The internet and postcolonial politics of representation: pacific traversals
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CHAPTER FOUR - RESEARCHING THE INTERNET

Introduction

Anthropological discourse often exhibits (or hides, which is the same) conflict between theoretical-methodological conventions and lived experience. Anthropological writing may be scientific; it is also inherently autobiographic. (Fabian 1983:87)

This chapter is an account of how to 'do' critical ethnographic internet research. It discusses some practicalities involved in doing this sort of research from a feminist methodological (however delineated) starting point. It is also a partial reconstruction of how a research method unfurled when the internet/www was the site, medium and, by implication, the co-object of study; a third tale of the internet in that sense. Anthropological ethnography (Hakken 1997:45) is, broadly speaking, the methodological inspiration for enabling me to do what I did 2. And IR/IPE is the academic discipline in which the research was conducted. The three terms in the title correspond to both practical and epistemological divisions of labour. Whilst the first is arguably still in the process-of-becoming, the other two have well-established canons of theoretical and research credentials, and their contestation of course. This chapter, with its more autobiographical tone, operates as a two-way bridge between Part One and Parts Three and Four.

It is by way of these demarcations that I shall be exploring a number of methodological issues that arise when doing internet research, and do so vis-à-vis feminist 'sensibilities' in IR/IPE (True 1996, Peterson & Runyan 1999, Kofman & Youngs 1996, Nicholson 1990, Tickner 1995, Whitworth 1999). The term 'sensibility' is used here for its productive and problematic connotations. Being sensitive in the first sense means being receptive to new, unexpected, and personally challenging discoveries during the course of any politically engaged research project. What I mean by this is that one corequisite for any feminist theoretical approach is some sort of political (normative, if you will) engagement that would improve the lot of those who are disadvantaged/(groups of) women (see Peterson & Runyan 1999, Harding 1998a). On the other hand, a focus on 'gender' should not be construed as synonymous to focusing on 'women' per se (Bordo 1990, Butler 1990, Carver 1998). This would occlude how a theoretical and historical construct is spliced with others such as ethnicity-race, class-status, sex-gender. The practical decisions that have had to be made and parameters set - or enforced - reflect how the internet/www has been developing over the last ten years at least, both in itself, vis-à-vis the contemporary 'new(er) world order', and in conceptual terms. They relate to very concrete practical problems of doing feminist and interdisciplinary research within academic institutions (see de Certeau 1986: 199 passim), let alone research into the internet/www that is consistent with a critical IR/IPE framework 3. What has emerged as a 'method' also articulates my own learning-by-doing as I was confronted with technical contingencies, the (in)appropriateness of new or established assumptions about data collection and archiving, and ethical choices along the way. In that sense, the method portrayed is feminist in so much as I am writing myself - the 'researcher' - into this account of the research process (Hughes, Kennedy, Miller & Wyatt 2000: 4). The conundrums outlined here also reflect upon the online life-cycles to date of the discussion forums, respective software, infrastructural access and capabilities, and their composite communities. The discussion threads examined here constitute new(er) archival material or 'evidence' with their own characteristics. So included here is the life-cycle of the research itself, and my part in it.

To talk of 'doing method' is to imply some notion of 'theory', however defined, or a process of theorising. Here the latter is taken to mean, at the very least, a (self)reflective process 4.

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2 Writing about method from a feminist sensibility (Hughes et al, 2000), and certainly in the case of a rapidly changing technology like the internet/www, can also be seen as 'inherently autobiographic'.

3 By this I am referring to the multifarious body of feminist inspired - and other - theory and research in IR/IPE that intersects with post-positivist - constructivist - understandings of political economic relations, postcolonial perspectives on the 'other' and the concomitant research methods that emerge (Ling 2001a, Der Derian 1995, Devetak 1996, True 1996). These terms also designate discrete sub-disciplines within IR/IPE that do not necessarily communicate with each others' work. But I regard these differentiations as an historiographical and institutional issue rather than always an issue of a priori 'incommensurability'.

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of achieving conceptual rigour and maintaining intellectual integrity. Being aware of one's position as researcher/co-referent in the knowledge that is produced also ties in with 'feminist sensibilities', which I will explain further on. Rather than declaring the discovery of 'a' feminist method for online research, and least of all setting out to put dibs on an 'ethnographic method' for the discipline of IR/IPE, this account deals with a number of interrelated issues for online research that also overlap with feminist theories and politics.

Feminist-inspired approaches ask certain questions and not others, in a number of particular ways. For example, they ask questions about (the political economies of) any gender-power relations, about the relationship between subject-researcher, research object and subject-subject, especially when these interactions involve other people, other societies, other sociocultural and political assumptions than one's own or one's disciplinary framework. Apart from how such questions critique the power constructions of Cartesian dichotomies and their gendered - ethnic - class corollaries, feminist questionings are also at work in internet/www research. In terms of this project, these questionings echo through the study of everyday-life-as online-archives, the nature of online-ness vis-à-vis offline academic standards for research, the peculiarities of cyberspace as an ethnographic 'field' or new source/site for investigation, and choices to be made between quantitative and/or qualitative data gathering in an age of electronic (re)search tools and new ethical situations thrown up by internet research. By extrapolation these roughly correspond to the way in which the internet/www offers new possibilities and also new pitfalls for interdisciplinary critical theory and research (see Chapter Two).

In this account I unpack some of the mechanisms that have allowed me to substantiate the claims being made here. I have already hinted at some of the communal nodes between feminist sensibilities, the nature of online discussions as daily practice, and critical ethnographic research methods. But there are some major assumptions going begging; what is - should be - 'feminist' method, how to conceptualise the internet/www, and the increasingly fashionable (see Miller & Slater op cit: 17/18) adjective of 'ethnographic' in the Social Sciences. This leads me to assert that how something is conceptualised, what abstract parameters are set, co-constitutes method. Such a stance also conforms to feminist sensibilities, of the post-positivist and/or postcolonial variety at least 4. What I shall be presenting are the details of a mixed method of qualitative research (see Miller & Slater: op cit, 17-18/18) 5.

Some Definitional Discomforts

This section examines the conceptualisations already at work in the previous chapters and how I arrived at them in the course of the research. These seep into the more blow-by-blow account of online research specifics later on. Why I see the practice of conceptualising (normally banished to the realms of one's 'theoretical framework' or 'definitions' sections in research proposal or final product) as method is because conceptualising the internet/www - cyberspace - virtual realities and so forth calls upon a host of methodological assumptions and practices; old, new, and recycled. To a certain extent they replicate familiar lines of epistemological conflict in the academy and, as far as this research is concerned, of all too familiar forms of theoretical and substantive exclusion such as ingrained disciplinary boundaries and conceptual rigor mortis (see Haraway 1997) 6. How one conceptualises the

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4 Although ostensibly not putting a feminist approach forward, Johannes Fabian (1983) puts it well in his critique of an anthropological discourse (and of other Social Sciences I might add) that "construes the Other in terms of distance, spatial and temporal. The Other's empirical presence turns into [her/his] theoretical absence, a conjuring trick which is worked with the help of an array of devices that have the common intent and function to keep the Other outside....." (1983:xi). See Stacey (1997) for a personal account of how this works - or not in fieldwork.

5 See Appendices Three and Four for some empirical details relating the pool of discussion threads referred to in Chapters Five to Eight.

6 In 2001, it can be quickly forgotten just how 'odd', 'unconventional', 'self-indulgent', and 'irrelevant' internet-based / internet-focused research was in some academic communities not so long ago (these terms are but a selection of those I have heard over the years). As I have argued in Chapter Two, IR/IPE is one discipline that guards its (highly porous) disciplinary boundaries most fiercely. Internet and/or 'communications' research is only now becoming more 'legitimate' from within IR/IPE. A good example is the financial and institutional support now given (since about 1999) to 'international communications'
object/subject of research channels research efforts in certain directions and particularly in the case of ICTs. For instance, more empirically focused conceptualisations can presume the currency of certain data gathering devices - electronic ways especially; presume the (in)efficacy of certain kinds of counting, tallying and statistics as primary data; see online groups/communities and their textual presence/electronic traces, as a world apart or as in/of-a-world (see Jordan 1999). Any research tradition and method informs how one arrives at a concept. In the case of the internet/www, established empirical and political positions have until only recently been either dismissing it or subsuming online manifestations as ontologically inferior to 'real' changes in political economic systems and/or sociocultural life. As I have argued, on the whole ICTs are still regarded in IR/IPE and Political Science in rather technologically determinist, and eurocentric terms. This impinges upon what exactly about ICTs is being researched and what problems, or solutions are construed accordingly.

Having said that, burgeoning research into the effects and uses of ICTs over recent years throughout the Social Sciences has given rise to a set of concepts and metaphors (Kleinsteuber 1996) used to encapsulate these (for example the 'Information Society', time-space compression, Global Communications). The methods employed, however, to investigate these processes often amount to an electronic version of established ones. Ethnographic method is also a case in point (see below). As for any sort of Feminist method, of the ethnographic variety or not, this research path simply points to the veracity of Linda Nicholson's comment on how trying to "identify unitary themes in the experiences or perspectives of women may require the suppression of voices different from our own" (1990:6). On the other hand, the online groups focused on, the discussions examined and participated in also bear out the other side of this coin; that theorising [and practice] needs some stopping points and that for feminists an important stopping point is gender. To invoke the ideal of endless difference is for feminism either to self-destruct or to finally accept an ontology of abstract individualism (Nicholson 1990:8).

Concepts and how we get to them are also stopping - and starting - points for what we end up discovering and how we get there along the way (see de Certeau 1986:117-118). For this research three have been at stake. Let us begin with the first.

The internet/www

Coming, as I do, from an international political economy approach, the materiality of ICTs is seen as integral to their sociocultural, symbolic and political resonances. This materiality is also pertinent to the gendered, ethnic, and class dimensions of these resonances. It permeates, and is articulated in the exchanges of meanings, (cyber)spaces and meeting places that are emerging in and through the internet/www. In the case of researching these as they operate online and in cyberspace transplanting established research methods, rules and norms of objectivity, validity and archival integrity cannot be done automatically (see Jones et al 1999). Furthermore, terms like the internet, world-wide web, ICTs, computer-mediated communication, to name but a few, have had many shifts in meaning over the last few years.

working groups and research sections by, first, the British International Studies Association and then the (US-dominated) International Studies Association. There is also an international 'Association of Internet Researchers' that had its first international conference last year. A quick literature search would also show that most internet research monographs and edited volumes date from the last two-three years. Granted, I am biased, but there is a clear upward swing in the research curve on internet-related matters in IR/IPE if international conferences are anything to go by; prompting one Political Communications scholar to comment that other forms of media are in danger of being overlooked in this latest fad (Frank Beer, ISA Annual Conference 2001, Chicago, USA).

