The internet and postcolonial politics of representation: pacific traversals
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CHAPTER EIGHT - PLEASE REFRAIN FROM USING CAPITALS

Introduction

[Int]he virtual reality that is cyberspace has often been construed as something that exists in binary opposition to the 'real world' but when it comes to questions of power, politics, and structural relations, cyberspace is as real as it gets" (Kolko, Nakamura & Rodman 2000:4)

So far we have looked at (re)articulations of the gendered specifics of postcolonial inter/subjectivities - lived lives - from the 'inside out'. We have then taken a close look at the multiplex and contentious meanings of democracy in a postcolonial context as (re)articulated online by diasporic voices, from the 'outside-in' for the most part. The last chapter examined everyday embodiments and enactments of race/ethnicity, culture, which constitute self/group identifications of these internet practitioners, many of whom encounter discrimination from within and without their immediate communities. During the course of these reconstructions, readers may have noted the traces of some specifically online gender-power relations and hierarchies in operation as the discussions unfurl. For example; when an interlocutor's legitimacy or 'authenticity' (Chapter Seven), historical or cultural knowledge (Chapter Six), age, gender, and class/status (Chapters Five and Six) are queried or outright challenged. Or when respect is paid to online leaderships, and others (according to age, experience, or ability to make a point well). These operations constitute online rules and behavioural norms (as decided upon by moderators) on the one hand, and semi-articulated moral - ethical - considerations (depending on the immediate issue, degree of self-consciousness of the participants) on the other. Both separately and together, these "structural relations" delimit the actual discussions and internal relationships as they unfold in an online environment. They also stem from, and feed into behavioural and moral assumptions from offline worlds and references. Debates about the role these internet discussions have - should have - for rectifying negative stereotypes of Pacific Islanders are more explicit expressions of these moral economies.

By moral economies, I am referring to forms of online rule-making and evolving norms as they pertain to inter/intracultural practices in toto. The first are clear when moderators and website administrations intervene in the discussions. After all, these sorts of informal inter/subjective interactions, like most conversations or spontaneous debates, have an organic, hectic and contingent nature. Online gender-power hierarchies do emerge over time in any scenario. But as these 'ground-rules' and the cultural/behavioural norms they imply are developed in order to 'manage' these forums, they also mingle with other ethical - Christian - moral considerations. The upshot are nascent online gender-power hierarchies which delineate the tensions and frictions that lie 'between the lines' of any of these 'textual surfaces', between any two or more participant reader-writer and onlookers, and between these groups and their 'representative' function to the (cyber)world at large.

In order to unpack these dynamics, this chapter will be isolating a particular category of reflective threads in order to examine how "questions of power, politics and structural relations" (Kolko et al 2000:4) actually operate in the Kava Bowl and the Kamehameha Roundtable discussions. On the face of it, these appear to boil down to "legal issues and of 'netiquette'" (Tim Sansom, 24/04/99). But I also want to show how these groups carry and assert their own versions of what constitutes netiquette which overlap with postcolonial Polynesian/Pacific Island behavioural and cultural 'codes' as they are (mis) understood, picked upon and then put into practice in a diasporic and online context. These overlaps, reflections

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4 My thanks to Marieke Riethof for her helpful comments on this chapter.
6 By the latter I am referring to both the at-home (in the Pacific Islands) and diasporic participants but without conflating the two nor allotting experiential privilege to one or the other, even though many arguments reveal rather polarised stances between them. See, for example, the 12/24 follow-ups to All Subject Headings Longer than 1 Line will be deleted! (initial post, POLYCAFE, 04/05/99, no longer on
and ambivalences only really become explicit at moments of stress or protest, or when the
leaderships assert themselves.

Another point is that these sorts of navel-gazing threads can only occur, and so lend
themselves to analysis, as internet/www discussion forums start to develop a collective memory
after several years, as in the case of these websites. The broader online communities that feed
into these particular forums and offline locales are all implicated as a result.\(^7\) In these sorts of
communicative (cyber)spaces, there comes a moment when looking back is possible and,
indeed, deemed necessary. Such moments are both signifiers and ‘material manifestations’
(Peterson 1998:11) of the aforementioned moral economies. These encompasses gender-power
relations of ownership and control, influence and leadership, social hierarchies and generation
gaps, which are as present in everyday online communicative practices as they are in offline
ones. Given the social constructivist take at work in this study, the term thereby denotes “the
beliefs, practices and disciplinary regimes [that] shape subject/identity formation, emotional
allegiance, and motivational dynamics” (Peterson 1998:11). These dynamics are the stuff of the
discussion content and arguments examined here. But even whilst they are confined for the most
part to these corners of ‘cyberspace’ the issues raised are spliced with those from the last three
chapters. Conversely, the way all the discussions unfurl are informed by these emergent moral
economies. The best way to unbundle this dynamics is by looking at the spasmodic, albeit
plentiful, threads that deal with everyday online management entailing, on the one hand ‘good
housekeeping’ and, on the other, the ethics of re-presenting oneself/ourselves (as an oft
misunderstood minority) to others. These overlapping dynamics are epitomised by a particular
thread from the Kava Bowl; one that marked an online ‘event’ in itself.

In March of 2000, an intense debate broke out in the Kava Bowl’s Discussion Forum. It
began when an initial post by a prominent participant and co-moderator expressed his regret
about a ‘deterioration’ in the content, quality and style of recent discussions. After a short
historical reconstruction of the ‘good old days’ of 1997-98 when the Kava Bowl was “the most
popular Pacific Island site on the entire internet with more than 500,000 hits a month”, Sandy
then went on to make his dissatisfaction with the current tenor of the discussions abundantly
clear.

Then things changed. In late 1999, technical difficulties caused the site to be inactive for
several months. When the KB finally came back online, many of the regular
contributors had moved on to other venues and the dedicated band of volunteer editors
were no longer vigilant in monitoring the content.\(^\)\(^\)\(^8\) Now, when the world comes to
KB, it learns that Tongans are little more than gang bangers, gossip mongers and, in
short, insolent and disrespectful children … and it simply isn’t interested, so it leaves
never to return … but the memory is planted and the stereotype grows and is reinforced
each day as more and more nastiness is posted here to be read by one-time visitors from
around the world. Think about it folks. Is that the image of Tongans you wish to
perpetuate? If so, you spit on the graves of your ancestors… (Sandy Macintosh,
27/03/00)\(^9\)

The 89 follow-up posts that constitute this thread came in thick and fast within the space
of two days\(^9\). Not only did at least two other members of the ‘KBAdmin’ declare their own

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\(^7\) The KC, KR, SPIN and THA, once the main serious discussion forums for Pacific Islanders, are now
several amongst many. Participants often refer to other sites, and add in hyperlinks to them. This is more
evidence of the materiality of online comings and goings of the South Pacific Islands on the
internet/www. Their founders recognise the knock-on effect as well (Latukefu 1999; interview, Aiono
1999; interview, Kami 2001; interview).

\(^8\) \textit{RE: Kava Bowl}, initial post at http://pacificforum.com/kavabowl/kc/messages/55977.html

\(^9\) This is usual for popular or controversial topics, the relevance of the follow-ups to the initial topic
notwithstanding. Over two thirds of the total follow-ups came from the KB ‘constituency’; that is, regular
participants many of whom claimed to be ‘old-timers’. 14 follow-ups were from the ‘KBAdmin’ either in
its official capacity or from members thereof. Tabolo Kami, the owner did not post in his own name here
although he has done on other occasions. Other moderators like Phil Tukia and Dot posted as individuals.
Sandy himself was ostensibly responsible for at least half of these ‘KBAdmin’ interventions. For the

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views on this issue, either as individuals or under the ‘KBAdmin’ signature, but so did ‘older’ regulars enter the fray along with some of the ‘newcomers’ in question. Nostalgic lyricism:

>Sandy .. you are who and what you are, that does not make any difference to me, palagi or not, I totally agree with you, wholeheartedly....This was my home, here I found company, here I sang my songs, quoted my poetry, shared my innermost thoughts without any fear of contradictions or ridicule...it made my loneliness easier to bear, talking, listening, laughing, crying with my people, the Tongans, that I love and admire so deeply....as it is, alas, it is no more....” (QUEENEMA, 28/03/00)  

jostled with disdain and wit:

Hey doctor with no patients, you should be in the movies or TV ...One is entitled to ones opinion no matter how facetious [sic] it smells... (Buzz Lightyears Behind, 29/03/00)

Consternation:

I had encouraged my children to visit KB website but no anymore ... and why is that ... foul languages, heaps of gossip and disrespects among the chatters. I don’t want my children to see Tonga as it is in the kb website... (Worried Mum, 27/03/00)

vies with various degrees of (un)qualified support or defence:

I understand where you’re coming from, I’ve been an avid KB’er since back in like 1996-7 ....There cannot be a totally clean site with no rumours, gossip, etc. That is part of the Tongan tradition....(Fellow KB’er, 27/03/00)

This thread emerges at an historical, technical and economic conjuncture; namely the 4-5 year mark, the massive increase in volume of traffic (Kami 2001: interview) that impinging upon the costs of server space, software upgrades and time needed to administer and moderate all the inter-related forums. What is said, the intensity, and the wide-ranging participation, add up to a vivid rendition of nascent moral economies as these internet discussion forums and interconnected websites solidify into online communities. This thread is an explicit example of how online power hierarchies are perceived and acted upon, and how participants perceive the ramifications of (non)enforcement of the ‘ground-rules’ (see below). The amount of follow-ups attest to ongoing concerns at the time, in both the Kava Bowl and the Polynesian Cafe, about the

record, the vast majority of the remaining follow-ups basically endorsed Sandy’s point albeit differed in degree as to how the problem should be dealt with. The remaining ones registered differing scales of scorn or flippancy. There were also several direct references to Sandy’s credentials and approach. Addressing the tough stance taken by Sandy, who is 50+ and whose interest, knowledge and language skills come from time spent as an American Peace Corps worker in Tonga 30 years ago (see Chapter Six), one participant had this to say:

To some, your posting may have .. inferred dialogue at teacher - child level. To some of us, it is perceived as being rude and brazenly imperialistic. As I have said on many occasions, two hundred years or less of palangi societal values, has not been fully enmeshed with traditional Polynesian cultural values. Do not punish or scold those who choose to debate you point. It is a learning curve. We hear you some better than others. (Supporter of True Polynesian Values, 27/03/00)

Agreed! But I think a nom de plume would assist your post, Sandy, in reply to initial post, at http://pacificforum/kavabowl/kc/messages/56039.html). This message is signed off with “much love and respect” and the initials CK; a clue for those in the know.

