The internet and postcolonial politics of representation: pacific traversals

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CHAPTER FIVE - I'M TIRED OF SLAVING MYSELF

Introduction

[Many] adult women ... are involved in activities which presuppose internal standards of excellence rather than external criteria of success ... The dichotomy between a public sphere of the economic, and a private personal realm, assigned "naturally" to women, in fact places women in a double bind... (Benhabib & Cornell 1987:9)

... les diverses manières de parler, de se présenter, bref, de se manifester sur le champ social, ne sont pas autre chose que l'assaut indéfini d'un sujet 'public' pour prendre place parmi les siens. (Giard & Mayol 1980:34)

The ensuing boom in new kinds of ‘translocal’ (Clifford 1997:7) sociability and communication supported and enabled by ICTs has implications for some basic assumptions underpinning (neo)liberal democratic institutions and societies. The ‘public-private’ distinction is arguably one of the more intransigent of these, from both a broadly feminist and a postcolonial point of view. It is also one of the main stress-lines in debates about where and how the internet/www affects political and social life (Toulouse & Luke 1998, Loader 1998, Wilhelm 2000, Turkle 1996). What constitutes the ‘public sphere’ of political decision-making, regulation, and constituencies, the public or private ownership of the ways and means for any of these, where the ‘public’ person ends and the ‘private’ person begins are all being turned inside out through, and by online interactions. Both commercial and communicative uses and applications of ICTs are implicated as the internet/www splices through accepted notions of public-ness (civil society), the personal (privacy, the domestic sphere), let alone proprietary issues around state and/or private (capitalist) control and ownership of Telecommunications, Broadcasting, the Print Media, and other Public Utilities.

Recalling Chapter Two, many contemporary analyses of the social and political impacts of the internet/www (whether utopian or Dystopian) tend to reproduce a comparable dichotomy though; between what is produced by online or offline interactions, between life in the virtual world of cyberspace or that of the real world of (international/global) politics and economics. However, the more one delves into the internet/www as a ‘grassroots’ political or interpersonal communicative medium, the more challenging it becomes to apply this hierarchical distinction to the interplay of the multiple experiential and material dimensions of these erstwhile telecommunications infrastructures. What becomes evident is that the plethora of new(er) political practices and ideologies; commercial profits and losses and their material consequences; symbolic artefacts and their psycho-emotional import being affected and produced cannot be adequately represented by such dichotomies. When these intersect with the (online) interactions and politics of non-Western peoples who are growing up or living in diaspora and their (offline) interlocking relationships with each other and their cultural points of origin, this is even more the case.

Dichotomies like Public-Private (and now, Online-Offline) are quite tenacious⁴, all too easily reproduced for even the most fervent social constructionist. Collapsing stubborn polarities into catch-all normative concepts like Global Governance, the Global Market, The Global Information Society, or even Cyberspace, is not the answer either. This chapter

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² A revised version of this chapter is in the International Feminist Journal of Politics (Vol 3, No. 3, November 2001). My thanks to David Gauntlett and Rachel Gibson for their valuable feedback as discussants on earlier versions presented as conference papers and to the two anonymous reviewers and Gillian Youngs at IFJP for their constructive criticisms. My gratitude also goes out to Helen Morton, Al Aiono, 'Alopi Latukefu, Taholo Kami, Seija Ridell, Tere Teiwa, for their direct input on the issues broached in this chapter. And for the record, a big 'thank you shout' to everyone at the Polynesian Cafe and the Kava Bowl for this chapter and the three that follow.

³ "The various ways of speaking, presenting oneself; in short, make oneself known in a social context, is nothing other than the traces of a 'public' subject asserting his/herself [assault indéfini] amongst her/his own kind." (my translation).

⁴ By this I mean to say that there is a psychological and emotional investment in these separations in industrialised, Hi-Tech 'information societies'.
highlights the specifically gendered (re)articulations of the public-private-personal problematic by way of a set of discussion threads on the KB and the KR that were posted by women, for the most part. These particular threads indicate how personal-private-public issues are being lived, perceived and dealt with as both at-home posters and women living in the West talk about sex-gender roles from their own particular sociocultural and race/ethnic backgrounds and ‘globalised’ diasporic standpoints. As far as these discussions go, private-public lives and concerns are being re-lived and articulated in a new(er) sort of accessible and open space on the internet/www.

The proprietary, and sociocultural aspects to these public-private personal politics are never far away either. In fact they weave in and out of each other. The online, immediate and archival, content that emerges is a record of the complexity of the diasporic sociocultural and political economic conditions in which these women and men are being formed whilst living, growing up as ‘a minority of a minority’ in OECD countries. How all this works is a complex interplay between understandings of the ‘private’ as ownership and a personal - intimate - affair, of the ‘public’ as a political - community - interest, and the newer articulations of these being lent by the practice (and recording) of everyday lived lives online. The boundary is even more blurred when these occur in the spaces of websites such as the KB and the KR whose moderator-owners still adhere to non-exclusive and user-discretionary software and open online access. Although such online groups / communities and their discourses are distinctive from offline ones, the participants are well aware of the interaction between their online interventions, the postcolonial politics of life in the South Pacific Islands, and the complexities of these for Polynesians living and growing up abroad.

These threads are not only a sub-set of the enormous range of discussions that have been carried out on these online forums over the years, but they also trace substantive non-commercial uses of the internet/www in general. These sorts of uses are (re)articulating - and reproducing - existing communities and relationships on the ground. In the current history of globality, they lend new dimensions to border-crossing and trans/international relations by bringing them ‘online’, in all senses of the term. The hermeneutic process that we are about to embark upon has to deal with the aforementioned inelasticity and cultural egocentrism of the Western Political Social Science lexicon. This is not only because of the nature and / or effects the internet/www that may, or may not, be emerging, but also because this lexicon is permeated with dichotomies (Young 1990). These cannot do justice to the myriad of (still) accessible s(pl)aces, conversations, textual production and other aesthetics (Cubitt 1997) that are being peopled, produced and experienced in multifarious online scenarios. Whether all forms of online sharing and inter-exchange are always unproblematic is beside the point in that, as I have been arguing, these non-elite uses of the internet/www are adding a new dimension to everyday life. This chapter begins examining these interactions by recalling Second Wave feminist critiques of the gender-loaded and eurocentric nature of the public-private distinction in itself, let alone two corollary terms; the ‘personal’ and the ‘domestic’ (Fildes 1983, Nicholson 1997:1-10, Sargent 1981: xi-xiii, Harding 1998a).

Online practices of everyday life, let alone the notion of cyberspace itself, is confronting the public-private dichotomy head-on. This sociocultural, political economic and conceptual division, one that has also been constructed and institutionalised along gender/race/ethnic and class lines, is being reconfigured by new(er) ICTs. The online traversals and textual practices of second and third generations of the Pacific Island diasporas show this confrontation as a process ‘in-the-making’. So, with feminist debates as a guide, this chapter goes calling on the public-private problematique. Not to reproduce already contested terms by asserting a whole new set of "prescriptions, descriptions or explanations" (Fildes 1983:67) but, rather, to see how emergent and particular online discussions and interactions occurring in not-yet commercialised cyberspace are reinscribing the practice of everyday life. Moreover, as both postcolonial and

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5 This is a modification of Gayle Rubin's initial conceptualisation of the 'sex/gender system'; namely "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (Rubin 1975) 1997: 28). See Haraway (1997) for a fuller account of the genealogy of the terms sex and/or gender.

6 On the complexity of private ownership and copyright issues vis-à-vis ICTs, see May (2000).

7 Along with that of the public-private, there is the; national-international, state-market, local-global, agent-structure, un(der)developed - developed, global-regional, and the list goes on.
feminist critiques of the public-private dichotomy contend, these online interactions articulate the public-private-personal in ways that do not "confuse unproblematically a uniform, set of meanings which are common to all" (Fildes 1983:68). Furthermore, close examination of the online archives that have built up over five-six years of daily interactions on these discussion forums show the intimately connected "material realities and ... ideological tropes" (di Leonardo 1991:25) that are emerging through, and on the internet/www. It revisits it by way of the - still controversial and 'gender-troubled' (Butler 1990) feminist slogan 'the personal is political'. In short; "there is no private domain of a person's life that is not political and there is no political issue that is not personal" (Charlotte Bunch quoted in Sargent 1981:xix).

There is a practical - methodological - rationale for beginning the viewing and 'reading' of these online discussions from this bottom-up, subjective angle (Harding 1998a). Research into non-western corners of the internet/www and, moreover, women's place and roles therein, is relatively recent (see Harcourt et al 1999, Kolko et al 2000). Focusing on the (arguably outdated) connection between the personal and the political revisits how "personal statements remain a source of suggestive illumination of the texture of life" (Fildes 1983:63). For everyday online scenarios and articulations, let alone for those that are not generically 'Western', this accent can thereby circumvent any tendency to head for conceptual closure and categorical definitiveness too quickly. As this, and subsequent chapters will show, such tidy ends are not so easily achieved when living between - and in - two or more cultures and their expectations The everyday politics also lie in how the immediate and broader meanings of the public-private-personal (re)articulations examined here depend on who is talking, to whom and for whom (Fildes 1983:68). These discussions between diasporic generations of South Pacific Island women communicating with friends, strangers, extended family, elders and community leaders on and through the internet/www show the "varying ways in which women themselves perceive their situations" (di Leonardo 1991:17) and the personal-political import thereof is quite manifest, in the interlocutors' own words.

This chapter looks at a specific set of themes in their own right by way of the 'public-private' distinction, thereby ignoring several overlapping ones, such as (homo)sexuality and changing sexual mores in postcolonial societies. It is organised in two main parts. After a 'rough guide for readers', that follows on from the last chapter, the first part situates the reconstructions of the second part vis-à-vis the public-private dichotomy. In this respect, the notion of 'online-ness' develops the notion of everyday life vis-à-vis postcolonial diasporas on the internet/www. The second part is a walk-through of some specific discussions on sex-gender roles for everyday diasporic lives from the point of view of Samoan and/or Tongan women - and others as well. The women posting/speaking are regulars on these forums and have been active in all other discussions as well. In these threads, they express personal concerns, respond to those of others, about multiplex expectations and experiences in and outside their Pacific Islands of origin. Some women have Polynesian partners. Men are present as well but these particular discussions are dominated and mainly initiated by women. The chapter concludes by linking these peregrinations to discussions on the postcolonial Pacific Islands and globalisation that cut through, and spins off from these concerns. The point being made here is that both the internet/www and the way these groups use and traverse it show that 'inside out' entails not just a spatial - geographic relationship of either/or, inside/outside but also an inter/subjective exchange of meanings. In this respect, the notion also conjures up the image of a garment being turned inside out. Its seams, different textures to the fabric, inner rips and tears, wear and tear, become visible. An inside-out garment can still be worn even though it looks different, does not appear as it was 'designed' to be worn and so on.