7 The email questionnaire for example, or the study of online voting behaviour by recourse to new electronic quantitative tools. Various sorts of Discourse Analysis have found a new goldmine as well, in the new semantics and lexicon of online interactions on newsgroups, fantasy communities and live chat and so on (Jones et al 1999, Kolko et al 2000). Media Studies use of Content Analysis has also found a new resource in the internet/www (van Zoonen 1994, Wilhelm 2000).
My own tussling with how to pin down the internet/www in the 1990's as an immensely popular, public medium, where being online, web surfing, live chatting and emailing (not to be underestimated) through local area networks quickly established themselves as social, inter/subjective activities. It is also the story of my own methodological (and conceptual) steps that wended its ways gradually down from top-down to bottom-up conceptions and method. This book is the upshot even whilst it can only just begin to engage with the steady growth of internet-based and internet-focused scholarship in the last few years. Coupled with this are massive increases in commercially oriented internet use in the OECD regions and the integration of new(er) ICTs into Development discourse and Foreign Aid budgets. Of course the statistics that get bandied about in this respect belie the intricacies of the gendered, sociocultural, ethnic, economic, and geographic divisions that go along with these developments, on both sides of the so-called Digital Divide (see Appendix One). These dynamics are part and parcel of this reconstruction of a research method which is another tale of the internet in itself. Telling this tale serves as a reminder about just how 'everyday' the internet/www has become in the last few years, of how unfamiliar its applications once were, not so long ago, and how patchy its spread was in most parts of the world, the US West Coast notwithstanding.

When I started out in 1996, an IR/IPE point of view of ICTs saw the infrastructural and institutional issues (offline worlds let us say for a moment) as far weightier - worthier - than the online presence or content of discussion groups (and arguably still does). In the case of the South Pacific Islands vis-a-vis ICTs in general (Ogden 1993, Dator et al 1986) let alone the internet/www (Ogden 1999, Morton 1999), the object/subjects of study - institutions, people, online groups - were fewer in number and far from the internet homelands (where the diasporas are living). In relative terms of internet connections and even telephones there was according to some "nothing out there" (Norman Okamura, PEACESAT, 1999: interview). As for the discussion content that is at the heart of this book; in the early years it entailed many more 'birthday shouts', family hello's, 'desperately seeking my cousin' than it did earnest debates about 'being a Tongan (or Samoan) woman today' (Chapter Five), 'Democracy for Tonga' (Chapter Six), the nature of 'everyday embodiment' (Chapter Seven), or the need to show 'good' spelling and grammar when posting online (Chapter Eight). In this sense, the textual practices - production - and motivations of participants seemed to underscore prejudices about the banality such 'subjective' interactions let alone their relevance for critical examinations of the neoliberal 'new world order' and it global 'nébuleuse' (Cox 1992). Since they were started in 1995/96 (see Morton 1999), the diversity of the online 'constituency' (Aiono 1999: interview) and volume rapidly increased, reaching a peak of up to a million 'hits' a week in 1998 - 1999 (Kami 2001: interview), evened out or slowed right down as participation, intervention on the part of the moderators, and popularity has waxed and waned. Be that as it may and putting aside for the moment the going offline of the Pacific Forum in 2000, the various forums, live chat sites, and their online communities have consolidated and settled into a discernable regular ebb and flow. As I was soon to discover, the discussion forums and their Live Chat and various

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8 For instance; as phenomenon - infrastructure - 'network of networks' - social space - virtual reality - hardware and software - capitalist tool - commercial vehicle - media - interactive medium - High Tech - space of flows


10 Nevertheless, in the pioneering Kava Bowl forums, serious discussions were being instigated. These go back to 1996 and I have printed copies of some, although they are no longer accessible online.

11 By this, Cox was referring to the impreciseness of processes of neoliberal economic restructuring - or globalisation. He was pointing to the idealistic aspects of these terms, and their meaning-making power nevertheless.

12 For example, in the month of June - July 1998, the Kamehameha Roundtable alone had 589 'hits'. In July - August 2000, 543 'hits'. In those three years, an established body of issues and participants has emerged. New ones have come and gone. Nowadays there are far more than just the Kava Bowl and the Polycafe for Pacific Island people to go to (Kami 2001: interview). See the short thread entitled Where do you go? (Internet Traveler, 12/04/01, at http://polycafe.com/kamehameha/kamehameha2000-2/3648.html) in which regulars compare notes about their favourite Polynesian sites; up to eight for Samoa alone (see
other sub-sites, constitute an important part of the Pacific Islands 'online' and the experience of these forums' initiators confirms this (Aiono 1999: interview, Kami 2001: interview). When I started to look at these, then still very loose and hectic discussion threads, more closely, then bookmarked, downloaded, cut and pasted, and printed out the threads, my perception of the internet/www as 'just another' variation of person-to-person telecommunications infrastructures (which it is as well) began to shift. Having dismissed the early 'utopian' writing on virtual communities (Harasim et al 1994) for what I saw as a lack of political critique, the doom merchants of critical IR/IP were just as unsatisfying (McChesney et al 1998). Once these non-commercial (cyber)spatial interactions became clearer, more substantial and traceable, so then did the notion of the internet/www as a potentially empowering medium, provider of non-commodified spaces and places (Jordan 1999).

As my practical know-how of the internet/www deepened, so did the nature and the content of the project itself and how I went about it. What began has a fairly structuralist, top-down approach to ICTs and the South Pacific region in the context of globalisation, with no firsthand experience of this sort of online activity (other than emailing and early 'gopher' internet searches for study) has become a more consciously focused on how everyday life and online communications interact. The tension between these and the commodifying tendencies of the neoliberal political economic ethos (see Chapter Two and Nine) also became more sharply drawn. The Pacific Islands as a fixed geographical concept - on a map, and in my memory and life experiences - shifted to the everyday life of their diasporas and the traversing that goes on between the two. These dynamics trace the interplay between the physical and the imaginary, to put it simply. What began as a project with 'thin' empirical substantiation and very few clues as to how to go about investigating this relationship grew into one that can call upon more than enough online material - archives and documentation, approachable practitioners and their various traces that consist of signatures, private emails, direct (face-to-face, telephone and email) interactions with myself. This is aside from the boom in scholarship and popular publications, websites, interviews, email exchanges, visits to the region, and telephone conversations. Of course, what was actually being revealed was my own ignorance of how the internet/www - past and present - has always been at heart a grassroots communicative means and medium (Williams 1977:158 passim, Jordan 1999). Nor should it be overlooked that the commercialisation, business (to business) objectives and higher sophistication of functionality, connectability and capabilities of world-wide web software are recently 'new' in the history of the internet even as these aspects have now become the grist to the mill of corporate R&D and media hype.

The upshot of all this is a richer conceptualisation of a more complex internet/www that is not in an a priori one-to-one relationship with neoliberal strategic forces. The generation of ICTs that encompasses the internet/www includes the emergence of everyday (cyber)spaces. As I have argued, this 'domain' is qualitatively distinct from conventional geographies of communicative spaces and practices and their constituent technological underpinnings. The internet/www, as socially and politically economically embedded technologies are also technical infrastructures by which (a means) and through which (a medium) communicative interactions occur and develop. These are not necessarily or even desirably commercial, not necessarily individualistic nor communal for their uses and 'cyberscapes' are spliced with race, class, gender in various combinations and online renditions. These online interactions - 'onliness' - do not operate without affecting their sociocultural or political economic environments in turn. One way of not losing sight of the materiality of the internet/www when examining online communicative practices that are enabled by Bulletin Board software (reading and writing texts in fact), is to steer clear of either conflating online and offline scenarios or reifying their differences.

Appendix One).

13 Taholo Kami has many stories about the times he has been approached by 'KB'ers', in nightclubs, whilst living in New York, and through personal emails. Some major financial support comes from one or two KB (online anonymous or polysemic) regulars, one of whom regularly meets up with him on his business trips (the 'Great Gatsby' Taholo calls him).

14 By the first, I mean the decontextualising of online practices from the broader contexts or reducing changes in 'world order' to ICTs per se. And by the second I mean the way in which cyberspace and/or ICTs get reified and so become seen as exogenous causal agents. In both respects, ICTs get treated
Going further with this more robust, bottom-up conceptualisation of the internet/www and the interactions that underpin it. Focusing on the 'manifest content' over time of such online conversations (van Zoonen 1994) provides a methodological way into then interpreting these articulations of everyday life and inter/subjectivity online; not as un-real interactions but socially embedded ones that also retain their own distinctiveness (see Miller & Slater 2000: 3/18 passim). In this case, the 'content analysis' entails asynchronous 'conversations', embodied as texts, and engages with them as well as their producers-interlocutors. Such online traversals (in both senses of the term) are not hermetic, self-contained for they can only exist in relation. A discussion thread (see Appendix Two), online group or community does not develop in splendid cyber-isolation. In other words, whilst online life is not over and above offline life, nor it is in a direct one-to-one correspondence to it (see Jordan 1999). Whilst they do exist and can be studied in their own right the broader (con)texts are not negligible. Discussion threads emerge from and speak to other narratives, conversations, relationships. Explicit references jostle with sub-texts and offline lives. The writer is the reader and vice versa and both are interpreting - quite openly in fact. Collecting, collating and then looking hard at such content demands time and self-reflexivity. In those moments of being confronted with 'flaming' or directly challenged, it involves a direct engagement with the 'subject matter', both as a 'textual surface' (Carver 1998) and as living interlocutors. This sort of content analysis is inherently inter/subjective (as opposed to the 'objective' distance taken between researcher/subject and researched/object).

