The internet and postcolonial politics of representation: pacific traversals

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INTRODUCTION

[Our] economy, society, culture, and indeed our very existence, are not fenced in by our national boundaries. We are inextricably part of larger entities: the Pacific region and more importantly, the world economy. Conversely, very existence as small isolated groups of people occupying a vast surface of the earth, like human groups occupying the scattered oases of the Sahara, is our unbolted back door. The result is that our Pacific region is the favourite ground for weapons testing by all major powers of the world, toxic waste disposal, and rapacious ocean resources exploitation. (Hau'ofa 1987:164-165)

A considerable percentage of the world's Pacific Islanders live overseas... New Zealand, Australia, Japan, the US, Great Britain, Germany; the list seems endless... Noteworthy, of course, is the fact that the KB [Kava Bowl website] is being accessed more than 600,000 times per month, making it the most popular Poly [Polynesian] site on the 'Net. Even more interesting, though, is the fact that 'hits' are coming from more than 60 countries around the world. Polys are everywhere. (KB Admin 16/11/98)²

This is a tale of two internets. To be more precise, it is a tale of two sets of internet-mediated communicative practices, (cyber)spaces and places, online (textual) productions, and their creators. Along with these two tales come two visions for the future. The first (top-down) version is the most widely disseminated. It emanates from the industrialised, internet heartlands of the OECD. It is a story of global markets and commercial marketing strategies; of corporate uses and perceptions of the internet/world-wide web. The alternative (grassroots) version is the main focus of this study. It is a tale that emerges from the activities of diasporic groups on the internet/www who are living as 'ethnic' or 'non-western' minorities ³ in these heartlands and interacting with each other and interlocutors 'back home' in their countries of origin (the South Pacific Islands). These practitioners are protagonists in - and creators of - enormously rich discussions and diverse interpersonal relationships that unfurl in the (cyber)spaces and places of the internet/www. What makes these movements and interactions particularly interesting is that they also (re)articulate longstanding, uneasy relationships between the 19th-20th century colonial powers of the Pacific (Great Britain, Germany and France) and their former colonies ⁴. At the same time, they present a whole host of other relationships and concerns that arise from living in the west. This study shows how the lived lives of these practitioners and their (re)articulations ⁵ online trace a complex set of everyday (cyber)spatial practices. The massive

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² Weekly Discussion Topic #59: Living Overseas... In A Poly Community, Or Not? The title of a message posted (initial post) on the Kava Bowl Kava Club Discussion Forum (KB). The discussion that ensued is no longer available online (no longer on server). All citations from these websites are reproduced 'verbatim'. This includes typographical errors, phonetically-based 'misspellings' that are often written-speech patterns, other languages, 'in-house' acronyms and abbreviations. Where appropriate, and without being too obstructive, these will be clarified in parentheses.
³ Such terms have their own localised sets of presumptions and contestations, hence the qualification. See Ashcroft et al (1998) on the term 'ethnicity' for instance.
⁴ The technological predominance and neo-colonial presence of the USA in the whole Pacific region notwithstanding of course. The contentious issues and historical relationships will become clearer in due course. Suffice it to say that Hawaiian and American Samoa are cases in point for the USA. French Polynesia in the case of France, Fiji in the case of Great Britain, and (formerly) Western Samoa in the case of Germany and then New Zealand (Teaiwa 1999). The two main Pacific Island groups concerning us here, Tonga and Samoa, have historical and contemporary links to Australia, New Zealand, and Great Britain by virtue of their membership of the British Commonwealth.
⁵ I follow Hall here. In short; an "articulation is... the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time..." (Grossberg 1996:141, see page 156). See also Slack in the same volume (1996:115). To articulate is also to utter, express a thought or feeling (see Freire 1972). I have added the (re) to indicate both the relatively novel way in which these dynamics operate in an internet/www context and the iterative qualities of these expressions, connections, symbolic and material productions.
amount of textual production that ensues shows the operation of received, and renegotiated, sociocultural rules and norms of behaviour which bring with them their own particular moral and ethical sensibilities. It also shows the exercising of particular online power hierarchies as participants challenge or acquiesce to these hierarchies as they come and go. At the same time, they appeal to extant political and communicative power hierarchies and sociocultural assumptions 'on the ground'. Interwoven in all the texts and movements that are produced by these interactions are (re)articulations of race/ethnicity, sex/gender, and class/status which comprise meanings of 'culture' and concomitant self/group identity formation for younger generations of the South Pacific Islands and their diasporas. All in all, these online traversals - practices of everyday life in cyberspace - point to a nascent politics of representation that is also a postcolonial one. This politics of representation is facilitated and mediated by this non-commercial, relatively open and inclusive side to the internet/www.

But what exactly do I mean by this book being the tale of two internets? After all, is there not only one world-wide web, only one "global information infrastructure" (Gore 1994)? Are not internet users only able to partake of the wonders, and dangers, of cyberspace thanks to the US industrial-military establishment (see Abbate 2001, Thomas & Wyatt 1999)? Is not the internet simply a super-enlarged version of a shopping mall, full of porn, neo-fascist and other anti-establishment elements, or a domain where autistic internet 'junkies' roam? And if so, is it not more a negative influence on social relations, family life, and democratic institutions than a positive one? Whatever the preferred answer to these questions may be - and I shall be addressing some of them in due course - they tend to presuppose that new(er) Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) arrive ready-made; off the shelf so to speak. As I shall argue, taking a critical social constructivist view of technology and technological change, this belies the complex contours of power relations, and struggles, that are involved in the research and development of any technology. This is particularly the case for technologies that are seen as harbingers of significant political economic and sociocultural change. Whether such a monistic view of technology be optimistic or pessimistic, in both cases the analysis elides important distinctions in the historical, political economic and sociocultural dynamics of how technologies come to be, how they are actually used, misused, circumvented or ignored. For instance; how the latter-day arrival of new(er) technologies are increasingly beholden to sophisticated marketing campaigns in consumer societies; the power and influence transnational corporations or business alliances have on technological trajectories (by funding Research and Development or, conversely, by not doing so); what happens when new(er) technologies are duly taken up, ignored, or reconfigured by ordinary users.

Broadly speaking, then, the internet of the first tale is that of contemporary, computer-mediated 'haute finance' (Polanyi 1944: 13-14) and its world of gargantuan electronic financial movements and commercial transactions (E-Commerce) twenty-four hours-a-day, incessant corporate splits, mergers and takeovers. It is a world that adores the idea of the Hi-Tech technical-fix. This internet/www presupposes increasingly sophisticated and commercially orientated hardware and software. It develops more - rather than less- centralised operations and surveillance systems. This internet/www separates the 'tailor-made' configurations designated for corporate users ('clients') from the un-negotiable and universalised 'user-friendly' configurations aimed at the consumer market. Either way, ever-greater transmission capacity for

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6 These three dyads simply acknowledge the open-endedness of these categories and their complex theoretical genealogies. See Ortner (1996) for an anthropological theorist's take on status/class and sex/gender, Haraway (1997) on the term, gender. See also Ashcroft et al (1998) for a good discussion of race/ethnicity. Nicholson (1997) provides a very good anthology of Feminist writings on all these concepts and their various definitions.

7 The term postcolonial will be unpacked more in Chapter Three. Suffice it to say that it designates the political independence of former colonies in the 1960's as well as a theoretical turn marked by critiques of western - 'eurocentric' - theoretical and research frameworks and their tendency to assume ontological and epistemological superiority over all others (Seth 1999, Ling 2001, Harding 1998b). What I mean by 'politics of representation' will be developed more fully during the course of this study.

8 Simply put, this stresses the processes of research, design, development, respective modes of use/disuse that go into any technological artefact, system or combination thereof. It recognises that there are a host of social / power relations tied up in these processes, and their outcome. I shall return to this in due course.
greater volumes and higher capacity of (commercial) traffic is a must. This internet of mega-
corporations' profit margins, of the highs and lows of IT stocks and shares, is also the
internet/www of Free Trade advocates. With this vision comes the marketing of a clear 'global'
message for all peoples, a long-term financial, political, and social commitment to a certain sort
of 'High-Hi-Tech' solution for not only 'developing' economies but also for socio-economic
exclusion and political disenchantment closer to home.

The internet of the second tale is that of regular, intense and jovial interpersonal
communication. It is a world where information is shared rather than touted, where moral or
emotional support is provided and admonition also dealt out. It is an internet/www where
solidarity and empowering self / group identifications and role models are actively sought out
and (re)presented. This world is one where uses of ICTs are based on personal commitments of
time and money to set up and run websites, mostly not-for-profit. It relies upon easy, affordable
access to computers and telephone, relatively 'low-tech' hardware and software configurations,
This internet/www mediates and facilitates searches for practical, on-the-ground solutions to
concrete problems of cultural and emotional isolation, racist and sexist forms of discrimination,
social and political conflicts and economic exclusion for 'ethnic minorities'. From these
multifarious interactions comes content; online textual production that articulates specific and
recurring concerns of its creators who talk/write about their everyday lives, who take time out
from their daily routines to muse on their (mutual) hopes and fears. These, arguably more
mundane, uses of the internet/www entail all manner of intercultural and intracultural
interactions - and alterations. They are intercultural because new(er) ICTs have enabled, just
by virtue of access and possibility, new sorts of 'translocal' linkages and production between not
only nation-states but also groups from within these geostrategic boundaries. They are
intracultural in the sense that dispersed populations - diasporas - come into contact with each
other and also those 'back-home'. Whether born and raised in another locale, living as recent
emigrés / immigrants, staying put or travelling backwards and forwards between various
homelands, these users of the internet/www articulate lived lives online and offline. This
internet enables all sorts of creative, and controversial, sociocultural and political expression,
aesthetic production and newer (cyber)spatial practices. To illustrate how these non-elite,
grassroots uses operate, this study reconstructs a selection of the online discussions of a
longstanding and vibrant internet community of - what I shall call - the postcolonial Pacific
Island / Polynesian diaspora.