A Rough Guide for Readers

Taken in toto, the above dynamics constitute how (cyber)spaces are constituted, where and for whom the internet/www is (to be) placed, and with what designs. As some of the
gendered-ethnic-class contours 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 (feminist) theory and politics. Self-reflexivity is 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. Because this genre of online interaction both deeply personal (intimate) and public (in open cyberspace), here are some more pointers for 'reading' them (see de Certeau 1980: 23-26, 279 passim).

Some of the discussion threads cited are now no longer available, although their themes are recapitulated even now. Unless otherwise specified, those discussion 'threads' that are still current at time of publication have their full URL's and position on the overall thread included as a footnote under the name provided by the poster; for example Bitchyspice or bella. I would encourage curious readers to access some of these to get a better idea of how these online interactions look and operate in their original online, hyperlinked context (Appendix Two). For initial reference, this 'signature' (which can be either a name or a whole phrase), and date are provided following citation practice. These nicknames - 'nics' - are an integral part of online inter/subjectivity and moreover provide some clues to the 'personality' and relationships behind them (Jordan 1999: 59-79, Morton 1998). Other details in a footnote. Follow-ups can also operate as sub-texts in their own right and so the titles, when they are not repetitions of the original one, are integral to the online "tapestry" (de Certeau 1980 op cit) of these interactions. Whence the term discussion thread. Needless to say, these sorts of online overlapping and fluid communicative interactions require adjustments in how one reads, locates, and interacts with the medium in which the text is produced. Internet/www communications are still predominantly inter-textual even as they are hyperlinked texts (see Haraway 1997).

A final word about (online) 'textual surfaces' (Carver 1998:7-9). Re-interpretations and celebration of 'traditional'- 'modern' sex-gender systems (Ortner 1996, Rubin (1975)1997) and querying of idea(1)s or stereotypes provide the stuff of the debates, permeate the more autobiographical accounts. Apart from the ostensible content, another rendition of the inside-out dynamic involves (semi-)conscious decisions about concealing, or playing with one's 'true' (gendered and/or ethnic) identity by way of online forms of re-identification - (nick)names or handles (see Morton 1998, Ludlow et al 1996). Another subtle, textually embedded 'exchange

8 What I mean is that they have been removed from the server and/or the world-wide web altogether. This issue creates some interesting variations on the theory and practice of archiving, keeping records and also assessing any (kept) records' veracity. Online texts come and go according to factors such as server space, the way sites are administered and organised (see Chapter Eight), technical breakdowns notwithstanding. I have printed out all the threads referred to here, and many more besides. Others have gone for ever. As I noted in the last chapter, archives of online texts - if made room for - on the website's server are under the jurisdiction of their owners as they take up space and require time. For researchers, I would suggest that the real issue is less a question of the form or longevity of any 'archive' - be it hyperlinked bookmark, printed hardcopy, downloaded and stored on one's own server/hard-drive for future reference - but rather the purpose and position they have in the research. If this is content-based, as the case here, then my advice would be to start printing/electronically storing (website owners permitting) sooner rather than later and to err on the side of more rather than less. At the same time, vibrant ongoing communities like these ones provide more than enough comparable material over time. Hence, neither should one worry if there are 'holes' in the records. Official, boxed archives gathering dust in libraries are full of these as well. Besides, all (historical) reconstructions are partial at best.

9 To summarise, threads will be cited and referenced as follows. The poster (as given whether this be name or phrase) and date will follow normal citation practice. For example; (MA, 01/1/01). When the thread is no longer available online (it has been deleted or was not transferred during a change in the server), this will be indicated. For example; KC, no longer on server. A footnote will provide the website in question and other contextual details. First by the title of the message in question, whether it is an initial post or a follow-up. Italics designate message/posts' titles from signatures (which are not always names and can be part of the discussion itself). Second the thread, preceding message and its poster/date to which it is immediately related may be indicated (following the same procedure). This is important for re-locating who and where in a thread if it is still online. In those instances, the full URL is given. Abbreviations for the websites are as follows; KB (Kavabowl and/or Kava Chat which are used synonymously); KR (Kamehameha Roundtable); Polycafe (the Polycafe general contact forum from which the KR is accessed); THA (Tongan History Association that was accessed through the KB's portal, the Pacific Forum); SPIN (South Pacific Information Network).
of meanings' occurs as a poster identifies and situates herself by any combination of categorisations, giving her actual name notwithstanding. For example: man/woman, gay/straight, non/religious, old/young, married/single, sister/brother. There are also other signatures/by-lines that make inferences to opinion or relative expertise. For example: ignorant/expert, supporter/critic. And then there are those cultural or ethnic identifications or admissions such as; of mixed/pure blood, Polynesian/Palagi. A poster can be quizzed or admonished accordingly. These 'signatures' (whether they be nicknames or sub-texts in their own right) zigzag through the actual message, the rest of the thread, and have a bearing on the flow and layers of reading. How these personal choices, online personae, relationships are brought to bear on the way a thread or group of threads develop is also related to frequency of participation and degree of familiarity between participants (Morton 1998). There is a lot of humour, satire, and irony as well, in the tradition of both social gatherings and (Tongan) Kava Clubs on the ground.

Part I: (Re)Articulations

...la vie quotidienne ... a quelque chose à voir avec l’espace public dans lequel elle se déploie...nous ne travails plus sur des objets découpés dans le champ social de manière seulement spéculative (le quartier, la vie quotidienne...), mais sur des relations entre des objets, très exactement sur la couture qui tient l’un à l’autre l’espace privé et l’espace public. (Giard & Mayol 1980:14)

Two conceptual-methodological concerns already discussed are at stake in the reconstructions that follow, indeed for the next three chapters as well. The first is what I shall call 'online-ness' and what this constitutes for 'Polynesians On the World-Wide Web' at the Kamehameha Roundtable or around the 'Kava Circle' in particular. The second relates to feminist approaches to 'public-private-personal' conceptual boundaries in western political theory and its concomitant IR/IPE frameworks (see Kauppi & Viotti 1993, Kegley & Wittkopf 1999). These do not take into account other sociocultural and historical permutations and indeed, during the colonial period attempted to graft these boundaries onto other societies in a complex process of "conquest and desire" of the exoticised and erotised 'other' (Ling 2001a). The main aim here is to show these seams at work in online (re)articulations.

Online-ness

As I have argued, the internet/www constitutes physical-digital architectures and socioculturally constructed-tangibly experienced (cyber)space(s), which produce and circulate 'exchanges of meanings' (Murphy & de Ferro 1995) as well as have material substance. These are constituted by practices of everyday life that are both self-contained and porous to offline ones. They articulate corporeal and non-corporeal displacements and returns which (re)constitute particular and broader gender-power relations. For non-western and/or diasporic

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10 This denotes something else entirely from the western nuclear-family framework, given how extended family relations work in Polynesia (Ortner 1997:59 passim). They are also terms of solidarity - 'sistah' / 'bruddah', Sis/Bro are some idiomatic expressions of this.
11 That is; white/non-Polynesian . Two types of spelling exist - palangi (Tongan) or palagi (Samoan).
12 In the Pacific Islands, kava drinking (a mildly narcotic beverage known in Samoa, Tonga and Fiji mainly) is both a formal and male-centred social ritual - a source of debate in itself in some discussions. The Internet 'Kava Bowl' is a cyberspace variant of these in/formal kava circles (see Figure Seven). The telling of tall stories occur alongside heated political debate, ribaldry and satire. These playful elements are recognised and enjoyed on line as well. However, as a Tongan satirist put it, this "is not to suggest that our country comprises a nation of liars as some uninitiated foreigners seem to think, far from it. Truth comes in portions, some large, some small, but never whole. Like our ancestors we are expert tellers of half-truths, quarter-truths, and one-percent truths..." (Hau'ofa, The Winding Road to Heaven 1983:7).
13 Everyday life [la vie quotidienne] .... is related to the public space in which it unfolds.... we are no longer working on disconnected things [objets] in the social realm but, rather, on the relationships between them; more precisely, on the seam [couture] that joins the private and the public to each other." (my translation).
14 To reiterate an earlier point, positing gender and power as a relational dyad is to imply multiplex -
...it appears a large portion of the Tongan culture is based on age-old rules which contradict the very doctrines with which we set our standards by today. It amazes me how much we accept our culture without question. (Coral 17/07/98) 13

Such threads debate differing meanings, perceptions, experiences of racial/ethnic identifications and discrimination, womanhood, sexual and family politics, sex-gender hierarchies, sexual and social mores, 'tradition' and 'modernity'. The ones re-presented here are a component of long, fluid, open-ended and interwoven online textual and physical practices. 16 Individual postings can be lengthy, eloquent, short and sharp, funny, angry, contain literary, idiomatic, satirical and autobiographical prose, besides and interpolations of varying moods. The textual threads, online textures that are produced are 'public', for the record, in that these forums are designed to be accessible for all-comers.

The efficacy of the public-private dichotomy as accepted wisdom and as institutionalised politics is further tugged at when an inter/cultural element or perspective is brought to bear on it. Moreno in these online contexts that are available for all to see on 'open' discussion forums. The upshot is that the particular sorts of communicative practices being enabled by the internet/www entail a more recent, electronically mediated challenge to the well-worn path between this separation. Feminist critiques of the public - private division perse and especially its correlation with essentialist notions of masculine - feminine gender roles and spheres of influence have shown how this 'hardening of the categories' (Haraway 1997) perpetuates symbolic and material practices of exclusion and foreclosure (see Nicholson 1990, di Leonardo 1991, McDowell & Sharp 1997, Haraway 1992). The power relations of this contrast between theory and research, policy and practice, becomes more acute when witnessing on the internet/www how non-western diasporas (and their guests) passionately argue from their own personal experiences about cross-cutting notions of the 'traditional' and 'modern', cultural 'authenticity' and ongoing cultural change, and do this from the relative intimacy of their - by now well-established - corner in cyberspace. In this respect the made-visible gendered elements of this problematic shift into another sort of culturally understood notion of public-private that relates to postcolonial (re)articulations of democracy (Chapter Six). The elision is not far away, as I was to discover in an initial post of my own. My (undeclared) gender-ed 'bias' was taken up quite differently by my interlocutors:

*The 'public-private distinction - is there one??! (MA, 29/02/00)* 17

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13 Follow-up in *brother/sister* thread, 26/05/98, THA, no longer on server.