At once, the attraction of interdisciplinary theory and research (an integral part to most if not all 'post-positivist' frameworks) becomes a curse. Too many historiographies and interdiscines debates, too many methodological pitfalls, too many disciplinary boundaries transgressed, or straddled. Having said that and in light of the political stakes involved in the democratic future of ICTs, I would argue that both a feminist and a critical ethnographic approach can be of service even if it causes a number of definitional discomforts. Before addressing the second, however, I would like to dwell briefly on a few more of the ins and outs of the term 'feminist sensibilities'.

Feminist Sensibilities

The peculiarities of the anthropological epistemological enterprise notwithstanding (see Douglas 1998, Fabian 1983, Ulin 1984), when research involves interacting with non-western societies and/or their diasporas, the adjective 'feminist' becomes anything but self-explanatory (Narayan 1997). Indeed has it ever been, let alone in this day and age where the media are extolling the self-confidence of young women proclaiming 'I am not a feminist' and the marketing of 'girl-power'. Neither will it hurt to state the obvious by saying that there are various sorts of feminist theoretical and political perspectives, past and present, in the Social

"independently of [their] embeddedness". Miller & Slater (2000:6/18) put it well when discussing ICTs vis-à-vis their role in 'mediation'. By showing how much literature posits ICTs at one end of the spectrum to 'real life', they mount an astute critique of influential surveys like that of Castells for their reproduction of the mind-body dichotomy (Miller & Slater 2000:6/7/18). Hamelin (1998) also discusses these issues well in terms of the pros and cons of ICTs for sustainable development.

Such things like "in your last posting you said....." and "I think you read me wrongly" are regular features of online discussions, as are cuts and pastes, citations from each other's previous messages, and so on.

And here I situate myself in the feminist generation that came of age reading Germaine Greer, Simone de Beauvoir and Juliet Mitchell, amongst others.
Likewise for what constitutes appropriate feminist method. These 'feminist sensibilities' overlap with critiques of ontological universalisms and epistemological arrogance; to wit the 'postcolonial turn' and critical approaches. The internet/www, let alone how to 'know' it, straddles all these debates and currently feeds into and from them.

For this research I still had to decide how I was going to delineate and investigate 'gender', where to draw the lines and what sorts of lines would be drawn. And if gender is not simply a synonym for 'women' (Bordo 1990, Butler 1990, Carver 1998) then how do I 'operationalise' the term past being a descriptive one? What emerged is the aforementioned notion of gender-power relations (Bordo 1990). Although this decouples the power side of the dyad from its de facto gender-neutrality, this short-hand can still occlude the dynamics of race-ethnicity and class-status within these relations. In all the discussions I have followed in these online groups my own privileging of 'gender' and unconscious reduction at times of this once powerful term for challenging essentialist categories like 'woman' or 'man' has been challenged by the participants' articulations and debates over how all three signifiers of difference, practices of in/exclusion, are more or less present at any given time in these online articulations of everyday life. The details of these concerns as they unfold online will emerge in the next chapters. In settings where rules of conduct, dynamics of dis/empowerment, conventions of participation, the right to speak and silencing are construed differently (Gal 1991, Chapter Eight) this has been a powerful corrective to the privileged assumptions of my own white, middle-class, European-centred 'positionality'.

Back to how I have applied 'gender', as analytical concept and/or empirical category. I did not set out to locate Pacific Island / Polynesian women as an empirical variable, demographic category in these discussion forums. Women are very present and active online in these cases, taking full advantage of the non-visibility of the text-based software to break down the gendered conventions of public forums in not only the South Pacific but also all manner of sex-role - and racial - stereotyping (Figures One and Three, Chapters Five and Seven). Targeting how gender gets articulated, as discussion content and as the 'personage' of the poster has been one practical way of dealing with complex, overlapping discussions between fluidly anonymous protagonists (Chapter Eight). Threads weave in and out of any number of gendered, ethnic/racial, and socio-economic 'markers' and, moreover, their contestation. For methodological considerations, gender-power relations is a term that operates more as a disruptive device, a content tracer, a contextual 'timbre' rather than an empirical category or 'variable'. The dyad also serves as a reminder that whilst gendered divisions and differences are constitutive to how any world, society, culture, community works, they are not the only issue at stake. And certainly not in these forums. Women make their presence felt and behave as fully fledged members of these communicative spaces and practices.

This has been my own choice, a practical delimitation for doing research with a 'gender lens' (Peterson & Runyan 1999). It has been borne out by the way discussants post initial points for discussion, bring up personal problems (as they do often) or discussions and interactions unfurl. Practically this has meant, apart from noting when 'gender' issues are part of the explicit content of both the original message and subsequent follow-ups, giving a central place to women practitioners, as differentiated speakers talking amongst themselves, rather than as a group-of practitioners (Chapter Five). It has entailed noting the intersection of gender with identity-formation along race/ethnic and other lines (Chapter Seven), where it plays into generational conflicts about online behavioural standards (see Chapter Eight), sexual mores,

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17 For example the applicability of empiricist methods, disaggregating women as an object of study, gender as a variable or whatever, interpretation, life-histories, women's voices, women in the Third World, as workers, as carers, as part of the informal economy, female voting behaviour, how 'masculinism' is reproduced in world politics, and so on (True 1996, Peterson & Runyan 1999, Whitworth 1999).

18 My gratitude to Lily Ling for reminding me of this.

19 I have indicated ostensible female - male participation where appropriate.

20 In the Weekly Discussion Topics of the Kava Bowl (see Chapter Seven) there were no threads initiated with a manifest 'gender' content. These were all to be found on the grass-roots initiated discussions in Kava Chat and the Kamehameha Roundtable.

21 Where two protagonists may/may not opt to locate themselves as male or female.
and/or sexuality for strictly Christian communities (Chapter Five). Gender also emerges in
discussion about marital relations, political leadership, the meaning of traditional and modern in
women's roles in the postcolonial Pacific Islands. How female/male participants designate or
disguise themselves, how masculinities are at stake as much as femininities in many
discussions, and how relationships with other participants are not always defined by western
male -female/feminine-masculine constructs (as various as these may be in turn). The thing to
remember, and this will come clearer in Chapter Seven, is that there is not an easy social or
cultural divide for postcolonial diasporas growing up in the west. The extent to which these
stresses and strains get articulated online depends on the issue at hand, how it unfurls during the
course of the discussion, who is participating and also to lived lives offline.

**Ethnographic Methods: Bringing People Back In**

An ethnography is ... much more than fieldwork. In most ethnographic reportage of
quality, the length and breadth of the study allows one topic to become understood as
also an idiom for something else." (Miller & Slater 2000:18/18)

The greatest 'definitional discomfort' and how this relates to the mixed method I am presenting
here is over the extent to which this research can be designated 'ethnographic' 22. This is in itself
a particular research tradition, a disciplinary lens with its own colonial-postcolonial history (di
Leonardo 1991, Ortner 1996). In this respect, ethnography and its more flexible adjective,
ethnographic, beg definition anyway but more so since their increasing adoption as signifiers for
research that entails 'studying people / human agents ' at closer range (see Miller & Slater 2000:
17/18, Fabian 1983:106, Kendall 1999). Again, this methodological trend is sympathetic to
feminist concerns and norms. Precise definitions for ethnography are actually hard to find,
however, and the mark of colonialist ethnographies is highly visible in modern anthropology if
not unavoidable (see Fabian 1983). Ethnography as method, a body of knowledge, a personal
experience, also implies an established rite/right of passage in anthropology (see Fabian

'Ethnography' refers both to the study of the distinctive practices of particular human
groupings and representations - pictures of a people - based on such a study. (Hakken
1999:38)

How the latter is carried out is linked to the historiography of anthropology and its use by
colonial administrations in Africa and the Pacific amongst other places. Taking these complex
and ongoing debates as read for the time being (see Fabian 1983, Clifford 1997), one 'internet
ethnographer' notes the following methodological pointers:

Search for ways to observe directly and meaningfully the practices of interest, not just
talk about them with the participants: and ..... find ways to *participate actively* in the
practices (Hakken 1999:39, emphasis in original).

He then goes on to note that it is more advisable "to highlight rather than to try and banish
context"(Hakken 1999:40). From the point of view of an ethnographic endeavour this entails
that the researcher

pays attention systematically to both what is being studied and the way the studied is
being co-constructed by the situation, one's informants, and *one's self* (Hakken
1999:40, emphasis added)

This sentiment is echoed in a feminist focus on the gendered constitution of inter/subjectivity,
intentional self-reflexivity as research method (writing oneself into the story), and integrating in
the eventual 'product', the relative relationships of privilege and power between researcher and
researched (see Peterson & Runyan 1999, Stacey 1997).

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22 My thanks to Eric Nadeau for helping me in some initial brainstorming for this chapter.
For practical purposes in IR/PE (and assuming method follows theory to some extent) anthropological ethnographic methods (Fabian 1983: 106-109) present a wealth of techniques and styles to choose from. Even more so when it comes to online interactions, groups or social formations and/or their broader political economies. Nevertheless with the inroads being made by the internet/www into everyday life and academic research projects, three main criteria are no longer self-explanatory.

First is that ethnography, as generally understood, entails spending (extended) time with (groups of) people - traditionally from another culture/social stratum/class/race than one's own 23. Second, this presupposes travelling to another location - usually far away - for an extended period of time and actively participating whilst there, which entails learning another language 24. Third, the visit is reproduced, and the people/community/culture represented accordingly, in a scholarly account, according credence to the stipulated theoretical framework that is then substantiated by rigorously kept field notes. Whatever the theoretical take and the variety of data collection carried out, 'an ethnography' in short is comprised of long-term observation of and involvement with strangers some place far away from home that is interpreted and (re)presented later on (Fabian 1983). From a postcolonial critique, it is the exoticised 'other' that has, in the not-so-distant past, been the main object of study in this 'ideal type' of ethnographic research (see Figure One). Something that hasty appropriations of 'ethnography' as a terminology and 'method' per se would do well to bear in mind.