10 in reply to initial post in re: Kavabowl thread at http://pacificforum/kavabowl/kc/messages/56136.html

11 Ha ha. welcome back .. we were just talking about you, in reply to initial post at http://pacificforum/kavabowl/kc/messages/56290.html

12 In reply to initial post at http://pacificforum/kavabowl/kc/messages/56021.html

13 Re: Here’s my point of view..., in reply to initial post, at http://pacificforum/kavabowl/kc/messages/56036.html
effect of (un)desirable online behaviour, language use and general 'lack of respect' being shown in an open forum on the internet/www. Added to this are reflections on the broader implications these forms of online 'non-conformity' or strife have for the image of Polynesians on the internet/www, and also on the ground. One can also see concerns about how certain behaviours, 'acting-outs' (Turkle 1996) are more evidence of social and economic exclusion of younger 'Polys' in their diasporic homelands (Kami 2001: interview, Chapter Seven).

Many of the participants in this thread talk about how they have established various online relationships over time, refer to their role in voluntarily moderating the forums or their gratitude to the moderators, and many admit to spending a lot of time on these forums. The interlocutors of this one thread constitute the backbone of the Kava Club at least and their concerns are echoed in other ways on the Kamehameha Roundtable. As such their comments have weight although it is only in such a thread that this becomes apparent, crystallised in one instant, as opposed to latent or spasmodic. In the previous year, these regulars referred to recurring incidents of 'flaming', swearing, personal insults and 'silliness' - online behaviours deemed to be improper. Normally spasmodic, their increasing frequency seemed to indicate an apparent shift in the 'standard' of the discussion content and 'uncouth' element entering the discussion forums. Even though many interventions of this kind are often couched in tones of indignation or not, this particular thread sees the regulars expressing a large degree of nostalgia for the good-old-days. In other words, a sense of online memory, a shared past of mutual interactions, becomes apparent when the established online rhythm comes under pressure by 'newbies' who do not know the rules, or who are deliberately challenging them. Pressure also arises from the volume of hits becoming too large to handle by the moderators, as was the case in the period leading up to this thread. These threads also differ from the others studied so far in that they are more dispersed. Most of the time, discontent gets expressed as occasional initial threads, or annoyed queries at unexpected deletions of a posting (see below). Sometimes these comments lead to substantial discussion threads in their own right. For these self-reflective interactions, the response rate and its intensity is quite unpredictable. After all, there is plenty more to debate. What they do show though is how certain subjects and relationships remain relatively 'invisible' until such time that they become "controversial flashpoints for angry debate and overheated rhetoric" (Kolk et al; 2000:1).

In the context of the Kava Bowl and the Kamehameha Roundtable there are several triggers, either in the initial posting or from within the ensuing threads. One is instigated as a 'strategic' moment for scolding and/or provocation (Sandy's initial post on the Kava Bowl is a case in point). Another occurs more spontaneously during the course of other discussions, or when someone objects to their posting disappearing (for whatever 13

These were the posts that were very informative as well as inspiring to us in America. But I don't think that you (KB) should take this down because of these people. Maybe there are other alternatives to closing this down... I just think that the true beauty of the Kava Bowl isn't being exposed anymore, and that KB is moving away, rather than opening up again and influencing others for good... (FELLOW KBER, 27/03/00)

in Re: Kava Bowl thread (Sandy Mackintosh, 27/03/00) at http://pacificforum/kavabowl/kc/messages/56112.html.

14 Taholo Kami confirms that a large part of the KB population has been in their late teens - "college kids" - who spend 5-10 hours a week on the various Pacific Island chat/forum sites. Kami is still pleasantly surprised at the enthusiasm expressed for these forums by people he meets who. He has even been asked for autographs by parents of KBers (Kami 2001; interview)

15 A comparable example on the KR of late deals with these issues vis-à-vis a more familiar offline context. In a thread entitled Any Future US Political Clout for Pi's?? [Pacific Islanders] similar issues of leadership, (under)representation and younger generations are broached by a number of KR regulars. It also intersects with Tongan debates about political representation in Tonga itself (Chapter Six) albeit for a West Coast US context. See http://polycafe.com/kamehameha/kamehameha2000-2/3190.html

16 For example: I remember a time, several years ago when the KB was first starting out, when the Kava Bowl was a Polynesian jewel in the crown of the Internet...("Sandy Macintosh, 27/03/00, RE: Kava Bowl, Initial Post at http://pacificforum.com /kavabowl/kc/messages/55977.html), and "I also miss those "good ole days" of the Kava Bowl... I wish that the classic contributors of 1996,97 and even 1998 would come back to this forum", (Phil Tukia, 27/03/00, in RE: Kava Bowl thread, http://pacificforum.com /kavabowl/kc /messages/56053.html).

17 See Morton (1996) for how these behaviours run counter to Tongan socialisation processes.
reason) and so is more of a 'tactical' nature (de Certeau 1980: 21, Giard & Mayol 1980:22). Whether they pull large number of different posters or not, these threads are one way in which current trends and interpersonal strains are put under the communal microscope. The upshot is that online gender-power relations - the communicative hierarchies they constitute - are (re)affirmed, (re)asserted, if not their very essence (re)negotiated.

Before showing how all these dynamics work by way of this sort of discussion thread, two orientation markers are needed. First, the overlapping technical, ethical and symbolic components of these moral economies need to be unpacked further. These are both a product and process of the politics of representation that are being worked out when groups disagree or "brawl" in public (cyber)spaces such as these. Given these practitioners concerns about such altercations on-the-ground, these online articulations are drenched with setting standards and providing good role models (see Chapters Five and Seven). The online gender-power hierarchies that emerge - their reinforcement and contestation - are informed by religious, ideological and cultural beliefs. Hence the term moral economies. These become evident in those instances when various assumptions about 'right' and 'wrong' are dusted off. When respective online leadershps enter the fray their particularities become more explicit, get spelt out in effect. The second marker is a sort of compass for tracing these online textual practices. The relevant pool of threads, spanning at least two years, has been sorted along four axial sets of themes taken from initial posts. These 'axes' (to be understood in their mechanical as well as their navigational connotations) link up three main operating criteria that underpin these economies.

Moral Economies

Over the years, the various interpersonal relationships across participants and between the administrators and their 'constituencies', the way friction is managed, the content filtered and vetted together form nascent online moral economies. These have been developing gradually, and tangibly, in what amounts to the ongoing "management of household or private affairs... the arrangement or mode of operation" (Webster's Dictionary) of the textual and personal comings and goings in these online scenarios. Hence the term 'economy' is being used in a more inclusive, non-positivist sense than is usual. This is in order to account for the "social imaginary and symbolic ordering" (Peterson 1998:7-8) that goes along with both organising everyday interactions and more formal online debates. Such arrangements, which also entail forms of group and self-regulation are 'moral' because they are not just about legal or practical 'netiquette' issues in the general sense (see below). Insistence upon some general and context-specific online behavioural codes, and conscious references to the sociocultural contexts from...
which they are derived, are, more often than not, "centred around questions of ethics" (Kolko et al 2000:2). There is a moral - and cultural - imperative, based on the notion of respect which is constantly being articulated, referred to, or challenged 24. These moral economies are not codified in so many terms, beyond a set of legal codicils and basic 'ground-rules' (see Figure Nine) and to a large extent they are being worked out as these forums go along. These rules are open-ended, worked out as the forums have developed and open to contestation and consultation. When moderators do post clear statements and/or enforce them structural gender-power hierarchies as they are practised - acted out - become crystallised 25. These communicative hierarchies delimiting the 'right to speak' and what content is permissible are ostensibly the sole prerogative of who owns, has the authority to control the operation of these sites. This is not beyond reproach however as these threads show 26. Gender-power relations of this sort also constitute online status and acquired seniority based on criteria such as longevity, persistence, proven expertise, popularity, and oratory prowess 27.

By moral economies, then, I am also referring to the fluid and dynamic gender-power relationships that get articulated in and through the course of the discussions. The specific dynamics of these economies, as they are expressed and thrashed out can be traced most easily in these self-reflexive instances. Not only do they organise the ebb and flow of the interactions but they also contribute to "ongoing processes of definition, performance, enactment and identity creation" (Kolko et al 2000:10). Even though various aspects of these moral economies are asserted and evident in some way or other all the way through any discussions, in this chapter they are discussion points in themselves. At the heart of any of these threads are tussles over what is/is not acceptable material or behaviour online and what is/is not an acceptable form of enforcement vis-à-vis the sociocultural roots of the designated websites; Samoan, Tongan, and/or Polynesian. As such, the threads become powerful expressions of various alignments between the views of older (literally and in the sense of long-standing) participants and those of newer, younger ones. Women and men are fairly equal in terms of participation and certainly in terms of outspokenness (see Morton 1998a). Such introspection offers a sharp, albeit spasmodic, close-up of intracultural and intercultural dynamics that are part of the everyday life of being in diaspora - a "minority of a minority" (Aiono 1999, interview). When online, they become refracted and intensified in these open - public - cyberspace/s 28.