16 For example; typing a text and posting it; logging on and off; arguing-flaming-being censored, flirting, chatting, hyperlinking, solidarity building through information sharing (Harcourt et al 1999, Jones et al 1999, Kolko et al 2000).

17 This was the subject heading of an 'initial post' I posted on the Tonga History Association's Discussion Forum (29/02/00, THA, no longer on server). In it I stated my motivation for posting (confusion whilst dealing with the early drafts of this chapter), reiterated my identity as a researcher or hailing from the region as my birthplace (Samoan) or my official nationality (New Zealander). I also made it clear in this case that responses (follow-ups) may be quoted.
Unfortunately, the answer is NO. Polynesian culture is rooted in a communal relationship .... Privatisation is merely a foreign concept and does not thrive in Polynesia (True Polynesian, 29/02/00)

....surely this is difficult to maintain these days, even in the islands.. (MA 1/03/00)

... As said, Privatisation is not what being a Polynesian is all about. Once one start to set boundaries around him/herself and claim total possession over his/her belonging he is not a true Polynesian anymore, he becomes a breed of selfish being and a foreigner and hence we say "fie palangi" (wanting to be a white man (non Polynesian)). However I agree with you, being a Polynesian is hard [to] maintain these days both inside and outside Polynesia. (True Polynesian 2/03/00)

... I recall [a briefing] in which they made the case that the concept of corruption was not relevant in Tonga because of this communalism. what was taken by people in high places was simply distributed among others. I wasn't convinced. Put it this way; what's yours is the Royal Family's. But is what's the Royal Family's yours? (George Candler 2/03/00)

The Royal family 18 owns what they have because the people allow them to.... Hence indirectly, people also own what the Royal Family have. (True Polynesian 2/03/00)

I began with the notion of public-private as an issue of subjectivity. My interlocutors responded according to another, overlapping, one; namely public versus private issues of ownership and control and how these pertain to the Polynesian culture in general and the Tongan political landscape in particular (Chapter Six). That the two are not that far apart, in both theoretical and political practice and private lives was all too clear in how this discussion developed and eventually stalled. My main interlocutor, True Polynesian, whilst taking a public stand on authentic Polynesian (Tongan) values vis-à-vis public and private ownership, did not see the personal vis-à-vis the public as a problematic or politically relevant issue; beyond those marked by individual choice, that is.

...what would you say to the notion of the 'personal' in your model of Polynesia as open and sharing? Are not some of the 'tougher' discussion threads also about what is allowed or not? Where the line is between 'personal-private' and 'public'? (MA 3/03/00) 19

... what don't you understand in the word "personal"? The word speaks for itself and only the person concerned can speak for him/herself.... (True Polynesian, 3/03/00)

The cross-cultural elements to this exchange aside 20, this 'double articulation' of the public-private distinction is always present when discussing the implications, effects or significance of the internet/www. When online and involving postcolonial issues and populations, these include new(er) permutations of some specific mechanics and politics of inter/subjectivity that blur these conceptually and politically troubled parameters even further. These gender-focused discussions operate both as personal testimonies and public statements. They speak from the inside out, acknowledging the distinctions but without baulking from the contradictions they presume to delineate. Not only are there gender-power relations at stake but so are there sociocultural and race/ethnic-power relations as well. The internet/www enables

18 The Kingdom of Tonga is a Monarchy. Although it does have a Western style parliamentary system with elections, the King and his family are the constitutional political leaders, with many economic interests and holding public office as well. Like many of the South Pacific Islands (New Zealand/Aotearoa included), pre-colonial and colonial political systems and forms of representations exist (more or less comfortably) side-by-side in one way or another. The countries dealt with here (American Samoa excepted) belong to the British Commonwealth either as politically independent nation-states (since the 1960's) or indirectly as protectorates. See Chapter Six.
19 Follow-up in public-private distinction thread - see above.
20 Where at the time I was unwittingly reproducing the very cultural distinction I was questioning.
such articulations to be a lot more visible and accessible, in principle and within limits, than heretofore.

This is not necessarily such an innovation in itself for 'non-western' societies seeing as they have always been engaging with generically western technologies (Mandaville, forthcoming) and political systems (Mohanty 1997), building upon extant social and cultural networks but also re-negotiating these, their own place in them, and themselves along the way (Clifford 1997, Ling 2001a). All too rarely does theory and research fully acknowledge the "power dynamics of naming 'others'" (di Leonardo 1991:15). By contrast, both Feminist and Postcolonial frameworks treat inter/subjectivity in term of how a subject, rather than being a fixed entity which enter[es] into social relations with its gender (and class and race) fixed in place, [is] always fluid, in the process of becoming, anxious to create and hold onto an identity which is constructed through discourse and everyday actions (McDowell & Sharp 1997:6).

Ongoing online discussions and the post-colonial lived lives articulated in and by them are evidence of how the protagonists are well sensitised to how the personal and the political - the private and the public - are mutually constitutive realms and practices with specific sociocultural threads and tensions. The following sub-string (of a longer one) between two long-standing participants - a man and a woman - is an example of the way some of these dynamics and tensions get (re)articulated online:

As a note to this discussion, I would warn participants against 'romanticising' the traditional culture of Tonga or any of the Pacific...At the same time however, we must not be revisionist in our interpretation of the Pacific, and re-invent 'Pacific Islanders' to historically reflect who we are now, from a traditional perspective. The influences are far more complex and involve the interaction between Pacific and European/Western culture and religion....('Alopi Latukefu, 31/05/98) 21

I agree...but after 30+ years of being indoctrinated to particular lexicon, values and experiences, it's difficult (impossible?) for me not to process, speculate, and learn information without a tainted view.... I believe I'm not exclusive to this type of ethnocentrism....[such] posts are a bit stifling you know ... [they] stop speculation before it has had its run....."(Jatu follow-up 1/06/98) 22

Stifling your thesis development was certainly not my intention....(' Alopi 1/06/98)

.... What I am trying to illustrate is that as a palangi [non-Polynesian], quite ignorant in Tongan history, anthropology and academia, I may take a different approach in this forum 23 than what may be deemed the correct, or objective one....(Jatu 3/06/98)

Such tensions take many forms and do not need to be always made explicit. But when they are, they can be rallying points for re-affirmation or positioning for those who are living as a minority elsewhere.

Feminist Nodes

You wrote "it is good to see that you can get along with the way women are viewed by men" - this is definitely NOT the case - it's just that I refuse to be limited by that type of narrow thinking, I refuse to let it hinder me, my life and the pursuit of my goals..... I find this most interesting - especially being both women (correct me if I'm wrong) yet

21 Warning: Romanticism, sub-thread in brother/sister thread (THA, no longer on server)
22 Jatu identifies as a Latin American whose husband is Tongan
23 The Tonga History Association is primarily for Historians although non-academics clearly frequent it.
having totally different views on the role of Tongan women within our society...."
(Legacy_NZ_24/05/99)

In feminist theory, the public/private distinction is particularly charged, and ingrained
theory and political activism engage with Marx and Engels' linking of the institutionalisation
of private property, and the capitalist mode of production to the sexual division of labour
produce surplus value under alienated conditions of labour and women stay at home to
reproduce more workers to produce surplus value. Feminists have pondered over how this
hierarchical separation between 'public' power (and alienation) - for men only - and all sorts of
'private' domesticity (and exclusion) - for women - relates to 'patriarchy' (Lerner 1986: 212-229,
238-240). The latter denotes either a distinct or universal social system (Youngs 2000) through
which women are a priori 'oppressed', 'domesticated' or excluded from 'public' political life
(Rubin (1975):1997: 30,32). These 'materialist' feminist approaches posit the capitalist mode of
(re)production (Sargent et al 1981) and the aforementioned social and sexual power hierarchies
(Youngs 2000:44-45) as an historical stage of patriarchal relations. All in all, and collapsing a
rich feminist historiography, 'public/private' denotes and critiques symbolic and material
(Hennessy 1993) gender-power relations that are reproduced or justified along distinct, albeit
interacting boundaries (Youngs 2000). Fierce disagreements notwithstanding, a feminist critique
tout court posits that such dualisms serve to perpetuate a pernicious set of "sexualised, racialised, and class-based" (Chang & Ling 2000:27) meanings, institutions, hierarchies, power
relations and ideologies (Fildes 1983:66-69) that subordinate an "array of embodied beings
culturally positioned as women" (Butler 1990:325).

To fast-forward to circa 2001, the controversial and increasing ubiquity of the
internet/www since the mid-1990's is impacting upon daily lives, political economies and
turning scholarly historiographies, political theories inside out in the process. The gendered-
ethnic-class connotations of these new activities effectively form their own seams and interfaces
in nascent (cyber) s(place)(s) (Giard & Mayol 1980: 24-25). And the already problematic
analytical and political status of the public-private dichotomy gets further tugged at when these
inter/intra/cultural elements are added to the analytical mix. What emerges is an electronically
mediated challenge to the beaten path worn between either 'a public' or 'a private'. Not only
does this corseted dichotomy need to be unixed but other grammars beg inclusion (see Ortner
1996: 153-154). As Chandra Mohanty points out, the lexicon at our disposal needs to articulate
and allow research into

a temporality of struggle, which disrupts and challenges the logic of linearity,
development and progress which are the hallmarks of European modernity.....suggests
an insistent, simultaneous, non-synchronous process characterised by multiple locations,
rather than a search for origins and endings... (1997:93, emphasis in the original).

