The internet and postcolonial politics of representation: pacific traversals
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FOREWORD

Between thought and expression lies a lifetime. (Lou Reed 1974)

The research project that led to this book began with a hunch; a hunch that the internet and world-wide web would be quickly taken up by the peoples of the South Pacific. That has indeed been the case, as this study will show. But between that hunch and this book indeed "lies a lifetime". The same could be said for the internet discussion groups profiled here. For there is much more going on than a bunch of people 'just' chattering online. These practitioners, who mostly come from the South Pacific Islands and their diasporas, are taking everyday interpersonal interactions online to meet complex political economic and sociocultural issues. In so doing, they produce an enormous amount of material to read and think about, and create new friendships and support networks on the way. These 'Pacific traversals' of the internet/world-wide web are navigating - and recreating - these technologies on these peoples' own terms and for their own needs. They can do so because spaces on the internet/world-wide web have been made available to them by individuals dedicated to improving the lot of their own communities, in the islands and overseas. Hence this book has a lot to say about the empowerment potential of computers and by extrapolation, the internet. But it also has a lot to say about the disempowerment potential of the same. There are powerful and wealthy political and economic forces that would tame and exploit these same technologies for commercial, military, or political reasons. The point I want to make, one that is made daily by these practitioners, is that the internet and world-wide web belong to everyone.

There are many other people who contributed to the intellectual and emotional processes that are part of this book. First, I would like to thank Gerd Junne, Lily Ling, and Marianne Marchand. My gratitude also to Kees Brants, Johannes Fabian, Frances Gouda, Cees Hamelink, Jeffrey Harrod, and Anne Sisson Runyan for their feedback and support. A special thanks goes out to Helen Morton, who took on the role of external anthropological expert, for her helpful comments on the final draft. I am also grateful to the Amsterdam School for Social Science Research for the year of funding that allowed me to complete this book.

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Of course, I take full responsibility for how I have presented these conversations, and the conclusions I have made. But I do so in the spirit of open (and strong) debate that characterises the Kava Bowl Kava Club and Polynesian Cafe Kamehameha Roundtable Discussion Forums. My hope is that I have done justice to the vibrant, rich and complex discussions and to the generosity of their participants.

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