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24 "KEYWORD HERE: RESPECT - For self, for others, and for the general spirit of this forum" (../Anni, KR, no longer on server)

25 For example:

As one of my fellow KR patrons put it, RESPECT one's host and treat his place like that of your own home....Unless people come with the attitude that they are ambassadors of their home, parents, society... be more CONSCIENTIOUS of our host, in that we put our best foot forward rather then infringing on the space of others with the obscene... (Teine o le Spring, 25/04/99) in reply to Time for Spring cleaning?, Polycafe, no longer on server.

26 Under the heading, Mmmmmmm nobody makes Laws...not even anybody should make Laws... a poster has this to say;

sheezzz making strict laws uh huh? .... But ya know havin an erased post means you are hiding the truth ... ya dun want anybody to talk about it or know about it...Where is the freedom of speech? Is this a media intake?" (sOuLjAz, 5/05/99) in reply to All subject Headings Longer than 1 Line will be deleted!, Polycafe, no longer on server.

27 For example, a threat from a member of the KB leadership about the KB being able to be 'intentionally closed down... it has been done in the past" (Sandy Macintosh, 27/03/00, I am who I am, in RE: Kava Bowl thread at http://pacificforum.com/kavabolw/kc/messages/56060.html). Such authority is not necessarily racially sealed for Sandy Macintosh is a non-Polynesian figure is, to a large extent, seen as an 'elder' in these online groups (see Chapter Six). Another example appeared in 2001 on the KR, when a poster declared her admiration for a regular in a post entitled Whatever happened to Ani? (chalena, 22/03/01) at http://polycafe.com/kamehameha/kamehameha2000-2/3308.html.

28 In cases of interpersonal disputes (see Axis Three below) this is strongest. For instance, in an ad hominem thread about a stalwart of the Polycafe - New Kid, the initial poster was taken to task:

You could've introduced yourself and enlightened the rest of the regular and passing patrons about your own sways, persuasions and politics. Some self-disclosure would have given us a clear idea that we have new blood among us. Others just blend in and post as they wish, making themselves at home.." (../Anni, 23/11/99)

SELF-DISCLOSURE would GREATLY facilitate matters, in reply to Daily Planet, NEW KID - WHO ARE YOU..?; initial post, KR, no longer on server.
Effectively, these alignments are exercised when textual oratory skills are coupled with the relative authority\textsuperscript{29} of any poster(s) during the debate. The support mustered, or the opposition encountered, has an impact on how any of the sharper disagreements or interpersonal battles are settled (or not) during the course of the thread. Although there are distinctive dynamics that belong to the hyperlinked textuality (see Kolko et al 2000: 10, Haraway 1997:125 passim) of these forums, these are still related to historical and material elements of (post)colonial Pacific Island contexts; sometimes explicitly (as with the Kava Bowl's link to the faikava), sometimes by intimation (when leaders are addressed as 'chief' or the forums are compared to Pacific Island understandings of family, respect and Christian values). Apart from differences in style and language, in themselves the source of much debate, the quality and future of life online, and by implication the concrete impacts of acting all this out on the internet/www has on the broader reproduction of racial stereotypes, is often being decided - heatedly. So, for the time being, these meta-threads background and inform other ones in order to set the house in order.

Behavioural norms and assumptions about propriety - and the rewards offered for conforming to these are also part of the practice of everyday life whether on or off the internet/www. In a European urban context these have been researched and theorised as the material spatial practices of people living and physically negotiating their neighbourhood - the quartier (see Giard & Mayol: 14-16, 27). In internet-based discourse such practices entail textual and figurative imagings - the written words of the discussion content and the graphics and symbols that encase these (see Appendix Two). They also entail the traces left by writers/readers and observers who access these sites\textsuperscript{30}. Certain norms are codified beforehand (Figure Nine) but only gain salience through trial and error over time or reiteration. In this sense, disputes are important moments of decision-making as well as interesting historical punctuations in the life of any (online) community. When articulated with post-colonial lives and concerns for Polynesians and mixed with a generation gap the stakes are raised - and so are tempers. Positions polarise quite quickly. These dynamics are aided and abetted by both the non-corporeal, and thereby liberating, aspect of written online discussions and the short reaction time between reading and reacting\textsuperscript{31}. Continual swearing - kapekape in Tongan - "in ANY language"\textsuperscript{32}, 'gossip' and slander, textual 'graffiti' like birthday shouts that lack substantive content and other forms of 'disrespect' to individuals families or reputations, have been recurring laments and exhortations throughout the life of these 'serious discussion' forums. This is a complex and difficult act of negotiation for the 2nd and 3rd generations growing up in the USA, for example, where the right of individual self-expression and Free Speech as a foundation of liberal democracy pits itself against some of these Forums' culturally (re)embedded ground rules and their guardians\textsuperscript{33}. The issue of how Tongans and/or Samoans - in themselves cultural

\textsuperscript{29} The term used throughout Polynesia is 'mana'. This entails traditional spiritual - and structural - gender-power relations (hereditary rank, title, status of women and men respectively), symbolic (spiritual and social) power and executive authority (political power). Nowadays it also implies social consensus - a mandate. In terms of my own understanding and experience, official forms of power do not necessarily give the woman or man 'mana', rather it is a mutually understood quality seen to reside in the person. See Ortner (1999:65).

\textsuperscript{30} For example, the ongoing R&D into electronic 'tagging' devices for keeping track of individual PCs and their users - the ubiquitous 'cookies' notwithstanding - statistics-keeping software for website moderators, let alone the innumerable traces left in caches even after 'deletion' or 'archiving'. Disappearance in one sense is but partial. For instance, even though the KB/KC are not accessible through their Pacific Forum portal, they are still present on the internet/www through their particular URLs.

\textsuperscript{31} Often times, visitors to this site will skim over a post, react emotionally, then sit down and type out a response/follow-up that either misses the point entirely or just doesn't make sense! Please read the Posts and follow-ups carefully ... (Ke ke fakama'uma'u ma'a, 27/03/00)

\textsuperscript{32} KB Posting Policy (KBAdmin, 27/03/00) in reply to Would you repost the guidelines for posting?, posted by Dot at http://pacificforum.com/kavabowl/kc/messages/55991.html.

\textsuperscript{33} This can result in some quite firm instructions; "...Free speech doesn't apply here. This is Taholo's site and he sets the rules. Live by them, go elsewhere, or do without KB altogether ... those are the only 3 choices" (Sandy, 27/03/00, in reply to re: its called freedom of speech, My dear, can't be controlled, in
minorities when in diaspora - are, or should be presenting themselves in the 'world' of
cyberspace thereby comes quickly to the fore as threads grow.

It appears that in terms of gendered aspects to out-and-out 'power over' (see Gill & Law
1988:73), men are at the fore, by virtue of being the owners (Al Aiono and Taholo Kami) or
very active participants and/or administrators (Sandy Macintosh and Phil Tukia in the KB,
'Alopi Latufefu in the THA and SPIN). But there are also a number of women who are also
important moderators and participants and who thereby carry their own powers of persuasion
(Helen Morton, Dot, LadyCYB, Sue Aiono, ..Anni). The gender-specific demographics
notwithstanding (Morton 1999), tacit conformity to the 'rules' become statements of various
degrees of support for their enforcement, if not requests to the (predominantly male) leadership
for action. Overt challenges to the norm and (tongue-in-cheek) subversions of this
'conservative' consensus34 are also outed when the leaderships are directly asked to perform the
internet equivalent of expulsion - deletion of offending or wayward posts. In this sense, power
has to be exercised intuitively by the leaderships although once authority is tacitly granted or
asserted, it is often expected. In short, both ends of the power spectrum are negotiable. The
ultimate enforcement, going offline or imposing passwords, is seen as a last resort.

Understanding and tracing how these dynamics work on line is an hermeneutic activity with its
own power 'quotient'. This is because inference (on my part as the participant-observer) and on
the part of the protagonists in terms of their own (semi/conscious or sociocultural reference
points) plays a large role in understanding how these moral economies operate. The things to
remember is that they are being worked out even as protagonists, write and respond to each
other. The

point is that we're not untouchables, infallible in our beliefs. We're not all experts but
individuals who come from diverse backgrounds who find it a homing-in process to be
amongst fellow Samoans/PIs [Pacific Islanders] in addition to our resident palagi sans
the usual fears about such a gathering. (./.Anni, 23/11/99)35

In turn, these online moral economies have other subtle permutations of gender-power
relations. In the first instance, they recognise where the nature of the internet/www permits and
delimits new communicative practices and deems these (un)acceptable accordingly. These have
become remodelled according to their own set of 'Ground Rules'. In the second instance, there

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puts it this way;

We use volunteers and nobody is paid to do this. In fact you will find admin are students or
fulltime workers who take care of the kavabowl on their own time. Sometimes reading every
single message over a slow connection can be quite an effort [as is the case in the Pacific
Islands] ....I meet so many people who tell me we need to delete more messages to keep the
board useful. Basically, personal messages can be sent by email, messages with Looong titles
will be deleted since they clutter the board. Any offensive messages or anonymous messages
which accuse a specific person are deleted. On personal messages, we don't have any obligation
to keep them on the board" (Taholo Kami as KBAdmin, 04/02/00)
in reply to initial post KBAdmin-What's the Fundamental Principle?, at http://pacificforum.com/
kavabowl/ kc/messages/50902).