If allowed to cut loose from these linear moorings, what emerges is how (postcolonial)
subjectivities (Ling 2001) online and elsewhere, are deeply embedded in multilayered
experiences, sociocultural interactions and assumptions, new and old. These strain against
respective 'public-private' institutions and conventions that have become frozen-in-time (de
Certeau 1986: 119-233), intersect with how a 'subject', alone and/or in community, is
constituted at various instances by her intimate and social duties, roles, relationships, separately
and together. How she sees herself, what she says and to whom, how others react, what social
and historical expectations are brought to bear form the stuff of communicative practices (see
Williams 1977: 23). The respective gender-power relations that get played out move in, skip
around, bump against all manner of institutions, psychological structures and daily conventions
(Giard & Mayol 1980: 14-17). And in non-western, postcolonial scenarios, as Ling points out,

25 See Nicholson et al (1990), Haraway (1992) for more on various feminist theories of subjectivity
subjectivity
... refers to the internally absorbed, personally-felt, mixed selves that derive from contending ways of thinking, doing, and being. .. The very condition of postcoloniality means an intimate mixing of subjectivities, not one distinct identity labelled 'southern', 'minority', or 'Other' tagged on to a more familiar ones like 'northern', majority', 'Self' in order to achieve a more representative 'objectivity'. (Ling 2001a:21 & 236)

Polynesians growing up in the West or those in the Pacific Islands with access to the internet/www, articulate the above from their own 'translocal' (Clifford 1997) standpoints and experiences. Participants are well aware of the pressures between their online interventions, the postcolonial politics of life in the South Pacific Islands and abroad. The immediate and archival online content forms a record of the complexity of living in diaspora, as "a minority of a minority". Those who gather around the online Kamehameha Roundtable and Kava Bowl for debate record the practice of everyday life from the inside out. This is not to present yet another dichotomy but rather to accent how being and doing things from the

'inside out' is to be impure, working at the borders, risking mixture, outreach, and invention; for to be inside out means to be creatively perplexed, upside down, out of whack, reversible, expressing the inside wholeness of self and community in outside masks and distant mirrors, in signs that baffle and menace as much as they reveal. (Wilson 1999:2)

The upshot of all this is that taking a close look at everyday life online should warn (feminist) scholars against subsuming multiplex experiences, communicative practices under an updated version of an "unwitting duplication of the eurocentric, bourgeois bias inherent in the notion of a separation of spheres..." (Fildes 1983:68, Harding 1998a, Giard & Mayol 1980:14).

The next section is a walk-through, one of many possible traversals, of some threads in the light of these delineations. I cannot overemphasise the inherent openness and fluidity of these online encounters, built up over time. Online archives such as these, and their creators, are very much alive.

Part II: Online Confidential

..the domestic/public dichotomy ...[is] a phenomenon that may exist in multiple forms with multiple meanings... [including] the varying ways in which women themselves perceive their situations. (di Leonardo 1991:24&25).

The oral and debating traditions of the peoples of the South Pacific find themselves well-suited to both the interactive, conversational, and oratory qualities of online discussions, imagery, and its embedding in Western forms of textuality (see de Certeau 1980: 231 passim). They are written to be read and debated in their own right whilst adding to an ongoing texture of online and offline relationships. As I have argued already, these threads are speaking from the inside out, acknowledging extant social and cultural (diasporic) networks but also re-negotiating these, an individual's place in them, and communities along the way. Participants are well sensitised to this fluid tension but also to specific sociocultural barriers and broader gender-power relations that come with this.

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26 The literacy rate in the Pacific Islands is over 90% with education rated very highly in social terms. For a more light-hearted view of these dynamics vis-à-vis indigenous cultural politics, see Hau'ofa's short story The Glorious Pacific Way (1983: 83). See also a thread entitled who are some of the SMARTEST Tongan women you know? (bella, 15/03/99, KB, at http://pacificforum.com/kavabowl/kc/messages/10459.html.
Postcolonial (Re)Articulations of Wo/manhood

For example in a discussion about 'women's right' the following declaration/criticism/entreaty was posted:

....we (Tongan) as a nation [are] coping with significant social change.....is the increasing number of educated Tongan women who [are] opting for the single life a sign of an active feminist revolution? The simple answer is NO. In fact, it is a dismal picture of the current state of affairs in Tonga.....despite the grounds for optimism, the traditional role for women in Tongan society has not [been] transformed. Even today, the ideal of good wife and wise mother is not an anachronism, the weight of tradition continues to bear heavily upon Tongan society.... Even though, Tongan women are changing their attitudes about their social roles, men. it seems are not necessarily going along with that change, You only need to read KB [Kava Bowl forums] to justify this.... Women are still viewed by most Tongan men [as] responsible for most domestic chores and are the primary carers of children. There is a good reason to question whether the Tongan women [should] strive for the same kind of equality so resolutely fought for in the developed countries; [should] the Tongan women respond positively to the brawling antics that accompanied feminist campaigns in the developed countries...? (Lausii 18/05/99)

What is being addressed here is how new conventions are being taken up, or considered vis-à-vis established social conventions and sex-gender roles (and perceptions of western-style feminism!) both 'at-home' and 'overseas'. But then, it depends on how one looks at such things. The view above was countered, in the spirit and tone of a semi-formal debate by the following:

Thank you so much for your comments on the state of affairs for Women in our Kingdom. I must seriously disagree with you however on some points........ I was much disturbed when reading your posting because you made Tonga out to be some sort of cesspool for gender discrimination, when in fact, there are more women working in the civil service in the Kingdom than here in New Zealand, also out in the villages, a lot of women provide the backbone for much of the families - and I can assure you their roles ... are not those of a docile domestic worker, but rather of a strong nurturing and dignified female figure, some of which simultaneously hold jobs! ... Tradition is not a hindrance - but rather something I very highly esteem. Our 'fahu' system is unique and esteem the woman as the most important member of the family - not even the glorious western world has such a provision. And merely because individualism is highly prized in the rest of the world, does not mean that we should automatically adopt it - please do not be resigned to making Tonga into another semi-Western clone!...(Legacy_NZ, in reply to Lausii, 20/05/99).

Threads dealing with the maintenance of cultural integrity vis-à-vis the dominant political economies of the Pacific region and changing sex-gender roles criss-cross and merge into (mis)perceptions of femininity and masculinity for the specific Tongan or Samoan (Polynesian) context, questioning these in themselves or the effect of negotiating them in other sociocultural conditions. They are a sub-section of more general polities of identity debates on these forums (see Chapter Seven). But in these cases the gendered-ness of postcolonial identity formation and obligations take centre-stage.

The following cross-section of a longer thread in the KC entitled "I'm Tired Of Slaving Myself" - The Role of the Woman show several entry points into this problematic for women living in contemporary (non)Pacific Island settings. The effects of becoming aware of the downside of any one set of 'cultural values' are all too clear, albeit a source for some irony:

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28 Here the poster is critical of stereotypes that exist beyond Tonga as well.
29 This is related to various degrees of status and privilege amongst and between men and women (Ortner 1997:59 passim). See also Helu (1999:15 passim)
the thing I have observed and found much dismay is the understanding ... (Samoan culture) that the women feel ... it is their responsibility to feel that they should assist in the kitchen to help serve while our men sit... (Lafemme Nikita, Polycafe, 19/05/99)  

amen sistah.... when's our next beauty salon appointment? ..... Just curious, are you Samoan? If you are, then you must be one hella of a samoan female, taking no s**t from any male. Are you a Women's Lib activist? I don't think our Samoan women can stand up for themselves because they are afraid ..... (ROTFLMAO 19/05/99)  

Our men are exhibiting a "learned behaviour" that has been passed down for many, many generations ...Unfortunately, when they come over from the islands, this "learned behaviour" comes right along with them. It's the first thing they take out of their suitcase...It's up to the younger generation to break that cycle. (CrazeeLuv, 19/05/99, Polycafe)  

.. With a Samoan mother and Tongan father, my upbringing was certainly an experience especially with the 2 different cultures... Unfortunately being an only girl, my father wouldn't let me touch the lawn mower!!! Or do anything strenuous as females are 'delicate' in his eyes ... (Afa Samoan, 19/05/99)  

The predominance, humour and eloquence of women's voices in such threads also shows where the internet/www allows them an oral space, through access to online forums. They press on and loosen gendered conventions and hierarchies of the right to speak by making use of the more permissive features of online debate; (quasi)anonymity, informal syntax and the immediacy - and safety - of posting a message for instance (Morton 1998) For women who are no longer prepared to 'be seen and not heard' internet forums permit them to 'push against oppressive boundaries' to 'invent spaces of radical openness' within which to challenge dominant power, taking it on from the margins (hooks in McDowell & Sharp 1997:3). The thread wends on;

.. I just want to say that not all our men are this way... So let's start by understanding that we are a new generation, don't take away all that we've learned as a culture but bring in to light all the new things we can teach... (Found me A Strong Samoan Man, 20/05/99)  

Don't get caught up in the westernized role.... Our culture dictates much of how we raise our families, it is the core of our being and we choose to do with it is ours to use.....(Hamo 20/05/99)

30 initial post, at http://www.pacificforum.com/kavabowl/kc/messages/42855.html. This was also posted in the Polycafe (no longer on server). The follow-ups cited are taken from either the KB/KC or the Polycafe (where indicated).

31 This poster is most likely a woman, as it is not the only message posted. Whether a woman or not, her participation is not challenged.

32 Contemporary communicative and political hierarchies are male-centred in Tonga and Samoa. On-the-ground kava circles (clubs) and formal kava ceremonies are not normally frequented by women, except in a certain ceremonial capacity (see Helu 1999: 5). Visitors (like myself) are not prohibited from going to a night's kava club however. Women however do have 'public' power - as chiefs (matai) in Samoa, or royalty (in Tonga). The - controversial - impact of western missionaries in the 19th century also impinges upon postcolonial 'public-private' meanings of power in the South Pacific. Posters certainly do not agree on how and why, and neither do Pacific scholars. See, for example, a thread entitled, Women In Tonga...Recognised Or Ignored???? (Finekat a 15/03/99), initial post, KB, at http://pacificforum.com/kavabowl/kc/messages/ 10470.html.