Critiques and reflections upon these criteria from within a postcolonial theoretical framework notwithstanding, ICTs have been challenging all these on several fronts (Clifford 1997: 52 passim) as well. As I have already noted, the ostensible accessibility of meeting places on the internet/www has refracted the coupling of ethnographic knowledge to extended fieldwork. With virtual communities, live chat, online discussions visible and available from one's very own desktop, the notion of the 'field' (see Clifford 1997:58 & 64 passim) is under reconsideration as well as the way one gets there, let alone what one 'sees' or 'hears', who one is interacting with whilst there. This refracts the assumption of having to travel afar, as well as that of observation-participation as a necessarily physical act of presence or interlocution. In one sense the now ignominious notion of the 19th century armchair ethnographer has returned with a vengeance as researchers often do not need to leave the comfort of their offices even to go to the library for books and documents, let alone drag cassette recorders around to interview people, collect first-hand accounts, or spend months in a village without electricity (a prerequisite for all current ICT's functionality). Email and web browsing facilitate these traversals with panache and relative immediacy 25. And logging on to an online discussion in an asynchronous setting (see below) does not presume or enforce active, real-time participation (Miller & Slater 2000:18/18). Asynchronous chat software permits a participant-observer to 'lurk' without necessarily having to make their presence known by 'posting' online. It can also allow for an important time-lag for reflected response, or careful position statement as opposed to the immediate face-to-face scenario 26. Being online also replaces the conventional dependence of an anthropologist on local 'informants'. In online discussion scenarios, all participants are potential informants in effect.

Returning to the account of my own research. In the beginning I was unwittingly taking advantage of these specific non-visible, disembodied features of online communications. I was glad for the invisibility that is lent to online - non-corporeal - 'field research'. Furthermore, I was not entering these sites as an anthropologist and so did not feel obliged either to see myself as a participant, nor announce ('post') my presence immediately. It was gradually increasing ethical unease with this position, let alone the desire to make contact with people for the research trip to

23 This is changing but it is, arguably, still the hallmark of much anthropological fieldwork. The 'classic' texts written by Malinowski, Mead, Levi-Strauss, amongst others, followed this pattern.
24 This is de rigueur in modern anthropological fieldwork (see Fabian 1983: 105 passim). This too is being questioned by internet-based research and English as its lingua franca. Anthropology is also readdressing its core research tenets (see Clifford 1997, Hakken 1999) as 'cyberspace' becomes a field in its own right - or not. See below.
25 Certain transmission architectures and infrastructures are necessary for most contemporary interactive software as is an institution or financial means to pay for all this.
26 Online communications are also characterised by their rapid-response qualities whence conflicts and issues of online civility (Kolko et al 2000:2 passim).
the Pacific region I was planning that had me deal with this in certain ways. That other key aspect of anthropological research - 'long-term involvement' (Miller & Slater 2000:17/18) - is also under pressure from the speed and easy access features of ICTs' information exchanges and accessing. Electronic tools - search engines that operate online or offline - are available to do the arduous collection of data, discussions and so forth automatically. However, these carry with them another set of methodological and interpretative concerns. Some of these I will deal with below for they pertain to this specific research.

All in all, whilst research methods in one discipline are not always easily, or fairly, judged by another (nor should they be perhaps), the adoption of the term ethnographic in an IR/IPE context requires me to show how this research departed from the above criteria. It does so in a number of ways, and ones that overlap, although not always, with the aforementioned impacts of ICTs on the 'ethnographic encounter'.

In a "more narrowly methodological sense" (Miller & Slater 2000: 17/18), this study is not an ethnography in that it is not intended as a full portrait of a community to which I intentionally travelled - corporeally - and lived in continuously for an extended period, observed, and with whose members and 'rituals' I interacted with on a daily, intimate basis. I am an accidental ethnographer in the sense that when looking for the Pacific Islands on the internet (to see how they were dealing with ICTs and so on), it was the online communities, their interactions, and geographies that were the most vibrant and longest serving presence. I did not set out to study an internet community as such (see Rheingold 1994). But national websites and tourist information sites - a few imaginative personal websites aside - were characterised more by their static, often outdated nature than anything else. What I did find out was that 'serious' Discussion groups such as these actually offer a certain sort of archival goldmine for those looking for the everyday operations and articulations of inter/subjectivity. These splice and inform trans/international or infrastructural 'levels of analysis'. For feminist concerns about 'silencings' (see Gal 1991) they also lend currency to many and various women's voices, this time in an online and postcolonial setting. More about this in the chapters that follow.

Participant-Observation and Fieldwork

Keeping the 'ideal type' of anthropological research still in mind. Having decided not to opt for live chat for logistical reasons, I did not adhere to the full participation 'rule of thumb' mentioned above. My participation was initially reluctant as I was very conscious at the outset of pushing the envelope too far in a discipline like IR/IPE, that was still in full internet technophobic mode circa 1996 and highly dismissive of the (alleged) voyeur-like tendencies of such research, let alone very critical (and rightly so) of the lack of political economic context in

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27 My gratitude to Helen Morton for her (ongoing) guidance in these matters.
28 In fact, this designation has been used quite strategically. First as a way of 'locating' my method in the broader Social Sciences and anchoring my critique of mainstream IR/IPE in the 'constructivist' camp. Secondly as an acknowledgement of important work being done on the internet/www as a site for social and cultural (re)formations by anthropologists (see Morton 1998, 1999, Hakken 1999, Miller & Slater 2000). Finally, as a way of making my research more accessible to anthropologists, and sociologists. This has been a valuable exercise in learning other disciplinary languages even though my forays into anthropological theory and my minimalist amount of 'fieldwork' in the conventional sense have simply confirmed how difficult it is to keep interdisciplinary research 'do-able'.
29 The point about the colonialis t overtones of this term is well taken (Fabian 1983, Friedman 1998, Douglas 1998).
30 See Ogden (1999) for a survey. Another good entry into independent and governmental Pacific websites and online news sources have been provided by the journalist/lecturer David Robie out of the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji. See http://www.asiapac.org.fj/cafepacific
31 As a reflection of infrastructural development investment and time-lags relative to heavily internetted areas, let alone different policy orientations and conception of the usefulness of the internet/www itself. See Mansell & Wehn (1998), UNDP (1999), South Pacific Forum Secretariat (1998) for recent surveys and policy-options.
32 Much IR/IPE is at heart an asynchronous and temporally distanciating research practice that constructs an 'other' to investigate. Live Chat would have required a much more online, hands-on approach than was advisable at the time. Besides, it would be fairly safe to say that IR/IPE has practically no research tools to permit this sort of 'coeval' interaction (Fabian 1983, de Certeau 1986).
much 'micro-level' analysis at that. As I did come to participate in discussions, I did so very consciously in the persona of 'researcher', albeit one who hailed from the region, and only came to get involved in certain threads when I felt it did not impinge on my tenuous observer status. Moreover, participation (even clicking open the forums) was for a while in waves as opposed to regular or daily. How I got past the unsettling issue of the transient nature of hyperlinked bookmarks for URLs and their servers and the role of hard-copies for achieving any degree of methodical data collection will be dealt with shortly. Only as the research component of the project drew to an end did I find myself more willing to get "the seat of my pants dirty" (Paccagnella 1997) and get more involved in the discussions (beyond the aforementioned declaration of my research interests). It bears pointing out as well that this progression came with increased familiarity with the groups, their 'moral economies', personalities and styles, and gradual knowledge and familiarity with the topics. In fact, my reluctance to converse in the early days was related to ignorance of the issues, a sense of having been away from the region too long, as much as anything else. I shall even admit to having been wary of 'influencing' the course of discussion too much, thereby breaking a key tenet of participant -observation; get involved! With hindsight, I am sure that some threads, and my self-perception - the experience - would have been otherwise if I had done it the full-immersion way of anthropological fieldwork. Whether this would have been better or worse - for all parties - is debatable. What is important methodologically at this stage is acknowledging that the experience, perceptions, and the outcome would have been different.

Another way this research differed from anthropology's expectations was in terms of the scale and length of fieldwork. This is not foreign to IR/PE research, which presupposes an inter/transnational approach by definition. I did visit the 'field' in geographical terms for nearly two months. By this I am referring to the context-of-origin (the Pacific Islands) and the lived context-of-diaspora (USA- Hawaii, Australia and New Zealand) 33. Looking back, this was at far too fast a clip although this is in inverse proportion to the impact the trip had on me, both intellectually and emotionally. In any case, it was not until I did actually 'go [back] there' in the physical sense that a lot of the broader context of the discussions themselves started to take on the inter/subjective experiential quality talked about in anthropology 34. Strictly speaking six weeks was not enough as a 'proper' ethnography of these communities would have entailed a different degree of participant-observation, something along the lines set down by Miller & Slater (2000).

Nonetheless, this is not to say that the same requirements have not been fulfilled to some extent. Particularly given the way the internet/www is changing our conception of the 'field' (see Clifford 1997). This has happened in two ways. The first is in terms of the relative level of my online participation-observation and personal contacts with those involved with these internet sites and/or ICTs and the Pacific regions. All along, emailing, telephone calls and face-to-face interviews have supplemented my online presence and in the course of the research made it more focused. The second is the time-span. The discussion threads analysed alone span five years 35. Although my 'participation' has not been carried out in the real-time context of

33 One key aim was to meet or talk with the founders and main moderators of the four websites under examination. In 1999 I managed to meet/speak on the phone with three out of four - 'Alopi Latukefu (South Pacific Information Network) in Sydney, Helen Morton (Tongan History Association) who is in Melbourne, and Al Aiono (the Polynesian Cafe) who I phoned in Los Angeles from San Francisco (after our appointment in Los Angeles could not go through). In 2001, I travelled to Brussels to meet the pioneer of all these sites, Taholo Kami (the Pacific Forum). Email was an invaluable back-up and supplementary communication tool in all these cases and I also made use of the forums themselves to make contact at first. The other people I interviewed can be seen at the end of the Bibliography. What this illustrates is that internet research is not a priori an armchair undertaking although even if it were, this should not discredit it out of hand.

34 My trip to Tonga and Fiji was the first time I have spent time in the South Pacific Islands - beyond airport transit lounges in Fiji that is - since I was a young teenager (when I went to Vanuatu). It was my first time ever in Tonga and Honolulu. My main regret is not getting to Samoa, where I was born, this time. This process of 'going back' happens both corporeally and online. In the latter scenario, as the participants discuss current events and so on they also reveal their own life histories, experiences and relationships. They are relating to each other not 'indulging' in individualistic gratification (see Morton 1998b) as the more dismissive stereotypes of online communications would assume.