34 For instance, in reply to the KBAdmin's initial post, Please refrain from using capitals, a follow-up
posted by Pohasnotsmiling - all in capitals - notes, amongst other things, that "KBADMIN SEES ONLY
CAPS" as opposed to "THE OBVIOUS VULGARITIES ALL OVER THE PLACE..." (22/03/00,
http://pacificforum.com/kavabowl/kc/ messages/55417.html). In the Polycafe, an altercation between a
disgruntled first-time poster and Al Aiono/POLYCAFE, ostensibly about anonymity (see below),
included the following protest;

I am NOT Polynesian, but enjoy coming here with my Polynesian friends every now and then.
Your response baffled me as I am not one of your many patrons here, who posts things just to get
a rise out of the rest of the idiots who bicker back and forth with each other and call each other
names. I was simply making a statement in reply to YOUR rules you so boldly made clear to us
not too long ago.... (Tommi Ann Davila, 14/05/99, Polycafe, no longer on server).

Both protagonists ceded ground in this thread which ended amicably.

35 In NEW KID - WHO ARE YOU - WHERE DID YOU COME FROM - WHAT DO YOU WANT - WHERE DO YOU HOPE TO GO???????? thread, KR, no longer on server.
are certain ethnic/racial elements to these online groups\textsuperscript{36} whose \textit{raison d'être} is to

be a place where ethnic and racial identity are examined, worked through, and reinforced [in order to] provide a powerful coalition building and progressive medium for 'minorities' separated from each other by distance and other factors'' (Kolko et al 2000:9).

Here, race/ethnicity are still very evident, gendered identifications still made explicit as opposed to being 'bent'. For many participants race/ethnicity is a primary boundary marker. To a greater extent than MUDS and other fantasy-based online communities, KB'ers and other 'Polys' of these forums are up-front about offline lives, often refer to them, argue about them and generally engage directly with "lifetime[s] of experiencing the world from specific identity-related perspectives" (Kolko et al 2000:4). In this respect, non-visuality and/or anonymity adds 'spice'\textsuperscript{37} to this engagement with others who have, it is assumed and mutually understood, something in common - the Pacific Islands. Seeing anonymity as an advantage is not a unanimously held view by these sites' leaderships nor without its pitfalls (see Axis Three)\textsuperscript{38}. Nevertheless, being able to deal with a certain degree of confrontation is part and parcel of whether debates progress or are halted, as the case may be. Arguably, the lack of traditional visual cues\textsuperscript{39} and the bending of other traditional gender and power based communicative
routines and hierarchies creates new spaces for political challenges and self-expression, especially for women (di Leonardo 1991, Gal 1001, Morton 1998). But when this nascent consensus about how far one can or should go in these matters breaks down, or is brought up short by a direct challenge from the groups' own leadership\textsuperscript{40} it is no holds barred. The point I want to make for now is that not everyone relishes how the gender/identity bending possibilities of the internet/www can facilitate such full-on confrontations. When linked to judgements about formal writing or debating skills\textsuperscript{41}, silencing also starts to play a role. This is an important element of these moral economies even if fiendishly difficult to trace in quantifiable terms.

\textbf{Compass Points}

The notion that there are (postcolonial) moral economies in the making here intersect with 'netiquette'. Whilst they certainly entail the latter rules and norms of internet text-based interactions (Kolko 1995), they operate on more than just an internet-based organisational level in that many of these groups and their online practices, are also shaped by Christian religious convictions and moral codes.

The term 'netiquette' was coined in the early days of online communities to denote a

\textsuperscript{36} There are regular tongue-in-cheek threads - or initial postings - on the specifics of race and ethnicity as history, cultural institutions, practices, and physical characteristics. These are interesting (tactical) examples of how people and groups with relatively little structural power (strategy in de Certeau's terminology) can appropriate - subvert - imagings and practices imposed by others (see Chapter Seven).

\textsuperscript{37} For instance, one poster noted that they "too have visited the KB since the early day, but under various nom de plumes for anonymity. I find the mystery of KBers adds the flavour to the debate" (Dragonite, 28/03/00 in RE: Kavabowl thread at http://pacificforum.com/kavabowl/kc/messages/56142.html). The issue of anonymity will be dealt with further below. Helen Morton (1998a, 1998b) has also done important work on the role this plays for these groups.

\textsuperscript{38} See Phil Tukia in Re: Kava Bowl Thread where he points out how it can be abused in order for people to "attack others under the guise of anonymity" (Phil Tukia, 27/03/99 at http://pacificforum.com/kavabowl/kc/messages/56053.html).

\textsuperscript{39} In Polynesian social mores, keeping the eyes down when addressing an elder or superior is a sign of deference and respect (see Morton 1996).\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{40} This is the whole point of the initial posting by Sandy Macintosh in Re: Kava Bowl in which he demonstrates on how recently the Kava Bowl has become "frequented solely by those lacking in years, good sense and any semblance of respect....." (27/03/00, op cit)

\textsuperscript{41} This also relates to how different uses and styles of the written word that can be found in these threads are ultimately judged. The 'rap', more upbeat dialects are often full of slang, phonetic spelling, and are badges of class, educational, and generational differences. See, for instance, (Bluecoco, 4/05/99, Polycafe, no longer on server) a sub-thread that developed within ALL SUBJECT HEADINGS LONGER THAN 1 LINE WILL BE DELETED! (4/05/99, Polycafe, no longer on server).
number of formalised as well as ad hoc, thus shifting and negotiable, behavioural codes for operating in the primarily written textual environment of the internet/www. Both of a general applicability and also very context-specific, netiquette entails both explicit structural limitations set by those who own or control website/forum, alongside implicit - unspoken - rules that any online community develops amongst its long-standing participants and which have to be learnt-by-doing on the part of any newcomers, or asserted to those who break them. The internet/www has been a source of newer forms of inter/subjectivity which to a large extent pivot around the issue of (the abuse of) anonymity, personal attacks (flaming), unacceptable language, and other forms of 'impropriety' on the internet/www. For these groups the 'legal and Netiquette' parameters, in their words the formal Ground Rules or Posting Policy, have been developing beyond these. One way to trace this process is through the thematic axes, based on the initial posts, around which these arguments revolve. These axes emerge in practice, over time. They are one way of lending coherence to what are, in fact, recurring and complex interweaving conversations based on complex sets of assumptions and sociocultural backgrounds for these online groups.

The first axis forms when the leadership (the moderators) declare their intentions to delete a post/thread or reiterate the rules. This often merges into the second, when the forum leadership is directly challenged and/or addressed vis-à-vis the same. Thirdly are the ad hominem threads - the 'personal attacks' - which break one of the more explicit, albeit least easily demarcated ground rules. These also partly constitute all the axes, and are some of the more discomfiting - and controversial - online practices (flaming, spamming, viruses) that have emerged with the advent of the internet/www. In these forums, such 'flame wars' are delineated along both inter and intracultural, if not racial/ethnic lines (see Chapter Seven). The last axis is the consciously self-referential posts, addressed by the one to the many. These are sometimes instigated by the leadership and sometimes by concerned participants. The debates that form around and across these axes interact with three premises - ideological stances or belief criteria.

First, there is a commonly held assumption, by many of the younger participants growing up in the USA, that being online - interacting in cyberspace - is a place/space for uncensored self-expression. This is the Free Speech criterion. It is in direct contention with the moral and technical power the website owner/moderator has to insist on their rules of online conduct, let alone their 'responsibility' to enforce these, ultimately through the deletion (censoring in so many words) of postings deemed undesirable. Such actions are carried out according to what could be called the Ground Rules criterion (Figure Nine). The level of acceptability is ostensibly measurable by the ensuing reactions. The second criterion relates more specifically to Polynesian cultural mores. The Ground Rules are based upon the aforementioned notion of Respect and deference (Morton 1996). The heated debates and 'flame wars' that have occurred when a moderator exercises their power to delete posts or sanction transgression include both declarations of outrage and various degrees of support for

42 For example: Tim Samson what race are you? (just wondering, 11/10/99, initial Post KR, no longer on server). Given the courteousness of this particular message, the ensuing thread was not particularly vituperative but the question did lead to some explicit declarations of identity and relative involvement (including my own) along ethnic-racial criteria (Chapter Seven).

43 Religion is a major source of morality, argument and affiliation. It will not be dealt with here.

44 Because they have access to the operational software architecture.

45 Where the boundaries are and what this entails are together and separately online and offline cultural issues around social (status) and generational deference. For example: "Teaching morality is not necessarily a Tongan thing, but Tongan custom is based on many things - one being RESPECT" (yes yes, 29/03/00, in RE; Kava Bowl thread at http://pacificforum.com/kavabowl/kc/messages/56309.html). In Tongan, the term is faka apa'apa which is also a formal form of address to be found at the end of many messages. Not resorting to 'profanity' (which includes both swearing and slang for many) also belongs to this notion. For instance, a poster in the Polycafe felt that it was "a lame excuse ... to use foul language as your right to freedom of expression. If you had an OUNCE of respect to elders who frequent this forum, then try adhering to some form of decency..." (Reader, Polycafe, 5/05/99, no longer on server).

46 For the Polycafe/Kamehameha Roundtable this is the site owners, Al and Sue Aiono. In the Kava Bowl it is the multifaceted KBAadmin and/or its various members (Sandy, Phil, Dot). The KB owner, Taholo Kami, is also active here.
whichever ‘fundamental principle’ 47 is at stake.

Finally, these two criteria are interwoven with other more or less subtle online practices of ‘power over’ or ‘covert power’ (Gill & Law 1988:73, Lukes 1998, Jordan 1999) vis-à-vis offline conventions. These can curb and admonish those who do not conform to the ‘norm’, shape how one says something or what is said (after all these are culturally and ethnic-racially specific sites). In turn, they are both cause and effect of (potential) misunderstanding between protagonists, no matter what online personas they assume. In any case, these emerge most clearly when expertise or authority is at stake. This is the Who/What are you criterion. How the target responds to the latter can range from posting a retort or from withdrawing altogether. Hence, beyond explicit apologies or about-faces, the effect(iveness) of such confrontational postings cannot be easily gauged or measured as leaving an online forum is not as obvious as the physical act of turning one’s back and walking out.