33 "... verbal interaction, whatever else it accomplishes, is often the site of struggle about gender definitions and power; it concerns who can speak where about what." (Gal 1991: 176). Online 'chat' is written-verbal interaction.
I'm a young woman and growing up in a new generation...... I find my peers (the 30 something crowd and up) have it a lot easier than did our mothers before us. It is our mothers who truly were under-represented, barely vocal and hardly seen... I have not heard anything in my upbringing COMMANDING 34 that relationships be dichotomised....Woman and Samoan ... and quite capable of carrying both. (... 20/05/99, KC)

I think the Samoan couples (first generation) here in the States are developing new attitudes towards one another... I still cater to my husband (whether at home or in public) by putting him first because I was raised that way, the Samoan culture expects that of me and IT'S OKAY WITH ME!!! (Am there now... 20/05/99)

Revisiting Obligations

The debates are liberally sprinkled with attitudes that stem from the strict Christian mores of many of the posters - an important, and at times contentious part of the (post)colonial Pacific Islands. Nevertheless, for societies where non-western understandings of aristocratic (female) rank and status are also contemporary political and social markers (Helu 1999: 121-134, Ortner 1996, Tcherkézoff 1998), being a 'woman' entails any number of (cross)cultural obligations. In an intensely debated thread from the Kamehameha Roundtable entitled Where are the Caring Women?, the (male) instigator of the initial post, after carefully outlining the various positions of his grandmother, mother and sisters vis-à-vis motherhood concluded (after more than a page);

.....My mother does not envy the conflict of values, emotional strain, and sheer physical fatigue as many young working [women] suffer....... I wonder if my sister with her liberated views of women's roles thinks that she falls short in one area where my MOTHER excelled. My mother and Grandmother knew where they stood. They knew what it meant to be a mother, wife. They knew what to expect of a man (and their expectations were generally lower, or more tightly focused than my sisters). I think with the world changing so rapidly the distinctions between the roles and responsibilities of men and women are blurring. The women of this generation do not know what they WANT or care very little about mother-hood and honouring (not obeying) their husbands. Perhaps their self esteem as caring women is low as stress and the breakdown of relationships continues to rise rapidly. (KZ7, 28/03/00) 35

This declaration of alarm - and insight into family politics - does not go unchallenged as the protests fly in from annoyed, amused and unrepentant (non)feminists, working mothers. The ensuing to-and-fro between KZ7 and other women covers the whole gamut of sexual politics (Millett 1977, de Beauvoir (1953)1972, Firestone (1970)1997) 36. As political statement:

In many societies including Polynesians, an IDEOLOGY of motherhood pervades all levels of society, claiming the adherence of women from all walks of life and socio-economic backgrounds. I believe that the ideologies of motherhood and femininity are closely enmeshed so that a woman's sense of femininity is entwined with the potential or actuality of motherhood. (Venus, The Aphrodite, 28/03/00)

What a load of crap ...... As far as I'm concerned, and I proudly speak as a feminist, not enough has happened. The women's movement has moved backwards with young women being lulled into the belief that they have achieved everything..... Go through

34 The (excessive) use of capitals is the online form of SHOUTING. Here they are being used more for emphasis.
35 Initial post, KR, no longer on server. Out of the 26 total - and lengthy - follow-ups, 7 were from KZ7 (who explicitly identifies as a man as the thread unfurls) with only one other male. Two others use unisex nicknames. Of the 12 distinct posters, the majority were (explicitly) women.
36 Linda Nicholson's Reader (1997) is a marvellous collection of some key feminist classics from the 'second wave'.

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what women have asked for in the women's movement, and you'll see that very little has been achieved. And if you aren't a male, then it really does prove that women have been duped. (Ninja 28/03/00)

Despite many postings that would disclaim any 'feminist' tag, they still show all too familiar gender-power issues albeit with a particular postcolonial tint. Personal testimony (this thread carries some lengthy autobiographical accounts) express these tensions and triumphs very effectively. The following two women had this to say to KZ7's nostalgia for 'traditional' (Samoan) sex-gender roles:

Libby women versus LAZY deadbeat men? Is that how we now dichotomize the issue?.....Had you caught me several years ago, I would have definitely sliced you down to bite-size and fed you to the sharks. Nowadays, there is nothing that any man can tell me that will break my stride because odds are, they will never be able to do as I have. Never juggle career, college and bear a child as I have...and all of it, without running home to Mom or sitting on the dough [the dole/social security] to get through the harder end of the reality of being me. (P., 28/03/00) 37

Do you mean to imply that women who are not full-time homemakers are less caring? If so, then I take exception to that very strongly. Yes, I work- full time. And yes, I have to put my son in the hands of strangers while I work. But I can assure you, that makes me no less devoted to my son than any stay-at-home mom. (Teuila, 28/03/00)

Having said this, the posters/women disagree with each other as well, depending upon their religious convictions, generation, or geographical position. On the whole though, there is an acknowledgement of being-in-debate and an attempt to clarify a range of conflicting duties and experiences.

Queries and Affirmations

KZ7's position statement is not just a rehash of 'masculinism' or 'neo-traditionalism' online, although he is put firmly in his place by his interlocutors. Women participants are also exploring what are/are not appropriate, tolerable femininities/ masculinities. Here, intracultural exchanges can become intercultural in an internet/www and diasporic scenario. Expressions of discomfort and a search for authentic signposts are part of this process 38. They weave in and out of confessional and declamatory interventions on familial networks and obligations, work and school relationships.

The next section is a sort of 'edited highlights' from another intensely personal thread entitled The ROLE of a SAMOAN WOMAN in Today's Society???? that encapsulates all these - and more - crosscutting currents and standpoints. The initial poster is interested to hear from others about a complex sociocultural and historical issue:

Being a Samoan woman myself, I am curious as to the views my fellow Samoans may have in regards to what they think my role in today's society may be (Georgeouss, 10/02/99, KR, no longer on server) 39.

37 This reply is a full-length autobiographical account of her becoming a mother vis-à-vis her own parents.
38 Language and isolation are loci for these concerns as many first/second generations growing up outside the islands are not proficient in the Samoan/Tongan languages. For example: "...I was in culture shock during those years [of high school in California] so I wasn't sure if being myself... Samoan ... was alright or not..." (Mixed up, 2/02/99, Kamehameha Roundtable, no longer on server). This gives rise to another sort of discussion between diasporic and at-home posters, not dealt with here. See Chapters Six and Eight.
39 There were 25 follow-ups to this initial post - the median amount on these forums (see Appendix Three), 14 separately named posters, of which at least 12 were women - they said as much and there is every reason to believe them (Morton 1998/99).
Her interest stems from her perception of the increasing assertiveness of Samoan women in the home and in leadership roles vis-à-vis how what I understand [is that in ] the Samoan culture, a woman's place is in the home listening and obeying her husband (Georgeousss, 10/02/99)

The latter is posited against her observation that

.. this is no longer the case. Samoan women are some of the strongest people I know and I see many of them in strong leadership positions. Many of them are very aggressive, practical, and WISE LOLOLOL ⁴⁰ ..... myself not excluded LOLOLOL (just kidding) but seriously, Samoan women are a force to be reckoned with. So in comparison with our past and culture versus what society holds in store for us today, what is the ROLE of a SAMOA N WOMAN? (Georgeousss, 10/02/99)

Most of the responses are affirmations for her view;

We are no longer seen as yet another group of submissive Polynesian women. Nope, we are actually seen as respectable and formidable women. (Jade, 10/02/99, KR)

Change and choice are key interacting factors here for Jade, who also identifies as a US resident;

I'm glad to know that my little girl will be able to know that the only limits as a Samoan and an American female in today's society is only herself... (Jade, 10/02/99, KR)

So on the one hand, for her,

the role of the Samoan woman .. is one that is very expanded and growing. We are everywhere and truly are a force to be reckoned with. It is no longer just the voice or faces of the Samoan male that is being felt in today's society. Nope, it is their sisters. mothers, daughters, and nieces. (Jade, 10/02/99)

But on the other, it is also down to personal endeavour.

I would want other Samoan females to know that wherever you begin in life.. don't take it as the only dimension in your life... be open to new and different facets of life, but be cautious as well.... We owe it all to each other and to the mothers, aunts, and grandmothers that have paved the way for us. (Jade, 10/02/99)

Some personal testimonials in this string underline the female role models provided by their older though not necessarily more conservative relatives.

My grandmother has always been the dominating force in my family, and I mean that in a good way... She is the glue that holds all of us together. My Grandfather usually defers to her judgement.... Outside the family, she is a shrewd business woman /entrepreneur and has earned and received the respect of those who know her.... I had always thought that the women were the reigning force in the family hierarchy. I was surprised to read that .... my family is the exception, not the rule. (Ally, 10/02/99)

They also muse about

⁴⁰ Laugh Out Loud (repeatedly). See Reid (1996) for more on visual behaviour symbols - 'emoticons'.

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a mix of the new role for up and coming Samoan women and then I see the more traditional role for Samoan women. I guess it all varies in age and where you are... (Mysterious Girl, 10/02/99)  

Another poster - A(ni) - presents her mother as leading

the pack in exemplifying the ENDURANCE of a woman under the pressures of society, family and her partner in life. Coming from such a line of women who have also experienced the age-old canon of men placing their women in check, has left an indelible imprint to redefine my role as a Samoan woman. (A., 10/02/99)

She then goes on, echoing others in this string, identifying with her 'female ancestry' but also the different circumstances of her own life. For

I am not my mother but an extension of her. Without need for explanation, I have found value in being me and being the neoclassic Samoan woman. (A., 10/02/99)

This poster has even more to say on the balancing act between equity in intimate relationships vis-à-vis the sociocultural assumptions tied to these in broader contexts;

I know well enough of the Fa'a Samoa [the 'Samoan Way'] to interact independent of him [her husband] among his people for I am not only his woman, but my mother's ambassador. (A., 10/02/99)

She wants to affirm both without compromising either "in both mainland [USA for American Samoa] and traditional places." But not everyone is so self-assured. Mafine notes, for instance, that on

this woman of today topic... I can only say I'm still stuck in the past but slow ungluing myself and emerging into the present...(mafine, 10/02/99).

Others concur that

the 'traditional' role for the Samoan woman has been and still is (to a certain extent) secondary to her male counterpart. (Bitchyspice, 10/02/99.