Such a 'worm's eye-view' in the disciplinary setting for this study - International
Relations and International Political Economy (IR/IPE) theory and research - is not self-evident.
This is mainly because this discipline's parameters are still the 'big story' of (inter)state-centred
relations and politics. The argument here, is that communication - mediated by language - is
constitutive of all social relations, including political and economic ones (Williams 1977). So
too, then, are the meaning-making that go along with those large-scale relations (and
institutions) known as 'world politics'. Given not only the increasing ubiquity of ICTs in
everyday life but also in processes of neoliberal global economic restructuring, the

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9 The specifics and relationship between the area - the South Pacific Islands - and its constituent cultural
groupings, one of which is categorised as 'Polynesian', will become clearer in the later part of this study.
10 Whether or not technology is seen as an 'independent variable' to the world/international state system or
an endogenous factor (Talalay et al 1999) to 'global change', as part of the 'knowledge structure' (Strange
1999) or simply as the tool of Capital (Gill & Law 1983, McChesney et al 1998, Harvey 1990), ICTs are
still not being studied enough as constitutive of 'world politics' and its problems (Ferguson 1995:3/17).
11 Here, 'neoliberal' denotes macro-economic policies and political agenda based on monetarist
economic orthodoxy (control of the money supply and inflation at the expense of employment and social
security, deregulated financial flows) that privilege market forces, rational economic agency and minimal
state intervention in price and wage setting in order to gain economic growth. This ideology has reigned
supreme in Western industrialised economies since the 1980's. In the 1990's its international advocate is
the World Trade Organisation and International Monetary Fund. Global economic restructuring is part
and parcel of contemporary neoliberalism. In other quarters the preferred term is 'global restructuring',
seen to be more precise as it refers specifically to the structural and organisational process which
'redefines capital-labour relationships and the role of the state, while furthering the asymmetrical
interdependency of economic functions across national boundaries' (Castells & Henderson 1987:1).
Waters (1995) and Scholte (2000) are two good analyses of the term 'globalisation'. For other summaries,
concomitant gender-power relations ¹² are writ ever larger.

The challenge for theory and research, within not only IR/IPE but also the Social Sciences in general, is to unbundle these dynamics in order to study how they are actually operating. The direction opted for here is to delve deeper into what is actually being produced - the 'discussion content' - on a website or linked websites vis-à-vis their relationship to 'offline' contexts. This is pertinent for IR/IPE scholarship simply by virtue of the trans/inter national/local toposcopy of ICTs, on the one hand, and the self-declared political and sociocultural agendas expressed in many an internet discussion/news group, on the other. It is also pertinent to sociological and ethnographic inquiry in terms of the intra/intercultural dynamics with all their gender/ethnicity/class permutations, of such online groups. The geographically dispersed and non-embodied (cyber)spatial constitution of these interactions, enabled as they are by the internet/world-wide web, adds a whole new dimension to them.

A word of caution at this point for I have been painting a rather dualistic picture. The point of juxtaposing these two 'tales' is not to compile an exhaustive compendium of common all-garden everyday, life online that is then compared to the 'real world' (Graham 1999, Everard 2000). The aim is to show how both 'virtual' (viz online) worlds and 'real' (viz offline) ones are becoming increasingly "co-constituted" (Harding 1998b, 2001). Not unproblematically though given the unevenness in internet/www access, technical facilities and communications needs already manifestly evident in the emergent "Global Information Infrastructure" and its accompanying "Global Information Society" (Castells 1996, Gore 1994). The political economic and sociocultural contours of these processes, and particularly for the intricate and fraught relationship between colonisers and colonised is what is at stake in both these contending uses, representations, and visions of the internet/www.

The Research Problematique

Even though neoliberal agendas have been predominant in shaping ICTs in general and the internet/www in particular, they have become part of "the practice of everyday life" (de Certeau 1980). In those regions that have access to them, that is. These everyday uses suggest that there may be new(er) expressions of inter/subjectivity ¹³, other sorts of communicative spaces emerging as a result. The "translocal" (Clifford 1997) nature of internet/www communications would appear to impinge upon processes of self/group identity formation. For those that are not necessarily bound up with one nation-state or delimited by geographical fixity alone, this would appear to be even more the case. Non-western diasporas living in the west are a case in point.

This postulation presupposes that these processes become manifest in non-fantasy online scenarios (like internet discussion forums, newsgroups, live chat sites and such like), which make use of the internet/www as an open and accessible medium. These online traversals also trace offline postcolonial and diasporic living conditions. The ensuing "circulation of meanings" (Murphy & de Ferro 1995, Jensen 1995), and concomitant moral economies ¹⁴ that emerge, articulate symbolic and/or material gender-power relations in crosscutting historical and sociocultural settings. If that is the case, and given the broader historical context of neoliberal global economic restructurings (in which the widening gap

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¹² This positing gender and power as a relational dyad is to imply multiplex - ethnic/racialised/class-power relations as well (Bordo 1990, Hall 1996a, 1996b, Ling 2001a: 145 passim). More on this terms in due course.

¹³ By inter/subjectivity I am referring to what Robert Cox calls "the common understandings shared by the people embraced ... in respect to the relationships and purposes in which they are involved" (1987:17). Cox then adds that this is "the [shared] mental picture ... in ideas of what is normal, expected behaviour and in how people arrange their lives with regard to work and income" (1987:22) The point here is that these shared assumptions, habits, ideas and so forth are as much designed, created, and circulated as they are pre-supposed, and vice versa.

¹⁴ This will be dealt with more fully in Chapter Eight. For the Polynesian diasporas online, it denotes a fluid set of internet-based rules and norms of behaviour (netiquette and these groups' own 'ground-rules') that also carry with them their own nascent awareness of (Christian) morality and ethics. These are being worked out by trial and error but they also draw upon the gender-power relations of postcolonial self/group identity formation.
between the power and access of the 'information rich' and the 'information poor' corresponds to that of the developed to the undeveloped worlds and their particular privileged and underprivileged groups respectively), contending uses and appropriations of ICTs are implicated in present or future 'world order(s)'\(^\text{13}\). The problematique that emerges can be summarised as follows.

\[\textbf{What postcolonial politics of representation are emerging through the practice of everyday life online by postcolonial diasporas especially given the dynamics of neoliberal global economic restructuring and its concomitant privatisation, commercialisation, and standardisation strategies for the internet/www?}\]

A number of questions arise when the above scenario is related to postcolonial diasporas using the internet/www as a means and medium for everyday communication. With respect to the South Pacific Islands, what are the implications of this for relationships with people 'back home', and relationships 'offline'? Whilst subjected to top-down standardising and regulatory pressures of the latter-day commercial internet/www, how do these online practices of everyday life, and the postcolonial politics of representation they are articulating, develop and unfold? How do the participants, and their articulations, resist and contest these greater forces and in so doing create empowering electronically-mediated living spaces for contemporary postcolonial everyday life?

In view of the interdisciplinary nature of the study, there are four elements to this problematique that need unpacking.

\textbf{1: The South Pacific Islands Online}

The Discussion forums researched here have been steadily patronised since at least 1995 (Morton 1999, Kami 2001: interview) by a core of faithful regulars and a fluid number of others. Whilst researching how the South Pacific Islands may have been actively engaging with ICTs, I began looking at the pioneering Kava Bowl internet discussion forums. These identify mainly as Tongan but not exclusively, and are accessed through its portal the Pacific Forum (http://www.pacificforum.com).

\[\text{Kava Bowl Banner 2001 (artist: Tomui Kaloni)}\]

This took me to an early spin-off, The Kamehameha Roundtable, which is accessed through the Polynesian Café (http://polycafe.com). This set of websites are predominantly Samoan but designed for 'all Polynesians'. Other closely related sites that will be referred to are the online

\(^{15}\) This term is a heuristic to designate, for the sake of argument, broad periods of political, economic and cultural change and distributions of power in the history of the (European) Westphalian State System "in terms of the duality of [the] interstate system and world economy" (Cox 1987:107). These periods include the rise of capitalist economies and the spread of colonial empires, and their accompanying liberal political and (neo)classical economic theories. See Kegley & Wittkopf (1999), Cox (1987), Wallerstein (1974), Schwartz (1994) for four different takes on these broader historical developments and their respective intellectual debates. The 'new world order' is generally seen as beginning with the demise of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980's and the reign of neoliberal economic and political ideologies in the OECD (the 'west' for all intents and purposes from hereon in).
discussion forum of the Tongan History Association (an offline academic association with close links to the Kava Bowl), and the South Pacific Information Network (http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/spin/) which has had close links with the Pacific Forum online and offline community.

By 1999, the Kava Bowl and Polycafe forums were all going strong albeit with some time spent offline by the former (the reasons for which are not the concern here). By late 2001 only the Polycafe remains as a set of live and asynchronous forums whilst the Kava Bowl has effectively turned into a Live Chat site. Since the mid-1990's, the Pacific Forum and the Polynesian Cafe portals have formed the main axis (and produced the bulk of the archival material analysed in this project) for the "South Pacific Islands / Polynesians online". For cyberspace life-spans, five-six years is more than respectable.

The participants originally hail from, are married into, or have lived and worked in the South Pacific Islands. Tonga, Western/American Samoa are the original foci but many come from all over the South Pacific region (Fiji, Hawaii, Papua New Guinea, Niue although all these also have their own online sites). The majority of participants live elsewhere - USA, Australia, New Zealand, Europe. As such, they are part of the Polynesian diaspora (Clifford 1997, King & Connell 1999, Ward 1999). Here, diaspora simply means geographically dispersed populations that left the Pacific Islands either temporarily or permanently, many in the 1960's and 1970's (as is the case with my own parents' two Samoan employees and their families), and settled in Australia, New-Zealand, Hawaii and the West Coast of mainland USA. The population drain continues today as younger people leave in search of education, employment and 'overseas experience'. The upshot has been large concentrations of Tongan, Samoan and other Pacific Islands groups in urban centres of these countries (Ward 1999, Fitzgerald 1998).