35 This is also nearly the lifespan of the groups (Morton 1998, 1999)
conventional notions of field-work, participating in an 'online' context is just as 'real'. I have had conversations with, been confronted by and learnt from a number of the people who post on these forums. I have also been included in a behind-the-scenes sort of ad hoc listserv communication. These discussion threads, the places where they take place in cyberspace and the respective 'online' or live chatting, and emailing interactions are the (cyber)spatial practices of 'real' people, comprise 'real' conversations about 'real' things, and entail 'real' gender-power relations (Chapter Eight). From the point of view of the eventual scholarly representation of these immediate interactions, the examination and interpretation of five years of discussion content has been much more 'asynchronous' in that it has occurred long after the immediate discussions that constitute these records 36. The cumulative archives of conversations whether in the form of Bookmarks or printed out and filed by myself, reflect the path of my own technical know-how, contingencies such as server changes, and methodological decisions about what needed to be archived 'offline' and eventually analysed. The latter records are in the form of hardcopy - printouts and reconstructed electronic files that have made full use of the cut-and-paste function of word-processing software. These can be seen as analogous to field notes. Needless to say, the material presented in the chapters that follow constitute but a part of this record-keeping let alone the online everyday life of the Pacific Islands 'online'.

Language

One last point where this method diverges from anthropological demands. This is about language. I do not speak fluent Samoan or Tongan, even though I know a smattering of New Zealand Maori and Pacific Island words, the main islands groups' official greetings, some children's songs. My Tongan -English dictionary, bought in Nuku'alofa, has been a great aid for the Kava Bowl discussions in this respect 37. The upshot is that earlier substantial sub-threads would need to be translated in full for me and certain sub-texts, puns, language games do not get dealt with in the way they could be (see Morton 1998). Nor can I go very far with the Tongan language threads that were quite prevalent in the early years of the Kava Bowl Forums. Nevertheless, the working language of all these forums is English, and more particularly so for the US-based Polynesian Cafe. A fortunate thing for me as well as many participants who are not fluent in the languages of their (grand)parents and who lament this lack (see Chapters Five and Seven). That being said, I have picked up quite a bit of basic vocabulary in the course of this research, especially since one operation of these websites is as resources for practical learning and sociocultural information - for visitor and second/third generation Tongan or Samoan alike (Morton 1996: 3).

Categories and Empirical Data

As for the more problematic issue of how ethnographic method tout court creates an 'exotic other' 38 through the object that is the eventual account, even as it assumes a shared intimacy through participation in the daily life of other peoples (Stacey 1997). This relates to the methodological practice of categorising, creating taxonomies (Niemann & Davies 2000) and other sorts of cut-off points according to respective disciplinary conventions. Arguably, IR/IPE is one of the most dogmatic of the Social Sciences in terms of this sort of boundary-making (see Marchand & Runyan 2000, Peterson 1996, Walker 1995). Having said that, for this research this is where one's method and concepts merge, particularly in an intercultural scenario such as this (Saunders & Foblets, forthcoming). In de Certeau's formulation, this is part and parcel of every day vis-à-vis representations thereof. Hence the researcher is in a subject-subject relationship. The majority of participants in these forums are dealing with the politics of categories, negative

36 Here, one returns to the 'time machine' model explicated by Fabian (1983).
37 Again, my thanks to Helen Morton for her help in translating Tongan terms words and phrases, and also to John Franklin for his help with Samoan ones.
38 I have been publicly accused of 'reverse romanticism', Said's point about Orientalism in the western academe being turned on its head for rhetorical purposes in this instance. Having said that, I do take responsibility for any romanticism that may be apparent in that respect. One aspect of being part of such discussions or communities over time is this very process and its personal implications (see Chapter Five, Stacey 1997).
racial and cultural stereotypes, at a personal and group level. For instance, many raised in the USA, Australia and New Zealand are confronted by people 'back in the islands' for their long-distance nationalism and relative privilege vis-à-vis Pacific Island political economies. In terms of how and where to draw the lines, neither do participants identify themselves as either 'Poly' or 'Australian/American/New Zealander'. Debates about and identifications with 'Tongan-ness' or 'Being Samoan' are to be found adjacent to fierce political debates between the very same people, this time as proud US citizens. These also trace online practices of 'othering' and exclusion (see Chapters Seven and Eight), of inclusion and 'belonging' (Chapters Five to Seven). But they are complex, in-the-making and overlapping. They become apparent over time but also as any one thread, or set of related threads unfurl, positions develop and dis/agreement crystallises (see Chapter Six).

All these online/offline articulations are there to be interpreted for sure, be given 'hermeneutic' substance (Fabian 1983: 89) but methodologically they are also need to be treated as practices-in-passing, as incremental (re)articulations that are fluid and open-ended. Hence so do the categories and the chapters that reconstruct and re-present these below. In other words, the 'ethnographic' motivation in this research was not to set out to record a primitive, threatened tribe nor picture 'a' community that can be disaggregated from the intimate online and broader political economic and sociocultural contexts of diasporas who are living in ICT-mediated worlds. The upshot is that open-ended, 'messy' conversations and disputes - short or very long, online forms of transient-ness (Cohen & Mitra 1999), data collection rigour and 'archivability' are both a technical issue (see below) and methodological strategy. They are difficult to pin down precisely because they belong to everyday communicative practices and social contexts. Technically speaking, the online aspects mean that 'internet ethnography' also entails data that were not - and are still not - necessarily designed to be downloaded, archived and pored over by a researcher even whilst they look like conventional 'archives' and this terminology is used in the software programs that website moderators use. Archiving is an academic fetish and a product of the modern nation-state in that respect.

**Summing Up**

To sum up. As far as I am concerned this research breaks too many tenets to claim ethnographic methodological rigour although there are clear crossovers. Hence I urge caution in the appropriation of the term 'ethnographic' willy-nilly in IR/IPE especially given the colonialis enterprise that once dominated ethnographic method and its ongoing deconstruction from within anthropological theory (Fabian 1983, di Leonardo 1991, Ortner 1996). I concede that the method employed here is 'ethnographic' in so far as it deals with people, their everyday interactions over a reasonably long length of time. The use of the term 'hermeneutic' also resonates with anthropological theoretical streams (see Ulin 1984), but more on this shortly. Over time, internet searches, and online interactions, encounters with members of these groups online and offline have - given a specific field of ethnographic research in its own right although here, it is being used more for its heuristic facility.

This refers to when the internet - cyberspace - is the field of ethnographic research in its own right although here, it is being used more for its heuristic facility.

My thanks to Mike Evans, Heather Young Leslie, Okusi Māhina, Helen Morton, Max Rimoldi and Eleanor Rimoldi for their guidance.

With a nod to the methodological, theoretical and ethical intricacies of the ethnographic

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39 This refers to when the internet - cyberspace - is the field of ethnographic research in its own right although here, it is being used more for its heuristic facility.

40 This differs from the short-term content analysis done by Wilhelm (2000), which is one of my main objections to some of the conclusions he draws about democratic potential of ICTs (see Chapter Six).
enterprise and interdisciplinary research in post-colonial times, I would argue that the term ethnographic thereby be treated with care in the case of IR/IPE. Not to do so would be to reduce complex theoretical and methodological debates to convenient adjectives and typecasting either for want of a better term or available 'method'.

**Practical issues and Research Tactics**

In this section I shall briefly look at some of the peculiarities of everyday online archival material, the human interactions and cyber-traces left by them. These relate to the discussion above as practical issues that demand research 'tactics' of a different quality than heretofore. In terms of electronic data and its collection. These practicalities arise when internet documents (in hypertext format), texts that constitute online conversations on the world-wide web, do not perform, stay still - accessible - long enough, are not 'readable' in conventional ways. They also intersect with the postcolonial critique of 'third world' feminists (Narayan 1997) and other scholars of the Social Science research canon in general (Harding 2001). The internet/www and research in/into it from the point of view of postcolonial societies and/or their contemporary diasporas are not divorced from such concerns, especially given the political and economic inequities of the current world order.

**Online-ness: Everyday Life-as-Archive**

The following pointers continue the story of this research, which also speaks to the literature that is emerging on the nature of cyberspace/spatial practices and research methods (Jones 1999, Kolko et al 2000, Shields et al 1996, Ludlow 1996, Jordan 1999, Graham 1999, Haraway 1997). Far from being evidence that internet research is necessarily easier than other types of data gathering or analysis (going to libraries, conducting face-to-face interviews, the rigours of statistical analysis, or searching official archives for instance), the logistics involved can be as time-consuming, as physically demanding (albeit in other ways) and as mentally challenging as conventional ones. Online discussions, by virtue of being written texts, remain online for a certain length of time, they build up into 'archives'. These discussion sites are among several that participants access regularly and when a debate is fierce, people are posting often over a short period of time, 2-3 days mostly (see Appendix Two). Content dealing with larger political economic, social or cultural issues rubs shoulders with the more intimate levels of everyday life. Big media or localised issues are intertwined with the 'trivia' of personal relationships. In that sense, the archives being produced during the course of the discussions can be seen cumulatively as everyday-life-as-archive. Not conscious diary-keeping or designed autobiographical accounts (Hughes et al 2001) but fluid, ongoing records of how people cope 'tactically' (de Certeau 1980) with their material and emotional circumstances, social, cultural or moral presupposition and structural restrictions (Chapters Five and Seven). Hence, the backlog and ongoing archival records need to be treated with care in the sense that they articulate 'streams of consciousness' in a very real sense. Although many are written with an eye to 'good' literary style (see Chapter Eight), the open - public - forum in which they are appearing, and awareness of 'setting good standards' in countering racial stereotypes, representing their communities in diaspora and in the islands, most of the messages that constitute a thread are spontaneous, open-hearted, packed with non-sequiturs and asides, spelling errors/revisions and

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42 McLuhan and Powers (1989) and Negroponte (1995) set the scene for these in many ways as well
43 Some ar are consciously 'archived' in electronic storage forms whilst others are not. This is down to the owners/moderators and is more often then not a decision based on financial or disk/server capacity. (Morton 2000, personal email, Kami 2001, personal email). Moderators have indicated to me that record-keeping software can be expensive and not always suitable (Aiono 1999; interview, Kami 2001: interview). Archiving millions of separate messages over the years also take up allotted space on the server, hence costs. It also takes time and conscious application which neither Aiono or Kami see as their domain. Archiving for them is a synonym for 'house-keeping' or cleaning up the backlog. In the case of the Tongan History Association, however, archives were instigated as a matter of course - being a forum for historians primarily. When Helen Morton stopped being the website moderator, she 'handed the archives over' to her successor. These have not been accessible through the Pacific Forum Portal since early 2000.
As I indicated at the outset, these will be reproduced here as they appear on-screen.