With this basic topography mapped out, let us now move around the four axes and follow how these moral economies are being actually produced and codified in practice.

Moral Economies At Work

Axis One: The Ground Rules

It should be clear by now that ‘netiquette’ is not sufficient for understanding the specific dynamics of non-generically western online communicative practices and their composite gender-power relations. Nonetheless, these more technical and legal considerations do have a place in these dynamics. They inform these moral economies as these rules and norms are interpreted, and applied accordingly by the leaderships and other protagonists in term of extant assumptions and emerging ideals (see the last part of Chapter Seven). In this sense, Axis One is the most ‘cyber-technical’ of these axes. But, as I argue more fully in the next chapter, no rules, norms or concomitant (technical) standard is devoid of other sociocultural assumptions. They constitute, more or less, ethical and political economic considerations. In the case of the ground-rules here, they also ensure some degree of legal protection and sociocultural screening from would-be critics from within the broader communities as well as litigation.

In the debates around the regulation of electronic communications on the internet/www (where responsibility for inappropriate content has moved from ‘content providers’ to the content itself and lately to controlling access), netiquette as such is as much a legal issue as it is about informal, (un)spoken rules. In the South Pacific discussion groups, legal disclaimers are just that (see Figure Nine). However, they also include ethical stands taken by the moderators vis-à-vis the “South Pacific traditions” of “decency and respect” (Figure Nine). The latter notions have developed as separable statements from the legal notices. These are the “posting policy” or the ‘ground rules’ that have not only pragmatic import but also delimit the Free Speech criterion usually purported to be integral to internet/www communicative practices (see above). In this sense they are the coutures and thus potentially the ‘fracture lines’ in the moral economies being worked out and practised here.

The contours are already evident in the most seemingly banal messages about the ground rules, such as those below (taken from 1998, 1999 and 2000 respectively), posted at regular intervals by the leaderships.

We were forced to remove a posting regarding KB services due to the negative tone in the replies. We have read the message so thanks for the comment...” KBAdmin (4/09/98, KC, no longer on server)

All subject headings longer than 1 line will be deleted! (POLYCAFE, 4/05/99, KR, no longer on server)

KB-ADMIN CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHY DO YOU HAVE TO DELETE AN ENTIRE POST. IF THE POST THAT WAS POSTED WAS NOT OFFENSIVE AT ALL BUT THE REPLY TO THE ORIGINAL POSTING IS THE CULPRIT... WHY IS IT YOU ONLY LOOK TO YOUR LEFT INSTEAD OF BOTH SIDES?” (taeoli, 4/02/00, KB).

The level of annoyance was also made visible by the message being in capitals - a breach of one of the ground rules but an effective one.

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All posts using capitals will simply be deleted, thus removing your hard work. Simply put, simply done. So please... (KBAdmin, 21/03/00) 48

In reverse order; the two main management concerns for any website moderator is readability, and available space on the server. In internet/www discourse, like emails, capitals can be used for incidental emphasis. However, when used at length they are tantamount to shouting 49. Needless to say they are also more difficult to read in longer posts. All moderators of these sites have regularly requested participants to ‘refrain from using capitals’ and on the whole this is respected and/or apologised for. The next practical issue is indicated in the second of the above examples, is the construction of subject/name lines; message headings in other words. In asynchronous Bulletin Board environments, these can operate in retrospect as a sort of sub-thread in their own right (so can be another entry point into the discussion content or show a change of direction in themselves) or as reiterations of the original posting (see Appendix Two).

"ANY messages with SUBJECT LINE that exceeds one line" (KBAdmin, 20/01/98) 50 are grounds for deletion in both forums. The main practical issue here is that not only do the iterative qualities of Bulletin Board software compound the original length in the case of highly frequented threads, but when coupled with capitals these have an overpowering visual - and emotional - effect. Moreover, they can create threads that not only suggest more substance than there sometime is but also take up room on the precious, usually self-financed, server space paid for by any privately-run electronic groups. Let alone on-screen 51. In earlier versions of the KB Posting Policy, there were also limits set on the length of messages themselves but this has only been enforced when the body of the message was deemed to be irrelevant 52 as the logistics of screening appear to have made this kind of regulation too difficult to maintain.

For the record, both the Polycafe and the Kavabowl explicitly forbid

- various forms of swearing - “profanity” (Polycafe, 4/05/99)
- “outright attacks of a personal nature that could be construed as slander, or libel...” (KB, 20/01/98)
- “attacks on anyone’s ideas, politics, or religion without …citing reasons, examples, or other sorts of evidence…” (ibid).
- “Gossip” has been more recently brought under the latter category (see KB Posting Policy, 27/03/00) as has ‘slang’ 53. These are problematic categories for younger less literary protagonists, as indicated earlier in that, here, language itself becomes a bone of contention (see Axis Two).
- Deletion is also possible if there is “total disregard for the conservative sensitivities held by

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48 Please Refrain from Using Capitals, initial post at http://pacificforumcom/kavabowl/kc/ messages/55331.html
49 “First, PLEASE don’t use caps! IT is ‘shouting’ in the cyber community and extremely polite” (Sandy, 27/03/00, Doesn’t Apply Here, in RE: Kava Bowl thread at http://pacificforumcom/kavabowl/kc/ messages/56110.html)
50 KB POLICY ON EDITING - PLEASE READ (no longer on server). Note here the judicious use of capitals. The Polycafe also insists on “No long ”Name” lines (4/05/99) as these two can be a way of responding without actually entering a message in the usual place.
51 In response to a poster asking where a number of postings had got to, the Polycafe leadership, after having given their moral reasons for deleting a thread, noted that “sometimes entire batches have to go .. in order to control the heavy traffic the cafe gets everyday ….It was unfortunate but sometimes we just have to clean house quickly!” They then went on to note that further transgressions may lead to them being “forced to adopt a registration/password policy” (POLYCAFE, 20/05/99 in answer to swift, 129/05/99, What's up w/ all those missing files?). This is something the Aionos want to avoid given their desire to provide open, public, internet forums (Aiono 1999: interview).
52 The broader portals of these discussion groups - the 'Pacific Forum' and the Polynesian cafe - are categorised and designed to "cater for different needs" (Aiono 1999: interview) and so non-related threads (e.g. birthday greetings and 'I'm looking for... inquiries) are seen as a waste of space in serious discussion forums. These differentiations certainly make the gathering and sifting job of the online researcher less onerous.
53 This is a later addition and the locus for much dispute about what constitutes gossip and its sociocultural role in, as here, Tongan society (see below).
the largest portion of the ‘population’ in KB” (KB, 20/01/98 and repeated at regular intervals in various ways).

It is the first of the three quotes above in which we see at once both the most controversial and the most elastic aspect of the ground rules; deletion as the ultimate right or responsibility of the leaderships.

Do not blame the Polycafe if responses to your messages violate the rules...we’re sorry, the entire thread will go......we reserve the right to delete what we feel is a violation of our ground rules” (POLYCAFE, 4/05/99, KR, no longer on server) 54

An eventual deletion - or lack thereof - has often been the trigger for many of the threads examined here. As well as being one articulation of the pivotal notion of respect that operates in all these sites, it is also an entry point into some of the more sensitive aspects to the moral economies at stake. For the Ground Rules criterion come into confrontation with the Free Speech criterion.

The KBAdmin is committed to providing a forum that will provide a service to our Pacific Island community and while we promote freedom of speech, we also recognise the need to provide guidelines to ensure the KAVABOWL remains a fresh source of useful information. We retain the right to delete postings that we determine are not in the ‘spirit of the KAVABOWL. (KBAdmin, 20/01/98, KB, no longer on server).

Two years later, during the latest debate about such issues (which occurred prior to the Kava Bowl going offline, for the second time in 6 months, ‘for technical reasons’), the above has become:

NOTE: Free speech prevails, but with limitations imposed from respect for Polynesian culture and tradition. Those who cannot live by this code should consider either an ‘attitude adjustment’ or another venue for their expression. (KBAdmin, 27/03/00) 55

On the whole, the Kava Bowl moderators have had a more rigorous approach to how this confrontation should be dealt with practically. Suffice it to say for now that such strictness has not been unanimously accepted, especially since the KB went back online at the end of 1999 after several months of ‘radio silence’ only to go offline again in early 2000. The ensuing stresses and strains also relate to differences in how power is exercised at any given instance, over time or any thread’s own lifespan. It also intersects with the extent to which leadership styles combine with other lines of influence - off and online - and with the various responses of the online ‘constituencies' or ‘populations’.

Axis Two: Querying the Posting Policy

It is to the above differences we now turn; that is the dialogue between leaders/moderators about the rights and wrongs of enforcement, as initiated by participants. The interactions around this second axis indicate the way in which moral economies have been evolving vis-à-vis the above ‘top-down’ rules and regulations. As clienteles have waxed and waned over the years, and relationships between and within groups of regulars (patrons) have built up, stagnated, ignited or whatever the case may be, so has the way in which the Ground Rules have been successfully taken on and integrated into the everyday online practices of these groups. It is when participants directly address the leadership, and the response they get from the latter, as well as others, that certain concerns about the relationship between all three criteria come to the fore. What emerges is that the Free Speech and the Ground Rules criteria are being

54 Initial post, ALL SUBJECT HEADINGS LONGER THAN 1 LINE WILL BE DELETED!. Again capitals are consciously used here.
constantly (re)negotiated vis-à-vis ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ notions of respect and propriety - literally and figuratively.