Their relationship to 'back home' is complex. It involves financial and in-kind remittances and other forms of social and economic networks between extended families, identity politics for 2nd and 3rd generations growing up in the affluent west albeit often as disadvantaged groups therein; urban versions of 'ancient' and 'modern' rivalries (ethnically designated gangs for instance); political contestation of social and political establishments 'back home' and/or social unity by reference to the same. The (role of the) various Pacific Island churches are central to all these affirmations and contestations. In any case there is continuous moving in and out of the Pacific Islands - both physically and symbolically - which predates the (post)colonial period. Hence in the South Pacific context, the notion and experience of diaspora has a variety of (post)colonial historical particularities. There are participants from the Pacific Islands

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16 Apart from the Pacific Forum, from now on these websites will abbreviated as follows; KB/KC, THA, Polycafe, KR.
17 For the Samoan (and Los Angeles based) Polynesian Cafe this is estimated at about 85% (Aiono 1999: interview).
18 This cuts (unevenly) both ways in the South Pacific. For example, I and one of my sisters were born in Western Samoa, had a Samoan 'nanny' (Tifa) and 'house-boy' (Mulu) who, for me at least formed an
themselves as well. These look to increase as internet access gradually makes inroads into the South Pacific; unevenly and problematically. Suffice it to say here that the main access points are urban - Apia in Samoa, Nuku’alofa in Tonga, Suva and Nadi in Fiji, which is the telecom/internet infrastructural hub for the region. As for home-use versus institutional, it appears that many younger participants are taking part from High Schools and Universities, and others do so from their places of work (by their own admission). For example, in the Tongan capital of Nuku’alofa, the latest public access point is the Royal School of Science (owned by the Tongan Crown Prince Tupouto’a). See Appendix One for an overview of ICTs and the South Pacific Islands.

The websites in question are *asynchronous* - not real time Live Chat - internet discussion groups, which are based on what is called 'Bulletin Board' software that allows participants to 'post' topics for discussion. The responses (follow-ups) form into discussion threads - of varying length, levels, and relevance to the original posting (how to read these will be dealt with in due course). These are hyperlinked to email addresses that may or may not be operable 19. Nevertheless, people (get to) know each other in these forums whether they sign off with their 'real names' or one or two 'nom de plumes' ('nicknames'). At any point during a discussion, participants can move from the public-ness of the online forum sites to the comparative privacy of a bilateral email interaction 20. There is no way of always knowing when and if this happens but from what I can gather, most of the discussion activity remains on the open - public - sites, even when it becomes two-way, flirtatious, personally abusive, and so on. These 'serious discussion' forums are sub-sites of larger ones. They are not necessarily more popular than their Live Chat counterparts and so can not be seen as 'fully' representative of online Pacific Island communities. In Nuku’alofa, Tonga, about 60% of the public accessed uses (at the Royal Institute of Science) is said to be for study, emailing and live online chat (Kaitapu 1999: interview, see Figure Six). It should be noted that Live Chat is very popular for it appears that most of the local Pacific Island users use the Kava Bowl’s live chat to contact friends and family overseas (Kami 2001: interview).

The discussion forums examined here can thus be seen as a sub-set of this community of users/participants. Not everyone is "interested in politics" (Justin Kaitapu, Systems Advisor, RSS, personal interview, July 1999) 21. Where the money goes is a moot and politically charged point. On the other hand, in Los Angeles, Al Aiono started the Kamehameha Roundtable as a serious discussion site and he is very proud of how it has developed; “it is a pretty serious place and the intelligent patrons [of the Polycafe] go there” (Aiono 1999: interview). Taholo Kami, the founder of the original Pacific Forum portal is also proud of the ongoing popularity of these websites (Kami 2001: interview). The Kava Bowl Kava Club has also developed into a forum for serious - and at times highly politicised - debates even though the Kava Bowl itself started out as a newsgroup for Tongan and Pacific Island Rugby fans and way for its founder, Taholo Kami, to keep in touch with family and friends whilst studying in the USA. The former *Weekly Discussion Topics* of the Kava Bowl formed an early focus for conscious debate-making. In short, these discussion forums have become established (cyber)spaces and places within an increasingly interlinked set of sites. Their composition is robust in that they feed into and out of broader communities, on the internet and on the ground, which trace affiliations of various sorts important part of early childhood. We have memories and assumptions framed by home movies, photographs, artefacts, visits, weddings and funerals, my father’s working career in Fiji and his ongoing friendships in the Samoan/Pacific Island communities in Auckland, New Zealand. My own early working life was based in predominantly Maori and Pacific Island environments - inner-city and ghettoised suburbs. And my political education (like many of my generation) was marked by the anti-apartheid protests and growing political influence of indigenous land-reform and sovereignty movements in New Zealand and the region during the 1980’s. Having said all that, my parents remain staunchly loyal to the British Commonwealth and its Queen, forming as they do later generations of the British diaspora that colonised parts of the South Pacific in the mid-19th and early 20th centuries.

19 This facility has been built in by the sites’ founders to allow for discretionary anonymity when socially or politically sensitive subjects are broached.
20 For example: "Jatu, I am interested in what you have to say. Write me sometime so that we can go in depth with you finds" (Hope, 12/12/98 in brother/sister thread, THA, no longer on server).
21 I have been informed (Kaitapu, personal email, 2000) that visitors and tourists have been increasingly making use of the internet access, for a nominal fee.
such as immediate and extended family, church, work, school and university. Whilst these predate these forums they also grow out of the new internet-based relationships that form accordingly (Morton 1999).

To flesh out this profile a bit more. The research dates from 1996 although the bulk of the material is from 1997-2001. It would be fair to say that 1998-99 were the halcyon days of these forums in terms of the volume of online traffic. These forums are not password-protected although there have been some recent changes 22. They are characterised by being 'open' 'public' forums. Although they are moderated and 'owned' by their individual founders, they are largely self-regulating, with varying degrees of intervention from the website moderators. The character and composition of the forums' discussions also differ as do their demographics, unsurprisingly given the cultural designations they go under. The way they are/are not moderated also results in different styles, emphases and recurrences of certain themes. Nevertheless, there is a large degree of movement between all of these and other live/chat sites. When one site goes offline people just shift onto another forum. These discussions may be designed to be 'serious', but this does not preclude humour, satire, and general socialising, although most of this is indulged on other (live) chat forums. Neither does it avoid less socially desirable online behaviours such as swearing or 'flaming' (personal abuse or attacks). The latter is heavily reprimanded by others and regularly deleted by the moderator(s).

Whilst open to all-comers, these forums identify as 'conservative' or culturally specific (as is the case of the predominantly Tongan Kava Bowl), hybrid or pan-Pacific by designation (the nevertheless mainly Samoan Polynesian Café) or interest-specific (the KB’s Faith Forum or Business Forums for example). They are heavily patronised by younger generations although not exclusively. There are participants aged 17 years old interacting with others who are in their fifties. Several posters admit to being grandparents, many are parents of young children, whilst others are studying at university, or working. From as far as one can judge from their own autobiographical references, many participants are in their twenties or thirties, and from all walks of life. An important thing to note is that many are practising Christians (Pacific Island churches are important social backbones in the Islands and abroad) 23. There is also a fairly equal spread of men and women - both by name and explicit identification (Morton 1998, 1999 and borne out by my own research) although this depends on the subject matter. My own feminist sensibility has meant that I have privileged the women’s voices and explicit ‘gender content’ whenever possible especially given the enabling properties offered by online (quasi)anonymity in certain instances 24.

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22 In the case of the Polynesian Café a software filter has been added to screen for un acceptable words - swearing - in both English and Samoan. The Kava Bowl Live Chat site requires a registered password and 'avatar' (all quite easy to do, just follow the instructions). Taholo Kami, the Kava Bowl founder is intending to get the asynchronous Discussion Forums up and running again, time and money permitting (Kami 2001: interview). Both founders admit to taking the opportunity when deleting swearing to ‘clean up’ the sites, thereby freeing up space allowed them by their respective servers (personal interviews with Taholo Kami, Brussels, March 2001, Al Aiono, San Francisco/Los Angeles, July 1999).

23 Both Taholo Kami and ‘Alopi Latukefu (the founder of the SPIN website) are sons of a prominent Tongan Missionary and Church Leader/Historian respectively. They were brought up together in Papua New Guinea. Taholo went to the USA to study for an MBA, after completing his BA at the University of Papua New Guinea. He is now living and working in Suva, Fiji after spending time in New York and working for the UNDP. ‘Alopi lives in Sydney, Australia and ran the SPIN site out of the ANU (Canberra) server. Al Aiono was born in New Zealand of a Mormon family. He now lives in Los Angeles with his wife, Sulu, and children. They run the Polycafe websites from their living room. The main thing to note at this point is the strong Christian convictions of at least Taholo, church background and community affiliations of all three, and their commitment to community-based internet/www uses (Aiono 1999: interview, Latukefu 1999: interview, Kami 2001: interview). All these sites are still run on voluntary labour made up of partners, friends, and other enthusiasts who offer their assistance as moderators/administrators. Expenses come out of their own pockets or through donations (Kami 2001: interview) although Al Aiono has a more conscious, culturally focused for-profit aim behind his websites (Aiono 1999: interview).