But not everyone agrees with this opposition between 'traditional' roles and modern changes in the first place. Bevo contends that

... the traditional Samoan view of women is [not] as submissive as you suggest....Samoan women have played a big, and important role in Samoan society. I believe that women are the movers and the shakers in Samoan communities.....women have always held influence. Even in Samoan history, some of the most powerful and important people are women..... Samoan women are beginning to immerse themselves in the American culture and therefore are swept up with the women's movement here in the West. But I believe that women have always been power brokers in Samoa. (Bevo, 10/02/99)  

Queries about "which society - Samoan or American? "(KL, 10/02/99) concern posters as well for it is important to know in assessing a situation. First, locate the 'where' and “...then I'll comment” (Bevo, 10/02/99). Whereas for others, location is a red herring given the

41 Gorgeous then wants to know "where are you from? Where do you see this happening?"(10/02/99)
42 By all accounts, Bevo is a man. He is addressed as such in other threads and does not correct this as others are wont to do when assigned the 'wrong' gender by their interlocutors.
big spread (geographical) that we are now in ..[and how ] ...as our people move out of Samoa and more into the Western culture, our views, lifestyles etc are subject to change [and so] I feel that the role of the Samoan woman today cannot be zoomed down to one 'list' of attributes... (Bitchyspice, 10/02/99)

Because both female and male posters are comparing and contesting assumptions, prejudices, and experiences in these threads, affecting these in their lives 43 or simply taking a stand these interactions should not be seen as transparent, unproblematic statements. They are ideas-in-progress as much as they are credos. Bitchyspice, who heads her message with an ironic to cook, clean and look after the kids...lol suggests that it might good to take a broader look at the issue and ask "What is the role for ALL WOMEN today?", and then apply it to our own cultures and situations (American, New Zealander, Samoan, Tongan etc), then we might get a better sense of what our roles may be.... (Bitchyspice, 10/02/99)

(En)Countering Others

Whilst these women want to celebrate their cultural/ethnic/gendered uniqueness, they certainly do not see 'traditional' roles and attitudes as unassailable.

In our culture, men are free to explore the world in whatever way they like before marriage, but NOT us girls. Western education informs us about equality of both sexes, our culture teaches us differently. They sometimes clash and be confusing at times, but the latter will always take precedence for some of us. University education sometimes enlightens one's mind to perceive/discern the inequalities inherent in our society, whereas our culture expects us girls to accept things as it is ....Maybe my perception is not applicable to all Tongan girls out there, but this is my own contemplation of our Tongan culture based on my own world... (Ice Maiden, 18/05/99)

As to equality, I understand you, yet it does pain me to see double standards used not as a personification of age old traditions (when both parties had duties and obligations) but as a means of suppression.... (Ryah, 18/05/99) 45

This thread turned into an intense debate about the rights and wrongs of pre-marital sex - for Tongan women in this case - and how this relates to practical realities. Claims and counter-claims, personal testimonies wended their way through the issue of changing sexual mores in Tongan gender-power relations, colonial missionaries impact on Pacific Island societies, double standards by men vis-à-vis female virginity, ideals of masculinity and femininity and respective domestic roles 46.

43 Ascertaining this would entail another sort of ethnographic project (see Morton 1999).
44 In the Interests of Equality at http://pacificforum.com/kavabowl/kc/messages/42738.html, in reply to Ryah, in What do you look for when you try to find a HUSBAND or WIFE? Thread, initial post by E. Tigris, 13/05/99). With 58 follow-ups, this thread rated high in interest. Male posters who insisted on the maintenance of virginity were given short shrift by many of the women (see Ortner 1996 for one analysis).
45 Glass Houses, Ryah in reply to Ice Maiden, at http://pacificforum.com/kavaboel/kc/messages/42744.html
46 Debates about the rights and wrongs of homosexuality and Polynesian expressions of transvestitism express some of these complex dynamics and experiences in particular. These constitute an essay in their own right for they intersect with pre/postcolonial sexuality and socially acceptability of cross-genderings vis-à-vis the advent of Christianity in the Pacific that still preoccupy anthropologists. This is not the place to go into these. For a taste however, see the quote from a satirical message posted on the Kavabowl but le'oo vaivai, the KB's resident satirist. This poster is in fact an middle-aged Tongan living in humble abode amidst the condominiums of Waikiki Beach in Honolulu, Hawaii. he "always wanted to be a writer" and has told Taholo Kami personally that the KB gave him an opportunity to practise his satirical skills (Kami 2001: interview).
Fe/male posters who insist on the maintenance of (biblically referenced) virginity were given short shrift by many women (Ortner 1997: 43 passim & 53 passim). One message entitled *Where is the strength to break away from unintelligent, irrelevant cultural stereotypes?* notes that there is something absurd in the fact that your post could have been written on March 28, 2000 ... I have no respect for these "traditional" institutions that are so biased and oppressive against women. It is SOCIETAL, not NATURAL. To be the vehicle for new life is woman's privilege. To bear sole responsibility for the emotional and spiritual well-being of the children - this is a demand I, and many other women, reject. ... There has been this bizarre dichotomy between what is masculine and what is feminine, what is essential (MAN) and what is inessential (WOMAN). Woman is, like man, a human being. (Princess, 29/03/00, in reply to KZ7 above)

Unlike MUDs and MOOs (Shields et al 1996, Ludlow et al 1996, Kolko et al 2000), such online confidences operate differently from games or fantasies played out by fictitious characters experimenting with new sorts of 'virtual reality' (Jordan 1999), even though they can be playful. They are the traces and expressions of the daily practices of real people and their online personae. These conversations-as-written-texts have both authors and addressees who are related in some way, and if not, have become known to each other in the process of articulating what it means to belong, be connected in some way to a set of cultural and historical heritages (Morton 1998). Whether by the burgeoning techniques of hyperlinked conversations, use of inference, symbols, references to offline relationships, online variants of Polynesian social controls when a "lack of respect" is shown, the process of discussion and how it interfaces - and collides - with lived lives and relationships is central (Morton 1999). This is the other angle of being inside out. For an

...'inside-out' Pacific of global/local interweaving ....implies that the inside is already outside and vice versa: the boundary does not hold, impurity and difference exists as everyday fate, and the categories mix and bleed into one another in unstable new ways.... (Wilson 1999:6-7)

In the process, intimate lives are 'outed' and engaged with online 47. Although monitored informally and formally the ground-rules are still 'under construction' (Chapter Eight). The issues and lives at stake intersect with the personal choices, the upper limits of western-style individualism and the exigencies of other obligations. Christian belief systems and church affiliations also bring with them their own gender-power baggage. For example:

*Why is it that when a Tongan woman marries a man, it is expected of her to drop her religion for his??* I have never quite been able to comprehend why in our Tongan culture it is simply expected of a woman to follow her husband's religion. But most of all I can't seem to understand how anyone could expect an individual to conform and believe in something that is foreign to them." (kode, 30/03/99) 48

I don't know about the culture, but I am a woman, that when I got married me and my husband went to my religion, we agree to go there before we were married .....I don't think that is a culture thing, it just depend from you and your husband... (a friend 31/03/99)

From the Tongan Culture's perspective, it is perfectly normal. Not an iota wrong with it. However, if you are trying to answer from a Western Culture's perspective, then there are millions ways that could be wrong. Therefore, if you are not in Tonga at the

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47 In moderation. The main protagonists of any discussion do hold back on personal details of said situations. I have encountered and engaged in this myself at times on these forums.

48 initial post, THA, no longer on server.
moment, the chances are you should do whatever you want to do. But if you are back in Tonga, your life will be much easier that way. Trust me. Which one is right and which is wrong? To be truthful, they are both right. It all depends where you are. On top of all that, you make your choice and live with the consequences of your choices. That's all. 

We simply cannot apply our Western assumption on marriage to something that may look the same but it is not. Now, do you want to know if you should follow him? It's all up to you. Remember, when you are married to a Tongan person, you become part of that extended family. It is expected of you to be part of that family, whether you like it or not. Confused? I don't blame you. Good Luck. (counsellor, 1/04/99)

Such tricky intimate, familial and social negotiations - "postcolonial learning" (Ling 2001a) - are the fabric of postcolonial and diasporic lives, all of which occurs under certain culturally (en)coded, conditions and 'moral economies' on/offline (see Chapter Eight). Despite the fact that the inherent fluidity of this seems fixed as these discussion threads become product, cultural artefact (by virtue of their online shelf-life, or by being saved, copied, or printed) 49 these interactions and their cultural permutations and reiterations still remain personal - intimate - even as they are 'for the public record'. They are also powerful correctives to some feminist inspired counter-dichotomies as well. Posters have an eye, and an ear, for a broader audience as well:

Does searching for Equality by a woman destroy the harmony in a Tongan family? (Lut, 18/05/99) 50

... Women should continue respecting the husband [no] matter what background, colour, limitation he has and moreover know their place in the family circle... (bset 18/05/99)

...Face it 'men' time is changing and so are women ... I know that this is relatively new in Tongan family life (giving women equality in a marriage) but hey, try it cause you might like it. (I know we do). (wonderwoman 19/05/99)

...I am not a feminist but I strongly believe that we, as women, will no longer allow ourselves to be 'doormats'. I am not suggesting that we abolish our role as traditional Tongan women ... Far from it! I am only saying that we deserve better.... (funnygirl 20/05/99)

Yes and No...It all depends.... I think it all depends on the extent & the objective of a woman's pursuit for equality within a relationship. If she's attempting to take over the family, thus leaving the husband as the "hiku" [lower], and herself as the "ulu" [head], then that's TOO BAD!! A woman like that is nothing but a TROUBLE-MAKER to the family!! .......sometimes Tongan men can .....be so ignorant as to claim that since Tongan women are educated, education plagued their minds with all sorts of formidable feminism ideas which are "out of place" in our culture and way of life. Maybe it can be justified but that's not the case in every situations. Sometimes, what some of our educated Tongan women prefer is a "life-partnership" kind of relationship rather than a dominant-submission" one in which the woman has NO voice at all in the family. ....... We're living beings with minds of our own!! Don't forget that! (Ice Maiden 18/05/99)

Contemporary thought is great in contemporary homes and society ie. US, UK, Europe, Aust and NZ. However this many not prove to be the case back in the islands.....It is crucial to hang on to tradition and culture. So much so that the part women play is vital