Having set the Ground Rules, the moderators then have to deal with the effects of their (non) enforcement, something which is brought sharply to their attention by participants taking umbrage in either case. Generally speaking, when the formal leaderships are addressed, they answer accordingly. The structural power relations thus become articulate(d) as the leaderships become protagonists themselves in discussion threads initiated by others. It is at times a delicate process in itself let alone given the volunteer basis on which any administration and moderating is done in all these forums 56, the limits of the software notwithstanding 57. This cut-and-thrust between protagonists is further sharpened by the de facto authoritative tone lent to a statement that is written and read (often too quickly) online 58, to wit, the effect of a precarious combination of thinking-and-writing out loud.

Be that as it may, it needs to be noted that on the whole, the Ground Rules /Posting Policies are adhered to and that their execution is more often than not encouraged by the ‘grassroots’ constituency. Those who do not feel comfortable with the direction, content, or social mores of many discussions do stop participating or remain silent (see below). Others stay and add their ideas to the debates whilst others just carry on getting enraged. In Polynesian terms, both the traditional, emancipatory and performative aspects of (new) communicative cultures come into play 59. So do differences between how posters in-the-islands see these things vis-à-vis those growing up abroad, let alone the emerging generation gap on how to interpret the rules in everyday life online. We shall see below how these different perspectives and experiences can come to a head in both forums. Nevertheless, there is a high degree of tolerance - on all levels - in actual practice 60. For instance, most long subject headings and/or capitals are

56 “We use volunteers and nobody is paid to do this...” (Taholo Kami, 4/02/00) in reply to initial post, KBAdmin: What's the Fundamental Principle thread at http://pacificforum.com/kavabowl/kc/messages/50902.html.

57 In who do you edit? the poster (Safata) suspects the leadership of being partisan in a thread in which he has been subjected to character assassination. As far as he is concerned the KB Administration has been negligent in their duties. The KBAdmin explain that we try our best to discourage accusations that are not related to the topic and we encourage people to voice opinions. You will notice that the comments were erased .... but unfortunately the software did not remove the message itself. We have erased both messages that were most unnecessary. (KBAdmin, 30/01/99) in reply to Who do You Edit?, http://pacificforum/kavabowl/kc/messages/3983.html). When Safata refuses to accept this, he is admonished by another poster - reader;

Hey Safata, cut the admin some slack. They are limited to what their software allows them..... If you still don't like it, then hit the road Jack or help finance this forum for better software..." (reader, 31/01/99)

58 No duhh, that's what the Admin. said, in reply to Safata at http://pacificforum/kavabowl/kc/messages/4016.html). Safata retorts that he has indeed donated to the Pacific Forum online.

59 For instance;

Frankly, being an islander, and with English as one of my second languages, I take everything I read with caution. If this was a uni[versity] web site, then I would be pedantic about details. Given it is not; I try and use my coconut [head] to deduce and interpret the question congruent with the author's intended meaning i.e. with how the writer intended the post to be read in the first instance. (Principal Skinner, 5/02/00)


60 For instance;

There are many explicit examples of such tolerance - the very existence of such forums being the case in point. In the following example, what began as an ad hominem thread, the idea and practice of (new) forms of tolerance gets reiterated. The main protagonist - Daily Planet, having accused another - New Kid - of a "peanut gallery style", finds her/himself in the centre of such a seesaw between reaffirmation and calls for removal/the silent treatment - "If you don't like what he (sic) says, then move on to the next post (LadyCYB, 22/1/99, Come on people!!, in reply to I second that KR, no longer on server). Daily Planet begins to back off;

...sorry about the misunderstanding, just thought to come out and see your intent ...No hate intended...The KR is an interesting forum to come out in, but sometimes we tend to be too
not deleted out of hand, a large degree of ‘rap’ style language and other uses of the vernacular are left alone, the more politically or socially sensitive nature of some discussions are allowed to run their course (see Chapter Six). In addition, the leaderships take care to give assurances about inclusiveness when the positions become severely polarised or misunderstandings occur, outright apologies notwithstanding.

Tolerance and openness has its limits though. For the devoutly Christian populations of these forums, the use of swear words and ‘offensive terms’ is not countenanced. I would say though, that over the years profanity has not actually been indulged in that much in English although when used in Tongan or Samoan it has been swiftly dealt with. Having said that, playful manipulations of standard spelling such as symbolic substitutions or phonetic variations to other, less socially (un)acceptable words are scattered throughout all the discussion threads (like @$$ or a*** for instance). These are increasingly inventive with the advent of software filters in the Polycafe which also read innocent syllables in one language as an unacceptable word in Samoan thereby rendering it unutterable in cyberspace. In practice, the boundaries of acceptability are derived from the socio-economic backgrounds and (Christian) belief systems of the forums’ populations (as revealed in their own texts). A large number of regular participants are devout Christians. Some are parents or grandparents if not community leaders offline whilst others presume a relatively high standard of literary skills - including correct spelling - in the still written textuality of online discussions. The first group of regulars - who are vocal and numerous - have lower tolerance levels for any swearing, so-called. There have also been complaints over the increasing prevalence of contemporary forms of the vernacular slang or 'gangsta' talk. On the issue of linguistic standards, long-standing or prominent participants have also been pitted against some of the newcomers - especially in the KB of late. In any case, the general feeling, over the last year at least, albeit with varying degrees of intensity, is that notwithstanding the right to speak freely, there still have to be "limits, both moral and legal...". Where the limits are or should be and, furthermore, what the impact all this has on how Polynesians should behave online let alone how they are (or should be) seen by the 'outside world' is at the heart of the discussion threads forming this axis.

One of the central fracture lines though, which also illustrates the above dynamics from sensitive. Howz dat?... I do believe we all have the right to release and voice!.." (Daily Planet, 22/11/99) in New Kid - Who are you? Thread, KR, no longer on server). It takes another one of the prominent women (../Amni) in these groups to assert the established norm;

It’s a positive to be PASSIONATE about our belief system; it just takes a smidgeon more to be recognisable of the common respect due to another .... Square your shoulders for you’re not the only [one] who has felt humbled within these walls. But better be HUMBLED than HOBBLED in your efforts to share with others..." (.., 23/11/99) in reply to Daily Planet, KR, no longer on server).

There is no sign over the [KR] door that EXCLUDES anyone based on gender, religion, creed or national origin. There is none stating that this is an exclusive site for SAMOANS only..." (Pua, 13/01/00) in reply to ...Check yourselves (PC) because this is the Kamehameha (Hawaiian) Roundtable and not "Samoan" Roundtable) concerned, 06/01/00, initial post, KR, no longer on server)

It tends to come in bursts in connection with ad hominem threads, and thus makes an impact in the quicksilver atmosphere of online discussions.

The leaderships post a notice when they have deleted such a post and its thread.

For example, Worried Mum, in RE: Kava Bowl thread.

We as a people ARE capable of so much. I am so tired of seeing these 'fools' post messages that make no sense, have poor spelling, grammatical errors everywhere and all this 'gangsta' crap. Its embarrassing! Wake up people!!! (Well said Sam Owens! 20/05/99) in Thank you Polycafe thread, Polycafe, no longer on server.

“everyone is for the right to free speech; the controversy is what the boundaries are and how we should enforce them” (Lafemme Nikita, 23/04/99, THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF SPEECH! initial post, KR, no longer on server). To which Sandy - the (non-Polynesian) stalwart of the KAdmin - replied;

... in this forum, the classic "American" definition does not apply here. On the contrary, the code asked for here is tempered to meet traditional Polynesian, and particularly, Tongan [in the case of the KB] ethics of reverence and respect. There is no swearing tolerated here...." (sandy, 23/04/99) at http://pacificforum/kavabowl/kc/messages/42006.html).

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the point of view of the participants, are inquiries/requests made to the leaderships (particularly over the last year or so) about the ‘profanities’ clause of the Ground Rules, and its recent coupling with a ‘no slang’ clause. These threads show how the focal points (technical inquiries aside) around which the leaderships are addressed directly or held accountable tend to fall into the following types of concern. First:

dear Polycafe, i'm sure by now you are very tired of seeing all the post that have been full of profanity....( Bluecoco, 4/05/99)

Thank you Polycafe for doing away with posts with slang and profanity!!! (Sam Owens, 20/05/99)

Second:

I post an innocent question and statement about the crap that is in here, and you go and erase MY post?! what the hell is that? (Tom, 14/05/99)

KB-ADMIN CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHY DO YOU HAVE TO DELETE AN ENTIRE POST. ... WHY CANT YOU DELETE THE OFFENSIVE POSTING AND NOT BE TOO DAMN LAZY AND DELETE THE ENTIRE POSTING... (taeoli, 4/02/00)

Well ya know...the laws are so lame that it isn't good enuff to stop people ... but ya know havin an erased post means you are hiding the truth... ya dun want anybody to talk about it or know about it... (sOuLjAz, 5/05/99)

Third:

I think it should be the responsibility of the KB Administration to steer comments to the subject matter in discussion. Any personal comments or personal attacks should be deleted! There seems to be an inconsistency in the editing that is being done. I think that KB Administration should delete right away any comments made to the person of ......{name of injured party}. (safata, 29/01/99)

I second that motion, .....I read those derogatory remarks and I am suprised that nothing is being done about it ....Personal attacks should not be T-O-L-E-R-A-T-E-D on this forum period.( Polyway, 29/01/99)

In order of appearance; the first is either to lend support to recent reiterations of the Ground Rules and/or enforcement thereof or to demand action. The next is to object to the very same, either as an accidental victim or in terms of the Free Speech criterion. The third focal point is for objections to 'gossip' or personal accusations made about the poster or their (extended) families and a call for action. The ad hominem posts in question here form an axis in their own right and work according to the What/Who are you criterion (see below).
Profanity or Colloquialism?

