional reform agenda more vigorously and linked the continuation of Australian aid more explicitly to Pacific Island acceptance of this agenda. This discussion, however, focuses on the period 1994-

1996 under the Labor Government, as the main elements of the new depiction were worked out during that time.

9 Curiously, however, at the same time Australia was placing itself outside the South Pacific boundary in the new doomsdayism, it placed itself firmly inside when it came to leading the Pacific campaign against the renewal of French nuclear testing at Moruroa and Fangataufa.

10 See, for example, Alexander and Taylor (1996) in which the findings of the *State of the Environment* report are summarized.

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Abstract

For several generations Australians have generated powerful depictions of a region they have variously called “the islands,” “the South Seas,” or “the South Pacific.” The most recent characterization is embedded in a forthright salvationist message that warns of an approaching “doomsday” or “nightmare” unless Pacific Islanders remake themselves—just as Australians have had to. Like earlier Australian depictions, the “new doomsdayism” sets up Pacific Islanders for outcomes not of their making. While the images of “the region” and of the potentialities of its inhabitants might at first sight appear to mark a departure from the subordination inherent in the development and security discourses of the cold war era, the underlying preconceptions suggest that it implicitly denies self-determination while claiming to advance it, and promotes superiority and exclusion while claiming to advance equality. At the heart of the new doomsdayism is the

assumption of a special right to manage, steeped in old racist assumptions that are the most difficult to acknowledge.

The certainty with which the new depiction has been put forward, the evangelical tone with which it has been promoted, and the dramatic and exaggerated imagery associated with it suggest that the answer may lie as much in a changing Australian imagination as in a changing reality “out there.” This is not to deny the existence of significant problems in particular places of the kind described in the general portrait. Nor is it to deny the right of Australians to represent island life. But if Australian knowledge of the South Pacific is to avoid the charge of hegemonic and belittling thought, there will have to be recognition of the subordinating preconceptions that continue to underlie Australian framings of “the islands.”

KEYWORDS: colonialism, doomsdayism, economic development, identity, image-making, policy formation, power structures