49 with others lost forever for want of steady archiving - whether on my part or at source
50 Initial Post (by a male participant), http://pacificforum.com/kavabowl/kc/messages/42751.html. Of the 11 posters (15 total posts), about 7 were women.
to the survival of these traditions.....The only downfall perhaps is that island men rarely exercise the grey matter long enough to digest island women issues and how they fit into modern Westernised society. But we are learning...(CaptKJustice 19/05/99)

And amid high levels of earnestness, self-satire and gentle - although not always - teasing has a place as well:

Look, to keep things simple and back to tradition. Women: Get back in the kitchen and just make babies, that's your job. Men: I'll see you in pub after work.... (Traditionalist Hunter Warrior Knight Crusader Terminator, 18/05/99)

The following, loud outburst is a good example of tongue-in-check reprobation / exasperation. But it also highlights the way postcolonial masculinities (in this case) also have to contend with conflicting expectations in new contexts and pressures:

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN A TONGAN MAN IN TONGA AND A TONGAN MAN IN THE STATES. The major difference is this... RESPECT!!! the real men from the islands are gentlemen .. not "gangstas", "players", "ballers" .. they are MEN that know how to treat a lady! hey ladies am i right? or am i right? much love to all the MEN that these BOYS in the States consider to be "F.O.B's" 51 .. we consider you to be the real MEN!!"( a girl's point of view, 28/01/98)

To sum up. These online records are on the borderlands of meaning-making, in all its symbolic and material dimensions. The participants are well skilled at commuting between these domains - celebrating or subverting them in their own discussions. Interactions between author and reader/s - with the two roles rolled into one - create interwoven threads. Although compacted into a computer screen at the time of reading/writing/accessing, residing in servers and caches, and only activated by scrolling, clicks and hyperlinks, they are also writ large on the world-wide web and offline scenarios. These stretch out behind and reach back into all these screens. Everyday online practices of talking-writing-linking perform (self)representative tasks, that are open to multiple cross-readings, fraught with mutual (mis)understandings, subject to eventual censure - from both within and without. Postcolonial (gendered) subjectivities are never too far from other meta-narratives. Sociocultural and historical contexts are always active in these online conversations - and altercations. They attest to how movement "between cultures, languages and complex configurations of meaning and power have always been the territory of the colonised" (Mohanty 1997:94).

Reasserting the Political in Everyday Cyberspace

The spaces in which social practices occur affect the nature of those practices, who is 'in place', who is 'out of place' and even who is allowed to be there at all. But the spaces themselves in turn are constructed and given meaning through the social practices that define women and men as different and unequal. (McDowell & Sharp 1997:3).

A trop oublier ce long processus d’accoutumance, on se risque à manquer la puissance véritable, quoique masquée, avec laquelle les usagers ..... gèrent leur emprise propre sur leur environnement et la manière discrète, quoique tenace, avec laquelle ils s’insinuent dans l’espace public pour se l’approprier. (Giard & Mayol 1980:24-25). 53

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51 Fresh Off the Boat - a self-explanatory pejorative term.
52 initial post, KB, no longer on server. This message (the original capitals have been retained to show how this was effectively being shouted) got 40 responses thus rates high in significance, even accounting for multiple handles.
53 "By forgetting too quickly this long process of familiarisation [accoutumance], one risks losing sight of the true power, however obscured, with which users .... get a grasp of their own surroundings and the discrete, albeit tenacious, way in which they insinuate themselves into a public space in order to appropriate it." (my translation)
The delineations made thus far and these online (re)articulations of the public-private problematic show a very different sort of cyberspace to that being represented as the 'Yellow Brick Road' to the nirvana of the global market economy (Emmott 1999). But neither do they ignore the material import of the political economic processes entailed in neoliberal (would be) appropriations of ICTs. Nor do they deny the debates that are raging around the role of ICTs in the erosion of civil liberties, intellectual property rights, increased electronic surveillance, dissemination of (child) pornography and/or extremist material. Indeed many threads address these issues as well. Be that as it may, such everyday online discussions tend to be confined to the foreclosed 'private' realm of domestic consumption, moreover that of deregulated markets (see Chapter One).

It may still seem tempting to 'domesticate' these more informal, less structured inter/subjective and inter/cultural articulations by forcing them into the gender-loaded confines of the private-domestic sphere (Benhabib & Cornell 1987) or 'fantasy' niche of earlier research (see Ludlow 1996, Harasim 1994). Doing so robs this sort of non-elite, grassroots online interactions of their counter-hegemonic potential to the blanket application of privatisation and structural adjustment agenda in the contemporary international/global political economy 54. It thereby helps to perpetuate a monolithic, monocultural conceptualisation of the future of the internet/www as any sort of public sphere as such, let alone the equitable development and dispersion of new(er) ICTs in general. A closer examination of non-western diasporas online presence and articulations further underlines how such a conceptualisation carries along with it a somewhat ethnocentric, gender-blind assumption about who actually uses, benefits, and so should contribute to the long-term development of this constellation of ICTs at the broader political and macro-economic level. The point to remember for now is that the ‘window of opportunity’ holds for the time being at least, given the political economic and policy implications of increasing private corporate ownership and commercial appropriations of ICTs (of access and distribution at the very least) and the sprawling multimedia corporations emerging from these forces, under the auspices of neoliberal global restructuring.

Not only this but the discussion threads cited here also interact with and cut across many others that are also concerned about the implications of globalisation processes on the public and/or private fabrics of Pacific Island societies, however they may be construed. The point is that the above intimate exchanges are permeated (in the form of sub-threads, detours, or explicit references in follow-ups) with ones such as this;

*Views on Globalisation? … I'm a computer novice and this is the first time I've entered a new discussion thread … I am very interested in people's views and opinions on Globalisation as a whole or from any perspective i.e. in relation to Samoa etc…. (Leilani, 5/08/98) 55.*

…the worry that I have about Globalisation is the effect it will have (or is having) on smaller entities within society… This is where I see it affecting Samoa. As we move closer to this thing called 'globalisation' and 'universalisation', then the more our needs, wants etc etc will be generalised by the larger corporations. This is where the minority lucks out and has to make do with whatever is available on the market….at the same time as this phenomena is the expanding influence of America on the world … have you realised how sitting close to 'globalisation' is the idea of 'Americanization'? (Bitchyspic 5/08/98)

… One of the main ideas of the 'new world order' is the notion that the balance of power would be determined more so on the economic battlefields ….If so we would have to admit that it is much less gruesome. However, whether it's less devastating is still open for discussion." (JR 6/08/98)

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54 The well-known example of the Zapatistas aside.
55 initial post, KR no longer on server.
Will the little people be totally powerless (as if we aren’t already!) as their companies shut down because they have been bought by Rupert Murdoch or whatever? ... I think globalisation has a lot of benefits, but its consequential backlash is equally scary ... hmmmmmm...reminds me of colonisation a bit don’t you think? (Bitchyspice 6/08/98)

...globalisation is enhanced by communication, finance, environment and consciousness... People are thinking of this planet as a single place or one community... How will this phenomenon impact on the Samoan Islands? Not much. If worse comes to the worse, we can always plant more taros, fa’is and go back fishing... or live out of the land to survive any catastrophic events from the crash of the global economy!!! LOL (New Kid 6/08/98)

...Globalisation [presented here as positive] .... must be tempered with the will of the people-at-large... (Rob 6/08/98)

...Globalisation is the reality of our times ... I think we will continue to see the expansion of corporations ... Whether this will be seen as a benefit from the perspective of the citizens .. is still not clear. I think that depends in large part on the type of leadership in place in those countries... (JR 6/08/98).

These musings relate to the question of who, in a 'globalising' world, cyberspace belongs to and by extrapolation whether it is - or is not - a public or private sphere, merely a tool, an empty space ('greenfield') for commercial exploitation. This cannot be addressed in either/or terms, least of all with respect to the Pacific Islands. In spite of the social, political and economic forces reducing the internet/www to yet another marketable commodity or modernisation/development 'must' (Cox 1992, Mattelart 1994, Bourdieu 1998) 56, the internet/www as a communicative, non-commercial public medium behoves closer critical attention (Ridell 1999). The present commercial hype of electronic commerce and financial transactions should not divert us from how the internet/www is also a space and place for cultural production and everyday socialising. These lend qualitatively different dimensions to previous work on the public-private matrix, irrespective of the (feminist) political or academic persuasion. When used, re-appropriated, for grassroots online discussion and sociocultural contact, the internet/www as a complex of translocal relations and inter/subjective practices which entail other, intercultural and intracultural practices for (re)articulations of personal-political/public-private issues. These cut across each other both generally and in culturally specific terms or locales (online and offline) which in turn are implicitly intersected by ownership and (de)regulation imperatives in the current neoliberal macro-economic climate. The latter is thereby re-cast as culturally and historically specific, rather than inevitable or universal.

Postcolonial Concerns in a Globalising World

It should now be clearer that the immediate 'object of analysis' here - the content being produced through online discussions - comprises a lot more than just a bunch of disembodied, off-the-cuff streams of consciousness, nonsensical and whimsical jottings of the fictitious 'posters', even if they also exist in their own literary right. They are the traces and expressions of real people and/or their online personae. These conversations-as-written-texts have both authors and addressees who are related in some way, and if not, have become known to each other in the process of articulating what it means to belong - be related - to a certain cultural heritage and/or cultural group. The participants employ techniques, appropriate the ostensibly Western R&D bias in the technologies underpinning the Internet (Jordan 1999:46) in a number

56 With a direct impact on the politics and gender-power relations of access.
of subtle, culturally specific and diasporically influenced ways. Whether this is done by way of adaptations of the meta-textual visualisation devices that have become the hallmark of online communications\(^\text{37}\), by inference and/or references to offline relationships, the use of humour and satire, the assertion of online variants of Polynesian social controls when a "lack of respect" is shown (Chapter Eight), the process of discussion and its interaction with lived lives and relationships is central. Through it and in the content being produced, past and current inter/cultural gender-power relations, social mores, and political economic conditions combine in these publicly private expressions of lives and idea(s). In short, the threads represent people in the process of articulating themselves\(^\text{38}\), their relationships, their ideas and prejudices, in cross-cutting agreement, contention and negotiation with each other. In the process, inner lives are 'outed' in a new(er) form of public-ness and their political economic and sociocultural contexts are captured in the same frame. The issues and lives at stake are both personal and political, intersecting the personal choices and boundaries of western style ideals of subjectivity with the fluid exigencies and intercultural variations of other ones.