24 In Polynesian public communicative cultures women are to be seen and not heard. For instance the falikava ceremony on which the internet Kava Bowl is based (see Figure Seven), is a male-dominated activity. Women are usually only there for to serve and make the kava, namely in their role as tou’a. Internet-based communications have allowed women and other silent groups (homosexuals for instance) a
Seeing as it is younger generations of the mid-twentieth century diaspora that produce a large amount of the postings, the topics are weighted accordingly. This comes to bear when diasporic participants are interacting with those posting directly from the South Pacific Islands in that there can be some sharp polarisations on certain issues (homo/sexuality, political issues and affairs in Tonga and Samoa most particularly). In any case, and contrary to assumptions about the 'nowhere' status of cyberspace, where someone is posting from can be a crucial element to the argument put forward, let alone to the sociocultural and political economic sub-texts in play. For instance, those hailing from beyond the Pacific Islands - often looking to get in touch with their, or their children's 'Pol' roots can be taken to task for their (perceived) relative lack of on-the-ground knowledge and experience. For regular or new posters of (non)Polynesian origin the same applies, with issues of 'racial designation' and thereby credibility getting thrown in the ring at times.

It also bears mentioning that not only do many posters know each other already, or have traced each other through extended family connections, but do so even when in a number of guises. Anonymity is, I would contend, (Morton 1998) less of an issue that one would think as a closer reading soon shows who the poster is 'really'. But it is more prevalent for threads; such as homosexuality (frowned upon by many Christian Pacific Islanders), domestic violence, pre-marital sex, inter-racial/cultural relationships and such like. Those professing to be gay do not use real names whilst many objecting to them (usually on religious grounds) do. In these instances there are a number of criss-crossing concerns and lines of division; the historical nature of trans-sexuality vis-à-vis homosexuality in Polynesia, the morals of the predominantly Christian posters that condemn homosexual practices as a sin, (post-colonial) notions of what constitutes sexual (im)propriety. These then cut across arguments about the role and effect of colonial missionaries on pre-colonial regimes / ways of life and sexual mores, the differences between public behavioural codes, intimate or domestic scenarios and whether this denotes hypocrisy or tolerance. For those about being a woman/man - in various scenarios - gender and standpoint are more readily asserted. For those about masculinity, the risqué humour and satire is usually at the expense of certain (diasporic) Polynesian male archetypes and their archetypal 'submissive' female counterparts.

All in all, this research bears out the point made by Miller & Slater's work on Trinidadians on the internet/www that "the Internet naturally fitted... intensely diasporic relations...[that] has meant integrating over distances through any means of communications" (Miller & Slater 2000: 2/18). I also agree with their "refusal to treat the Internet independently of its embeddedness" (op cat's/18) although I would nuance their arguments differently. In the case of these websites, anyone is welcome to participate whatever their gender, ethnicity or creed, and many do. These are designed to be accessible communicative spaces on the web.

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26 Participants reveal themselves in various ways for different reasons (Morton 1998). Within a thread, here are at least 3 places to see self-references and/or adaptations of these - name given in heading, the name signed at the end, in the body of the message or when addressed by someone else directly. These occur differently, according to the whim of the poster, the relationships between posters (some in fact may be sitting in the same room as I saw whilst in Tonga) and as a response to direct confrontation.

27 Al Aiono is less comfortable with the increasing use of nicknames, however, as he sees it as a potential abuse of these forums' integrity (Aiono 1999: interview). The use of nicknames and other forms of 'anonymity' are on the increase though (Morton 1998)

28 For instance:

I agree... that the views expressed in places like the Kava Bowl do reveal a widespread homophobia. However, I would like to suggest that there is a difference between public opinion and private behaviour. What I mean is that while many Tongan males may express homophobic attitudes, many have also engaged in homosexual behaviour... I don't think Tongan men are very different to western men in all of this, either! (Helen Morton, 10/06/98)

A different view, in reply to Homosexuality in Polynesian Culture, initial post by Douglass, THA, no longer on server.
2: (Cyber)Spatial Practices of Everyday Life

An initial introduction to the particular notion of "the practice of everyday life" used here is warranted. This follows Michel de Certeau's conceptualisation 29. His critical hermeneutic approach, coupled with a feminist perspective, lends itself very well to researching and tracing everyday articulations and (cyber)spatial practices online by non-corporate users and more so by non-western (diasporic) groups. His emphasis is on the inventiveness, the creative resistances of ordinary people in their daily practices of reading-writing, work, shopping, cooking and so on (de Certeau 1980, Buchanan 2000, Ahearn 1995). De Certeau critically develops Lefebvre's spatial schema of the 'everyday' (Niemann & Davies 2000, Roberts 1999, Harvey 1990) by emphasising how 'tactical' (that is spontaneous, informal, semi-legal) practices that comprise 'low' culture, daily habits, interactions and movements are just as politically relevant as 'high culture', party politics and other 'disciplining' institutions claim to be. The subversive qualities - and gender-power relations - of this bottom-up politicised notion of everyday-ness are part of the 'public' record even when ignored by experts (see Godzich 1986). De Certeau's point about the resistance potentials of 'making-do' (faire avec), creativity of the 'practical arts' (arts de faire) puts the analytical and political stress on informal, 'subalter'n sociocultural interactions and cultural production.

A couple of initial delineations need to be made, however. In internet/www terms these everyday practices have moved from the proximity of the continental, urban quartier (Giard & Mayol 1980: 18-22) to an ostensibly 'global' and non-corporeal locale 30. The (cyber)neighbourhood of diasporic groups growing up abroad is traced by their relationships with each other, with adopted geographies - as a whole or in specific locations, with life 'back in the islands' and with older generations. Besides, in the South Pacific, spatial practices - physical displacements - have always been constituted by ocean voyages (Hau'ofa 1998, Ward 1999, Clark 1999). Hence the movements, and inner-cities of the European - male - urbane fi"deurs (Arendt 1992:18, de Certeau 1980: 171-175) need to be re-read for both online and (urbanised) postcolonial scenarios. Be that as it may, the point is that (cyber)sp(l)aces are made by people everyday who leave their own (online) traces in the process.

Echoing Foucault (1979), de Certeau's conceptualisation of the everyday also critiques pervasive technocratic power, which he does not divorce from capitalist commodification processes 31. Together, their respective political economic strategies and architectures aim to separate out and then privilege designated spaces, practices and interactions in order to maintain power and control over others, non-elite groups especially. I will be arguing that these stresses and strains are all too clear in the history of ICTs and more recently, the internet/www (Thomas & Wyatt 1999). The practice of everyday life online shows an extensive and extending inter/subjective communicative (cyber)space that is not inevitably privatised nor standardised, despite what E-Commerce buffs and the 'Global-Speak of Corporate Capital would have us believe. Internet communities (fantasy ones aside and this is debateable) are anchored in specific cross-cutting 'offline' gender-power relations and histories as well as immediate online ones. Following de Certeau, online discussions also operate as vibrant everyday practices and cyber-traces in their own right. They counter and poach (de Certeau 1980: 10) from elitist programmes for ICTs, do their own thing so to speak, for as long as is feasible or desirable 32.

30 The upshot is that there are different dimensions to tracing (physical) presence - corporeality - and political organisation than originally conceived by de Certeau and other 'practice theorists (Ortner 1996: 7, Jordan 1999: 1) such as Lefebvre and Bourdieu (see Roberts 1999) or feminist activists (Sargent 1981).
31 See Roberts (1999) for another, less sympathetic, reading of de Certeau vis-à-vis Lefebvre. Part of this is related to how de Certeau's cultural theory has been adapted and depoliticised (as Roberts argues and I tend to agree with him) by much contemporary Cultural Studies and Media Reception Analysis.
32 Costs, huge commitments of personal time for moderators, limits of server and electronic storage capacity, connection fees and so on have all dogged these websites. Taholo Kami - the Kava Bowl (personal email 2000) and Al Aiono - Polycafe (1999: interview) have dealt with these in different ways. The administrations also use different sorts of electronic housekeeping and archiving (see above)
3: Feminist and Ethical Nodes

Ethics...defines a distance between what is and what ought to be. This distance designates a space where we have something to do. On the other hand, dogmatism is authorized by a reality that it claims to represent and in the name of this reality, it imposes laws. (de Certeau 1986:199).


This approach links directly to some of the ethical conundrums thrown up by doing online research into active communities (Sharf 1999). These range from whether research subjects be given pseudonyms when citing, to the positionality of the researcher in an online non-visible scenario to the issue of what constitutes an archive in the fluidity of internet-based textual production. The analysis and presentation of written conversations by live persons, irrespective of whether they have acquiesced to being quoted by default - or not - simply highlights how the researcher-as-subject cannot be totally external to the subjects-being-researched and/or field of action, let alone in full control of grasping how interactions and the meanings attributed to them unfurl (Ulin 1984) 33. This has preoccupied postcolonial anthropology (Clifford 1987, Haraway 1992, di Leonardo 1991) 34 somewhat more than it has IR/IPE theory and research. Nonetheless, not only must it be taken into account, but it also underpins how a feminist approach can demystify the power relations between the researcher and her object of research who are, in this case, actual people. Observer and observed are embroiled in some kind of mutuality and the concomitant gender-power relations impinge upon the body of knowledge eventually (re)produced; who gets the credit and also who has control over what is actually re-produced. In academic scenarios the latter is always the scholar-author...

33 The practical and ethical issue of whether to quote 'real names' as given in original internet posts of this sort is not an easy one to resolve. In many cases this 'real' name is in fact a nickname. So, the question then moves to the issue of what constitutes a real name in cyberspatial scenarios and the correspondence between that name (or other names used ) by any one person. I return to this point, and how I have dealt with it, at apposite points through the course of this study. Chapter Four examines the methodological side to all this more fully. I have opted not to alter names. At the same time as I have always been clear when participating online about my role as a researcher. When quoting private (and that includes emails) correspondence, however, I have requested permission to quote. In the one or two cases where that permission is still pending, I have withheld the name. Until these issues have been more fully debated - and researched or at least moved beyond the dichotomous discussions of what constitutes authenticity or inauthenticity in online interactions, this approach should suffice. Moreover, conversations about these issues are still in progress amongst internet researchers, myself and others, and myself and the moderators and participants of these particular groups. If anyone does choose to object to their 'real' name or 'nickname' being quoted in future publications of this research, I shall comply accordingly.