44 See Appendix Four. Even with a fairly large margin of error, they do make the point clear - high 'hits' also means many different posters, multiple 'nicknames' or 'signatures' notwithstanding.
these processes, even as a passive onlooker to any discussions, rather than my delayed ones. Furthermore, like many participants I discovered that coming and going need not be regimented, and that the relationship between longevity, quantity, and significance was an unpredictable one. For example, very early on I had to accept that if any bookmarked threads disappeared it went with the territory - both technically and culturally. Instead I began to look for recurrence, other forms of significance and other, more lateral and more multi-layered traces of relationship and dialogue. Of course, these 'discoveries' simply reminded me of how embedded my research habits were in western ontology and epistemological traditions (see Wendt 1999, Hau'ofa 1999: 51, Helu 1999:37 passim, Smith 1999).

What all this points to effectively is the nature of 'online-ness'. Mitra and Cohen (1999) list intertextuality, nonlinearity, the reader-as-writer, and impermanence as some key characteristics of the internet/www as a technical object-of-study. All these cause consternation for conventional quantitative and qualitative research methods. The first two characteristics can be seen in the formal properties of online texts, communicative relationships (addressing, mailing, or seeking someone for instance), and other 'spatialisations', movements through a corner of cyberspace. It is hypertext software that governs these in that it allows for the now familiar operations of lateral contingency whereby multiple connectedness between texts, sites, images operates through hyperlinks - the ubiquitous 'click here' operation. Discussion threads form along and through this architecture accordingly (see below). Other links - to images, other websites or articles, even to earlier threads - can be found in the body of a message/posting/email, although as the discussions examined are content-driven such external links are occasional rather than standard.

In these sorts of scenarios, intertextuality is also intratextuality as participants are interacting with each other and switching backwards and forwards, in and out, as they do so. As I have said, the subsequent aspect of 'nonlinearity' (whereby narrative logics are replaced or subverted by optional laterality and inversion) is not necessarily a discovery of western ICTs. A word of caution here though. The negative judgements levelled at these aspects of the internet/www as problematic for 'rigorous' research from some quarters bespeak, after their own fashion, rationalist and positivist frameworks for evaluation and interpretation. Many societies, cultures and traditions of thought do not rely so heavily on linearity, hierarchies between object and subject, theory and practice. When the latter issues are seen through a postcolonial lens and are occurring online, the two positions intersect. Finally, on all discussion forums, the privileged distance between writer and reader, and their relative roles, is collapsed (Mitra & Cohen 1999: 186-187, Kolko 1995). All participants on such a forum are both, at any and one time. This correlates to the collapsing of the distance between the researcher and the researched, which although not new to the internet/www period (see de Certeau 1986: 199-221) has become more accentuated and confront researchers more by way of ICTs. For example, when I enter a discussion, my words and responses - and those of my interlocutors, the relative position of my follow-up(s) in the thread, are visible objects online even before they have been 'opened' and the content pursued. Hence the title lines on their own are not adequate for assessing what constitutes any one discussion even whilst they indicate some of its manifest meanderings - a useful navigational aid in much longer ones (see Appendix Two). Some kind of hermeneutic intervention at the time is implied (see Ulin 1984).

All in all, these (cyber)spatial practices - their production and their co-production by

46 For longer threads, sometimes more than a hundred separate follow-up messages (in one case there were 217 follow ups - see Chapter Six) had to be opened, read, and 'archived' - usually in the fork of copious print-outs; again each individually actioned. The eventual sequencing of the hard-copy was embedded in the routine I developed for opening, printing and then later reading the discussions. Longer threads could take hours to complete and that was before I could even begin to read them properly.Whilst the latter was at my leisure, the first two were under the exigencies of short-term eye-to-hand coordination and the vagaries of our shared departmental printer - and colleagues. Sequencing became a stressful experience as reordering muddled up follow-ups simply underlined the material difference at stake between online document and its offline version. It is worth remembering again, that this issue and its logistics are a researcher's problem not an online participant's one.

47 Taholo Kami notes seasonal surges such as the Autumn semester in the USA when the hits surge as KB'ers come back online. There are also time zone-related surges in use, around the world and between the West and East coast of the USA (Kami 2001: interview).
way of other reader-writers - refract traditional, objectified notions of privileged positionality vis-à-vis the object of research. At the same time it permits (re)articulations of gendered, ethnic and class-based inter/subjectivity and it reconfigures the respective linguistic and visual cues - representational delimitations - in all of this (Warschauer 2000, González 2000).

**Reading Discussion Threads: Which Way Up?**

With respect to the mechanics of reading a thread - online and in its hard-copy form - certain characteristics of online communication/textual production need to be borne in mind. In short, these are laterally produced and experienced, linked through (hyper)text software whilst still based on conventional written codes and genres (Mitra & Cohen 1999). They are also mutually produced in-practice. Participants in these discussion groups are present in their writing, by posting, by being referred to in others. The content of their interaction builds up into shorter or longer vertical 'threads'. And together these create a 'meta' thread of the week/month's initial posts at the entry point (see Appendix Two). An initial posting gets the ball rolling and 'follow-ups' are posted by those who feel moved to respond.

There are some other aspects to reading these sorts of online (textual) interactions that bear mentioning. Although in hypertext (as a subject line and 'nickname/signature'), each response still has to be clicked open and read, in turn. Whilst a certain amount of information can be gathered by looking at the thread issuing from below the initial post (this page can show how many follow-ups, key participants, subject lines/diversions - offers some efficacy for straightforward tallying), how the discussion really evolves is *embedded in each follow-up and its relationship to the others*. Another sort of electronic embedding is the ostensible 'signature' - whether this be the actual name or a nickname (Morton 1998, Warschauer 2000). Clicking on this signature hyperlinks to an email address. Again this can be the actual active one of said poster or a fabricated one. The software used for these forums permit 'fake' emails. The reasons for this will become apparent in due course. Be that as it may, some of these email addresses are sub-texts - asides to the online conversation - in their own right, and witty more often than not.\(^{48}\)

This leads me to the next point. The point for reading is that they operate from the inside-out and reverse the initial 'upside-down' reading/printing strategy I employed as a means for achieving a methodical file. Threads, by way of these follow-ups, can form into several 'layers' (both hierarchical and parallel - it depends on how such things are evaluated). One layer is direct follow-ups to the 'initial post' (in a direct line). These can become an opener for a sub-thread, and subsequent follow-ups also and so on. The overall effect can be seen quite clearly as a longer thread of three or more layers begins to snake off-screen. What these visual effects illustrate are not only different nuances in the discussion content, technical contingencies notwithstanding, diversions, brief more intimate exchanges embedded within the thread, but also different relationships and preoccupations (which I indicate when apposite in the following chapters). Browsing and clicking anywhere goes on as well when participating as an interlocutor pure and simple.

Last; reading these online artefacts/archives for research purposes as opposed to reading for immediate participation. For a start, if one wants to follow a traditional sense of chronology, one has to start at the bottom and work upwards. Even though more substantial threads build within one - three days, there can be time lags and conversations / responses can reflect or mistake these as well. Bottom upwards then is the first rule. But within a sub-thread, chronological consistency demands a return to top-down reading/accessing. In short, the reader finds herself moving/clicking/scrolling upwards, downwards, along and around. The higher the number of follow-ups, the higher amount of clicking activity\(^ {49}\) and the more intricate the weaving in, out and through the thread. All this has to be got through any sense of the whole can be ascertained\(^ {50}\).

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\(^{48}\) My own tactic has been to sign off as 'marianne' or 'MA' (and I get addressed accordingly) and use my university email address. A lot of interaction goes on by way of these embedded emails addresses; in this 'offline' realm. See the last chapters of Jordan (1999) and his definitions for 'virtuality' (1999:1).

\(^{49}\) Hence the term 'browsing'. One should not underestimate the cognitive changes being incurred by the shift from linear to browsing reading operations.

\(^{50}\) The same goes for participants as misunderstandings occur - and are admonished - when the threads has not been read completely.
Setting Parameters and Achieving Rigour

Accessing and reading them are very physical activities in this respect with arguably new cognitive pressures and implications (McLuhan & Powers 1989, Negroponte 1995). Likewise for sifting through such complex and various sites either on-screen or in hard-copy form. Quite early on and in response to the rapid growth in the number of hits and range of interest, moderators created different sub-sites for focusing on different topics - and clientele (Aiono 1999: interview, Kami 2001: interview). Quite quickly, my early sifting problems were dealt with as I began to focus on the two-three main 'serious discussion sites' (with their IR/IPE related content) as the administrators intervened to keep sites uncluttered. Nevertheless, significance still needed to be ascertained, and a filtering system put into motion. The latter, once again, has not relied on the aforementioned electronic tools. In this respect the ethnographic 'method' in its most general form - taking the time in one place to get a sense of what is going on - helped as I began to develop a certain intuition about what threads were of recurring interest to participants and which could be left for the time being.