It is swearing (and/or slang) and what it signifies - represents - about the Pacific Island communities to a "world online audience" (New Kid (30/01/99) that gives cause for most concern. For instance:

Do you swear at a minister during church? Do you swear at your family's funeral? Do you swear at a matai? [Samoan title for a Chief] So why bend the rules in here? There are places where language should be used appropriately....If no set standards were placed on this place, then we may as call this place a hang out sleazy bar. Respect is not too much to ask for. (Reader, 5/05/99)

I am sure no one cares to have obscenities scribbled over the living room of their homes. WHY THEN DO IT HERE? (Teine o le Spring, 25/04/99)

But this is not to say that this consensus is self-evident. It has to be expressed, posted, and accordingly entered into the online 'scripts' of these everyday practices. Those dissenting voices who take the time to reply are thereby interesting counter-examples, as well as indications of how heterogeneous these communities-groups are. The silent participants or less frequent posters count also. For example, in the post below entitled I love profanities but..., one can see one of the few wry responses (where much of the earlier humour and satire of the KB in 1998-99 was in 1999-2000 replaced by a degree of anxiety in the face of a new clientele) to reiterated and interlacing objections to swearing and slang on the one hand, and breaches of the freedom of speech criterion on the other.

I personally love using profanities. The language of the sewer delights me. The first stream of daily profanities erupts from my lips at 6.30 am when, at the screech of the alarm clock, I tumble unceremoniously onto the icy cement floor...The second stream of profanities ignites when I can't 'do my job' easily on the bathroom throne. The third ricochets around the tiny bathroom when the razor cuts my chin during shaving ..... BUT upon exiting my cockroach-friendly apartment, I forget all about freedom of speech, and behave with relative decorum and respect for the sensitivity of others..... I thank you for the enlightenment, Madam, and wish you a good day...... Most respectfully yours-in-the-faith-in-freedom-of-speech.. (K'i Sulu, 26/04/99)

Where profanity ends and 'slang' begins is not always that apparent. Here, the 'questions of ethics' that are nested at the centre of all these disputes blurs into a nascent ethics of language use for postcolonial minorities in the wide open spaces of public cyberspace. The emerging contentiousness of the use of slang that merges with the no profanities rule is, to my mind, a more recent (re)negotiation of the Ground Rules versus Free Speech criteria. Although the following thread was quite short, it intersected with others concerned about falling standards of online behaviour in general. The three replies and the original post capture quite succinctly the way moral economies have been developing with an eye to (re)presentation of groups that, as diasporas, have been often disadvantaged and under stress in their post-colonial homelands (New Zealand, Australia, USA).

Thank you Polycafe for doing away with posts with slang and profanity!!! I applaud the polycafe for instituting new rules for posting messages here. I, for one, was tired of seeing the 'garbage' people would put on here..... A few months ago, I posted a discussion thread about being tired of hearing Polynesians talk slang and what type of image or impression it gave to others.....I am very happy to see that the Polycafe has

74 Let's Agree to Disagree: But not agree for an all-out brawl!, (initial post, KR, no longer on server)
75 ya always gotta go there with Freedom of Speech, in reply to Mmmmmmm, nobody makes laws....in All Subject Headings.... thread, Polycafe, no longer on server.
76 in Time for Springcleaning? Thread, Polycafe, no longer on server.
77 in reply to The Right To Freedom of Speech, initial post by Lafemme Nikita at http://pacificforum/kavabowl/kc/messages/42072.html)
raised their standards....This is only going to help in destroying the stereotypes that have been bestowed upon our people. I would like to see that our people are known more for just being big people who can kick ass... If I want to read or listen to slang or profanity, I can go down to the parks and look at the graffiti for that garbage. Thank you for ridding this website of all the riffraff and all the gangsters...(Sam Owens, 20/05/99)  

BRAVO!!....WE ISLANDERS NEED TO RISE TO A HIGHER STANDARD RATHER THAN SINK LOWER INTO HOODLUM. ITS SAD TO SEE ISLANDERS COME TO THE STATES FOR A BETTER EDUCATION AND LIFE AND THEN END UP LIVING AND TALKING LIKE GANGSTERS. IF YOU DON'T PULL YOURSELF UP, NOBODY ELSE WILL (Better quality of life please, 20/05/99, in reply to above)

Sam ... doing away with profanity was a great move. But I have to say that I ride the fence on the slangs being cut as well. I don't see anything wrong with [it]...... on days when I feel like relaxing a bit with my words and corresponding in this public forum with friends and family, opting to use some slang, or even made up words of our own, mostly just for fun.... maybe I see things differently ...I don't care for the whole misspelled words, tough guy attitude, 'Slang' crap either, but the posts which are by far the more offensive ones are ... the ones that are posted to purposely be hurtful...... Much gratitude to the Café's administration for cracking down. I am a Polynesian woman who is versed very well, in both verbal and written concourse, but you will catch me on days where I am sending shout outs, what's up etc.. to friends and families. I feel they are harmless forms of communication and hold no hurtful meanings such as profanity does.(Lisa 21/05/99, in reply to above).

The thread above and the others addressing this issue also indicate the demographic complexity of these groups as access becomes gradually (although patchily) available in the Pacific Islands  and the knowledge of them spreads both there and elsewhere. In the same month as this thread, and in the context of an initial post by the Polyc...
Speak for yourself. People like you grew up uneducated and slang as your 2nd or 3rd language but most Samoans and Poly people I know are respectable and have pride in the way they communicate .... shiz man go back to Samoa or Tonga or wherever you from. But let our people in America and other countries have a fair chance to make something decent and respectable of their lives.... (concerned, 4/05/99)

The responses to this challenge (which included a textual version of physical ‘slapping’) then reveals how language is a signifier for another line of difference. Using a different name-line (that is also part of the retort) get off da sack coco asks:

first of all, who the hell you think you're talking too, talking about uneducated and using slang as your first language. Have you ever been to Samoa? ...Don't act like a kid and talk down to people like your better than them. I for one grew up in a minority community, that's why I talk the way I do. My family started off poor, and I'm proud of it. You wanna talk about getting things in America, let's play a little ghetto game called Big Bank take Little Bank. I'm sorry you feel like that about your own ppl [people]. (Please! concerned my @$$, don't talk about slappin somebody, 6/05/99)

This position gets support from at least three others (COCOA, ConcernedForYou/Too, Putting it to the Point). In so doing, diasporic life as an ethnic minority, in the USA in this case, becomes a focus for articulating the underbelly of being-from-somewhere-else. As one of the posters notes:

..its so funny how some people come out here to America and forget where they are from. They try to fit into the life style of the Americans, but they can forget it. No matter what, you will always be a Samoan... (Putting it to the point) 83

This ties in with others in the thread who point out to concerned that is bad enough to call someone names for voicing their opinion, let alone cast aspersions about where they are/are not from:

what do you mean 'go back to Samoa or Tonga .. Where are you from? just because you are living in 'America' doesn't mean that's where you're from ...... (ConcernedForYou, 4/05/99) 84

When prompted a bit later, this poster (embellishing their nickname further) goes on to elaborate how:

You Samoans in 'Welcome to America' seem to put down ["the people in Savaii"] all the time. Just keep in mind, all Samoans, no matter where you've set up welfare at, have roots leading all the way to Western Samoa! So stop being so proud of being in 'America' because you might get your hobby butt deported to where you're legally from!' (ConcernedForYou Too, 5/05/99) 85

It takes a poster from Samoa (the island of Savaii) to put an end to this sub-thread:

Sitting here in Samoa and reading some of these comments is really amusing. Don't bother slapping anyone back to Savaii because they certainly do not belong here. (Samoan in Savaii, 13/05/99, Polycake, no longer on server)

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81 get outta here I've been in the cafe for 2 years before you and your sorry a** friends cam along, in reply to get off da sack coco, polycake, no longer on server. More than one protagonist noted the use of euphemisms and slang in this message also.
82 In reply to concerned (6/05/99, Polycake, no longer on server).
83 In reply to concernedFor You (Polycake, no longer on server).
84 In reply to concerned (Polycake, no longer on server).
85 FOB means "fresh off the boat".
86 in reply to Samoan in America (Polycake, no longer on server).
This debate is an important aspect of these moral economies even though there are relatively few explicit threads. It behooves mention for it also articulates some fracture points between not only at-home posters and their 'brothers and sisters' living abroad, but also different educational backgrounds, socio-economic positions, or relative skill and ease with written forms of spoken oratory. Bearing in mind that all this has both internal and external references in cyberspatial terms, at some stage someone (authoritative) puts the thread and the point of it all back in perspective. In this case it was the poster, Fatu:

The Cafe is here to help us explore our Poly Roots and build unity as a people. Samoan, Tongan...It doesn't matter, we all Bleed Red. We need to build each other up, not dogg each other.... Al, keep cleaning up the graffiti in the Café, this way all the patrons will enjoy the cafe. Alofa. (Fatu, 4/05/99)

The alterations traced above lean into the third axis - ad hominem messages or 'flames'. Here the Ground Rule encompassing "[no] outright attacks of a personal nature" (KBAdmin, 27/03/00) is at stake. But so are other questions about what are/are not generically Polynesian (Tongan and/or Samoan) public communicative norms, and whose interests the Forums are/should be actually serving. In short, the gender-power relations of these moral economies are embedded in participation - who and how. This has to be registered, made visible, by the act of posting a message. At the same time, the standards and mores constituting the eventual content - implicit and explicit - are brought in from beyond as well as created (reinvented) from within. The latter is one of the particular qualities that the internet/www - interactive communication technologies lends to post-colonial everyday communication in public cyberspace(s).

So, basically, the more permissive qualities of the internet/www for new(er) forms and practices of inter/subjectivity in any scenario have their own occupational hazards. It is to these that we now turn briefly.