34 By this, I am simply referring to the broad area of anthropological research, since the 1960's approximately, that seeks to problematise and then rethink the cultural and racial hierarchies and also positivist research premises of colonialist anthropological scholarship into non-western societies, and thereby the colonial administrations and literary canons that drew from this work (Ashcroft et al 1998).
(Stacey 1997). Some may say that these concerns are exaggerated. But many of the more politically and culturally charged discussions reconstructed further on actually pivot on who has the right to say what, on which 'true' story or interpretation is at stake. As for myself, initially my postings were sparse and mainly concerned with establishing the fact that I was researching these groups (Helen Morton, 2/09/98, personal email) although I have become more willing to 'put myself out there'. This made my participation at the outset more of a 'lurking ... reading messages without contributing any of my own..." (Sharf 1999: 249). Nonetheless, there are some complex ethical issues at stake when focusing "on patterns of naturally occurring discourse in which those studied cannot choose to exercise the same sorts of control as with online surveys." (Sharf 1999:248, see 246-247) let alone in an internet/www setting. I shall discuss these at more length in due course. These issues and ethical choices are equally valid for online research - whether the protagonists are aware or not, acknowledge it or not. It is an ethical decision, a chosen stance vis-à-vis one's research subjects given that world-wide web software permits observers to effectively remain 'invisible' if they so choose. As I have said, I chose to become visible early on. The same goes for all participants who can either multiply or conceal their on/offline identities and agenda if they so choose. Online, this occurs more easily than in traditional fieldwork research situations or face-to-face interviews (Mitra & Cohen 1999, Sharf 1999). I shall return to these points in Chapter Four.

The above issues intersect with feminist-inspired research methods. These acknowledge the corequisite of (self)reflexivity for the researching subject (Stacey 1997, Hughes, Kennedy, Miller & Wyatt 2001). This research takes the notion that the 'personal is political' to be also an academic politics of knowledge production that brings with it a methodological obligation (see Stern 1999:359). It holds true whether or not other online protagonists identify themselves as feminists or not (and not is usually the rule) 35. These nuances become materialised when content of a personal, intimate nature is being expressed quite openly in a public internet forum 36 and when I, the researcher, (re)present them in an explicit feminist-inspired context. So whilst one can glean a lot about the protagonists and the issue under discussion from the threads themselves, the sociocultural permutations and embeddedness of these online conversations means that many have sub-texts and assumptions of shared or sought-after historical and sociocultural knowledge riding on them. Thus they entail information sharing, gathering, and negotiating between posters that is addressed to those directly participating (by writing), and by inference to those not posting (reading only hence silent observers). The upshot is that the content produced - online archive - of these interactions is there to be read - interpreted - by anyone else. And here both the ostensible thread and its sub-texts can head off in all sorts of other directions, create other interpretative issues (see Appendix Two). All the substantial discussion threads illustrate these interlocking facets; between what is and is not said, the personal-intimate dimensions of issues that demarcate online and offline political economies and how (far) these unfurl in this corner of cyberspace. Over and above one's own (un)conscious involvement, this subtle interplay becomes public record to all intents and purposes. The methodological implications of this will be discussed more fully in due course. Suffice it to say that the reader's - academic presenter's - subjectivity is also entwined in and influenced by such processes.

4: Politics of Representation - Whose and for Whom?

We all now use the word representation, but, as we know, it is an extremely slippery customer. It can be used, on the one hand, simply as another way of talking about how one images a reality that exists 'outside' the means by which things are represented: a conception grounded in a mimetic theory of representation. On the other hand the term

35 And in this way I position myself relative to those women who do not identify as 'feminists', some do quite the reverse in fact. To reiterate, this positioning entails that "feminist research, to be consistent with feminist politics and principles, demands that researchers write themselves into their accounts of the research process." (Hughes, Kennedy, Miller & Wyatt 2001)

36 Conversing like this on the www potentially has a megaphone effect on these interactions but in practice this is considerably muffled by its sheer scale, if not ignored by participants (up to a point). Password protected sites and live chat have a different quality of intimacy to them and, I contend, entail privacy, methodological and ethical issues of another sort as well (see Sharf 1999:245).
can also stand for a very radical displacement of that unproblematic notion of the
concept of representation. (Hall 1996:443)

In this quote, Stuart Hall captures well the way in which the relationship between
can concept and method on the one hand and practical, political issues on the other are bound up in
the term representation. Hall's point about the tension that operates between the "mimetic" and
"radical displacement" is also at stake in this study. Not only because of the way new(er) ICTs
have a role in this but also because of postcolonial challenges to western forms of knowledge
production and the implications these challenges have for inter/subjectivity at both the 'micro'
and 'macro' levels of experiences and analytical abstraction (Hereniko & Wilson et al 1999,
Ling 2001a).

The operative term throughout this book is politics of representation. To put it rather
simplistically for now; the power (relations) of (any kind of) depicting lived lives (social
realities). More specifically, political refers to the "gap between representations and those they
are supposed to represent; the gap between orthodox symbolic languages and their utilisation"
(Ahearn 1995:158). This gap - space - shapes the relationship between the practice of
everyday life and the political economic and sociocultural institutions that underpin and delimit
it. This entails gender-power relations in both their material reality and their articulation through
language (Williams 1977). New(er) ICTs are recalibrating this gap in a number of ways whether
by accident or design. And there lies the rub for how the relationship between mind and body,
theory and practice, has been construed throughout the history of western thought,
industrialisation, territorial expansion, and knowledge production. In contrast to Hall's take on
representations-of-reality, David Harvey epitomises this influential (Western/European) take on
this relationship:

Any system of representation, in fact, is a spatialisation of sorts which automatically
freezes the flow of experience, and in so doing distorts what it strives to represent...

....But here arises the paradox. We learn our ways of thinking and conceptualising from
active grappling with the spatialisations of the written word, the study and production of
maps, graphs, diagrams, photographs, models, paintings, mathematical symbols, and the
like. How adequate are such modes of thought and such conceptions in the face of the
flow of human experience and strong processes of social change?" (Harvey 1990:206)

An immediate, and perhaps rather flippant response to this rhetorical question of
Harvey, is "not very adequate, an approximation at best". Which is, I contend, the orthodox
materialist point he is making. It is one that assumes the existence of some 'thing' beyond the
"flow of human experience and strong processes of social change" and how these are
articulated, learnt, conceptualised inter/subjectively. Implicit in this account is a 'social reality'
that in the last instance can be ultimately grasped or known, ultimately 'represented'. To focus
on the 'material' need not, however, preclude an equal focus on the 'symbolic' (Hennessy 1993).
How each is construed and relate to each other, how they both constitute any gender-power
relations does not preclude a political stance or 'project' either. Having said that, Harvey's own
aesthetic judgements about what constitutes 'good' Art, Literature, Science, Politics
notwithstanding, this reiteration of the Cartesian ontological, epistemological - and ethical -
split between mind and body is at the heart of his main beef against the 'postmodern condition'
and the body of post-positivist/post-modernist thought that purportedly 'represents' it (Harvey

In contrast to Hall, Harvey argues that to privilege the constitutive rather than
"mimetic" role for such 'spatialisations' is to reduce 'reality' to all representations thereof. This
he cannot countenance aesthetically not politically. Whilst he obviously concedes some ground
to how societies and polities are socially and historically constructed, he only does so according
to his identification with 'high modernist' norms and values (see Huyssen 1990) 37. Trouble is,

37 This effectively reduces all things coming after modernist art and literature to the well-peddled
representation of Andy Warhol (the godfather of Pop-Art) as only a commercial entrepreneur. In so
doing, Harvey et al squeeze the complex politics and history of 20th art, literature, and cinema into an
impossibly judgemental straitjacket.
Harvey conflates a myriad of 'symptoms' with one particular historical event and its political aftermath; the gradual demise of the Soviet Bloc as a counterweight to capitalist economies and the now hegemonic reign of (neo)liberal political economic thinking. From there he construes all contingent social and cultural phenomena as functions of one capitalist logic, one fundamental evolutionary line of change; in cartography, in manufacturing and production, in time-and-space, in High Art and Popular Culture. Throughout this nevertheless impressive critique of neoliberal global economic restructuring as a sociocultural process with ontological ramifications, he elides the gender-power dynamics of these processes, let alone their race/ethnic dimensions. Likewise for the multiplicity and historicity of the symbolic, pictorial, textual, aural ways by which any (new) world is 'known' or experienced by anyone, in any society. In other words, that these social realities are multiple (within and between societies) and that the 'knower' comes from an "extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities." (Hall 1996:443) is not duly considered in Harvey's lamentation of the 'postmodern condition'. Moreover, the high-cultural regime Harvey is effectively defending - the 'Enlightenment Project' - is neither historically innocent nor politically neutral. Far from it, which is the basic point of any postcolonial approach. But neither is it as monistic nor as unified as he would claim (Senghaas 2001, Featherstone 1996). Although I shall be returning to this theme in the next two chapters and also Chapter Eight, here is not the place to develop this argument thoroughly. The main aim at this stage is to indicate the deep divisions at work in how 'representation' is both conceptualised and used, in both everyday life and academic parlance (Bal 1999).

From the point of view of this study, what is missing in such critiques of late capitalist societies is where inter/subjectivity lies in these "strong processes of social change"; processes that indeed become deep-frozen into institutions, laws, organisational structures and political systems. Even though the (albeit elitist) cultural take on the effects of neoliberal global economic restructuring is important, it fails to take into account grassroots, popular cultural levels of political agency. This is what concerns cultural theorists (Chen 1996), much feminist and postcolonial theory (Nicholson 1990, Moore-Gilbert et al 1997) as well as the 'postmodern' critiques of how the 'enlightenment project' (see Huysssen 1990, Nicholson 1990). There is a subtle but crucial distinction, with political implications, between the quest for recovery articulated by Harvey and that of Stuart Hall, who is also from the critical Marxist tradition. For Hall, the aforementioned 'gap' - or "paradox" (Harvey 1990) - is more fluid in that...