Significance

There are several empirical and specific ways however for ascertaining 'significance' - once the focus has been decided. Generally, the success and robustness of any website can be measured by the number of daily/weekly/monthly 'hits' it gets. As I have said, there are software statistical tools for website administrators that do this but a researcher can always manually count. This, 'manual' method has proved quite satisfactory for setting up data-tables and ordering threads according to participation as well as content/significance for this research. As I was not looking to 'prove' popularity per se the latter has been adequate for making comparisons and confirming suspicions (see Appendix Four). The same technique applied for unpacking the demographics within any specific thread/set of threads, although the real name-nickname-subject line overlap does not lend itself to numerical infallibility. Nevertheless, with an eye on 'obvious' double-ups and old-fashioned counting over six months of the initial post pages of Kava Chat threads (1997-1998) I was able to ascertain one simple correlation. Long threads did indeed indicate high amounts of interest and numbers of participants. High participation/length in this context was as good a reason as any for perceiving a high degree of significance, engagement with the topic posted. When coupled with the reoccurrence of certain themes over the years there the recurring themes of these online archives began to become clearer. For example, an early decision to keep away from live chat, religious topics (even though the churches are a major aspect to local and diasporic Pacific Island communities), and very localised issues was borne out by the wealth of content that pertained to the theoretical framework within which I have been working (see Chapter Three). In short, whilst some decisions had to be made quite quickly, the themes examined in the chapters that follow constitute some of the most heavily patronised and recurring concerns of these groups; shifting sex-gender roles in a diasporic context, the meaning of democratic institutions in the postcolonial Pacific, and 'identity' The eventual - and copious - archives from which these reconstructions have been selected must not be mistaken, however, for anything but partial ones. This in turn reflects on the subject-object relationship for academic knowledge (re)production for as Narayan points out to 'third world' and other feminists in general seeking to acknowledge suppressed knowledge and experiences.

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51 Topics that often prompt the most vituperative, passionate and highest quantity of responses are those dealing with homo/sexuality, more 'risqué' discussions about intimate sexual relations, and anything to do with democracy in Tonga. At first the thread was 'bookmarked' and then eventually printed out if the number of follow-ups was at least 4-5, but preferably 10 or more. Longer posts (over 2 pages at times) with fewer follow-ups were also archived as they provide another sort of intervention (here the poster was moved to keep writing - causing moderators at times to ask for fewer essay-length postings). Longer threads could run into over 70 pages when converted into a conventional text format.

52 This was the first comment made by Taholo Kami in discussing these forums with me (2001: interview).
We need to move away from a picture of cultural contexts as sealed rooms, with an homogenous space 'inside' them, inhabited by 'authentic insiders'. (Narayan 1997:412)

Taken in toto, the above practicalities also constitute how everyday (cyber)spatial practices are constituted where and for whom on the internet/www. Likewise for how the latter is (to be) perceived, developed and with what sorts of political economic or sociocultural designs. As the gendered-ethnic-class contours of these online operations become more possible to trace empirically, it is apparent that the content being produced is not irrelevant, hermetically sealed from offline influences nor foreclosed from theory and research.

**Practical Decisions**

In nearing the end of this tale of an internet research method, some more practical decisions I made along the way need to be pinned down. But first, a reminder about the ethics of research into online communities/groups. These are an integral part of this hermeneutic schema.

Even when in cyberspace with or without a pseudonym, as a silent or active participant, the inter/subjectivity of the researcher is never totally removed from the objects-of-research. Working in an online field of action also entails "embodied spatial practice" (Clifford 1997: 53) that thereby opens the researcher to "the impact of subject-to-subject relationships (women and men, blacks and whites, etc)" (de Certeau 1986:217, Kolko et al 2000: 2 passim). As any critical approach begins by some sort of acknowledgement that the researcher is not always in full control of how interactions, and the meanings attributed to them, unfurl (Ulin 1984, Stacey 1997, Morton 1996:1-4). The converse is also true with respect to the difference in power and control between observer and observed over the eventual reconstruction and interpretation of these interactions (see Friedman 1998, Stacey 1997). Some may say that this sort of concern, making it explicit, is exaggerating; that it leads to one being too 'timorous' or is beyond the parameters of achieving (objective) rigour. However, the online debates examined here, and particularly the more politically and culturally charged ones (on democracy, racism, sexism) actually pivot on who has the right to say what and where, what is the 'true' story or interpretation that is at stake (see Sterne 1999, Friedman 1998). It would be too convenient to ignore this (even if it were possible and I would contend that this is not the case) and then write it out of these reconstructions. In short, caveats are part and parcel of the interpretation.

Secondly, whilst the relationship between field-university contexts, time differentials (Fabian 1983, de Certeau 1986:214-218) and inter/subjectivity are practical issues for the anthropological enterprise (Fabian 1983, di Leonardo et al 1991, Ulin 1984), it is exacerbated in research into this sort of online communicative scenario. Unlike password-dependent access to live-chat and the visualising function of avatars (Jordan 1999: 67-79, Gonzáles 2000, Warschauer 2000), asynchronous software permits the observer-participant to effectively remain 'invisible' if they so wish. This is one way to approach such online groups, access but do not post. As I have said, I soon opted against remaining invisible or uninolved in discussions. This sort of software also permits participants to either multiply or conceal their offline selves, fudge their contact addresses if they so choose. In politically or culturally sensitive discussions, this is sensible (Dai 2000, Chapter Six). When practicable or pertinent to the discussion itself, I have noted where and when one person is using several nicknames (see Morton 1998a), or where I note changes to signatures.

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53 As Jordan says, "people are not anonymous in cyberspace, as they construct identities that they use there." (1999:75). This starts as soon as one starts to post messages or enters a live chat site.

54 This is less of an issue than one might think in 'serious' forums such as these ones, with a constituency that often knows or is related to each other anyway and/or exchange 'alter-egos' with each other quite regularly.

55 For instance, in the Kamehameha Roundtable this message was posted under the title, Whatever happened to Ani?

I used to visit the Kamehameha roundtable once in a while and would always make it a point to read Ani's postings. It has been a long time since my last visit and I haven't read any posting that is reflective of Ani. But I see that Meilakepa, gp and Bevo are still here. Do any of you know what happened to Ani? Is she still here and assuming a different name? (chalena, 22/03/01) at http://polycafe.com/kamehameha/kamehameha2000-2/3308.html. In the (light-hearted) follow-ups it...
The next practicality is related to how whatever is produced - written or conveyed - in these interactions is there onscreen, to be read, consumed and thus interpreted by anyone else. This is peculiar to online-ness as opposed to traditional fieldwork research situations or face-to-face interviews where the relationship between researcher and object/subjects is relatively closed during the time of field research. Likewise for IR/PE research. It only becomes available for academic/public consumption after a certain stage (and levels of revision). Online observation-participation of this sort is a sort of public operation - the interactions take place in the public gallery of cyberspace. This is not a problem per se (though only perhaps if full laboratory-like control is sought), for self-reflexivity is also a key tenet of feminist research (Hughes, Kennedy et al 2001). So are approaches that would let usually silenced others (Gal 1991) speak, that would relativise the 'neutral' authorial voice by locating oneself in the process and demystify the notion of any 'one' ultimate interpretation. Nevertheless, citations and access to original sources are not self-explanatory. In terms of online research ethics, my approach to citation has been the following. In openly accessible forums, participants have conceded to their contributions being open to view and so potentially cited 56. In citing them, due consideration is given to the URL as well (when active) and/or the title of the message and place in an ongoing thread (see below).

Another practical issue is that of volume, vocabulary, and degrees in the integrity of reproduction for a conventional formal written format (such as this). In short, of just how much 'editorial' privilege I should exercise when presenting other people's words. In terms of any 'politics of representation' (Hall 1996b:443) for loaded terms like 'tradition' and 'culture', 'race' and sexuality, I leave it to the reader to decide where 'traditional' Polynesian cultures and societies (be it Samoan, Tongan, or others) end and contemporary ones begin 57; the times when these terms in themselves are explicitly up for discussion (Chapter Eight) notwithstanding. The protagonists make it very clear what their own opinions are and where the tensions and personal dilemmas lie. The ensuing high level of citations also relates to the logistics of distilling and representing long, interlocking discussions that are constituted by the relationships being built up and played out (Morton 1998a, 1999) and their dialogic quality (Ling 2001a). The threads demand lateral, 'upside down', 'reversible' (Wilson 1999:2) and linear reading. It does not suffice, given this hermeneutic schema, to posit just one, over-riding interpretation. The relationship between threads - and any reader/writer, and the iterative qualities of the content also matter. This relates, in turn to the idioms used, the phonetic spellings entailed, uses of emoticons, and specific languages and greetings. There is the occasional editorial intervention in the case of some idioms and Tongan/Samoan/Maori terms translated where apposite. For the most part, the texts are reproduced here as they appear on screen. Their idioms, phonetics, idiosyncrasies in spelling, internal 'emoticons' and various writing styles are part of the everyday patchwork of these online practices and on/offline lived lives and should be enjoyed as such 58.

This goes further though in the writing up of my 'findings' and/or public presentation of them. These informal, rich, and self-aware conversations are not peripheral to the conceptual framework nor the research tactics applied to 'coming to know' them. Given the feminist sensibilities already outlined together with the postcolonial politics of letting the silenced and marginalised 'subaltern other' speak, what this entails is allowing the threads themselves interact visibly with my interpretations and extrapolations; as open-ended. Given that these texts, recitations and the relationships they trace are the stuff of this 'participation-observation' they

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56 Albeit with expectations that 'due respect' will be accorded to those involved. This follows from responses to my own initial post (Kamehameha Roundtable, 1999) about the ethics of quoting. Other 'handles' I have used are; being Palangi (European descent), Samoan-born, New-Zeland raised, and academic (to which I have had some interesting responses - see Chapter Five).
57 Ortner (1997:59 passim) has a clear standpoint, and well-referenced discussion of these issues. See di Leonardo (1991: 1 passim)
58 See Chapter Eight for some of the tensions arising from these differences.
ofte nn than not, stand up in their own intellectual right and my interpretive role is just that, another after-the-fact intervention. This is one way to actually incorporate de Certeau’s challenge to the arrogance of (western) positivist research methods. It is but one way to acknowledge

a different epistemology from that which defined the place of knowledge in terms of a position ‘proper’ to itself and which measured the authority of the ‘subject of knowledge’ by the elimination of everything concerning the speaker. In making this elimination explicit [scholarship] returns once again to the particularities of the commonplace, to the reciprocal effects which structure representations, and to the multiple pasts which determine the use of its techniques from within. (de Certeau 1986:217-218).