In this respect the internet/www and its online practices of everyday life trace a couture (Giard & Mayol 1980) between the personal and the 'global' (taking these terms with a grain of salt). These online records are on the 'borderlands' of the public-private dichotomy in its symbolic (meaning-making) function and its material political economic implications. The participants are well skilled at commuting between these domains - celebrating or subverting them in their own discussions. But I contend that they are also uninterested in the way in which these conversations - between author and reader/s (with the two roles being also rolled into one) - smudge the ideologically charged division line between 'the' public and 'the' (universal) private-personal. That this seam - "couture" - is not a straight one anyway in practice and, moreover, has specific sociocultural articulations and repercussions for younger generations of postcolonial diasporas, is borne out by such forums nevertheless. Because they are occurring online they act as both reiterations/confirmations and re-articulations of postcolonial life in Polynesia and for their diasporas. Discussions around homo/sexuality express some of these complex dynamics and experiences in particular. Sexual preference as an intimate act takes on a postcolonial political and sociocultural tenor when extrapolated into identity and cultural politics.

A Question and Comment for Sandy ....I have a question and a comment for you. Firstly, my question is for you to redefine what you mean in your previous post-up about Tonga being 'founded' by Christian missionaries. What does 'founded' mean here and did we Tongans as a civilization and culture cease to exist until we were 'founded' by these missionaries? My comment is in support of the reader that claims that homosexuality is looked on differently in Tonga than it is in the West. Firstly, homophobia is a Western invention and not all of Tonga has assimilated completely into these western ways of intolerance. (Pule oto, 22/06/98)\(^\text{39}\)

With all due respect, I believe you have misread my earlier post as I did not say that Tonga was "founded" (meaning "started") by Christian missionaries. Rather, what I said was "The first European missionaries found Tonga in 1799...", meaning "came to", or "discovered" (for themselves), or "were introduced to" (fei'iloaki)...an entirely different meaning for the word. Believe me, I'd be the LAST to suggest that nothing was happening in Tonga prior to the coming of the palangi.....(Sandy's Follow-up 24/06/98)

An online discussion and the cyber(spatial) traces that are the actual threads that snake in and out of the screen also compacts complex inter-relationships into the same field of vision; the computer screen in short. Furthermore, as the above exchange illustrates, how these are understood and articulated in postcolonial and diasporic renditions is writ large when on the

\(^{37}\) Laugh Out Loud, Rolling On The Floor Laughing, : ), CAPITALS, etc

\(^{38}\) "...I was in culture shock during those years [of high school in California] so I wasn't sure if being myself ... Samoan ... was alright or not..." (Mixed up, 2/02/99, Polycafe, no longer on server)

\(^{39}\) in reply to Sandy (a prominent, non-Polynesian participant) in Homosexuality in the Polynesian Culture thread (Douglass, 10/06/98, THA, no longer on server)
internet/www. What these people talk-write about thereby performs a representative task that is open-ended, fraught with misunderstandings, open to multiple cross-readings and subject to eventual censure - from both within and without. To put it another way, although monitored informally and formally \(^{60}\). These discussions are open to all-comers even as the ground-rules may be culturally (problematically, 'racially' as well) exclusive. In any case, all this is in-the-making as participants communicate about things that matter to them, whether these be ‘close to home’ or afar \(^{61}\).

**Conclusion: Delineating Cyberspace(s)**

Dichotomies like public-private operate to materially and symbolically constitute the way Social Science, and IR/IPE especially, understands and constructs the world-as-object and also operates as a gendered and socioculturally _lived_ metaphors for ‘difference’ and ‘community’ (see Young 1990) in practice. This first set of reconstructions show the practice of everyday life online in operation. In particular, how (cyber)spatial practices are recalibrating this particular dichotomy. These online practices and the lived lives they (re)articulate, the cyberspaces/places they (re)draw have intercultural and intracultural elements and tensions. These have import for assessing and responding to contemporary R & D trajectories for a commercial internet/www as well as the gender/ethnic/class particulars of its historical rationale- neoliberal economic restructuring. The experiences and articulations of postcolonial diasporas online (see also Mandaville, forthcoming, King & Connell 1999) bear this out even when occurring in the midst of other, appropriation strategies (see Chapter Three). Bearing in mind all these ins and outs, confidence and political statements, and also how these are being made available, empowered on and through the internet/www, some conclusions can be drawn.

First, this chapter has introduced the ways in which everyday life operates in tangibly gendered ways online, albeit with particular stresses and strains, liberations and restrictions. These intersect with offline lives and work from the inside-out. In this chapter, the floor was given to (re)articulations of how the 'personal is political' vis-à-vis sex-gender roles for the postcolonial and diasporic context for Polynesians living 'overseas'. The methodological and ethnographic sensibilities that go along with this analysis challenge dominant (neo)liberal imaginaries that represent online (cyber)spatial practices as purely marketable commodities and cyberspace, however defined (Jordan 1999:20 passim), as an enclosed and (de)regulated conduit for private commercial interests. The internet/www is constituted just as much by non-commercial, 'low-brow', underground _and_ (non)western 'minority' uses/users (de Certeau 1980:9-26) as it would be by E-commerce and online shopping. There are many forms and meanings of public - open - communicative interactions and (relatively) equitable participation and political organising (Ridell, 1999) being practised, sexual/ethnic/class-based subjectivities being encountered, in everyday life online. The upshot is a far more multiplex delineation of public-ness, personal politics, intimacies - and the "interstices" between (Ling 2001a) - than the classic public-private dichotomy would allow. Uncritically reproducing this division when examining everyday communicative practices online could end up tightening this gendered - and eurocentric - "double-bind" (Benhabib & Cornell 1987:9) for women in general, let alone for 'non-western' women, and men, whose lived lives are being (re)articulated in online forums such as these.

Second, these online communities and their debates (re)articulate the political economic and sociocultural cross-currents of postcolonial inter/subjectivities from the inside out, on their own terms, using the internet/www to do so. These are thereby embedded in the _making_ of everyday life online and so need to be comprehended politically (Giard & Mayol 1980:24-25). In this respect, these (cyber)spatial practices challenge commercial R&D strategies for the internet/www that seek to commodify (potentially) accessible spaces and relatively informal communicative interactions. Far from showing a passive consumption of a predetermined technology (de Certeau 1980:11-14), or 'just' providing mutual support networks \(^{62}\), these

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\(^{60}\) The Kava Bowl is more tightly moderated than the Polycafe i.e. the KBAdmin frequently intervenes on a number of different levels. See Chapter Eight.

\(^{61}\) Both are highly relative - and relationship-based - terms for diasporas.

\(^{62}\) Over the years, many women and men have expressed their gratitude for this side to the forums.
interlocutors show how (postcolonial) gender-power relations as they are (re)iterated and (re)contested everyday (McDowell & Sharp 1997:266-267). Their constitutive communities and online traversals form an integral and vital part of the symbolic and material substance of the internet/www and its constituent place(s) and space(s).

To set the scene for the next (more recognisably political) discussions of the next chapter, one last observation is warranted. These online traversals and everyday practices need to be grasped as part of the (post)colonial historical context of the South Pacific Islands themselves. One that is openly recognised, for better or worse, as a 'global' context. They trace numerous interactions between this ocean's peoples and their diasporas, former colonisers and global exigencies (Hau'ofoa 1999, Helu 1999, Wilson 1999) in their contemporary 'globally restructured' everyday lives both on and off the internet/www. These bespeak centuries of 'pre-contact' migratory movements, political economic relations and histories and (post)colonial rule that have impacted on how the ostensibly 'empty' South Pacific ocean is represented, from within and without.

Pacific Island traversals on the Internet/www defy any number of old/new dichotomies currently employed to understand the sociocultural and political economic implications of the internet/www. As for those that concern the women of the KB and the KR, these assumptions have intercultural and intracultural pressures. How they impact upon everyday gender-power relations, love relationships, family obligations, and the desire to be "my own woman" on "my own terms" is (re)articulated online for the mutual benefit of all, even as they openly deconstruct these dichotomies from the inside-out.

The eloquence and forthrightness of these women is not confined to questions of the 'domestic' sphere and 'women's issues' however. They are just as vocal, albeit for different reasons and with differing allegiances, in debates that belong to the 'public/male domain' of politics, as the next chapter will show.

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63 In short, the difference between seeing the region as a 'Doomsday Scenario' (A. Latukefu, 1999; interview) or as a "sea of islands" (Hau'ofoa 1993, Ward, 1999).
64 For example, the 'digital divide', virtuality versus reality, online or offline, virtual sex versus 'real' sex and so on. I am not disputing the relevance or veracity of the concerns contained in these dualisms, just their mutually exclusive, gendered and culturally universalistic flavour that delimits conceptual and political horizons.
Ema (left) and Tema think Live Chat is a good place online to meet people, "especially boys".

With this course, based in Toronto, ten hours a week for six months provides May (left), Lose (middle), and Sieli (right) with a certificate and then (hopefully) a good job in a Tongan government department. Long-distance education means not having to go abroad to study.

These photos were taken in July 1999 when I visited the Royal School of Science in Nuku'alofa, Tonga. This is currently the main public access to the internet/www, apart from the High School, government offices and some private homes. The large number of women users (12/13 that morning) was typical (Kaitapu 1999; interview). In the first photo these women are on KB Live Chat websites, which is very popular as well in Tonga itself. The second photo is of a group doing computer-based study. The last shot shows older, younger, local and out-of-town visitors using the facilities.
Figure Six: On the Ground

These photos were taken at the Talamahu Market in the centre of Nuku'alofa, 5 minutes walk from the RSS. The top photo shows women weaving pandanus leaf, either into mats (*fala*), baskets (*kato*), or the formal waist-mat (*ta'ovala*). The latter is worn by the woman, in the photo above, who kindly posed for me.
These photos were taken during a *faikava* - or informal 'Kava Club' - that I attended at the 'Atenisi Institute in Nuku'alofa. Mainly a male affair (I was one of three women, all visitors from overseas) where kava is drunk, songs are sung, stories told until the small hours. It was pouring with rain that Friday night, with the proceedings lit by candlelight. The kava is mixed in the Kava bowl (*kumete*), to the left of the top photo, and passed around in a coconut husk. My thanks to Futa Helu and his students for their hospitality.