...events, relations, structures do have conditions of existence and real effects, outside the sphere of the discursive; but that is only within the discursive, and subject to its specific conditions, limits and modalities, do they have or can they be constructed within meaning. Thus, while not wanting to expand the discursive infinitely, how things are represented and the 'machineries' and regimes of representation in a culture do play a constitutive, and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event role. This gives questions of culture and ideology, and the scenarios of representation - subjectivity, identity, politics - a formative and not merely an expressive, place in the constitution of social and political life. (Hall 1996:443 emphasis in the original).

To sum up. The notion of a politics of representation has various aspects to it. One is about how the meanings and practices of (democratic) politics need readressing for postcolonial times, times that intersect with the so-called Digital Age. So do the meanings and practices of identity-formation in a postcolonial and diasporic context (as articulated online). These denote the everyday processes - spatial practices - that trace complex gender-power relations of online and offline life worlds/lived lives and interactions. The (cyber)spatial practices and the everyday lives they articulate cannot be properly grasped by conventional boundaries for experience and perception in IR/PE - global, trans/international/nation-state. The implications of these (re)articulations of inter/subjectivity and their permutations of sex/gender, ethnicity/race, class/status have import for the interaction between Research and Development and uses of ICT's with any future 'world order'. Where and how the internet/www is embedded in these processes concerns all peoples in all walks of life.
Situating the Study

Historical and Sociocultural Contexts

The initial historical point to make at this stage is that, for all intents and purposes, the internet/www have become part of people's everyday lives and indispensable for all manner of economic and, arguably, political activity. For those regions and peoples that have the means and access to the relevant equipment and communications infrastructures at least. The second broad historical point is that ICTs in general, and the internet/www in particular, are deeply implicated in the political economic and sociocultural changes in world politics that are usually known as globalisation or global restructuring (Harvey 1990, Waters 1995, Castells 1996/97/98, Scholte 2000, Fry & O'Hagan 1999, Marchand & Runyan 2000)\(^3\). To reiterate, I have opted for an adaptation of these terms; neoliberal (global) economic restructuring to emphasise the role neoliberal economic theory has played in these developments. Nevertheless, the jury is still out on whether the enormous popularity and economic significance of the internet/www is just a passing fad. Whether the swathe of analyses and prognoses of the social and political implications of new(er) ICTs will look quaint in a decade also remains to be seen. Commentators certainly do not agree about whether the world will be a better, more democratic place by having the internet/www as the principle means and medium of communication and information exchange within and across nation-state borders, within and across societies and cultures (Thompson 1995, Everard 1999, Graham 1999). Whilst all sorts of ICTs can be found as consumer items, personal communications devices, business and governmental facilitators, the transnational (viz global) corporations that design, build and support their various hardware and software components are now amongst the world's largest. Their continual reorganisations, mergers and acquisitions with telecom and media companies make for even larger capitalist conglomerations.

These latter developments in the history of international communications (Mattelart 1994), especially since the advent of digitalisation (Dicken 1992) encompass intensely competing material and ideological interests. Interests that are increasingly those of private capital, epitomised by the aforementioned IT-Telecom-Media conglomerates such as Microsoft, AOL Time Warner, Bertelsmann, AT&T, Cable & Wireless. The upshot of all this technical, commercial and political economic activity is that the physical configurations, uses and abuses, politics of content, access to and control of ICTs are deeply implicated in the practice and conceptualisations of post-Cold War International Relations / International Political Economy. The (postcolonial) politics of representation that are at stake lie at the contentious intersection of grassroots uses of the internet/www as an everyday communicative medium on the one hand, and its increasing large-scale commercial exploitation and privatisation by new(er) business conglomerates on the other hand. These are both occurring in the context of the emergence of a so-called global political economy (Castells 1996, 1997, Hamelinck 1997). This shift in thinking and policy-making impinges upon Development agendas of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and their Structural Adjustment rhetoric, for smaller economies (World Development Report 1998, South Pacific Forum Secretariat 1998). What is less evident, but which will be shown in this study, is that these dynamics also impinge upon self and group identity formation for younger generations of non-western diasporas, their lived lives and how they talk about and represent these issues.

In reverse proportion to their land mass, population size and GDP/GNP indicators, Pacific Islands communities, and their respective diasporas, are relatively proactive in terms of their online presence, activities and uptake of these technologies (see Appendix One). These uses have their own complex gender/ethnicity/class dimensions, their own 'translocal'\(^3\)

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geographies, and manifest content. These are 'atypical' internet groups because they ostensibly originate from generically 'non-western' cultures even though a large number are living and growing up in the west. As they populate, traverse and converse on the internet/www, these groups and their constituent communities are (re)articulating their own brand of postcolonial inter/subjectivity, sociocultural and communicative practices. In so doing, they actively appropriate and reconfigure the communicative practices, spaces and architectures of the generation of ICTs that is the internet/www.

The upshot is that the aforementioned 'global shifts' (Dicken 1992) are seen not so much in terms of their structural, top-down power to determine outcomes but rather from the other end of the telescope; how they are historically and socially constructed and, by extrapolation, contestable.

Intellectual Contexts

Social Constructivist Moods

This study is situated in the continuation of the 'Third Debate' in International Relations/International Political Economy (IR/IPE) theory. This theoretical-methodological and politically charged debate, following on the heels of the demise of the Soviet Union, effectively began in the late 1980's with the advent of a range of meta-theoretical and methodological critiques (some of which acquired the 'postmodernist' label) of established research models and foci (Lapid et al 1989, Devetak 1996, Der Derian 1995). These debates in IR/IPE mirrored those already raging in the other Social Sciences.

Since the 1960's, all manner of terminology has been used in the Social Sciences to denote a variety of theoretical and methodological contestations to (mainstream) modes of theory and research. The latter, based on beliefs in quantifiable 'scientific methods' and the objective status of the researcher, have been persistently challenged by these 'critical moments', ones that are characterised by the arrival of assorted 'post-positivist' and 'post-structuralist' frameworks. For the sake of argument, and at the risk of over-simplifying a vast literature and complex set of political as well as conceptual debates (see Leonard 1990, Huysseun 1990), these critical moments all reflect a mood of 'social constructivism'. This term also has a host of definitions depending on which disciplinary discourse they are addressing (see Ling 2001, Kolko et al 2000, Leonard 1990, di Leonardo 1990). Here, as I have already indicated, I am speaking of a broad inclination that stresses

how systematic knowledge-seeking is always just one element in any culture, society, or social formation in its local environment, shifting and transforming other elements - education systems, legal systems, economic relations, religious beliefs and practices, state projects (such as war-making), gender relations - as it, in turn, is transformed by them. (Harding 1998b:4).

Feminist and Critical (Marxist) approaches in the Social Sciences belong to this social constructivist 'mood' albeit in varying degrees of intensity and shades of political ideology. The theoretical framework for this study draws from these approaches, as they are read in IR/IPE (Marchand & Runyan 2000, Peterson & Runyan 1999, True 1996, Kofman & Youngs 1996, Burchill & Linklater 1996), and their intersection with 'Post-Positivist' critiques (Devetak 1996, Der Derian 1995, Palan 2000). This framework draws on these cross-cutting intellectual streams with particular reference to the intersection of Postcolonial critiques (Ling 2001a, Chowdhry & Nair, forthcoming) and Critical Feminist ethnographic approaches to participant-observation research into internet communities (Sharf 1999, Stacey 1997).

All the aforementioned social constructivist-inspired approaches take issue with positivist ontological and epistemological frameworks (see Viotti & Kauppi 1993: 1-16, Kegley

39 Harding, coming from Philosophy of Science, uses the term 'Post-Kuhnian' which is less misleading in many ways although less cogent in IR/IPE literature (1998b). Be that as it may, mainstream IR/IPE draws heavily on Karl Poppers' method - theory - of scientific inquiry (see Adorno 1976) on the one hand, and (neo)liberal political and (neo)classical economic theories on the other hand.

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It would not be exaggerating to say that the bulwark of IR/IPE theory and research has been one of the most resistant to calls for change that emerged with the prefix 'post' in the academy. The ins and outs of meta-theoretical debates in this discipline are less important than what the main bone of contention actually entails. Basically, the focus of all these critiques in one way or another is the positivist claim that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the 'objectively observed' object of study and the facts accrued - production of knowledge - thereof. Critics within IR/IPE then target the close working relationship between this philosophy of science and the notion that 'world politics' is characterised by the Westphalian nation-state system. Moreover, this system is one that operates under (or despite) conditions of 'anarchy' (see Kauppi & Viotti 1993: 47-53). Mainstream theories have been the champion par excellence of various 'realist' renditions of the world - as it is and ever shall be. Moreover, since the mid-20th century, this version of reality is delivered by fervent disciples of an accompanying battery of positivist research methods and models to underpin the veracity of this 'reality'. Enter the hermeneutic schema that is developed here, which takes its cue from those critical approaches that see capitalism as an essentially exploitative mode of production and social relations.

Implicitly, these ongoing, increasingly sophisticated and abstract debates essentially pivot on what constitutes 'good' 'scientific' method. In the process, this lexicon has been steadily chipped away at by well-honed critiques of its ontological and epistemological cogency (Der Derian 1995, Walker 1995, Lapid 1989, Ling 2001a). The upshot is a range of calls from all corners of the discipline to address the socially constructed nature of political and economic structures or systems, institutions and relationships that have been taken as givens for so long (Fry & O'Hagan 1999). This study also joins these calls by fore-facing the inter/subjective dynamics of sex/gender, race/ethnicity, class/status.