This leads me to another organisational practicality which provides new challenges to academic reading and writing conventions; that of reconstruction. These daily quasi-oral, written dialogues upset, subvert tidy sentences and water-tight conclusions. Transferring these hyperlinked conversations to the static page is a switch in medium - and genre. Without the ability to hyperlink, browse forwards and backwards, scroll downwards and upwards, and given that many threads have gone offline and those still accessible are effectively archives and in ‘read-only’ format, overlaps and repetitions seem to blur the horizon as the same theme gets revisited from different points of view. Whilst these threads and their respective chapters work as a distinct subject category amongst other major issues over the years in these communities, they also speak to and from them. How to present these overlapping debates, organise them and yet keep some of their liveliness - their relationality - intact?

As in the cinema (see Benjamin 1992), the internet/www forms of reproduction stretch and shift conventional representative formats. Film, and HTML are both visual fluid media, even though the latter is still textually based (Cubitt 1998), which allow for non-linear and overlapping frames and splicing. Added to this is the nature of oratory in Polynesian/Pacific Island contexts where public/political debate operates through the spoken word. So whilst it may have seemed logical to reconstruct the threads linearly, in accordance with overt chronology, or hierarchically vis-à-vis response rates or positions taken in the debates - for, against, neutral, irrelevant, this approach would not do them justice (see Appendix Two and Four). The aim in reconstructing these threads, therefore, is not to reduce an ongoing, complex and sensitive debates into static categories nor to create one tidy hierarchical or diachronic process out of a contingent and lateral ones. Neither of these categorising and organisational traditions fits the bill. Hence, I have chosen to re-present these debates overlapping themes, seen from several angles, but also through the eyes of the protagonists as they are articulated online. These contours, nuances and overlaps emerge as the content - the discussion threads - does. This way of distilling long criss-crossing interactions, measured treatises, short sharp retorts and interpersonal altercations on my part will be interpolated with, and thereby anchored by participants' own words. Once again, not as subordinate snippets but as substantial co-

59 the original word was "historiography" - the 'scholarly product' that is produced by History as an academic discipline. His point holds, however, for mainstream, positivist Social Sciences.

60 For instance, the rights and wrongs of (homo)sexuality, women's roles, postcolonial identities (Polynesian-American), specific scandals and issues, 'netiquette', current events of all sorts.

61 The online Kava Bowl follows offline communicative practices. As Helu notes, these entail “forms of socialised speech and notional creativity which are sanctioned by the ages and social convention, namely oratory, repartee, humour, the art of story telling, and linguistic rivalry - in short, the whole range of the verbal arts” (1999b:16). All these aspects can be seen operating in the sampling here. There are differences. For one, the online Kava Bowl does extend this "domain that is dominated by elders" (ibid) to include women, commoners, and non-Tongans.

62 I did, in fact, set out to do so but this turned out to be an endless play-back loop. It only really serves as an empirical point of departure. A thread is identified here by its title in the initial post and/or title line of the relevant follow-up as well as the respective poster. Follow-ups build into sub-texts of their own. The full URL is provided for the specific citation if still active at time of going to press (July 2001). These URLs are no longer open for posting in that they are archives, no longer accessible through the Kava Bowl portal. They are open for view though.
contributions to this re-presentation. Saying this is not to discount the control I have exercised over this particular representation of the Kava Bowl and Kamehameha Roundtable Public Discussion Forums vis-à-vis their participants. Rather, it is to allow their contributions to speak to, and against, this interpretation of the respective debates and lived lives carried out in Amsterdam and well after these online events.

Conclusion

I see the shapes, I remember from maps. I see the shoreline. I see the whitecaps. A baseball diamond, nice weather down there. I see the school and the houses where the kids are. Places to park by the factories and buildings. Restaurants and bar for later in the evening. Then we come to the farmlands, and the undeveloped areas. And I have learned how these things work together. .....I'm tired of looking out the windows of the airplane.... I want to be somewhere. (David Byrne 1978)

These chapters have laid out the theoretical and methodological elements to what I have called a 'hermeneutic schema'. The next section - in which online discussions are reconstructed and their content analysed - fleshes out this schema. I shall return to this term, hermeneutic, shortly. By schema I am simply referring to "a structured framework" (Webster's Dictionary) that codifies these online articulations, online / offline traversals that are constitutive of non-commercial internet/www communications. This schema provides a "way of perceiving cognitively and responding to [this] complex situation or set of stimuli" (ibid). Hence it is not intended as a complete model for - or of - these online 'life worlds' and the diasporic conditions under which they are lived, nor posit a causal relationship between them, ICTs and/or world order per se. Rather, it is intended to act as a sort of conceptual and practical map (navigational device if you will) for investigating, and so better understanding how the internet/www operates on an everyday level, and the ramifications thereof. This map, schema, is designed for the 'airplane view' more familiar to IR/PE theory and research. It is intended as a way in to the minutiae of everyday life and its delimitations, as lived by other sociocultural and political economic sensibilities to those usually propagated by this discipline. It takes the post-positivist and feminist critiques of IR/PE of the last 15 years or so to meet the political implications of the practice theory of de Certeau, as this pertains to non-western societies and their diasporas growing up in the West. This schema is but one possible way into analysing and looking at such online communicative practices, the communities they constitute, and their relationship to broader contexts.

The feminist aim is to enable a reconstruction of the operations of everyday life online as practised by its inhabitants vis-à-vis both their lived lives (offline) and also the 'postcolonial turn' (historically, politically and theoretically) in which all these interactions are occurring. Whilst it does so initially from within a critical IR/PE framework, it challenges these to engage more fully with both the impact and implications of ICTs and the postcolonial critiques of eurocentrism for the contemporary 'world order'. On the one hand, this acknowledges and examines the constitutive role "circulations of meanings" (Murphy & de Ferro 1995) have in the gender-power relations of the past, present and future international/global political economy. Talking about meaning-making implicates the process of interpretation and this is what is at stake when reconstructing these online debates (as opposed to offering causal explanations, scientific hypotheses or statistical 'proof'). On the other hand, this does not mean that these various representations are divorced from their broader socio-economic and political-cultural contexts. Neither does it entail reducing all material gender-power relations to a question of competing 'interpretations' of literary or cultural artefacts, confining all "concrete historical determinations" (Ulin 1984:126) to textual productions and inter/subjective interactions tout

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63 Another example of this straddling of the 'micro-macro' divide between much IR/PE and other Social Sciences can be found in Ling (2001a). Here, a theory and research model for 'Postcolonial IR' is presented by way of the practices of "thinking, doing, being" as both theoretical constructs, dominant representations and intercultural - hybrid - learning processes.

64 "What feminist research has to add to interpretative [hermeneutic] research strategies is a notion of power, and acknowledgement of the structural inequalities involved in and coming out of the process of meaning-making." (van Zoonen 1994:134). This cuts both ways in ethnographic scenarios (Stacey 1997).
Rather, echoing postcolonial and feminist critiques, this points to the
to the reflexive character of all interpretative processes in that knowledge of the radical other, 
whether human interactions, informants, or texts, discloses the uniqueness or historical 

To put it bluntly, all scientific research entails some sort of interpretative operation (van Zoonen 
1994:146). The Social Sciences are particularly prone to this sort of intervention even as it 
remains hidden from view, as in rationalist, positivist methods (Ling 2001a: 15-17, Walker 
1995).

**Hermeneutics or Hermeneutic?**

'Interpretative' is a label that covers rather diverse research traditions that all start from 
the way human beings experience, define, organise and appropriate reality. (van Zoonen 
1994:131)

Lest there be any misunderstanding, let me clarify the use of hermeneutic in this study. 
It is not a full application of the approach known as *Hermeneutics* that is represented by the 
work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur (Ulin 1984:91 passim, Fabian 1983: 176-177, 
note 13) even whilst it draws on its interest in the relationship between texts, those who produce 
them and their broader sociocultural and political economic contexts (Ulin 1994:91, 126-127). 
Rather, it is used as an adjective for a self-conscious intervention in the gender-power relations 
of this knowledge-production of the practice of everyday life online. It is a response to 
'machineries' of representation that have the 
power to define situations and identities, to frame issues and problems, to legitimise 
interpretations and experiences [that are ] unequally distributed along lines of gender, 
ethnicity, class and a range of other social and discursive formations and (re)produces 
such inequalities at the same time. (van Zoonen 1994:134)

When dealing with the spoken/written word of living people as they come and go online, 
understanding their communicative practices and relationships, this becomes a hermeneutic 
enterprise.

*Hermeneutic* signals a self-understanding of anthropology as interpretative (rather than 
a naively inductive or rigorously deductive). No experience can simply be 'used' as naked 
data. All personal experience is produced under historical conditions; it must be used 
with critical awareness and with constant attention to its authoritative claims. (Fabian 
1983: 89)

For the examination of meanings from within an IR/PP framework, the term 
*hermeneutic* simply highlights the constitutive - and methodological role - of language, textual 
practices, in mediating the "density of social life" (Ulin 1984: xv, Williams 1977) as well as its 
political economic changes, institutions.

[A]ll social science theories must necessarily be interpretative because human actions 
and cultural [political economic] products are objectified in the symbols and signs of 
ordinary language (Ulin 1984:xv)

It also centres (self)reflexivity in the process (Fabian 1983:90-91). At the same time it 
also accepts that part of the politics of representation - postcolonial or otherwise - involved in 
such an undertaking emerges from 
the convention that fieldwork [research] comes first and analysis later [then] we begin 
to realise that the Other as object or content of anthropological knowledge is necessarily 
part of the knowing subject's past...That the anthropologist's [researcher's] experienced 
Other is necessarily part of his [sic] past may therefore not be an impediment, but a
condition of an interpretative approach (Fabian 1983:88 & 89).

This is also the case for this schema, and hence the reason for calling it an hermeneutic one. It is up to the next chapters to put some flesh on its bones. For this reason, theoretical concerns will not be left behind from this moment on. These concerns emerge from the discussions themselves and their protagonists, as well as by way of this hermeneutic schema. Broadly speaking these are; sex-gender roles in a postcolonial and/or diasporic context from the 'inside out' (Chapter Five). The contested meanings of democracy in the post-colonial Pacific Islands and online (re)articulations thereof (Chapter Six). (Re)articulations of postcolonial self/group identity formation along race/ethnic/cultural lines (Chapter Seven). The fourth chapter looks at how gender-power relations emerge in a purely online context through rules and norms of online behaviour and the emergent moral economies that these inform (Chapter Eight).