Another core issue in this Third Debate - and beyond - is what differentiates IR/IPE from other Social Sciences. It should not be forgotten that this is a discipline that not only lived through two World Wars and the Cold War but also came of age during the latter period. Its core lexicon reflects this legacy. For example; the study and practice of diplomacy; explanation

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40 In IR/IPE, this mainstream includes Liberal Pluralist, (neo)Realist, and Globalist (viz: Marxist influenced) explanatory models of the Westphalian "state-system" and/or capitalist "world economy/world system" (Wallerstein 1974). See Kauppi & Viotti (1993) for the main delineations between these approaches. Burchill and Linklater (1996) provide strong essays from the point of view of Frankfurt School-influenced "Critical International Relations Theory" whilst Palan (2000) examines this constructivist shift, as it is read in more recent IR/IPE theories, in order to posit the study of "Global Political Economy". Marchand & Runyan (2000) provide a Feminist IPE-focused anthology on "global restructuring". Ling (2001a) has a good summary of how both these traditions relate to Constructivist, Feminist, neo-Gramscian and Postcolonial theoretical concerns - and their methodological implications. Leonard (1990) gives a very good summary of the intersections between the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, Foucault - as a critical postmodern theorist, feminist theories, and several schools of "Dependency" theory. Kolko, Rodman and Nakamura (2000) provide a good account of sociological takes on these issues and di Leonardo (1990) similarly from within critical feminist anthropology. One more thing bears mentioning. There is a new line of thought in IR/IPE theory called 'constructivism' as purveyed by Alexander Wendt in particular, which also draws on these debates. This book does not engage directly with this new "International Relations School" for the simple reason that Wendtian constructivism is a rehash of positivist method (albeit with an added dash of Behavioural Psychology). See Ling (2001a) for more on this.

41 For example; post-structuralism, postmodernism, post-positivism, post-colonialism. Huysen (1990) gives some very good pointers in how to negotiate these convoluted debates where semantics do matter (see Hawkes 1997). See also Nicholson et al (1990) for a collection addressing Feminism and Postmodernism more explicitly.

42 This is, of course, a crude rendition of an ongoing and complex debate. See Adorno (1976), Harding (1998a, 1998b) and Haraway (1997), Chalmers (1980) for four different critical takes on this issue. Burchill & Linklater (1996) and Der Derian (1995) are good IR/IPE centred collections.

and prediction of war and peace; models of inter-state and inter-firm relations vis-à-vis systemic change or stasis; treatises on the "permissive" conditions for anarchy and/or governance; analyses of relations of economic interdependency and/or structural relations of dependency. This lexicon still informs (inter)governmental and economic policy-making, political and diplomatic career paths. It still provides the most durable images, and "masculinist" lenses of what constitutes "world politics" (Fry & O'Hagan 1999, Peterson & Runyan 1999). Saying this is not to concur with such an 'image of reality', however. Rather it acknowledges its representative power - and persistence.

The Internet and the World-Wide Web

All this intra-disciplinary agonising within one corner of the Social Sciences intersects with moves towards interdisciplinary research in general. It also intersects with how the geo-strategic and conceptual maps of IR/IPE have become increasingly reconfigured by ICTs. Of course, these dynamics and their 'revolutionary' role in western history are axiomatic for the development of other communications networks like the railways, telephone and telegraph (Mattelart 1994, Standage 1998, Kleinsteuber 1996). It is also implicit in the history of European territorial expansion and industrialisation (Harvey 1990, Schwartz 1994). The relative newness of the internet/www simply highlights these ongoing theoretical and methodological conundrums let alone how to theorise and research ICTs without swinging between Utopian or Dystopian versions of technological change, on the one hand, and overly determinist or voluntarist explanations of their sociocultural or political economic implications on the other.

If, ICTs, indeed any technologies, are historically and socially (co)constructed, rather than coming out of nowhere then even the most sophisticated of technologies are constituted by gender-power relations of race/ethnicity, class/status (Mitter & Rowbotham 1995, Harcourt et al 1999). But even as these can be disguised, reinforced or rendered seemingly 'irrelevant' by vested interests, critically-inspired social constructivist conceptions of technology posit that these, seemingly intractable, forces and processes can also be impacted upon and their incumbent gender-power relations potentially challenged.

The 'Postcolonial Turn'

But there is more going on than just ivory-towered tussles over theory and method. Despite the triumphalism of neoliberal political and economic programs (throughout the western world, and the South Pacific in particular (Jesson 1999, Kelsey 1997), the continued dearth of humane alternative political and economic systems of governance since decolonisation in the 1960's, the demise of the Soviet economic model and concomitant advent of a 'new world order', have contributed to a crisis of conscience within IR/IPE. These historical junctures and all their complexity, the challenges they create to previously tidy modern nation-state grids for self/group identifications and political expression (Everard 2000, Peterson 1992), the rise and effect of non-western champions of industrialisation and Hi-Tech production (variously known as the 'Asian Tigers' or 'Newly Industrialised Countries'), and various forms of indigenous peoples' political consciousness and activism in former colonies have combined to create a sense of 'apocalypse now' for scholarship that takes it cue and sense of superiority from the European Enlightenment and/or the political economic dominance of western economies since the colonial era (Harding 1998b, Ling 2001a, Seth 1999). In short, this is the effect of what I call the 'postcolonial turn'. With it comes a certain sort of identity 'crisis'. This crisis is that of a certain intellectual generation, certain experiences and constructions of masculinity/femininity, of national and/or cultural identification (see Harvey 1990, Dufour 2001, Castells 1998).

In one fell swoop, the Third Debate, and the advent of the internet/www meets this postcolonial turn; namely both an historical period marking decolonisation and its aftermath and as a variegated set of theoretical critiques of eurocentric knowledge production and political economic self-interest (Harding 1998b, Moore-Gilbert, Stanton & Maley 1997). Some of the interlocutors and their conversations are still living in small island societies that were once British, German and French colonies in the Southern Hemisphere. They interact with those who make up the main constituency of these online communities; urbanised, low-income and
(presumably) better-off diasporas who are living mainly in the USA, Australia and New Zealand with a few in England and Europe 44. The emergent (cyber)spatial practices - a term that will be explicated in due course - are created by practitioners who have something in common, who know and recognise each other, either at first or over time, by way of these online relationships and meeting places. These established and new (re)articulations of inter/subjectivity, of familial and broader sociocultural relationships are embedded in the gender-power relations of postcolonial South Pacific Island societies, whether back in the islands or overseas (in their own words).

A final point reiterates an earlier point about how online texts (discussion content) such as these can be best approached. One last theoretical-methodological stream is that of critical / feminist ethnographic approaches (Fabian 1983, Stacey 1997, di Leonardo 1990). By this I am referring to ethnographic theory and research that resonates with the social constructivist mood and its postcolonial turn, as outlined above. This is a whole inter/intradisciplinary journey in itself given that internet research is a relatively new field (Jones 1999). The participants on internet discussion forums 45 create a vast amount of would-be archival material that can be collated and analysed in any number of ways. They are populated by people who enter these open (cyber) spaces in order to meet each other and debate about issues important to them.

Although they run along similar lines to email listservs and/or newsgroups, they have a very broad remit for discussion. They also feed into and assume an online-offline community nexus. The discussions cover a gamut of political economic and sociocultural issues and make full use of university, high-school and work-based PCs that allow relatively cheap access to the worldwide web and the hyperlinked, interactive power of the current internet infrastructure and software. The upshot is a whole complex of symbolic, physical and electronic interactions and the traces left by these. In short, what people are saying and how they are saying it matters to how the internet/www is being shaped, and in turn is perceived and represented to others. How they (re)present themselves, (re)articulate their everyday lives, how and what they (re)produce on the internet/www as they do so constitutes in turn the latter from a non-western, postcolonial and diasporic perspective; sometimes in unison and sometimes in tension. To be more specific in methodological terms. These physical, emotional and symbolic interactions in the communicative domain now commonly called 'being online' in 'cyberspace' 46, are traced through a focused 'content analysis' 47 of these linked forums. It is achieved by way of a 'hermeneutic schema' 48.

44 I say 'presumably' because many Pacific Islanders are part of the lower socio-economic strata in their adopted country. Even whilst they send container loads of goods, and money, as remittances to extended family members in the islands, this does not presuppose that they are particularly wealthy. This difference in perception is but one fracture line between diasporic and at-home participants on these forums. See Chapters Six and Seven for some examples.

45 These websites are not those of fantasy or 'virtual reality' communities known as Multi User Dungeons, or MUDS (see Harasim 1994, Jordan 1999: 60 passim, Kolko et al 2000).

46 For now, I shall be following this definition: "Cyberspace can be called the virtual lands, with virtual lives and virtual societies...[that]...do not exist with the same physical reality that ‘real’ societies do...The physical exists in cyberspace but it is reinvented." (Jordan 1999:1). For other renditions of this term see Kolko, Nakamura and Rodman (2000), Harasim (1994), Shields (1996) and Jones (1999).

47 This is a term from Media Studies which in its most strictest definition is "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (van Zoonen quoting Berelson, 1994:69). The content analysis carried out here, though, moves beyond this strict definition, to towards a ‘qualitative’ content analysis that includes - indeed centres and looks at - "latent meanings and associative conclusions...to include...the recognition of individual and culture-specific interpretations of media texts." (van Zoonen 1994:69). See van Zoonen (1994: 73 passim) for more on these distinctions.

48 By hermeneutic, I am evoking an interpretative approach that privileges the role of self-aware interpretation as a methodological intervention to understand and contextualise written texts that are the object of analysis (Ulin 1984, Fabian 1983).
General Structure

Before outlining the general structures and chapters, a few words need to be said about the chapter order. The decision to place the theoretical and methodological exegesis more towards the structural centre of the book (Chapters Three and Four) is a conscious one. These two chapters need to be seen as links to those before and after them. Both literally and figuratively. They follow on from Chapters One and Two and lead into Chapters Five to Eight, but also conversely. There are three reasons behind this ordering.

First, it is an acknowledgement of the laterality and intertextuality of internet/www communications and textual production. Linear narratives are no longer sovereign in this realm as even the most novice 'world-wide web surfer' soon discovers (see Appendix Two). Connections can be made in an enormous variety of ways. The participants of the online discussions presented here make full use of these other ways of making connections. Furthermore, if this book were to be placed on the world-wide web, these chapters could well be hyperlinked, which allows them to be opened in any order - laterally - rather than in a necessary linear sequence.

This is related to the second reason. Laterality, multivocality and other narrative forms - both oral and written - are also a key premise of Pacific Island cultural production and historical narratives (see Friedman 1998). So is it also for postcolonial critiques of western knowledge production and its (obsessively) rationalist cognitive and teleological frameworks (Seth 1999, Wendt 1999). Positing and substantiating an emergent postcolonial politics of representation, as I do here, brings the some obligation to actually try and exercise this in terms of my own "scriptural economy" (de Certeau 1980: 231 passim) 49. This ordering reflects these inside-out / outside-in tensions but more particularly looks to articulate the space(s) that exist between these usually dichotomous poles.

Finally, in keeping with the 'tale of two (or more) internets' analogy, Chapters Three and Four provide an analytical bridge between the surrounding sections and their respective representative operations. It is also a way of countering the persistence of dualistic and hierarchical forms of academic knowledge production. Of course, given the formal strictures of written texts (even when liberated by hyperlinking software), a certain degree of narrative linearity is still at work. The second tale - as found in Chapters Five to Eight - is the one privileged in this study. But relative to the first, it is not operating under equal gender-power relations, conditions of access or financial and technical wherewithal by any means. Postcolonial practices and articulations of everyday life online, the manifest content that gets produced, the technicalities and ethical elements to all this are in an uneasy tension with those of global capital. This is why Chapter Nine brings us back to themes raised in Chapters One and Two. This is not meant to imply having come full circle for this would reinforce the sort of pessimistic closure, resignation to the aforementioned technological determinism that is critiqued in Part One. Rather, it is to emphasise the strategic commercial and standardising forces that are lining up to appropriate the internet/www for their own ends and who are doing so at the level of everyday life as well; namely that of habitual, daily computer/internet use and the increasing reliance on services and equipment providers that go with this.

Chapter Outline

The book is divided into four main parts. Part One provides the historical and philosophical context of the study. Chapters One and Two look at how the emergence of ICTs from traditional telephony provides the political economic and conceptual pallet on which the internet/www is currently used and conceptualised. New struggles for the ownership and control of the worlds' tele/communications landscape are mixing and intersecting with ones that date from colonial times (the railways, telephone and telegraph). Public Service Media and Broadcasting models have been shifting to commercial, multi-media ones. The 'big brother' that was the Social Welfare state has been transformed into a global corporate version. Meanwhile

49 This is a reference to de Certeau's critique of how oral knowledge and cultural production have been slowly replaced by technocratic forms of writing. See Wendt (1999) for a Pacific Island-centred take on the role of written or spoken forms of representation vis-à-vis the symbolism of body tattooing.
global capital is working hard at controlling and appropriating all these political economic and sociocultural changes. Not only do they have the political and economic clout but they are fully cognisant of the way in which new(er) ICTs have enormous symbolic and persuasive powers. Chapter One looks specifically at how the 'global' is being constructed, projected quite literally through the image-making of these new powerful constellations of Transnational Corporations (TNCs). But at the same time, non-elite, non-commercial uses and presence on the internet/www (which has found its place as an interactive mass medium and media) indicate that new spaces and forms of personal and political expression have been opening up. For better or worse and there 'lies the rub'. Chapter Two addresses the latter in terms of the conceptual lexicon and analytical tools available for addressing these inter-relationship between ICTs and any (new) world order. This lexicon is found to be wanting and more so for addressing the intersection of the internet/www and everyday life.

Part Two introduces the Practice Theory of Michel de Certeau and argues why this is pertinent to studying postcolonial diasporas and the internet/www. Chapter Three develops de Certeau's argument that to speak of the 'everyday' (quotidien) - everyday life (la vie quotidienne) - means to uncover the traces left by the multifarious interactions of ordinary (groups of) women and men in past and present socio-historical periods. The main issue is to forefront the physical displacements, spoken words, social interactions - and political struggles - of ordinary people, and especially those of non-western peoples, in critical theory and research. In terms of internet research, this raises a number of practical research and ethical issues. Chapter Four examines these by way of an account of how this research was actually carried out; a tale of the internet/www in another sense. It is an autobiographical account in many respects that leans on Critical and Feminist anthropology. The aim is to show not only how this research unfurled but also what critical ethnographic method can offer to internet-based research from a critical feminist IR/PE perspective. These two chapters provide the 'hermeneutic schema' for the reconstruction and interpretation of the online traversals that follow in the next four chapters 50.

Chapters Five - Eight comprise Part Three. Here, postcolonial, non-European (albeit living in the West) subjects, their lives and words, are central. By way of these online discussions, and the (online) everyday lives they are tracing, the relevance of other histories and ways of seeing the new (global) world order make themselves heard. The difficult aftermath of decolonisation, and neo-colonial economic relations, in the South Pacific mingle with the gendered/ethnic/class contours of everyday lives. These along with political economic and sociocultural institutions are chewed over and discussed in an open space - forum - on the internet/www. Three out of the four chapters each take a broad thematic set of "discussion threads" (see Appendix Two) in turn; sex-gender roles, postcolonial political struggles, the ins and outs of self/group identity formation in terms of how race-ethnicity are embodied. All these pertain to how 'culture' is perceived, experienced and practised "whilst living overseas". These pithy debates, casual conversations, and earnest testimonies overlap and trip over each other at the same time as they handle quite specific areas and concerns for the everyday lives of the 'Polynesian Diaspora'. They also speak to and from situations 'on the ground'. The fourth chapter of this section, Chapter Eight, looks at the specific online gender-power hierarchies of these groups in terms of how they are managed. Online rules and norms - 'netiquette' in internet parlance - overlap and bespeak nascent 'moral economies'. These trace the postcolonial representational concerns articulated in the previous chapters.

The more technical, formalistic Chapter Eight links through to the first chapter of Part Four; Chapter Nine. As I have already mentioned, Chapter Nine turns the magnifying glass back onto the first tale of the internet. It does so with specific reference to the Microsoft anti-trust trial 51 and how this relates to 'Big Business' strategies for the internet - as commercial tool and consumer item. These, rather arcane but nonetheless highly political issues of de facto and de jure standards-making, manufacture and distribution of PCs and related software for the

50 In common parlance, representations entail visual images, all manner of literary genres as well as 'scientific' texts and graphics. All these are at work in this book, just as they are in the online traversals of the South Pacific online.

51 In July 2001, Microsoft won its appeal against the original ruling that the company should be split (as AT&T had been in 1984) even though the original verdict was upheld (that the company was guilty of anti-competitive behaviour). Microsoft shares rose markedly as a result.
ordinary user has implications for how R & D (mainly funded by business interests) contributes, or not, to the Digital Divide issue (see Chapter Two). This chapter takes another sort of worm's eye-view. This one is of everyday computer user-interfaces 52 and the technical tensions and manoeuvrings that lie behind, and embedded within these screens and system infrastructures in order to show a link between technical design and political economic agenda which impinge upon what sorts of technology is developed, how it is produced and distributed, and the gender-power relations of use and access. It is a chapter that looks to other areas of research, as yet unarticulated areas of political debate and technical struggles. The point is that no community-based internet group, running on donations and/or some advertising revenue can ignore the question of equipment and systems upkeep, server space, software and costs 53. The Conclusion revisits these themes and offers some brief reflections on the 'possible futures' that are being traced, or touted, in these two tales from a postcolonial Pacific Islands perspective.

There are one or two last precisions to make. This study reconstructs these online discussions from within a particular feminist critique of neoliberal global economic restructuring, a critique that is not necessarily shared by all my interlocutors 54. Another point is that the postcolonial politics of representation emerging through these online traversals have implications for academic theory and research into the sociocultural effects and political economic implications of ICTs, on the one hand, and postcolonial frameworks, on the other hand. Along with illustrations, graphics, cultural references, prose and poetry, the discussion themes of Chapters Five to Eight bespeak western / European conceptual and analytical renditions of these issues. After all, these online discussions intersect with major ontological and epistemological debates in the Social Sciences; sex-gender roles and the public-private dichotomy, equitable forms of democracy and economic development, the gender-race-ethnicity-class-status components of self/group identifications, whether they be within or beyond those based on the nation-state. Everyday life and abstract philosophical issues are interwoven, at times uneasily. So are all manner of different idioms, syntax and lexicon used by the protagonists in these debates. Sometimes these do not mesh with the (more academic) ones opted for here. The distinction between my chosen analytical terms and those of the people I cite have been made visible, rather than explained away. The verbatim citations from the discussion threads - with all their vagaries of spelling, syntax, punctuation and formatting - will bear this out. The same goes for the complexity and open-ended style of the debates themselves. In other words, the operative principle of this study follows Spike Peterson when she calls for

new mapping strategies to situate ourselves and effectively negotiate the difficult terrain of globalised 'new times'. ....Rather then paralysis in the face of [these] challenges, we must ....acknowledge complexity without abandoning commitments to human understanding and progressive politics. (Peterson 1996:21)

52 The computer screen and equipment array of PCs and work stations used by ordinary users and its (by now) ubiquitous icons and word/data-processing packages.

53 Taholo Kami, for instance, invested early and at his own personal expense in the Bulletin Board software he uses for his many sites. He, too, acknowledges the double-edged sword of freely-available software currently available in the www. Both he and Al Aiono also know about increasing maintenance and server space costs; things that most users take for granted and do not question. Except when, like petrol, these things become unavailable and wreak havoc accordingly.

54 I say this because I have interacted with participants on this level during the course of this research, and my times spent 'posting' messages or responses.