**Axis Three: Querying Who You Are**

[Online a] "who are you?" response to a real name is a confrontational device that one would never do on the ground. (Teresia Teaiwa, 1999; interview)

I also find that when one does post such opposing views to the norm, personal attacks are made. Whilst personal attacks do not bother me, you get to the point where you lose interest and feel you are banging your head against a brick wall ...(L.T. 20/05/99, personal email) 85

The above two comments are examples of potential/former participants who would not/no longer actively participate in the online discussions. Each have their own personal-political reasons for being cautious or eventually retreating, and made it clear to me they were not condemning the principle of these forums. Their experiences relate to those (sub)threads that operate according to the *Who/What are you* criterion and which carry demarcations about rights of belonging and participation in these communities-discussion groups, let alone how they (re)present complex personal and sociocultural relationships offline.

Whether this is an indication of these forums being 'victims of their own success' or not, the few still extant ad hominem threads and the calls for decorum that follow from them do show how the gender-power relations of interacting are not only down to the leaderships but also their constituencies. In order to counter, to affect how the thread looks and how the content actually unfurls, people have to participate - post a message in fact:

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87 *to all the drama queens on the Cafe....*, in reply to *ALL SUBJECT HEADINGS LONGER THAN 1 LINE WILL BE DELETED!* thread (Polycafe, no longer on server).


89 This comment was made in a personal email to me by a former participant in the Polycafe.
Don't be content on being a mere spectator. If you don't get into the fray, you get benched on the sidelines, plagued by obscurity. The KR [and KB?] is, after all, a CONTACT forum. (concerned, 13/01/00)

All well and good, but it takes a thick skin and the confidence afforded by long-standing online presence/participation to proceed in these cases. Even more so when the addressee cannot claim to be ethnically Polynesian or be automatically granted the status of 'expert'. Religious beliefs are also cause for personal criticism (whether these be perceived as too dogmatic or not strict enough). The argument also gets personalised quite quickly when offence is taken, positions are polarised in a delicate topic, or if a posted message - opinion - is couched in strong language. People tend to react quickly and 'petulantly':

...yes, a battle of the brains, we all know who has won before the match has even begun. Pokemon, calm down. I agree with Sandy. Be slow to anger and quick to listen... (langimalie, 27/03/00)

Online prominence in this context can be both a curse and a blessing, especially since many ad hominem posts are addressed to such regulars. These can range from the gentle inquiry:

TIM SAMSON [Sansom] WHAT RACE ARE YOU? if you're not Samoan then how did you find out about this site? don't get mad now i was just wondering...thank you for your time and god bless!!! (just wondering, 11/10/99, initial post, KR, no longer on server)

to a sort of public challenge (in this case it turned out to be somewhat tongue-in-cheek) on the issue of personal style and/or opinions:

Safata or Satana or who ever you are: I have been flicking through the board on a daily basis and I find this character (safata) to be a bag of nothing. Safata raises issues that are sometimes interesting, but he or she cannot provide any logical or factual, let alone any coherent proposition(s) to reach a valid or [sound] conclusion.... (Maui, 9/02/99)

and to the ostensibly more malevolent (this thread eventually turned on the initial poster who duly retreated.

NEW KID - WHO ARE YOU - WHERE DID YOU COME FROM - WHAT DO YOU WANT - WHERE DO YOU HOPE TO GO?????? You need to take up another hobby or vocation. Your comments are tired and you need to take a rest - or give the rest of us some serious recess from your peanut gallery style!! (Daily Planet, 21/11/99)

Such confrontations can indeed be unpleasant or disconcerting to receive if the intention was not to give offence and those who object by retreating altogether are difficult to trace. For precisely that reason; they have opted out and thus 'power to exclude' is successfully exercised.

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90 initial post, Thank you Pua for enlightening me. And if you miss Pua's message, here it is again, KR, no longer on server.
91 "As for this palangi's 'ignorance' ... well, I'd be happy to match mine with yours ANY day on any subject. Care to give it a shot ...or, are you all smoke?" (Sandy, 27/03/00, You Only Prove my Point, in reply to Pokemon, No Kohu Pleassee in re: KavaBowl thread at http://pacificforum.com/kavabowl/kc/messages/55989.html.)
92 Lisa objected to the terms 'buffoons...riffraff...gangsters' being used for those who used slang "...for I am far from any of these 3 descriptions" (21/05/99, in reply to Thank you Polycafe for doing away with slang and profanity!, Polycafe, no longer on server).
94 initial post, Safata or Satana or who ever you are at http://pacificforum.com/kavabowl/kc/messages/4445.html.
95 initial post KR, no longer on server.
as online social pressure. The aforementioned objects of criticism responded accordingly, backed up by overwhelming numbers supporting their presence and thereby berating the initial posters. The ‘winner’ is s/he who gets the last or most strategically positioned impressive word, quite literally. Persistence is not always a prerequisite for the latter however. These threads (if they remain online) also reveal another couture between online gender-power relations, offline parameters of social control and decorum (Morton 1996) that lie behind the limits set in the legal notices of both forums. Contingent to all this, are the pressures of demographic changes over time within the groups. These, too have an impact on how moral economies evolve or are made operational. For many of the ‘old guard’, it

really is a shame that people come in here and destroy this website by posting ignorant and derogatory comments (especially towards fellow polys). I wonder if these youths would post those things if they knew that their parents would read it. I very much doubt it... (Disappointed, 24/04/99)

Anonymity

At this juncture, more needs to be said about how many of these kinds of challenges take advantage of online (quasi) anonymity, where the software set up for the KB and the Polycafe permits people to post under various ‘names’ and/or email addresses. This has several aspects to it. In the tightly run communicative and socio-economic hierarchies of Polynesia (Morton 1996, Ortner 1996), non-fixed identities on the internet/www can provide a locus for loosening up gendered and social hierarchies, and thereby facilitate criticism of the status quo (see Chapter Six). Moreover, the eventual products - including nicknames and other ‘handles’- are another articulation of the various aspects of postcolonial lives for ethnic minorities. In this sense, anonymity is liberating and empowering; women find new expressive spaces and participants can voice their opinions and objections to events (at home - in the islands, and here, online) with relative impunity.

The empowering side to online debates such as these for cultures that have tightly ordered public communicative and representative hierarchies has not gone unnoticed in either Samoa or Tonga. On the one hand the interactive aspects of internet communications allows such societies to get away from “traditional hangovers” by allowing “people to find themselves as individuals” in nominally ‘communal’ societies (Helu 1999: interview). On the other hand, local leaderships in the islands and abroad can exert direct pressure on the online leaderships when the discussions are seen as cutting too close to the bone. Others are more circumspect as they note that there is “no free lunch” with regard to the “psycho-social satisfaction” of ICTs given the transnational political economic interests that “control it ultimately” (Okusi Māhina 1999: interview).

Another aspect is how playfulness and new forms of creative identity-making are also

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96 Unlike THE DAILY PLANET poster who challenged NEW KID, the poster, Concerned, elsewhere could not get her/his point of view conceded to despite providing nearly a third of the total posts in a thread that was 65 posts long, entitled WILL DELETE PERSONAL and UNRELATED THREADS - PC, does that mean that all posts which don't reflect the Kamehameha Roundtable will be erased. Check yourselves (PC) because this is the Kamehameha (Hawaiian) Roundtable and not "Samoan" Roundtable thread (06/01/00, KR, no longer on server).

97 Posters often compare online to how one (does) behave elsewhere - at home, in the village or on formal occasions; “The Cafe is much like a family owned store back home in the islands......” (Teine o le Spring, 25/04/99 in Time for Spring Cleaning? Thread, Polycafe, no longer on server)

98 I second the motion, in reply to Enough is Enough, Dear Polycafe: Time for spring cleaning?, Polycafe, no longer on server).

99 As opposed to the Tongan History Association Discussion forum, for instance.

100 This is especially the case in the Live Chat or more social sub-sites. See Morton (1999).

101 On this, Helen Morton in her analysis of the use of real versus nick names in the earlier years of the Kava bowl noted that between 1996 and 1998, there have been “some interesting shifts over time in the naming choices of KB participants. Most obvious is the shift away from real names towards .. nicks and descriptive names [and] the appearance of more names that play with language.” (1998:15). She also notes that the positive male-female ratio in 1996 had reversed by 1998 (her sample showed 56% of the real names to be female).
emerging more and more, either in situ or as a thread progresses. This underscores Morton's point about how "naming on the KB is primarily relational and responsive rather than based on individual considerations" (1998a:19). Thus seeing the same person "using a variety of names, according to the context of the messages" (ibid) indicates rather different concerns and motivations than is generally believed as a result of research into fantasy (MUDS et al) based online groups. In short, western concerns about online 'anonymity' or dissimulation are not a priori for what identity (and its formation) is, or is not, in an internet/www context, especially a postcolonial diasporic one.

So, anonymity in lieu of - or together with - real names, multiple email addresses ('addies') are not only tactical-strategic decisions but personal-political choices. When used well, and as participants get more skillful in manipulating the messaging software, they also interact with other sorts of textual - communicative - creativity; name lines and pseudo/multiple email addresses also give scope for sub-textual references whilst allowing protection as well as nuance in more sensitive discussions. As mentioned earlier, power and influence can also be brought to bear on the forum leaderships in their capacity as (online)community representatives, especially when socially or politically sensitive subjects are broached. As I have said elsewhere, this anonymity is, much of the time, playful and fairly transparent.

It does get serious though when the personal and political stakes are raised, as in the case of ad hominem threads and more general recent crises of representation (Axis Four). In this respect, the third axis points to how uses and abuses of the "guise of anonymity" both temper and enhance the power of exclusionary practices. Despite the declared ideals of inclusiveness there are limits. It is a delicate balancing act between an open-door policy to all-comers, the fostering of "relative security from disclosure of one's true identity" (Phil Tupia, 27/03/00) when creating new communicative spaces and existing power hierarchies amongst the various tightly knit, albeit dispersed, Polynesian communities.

In 1996 I created this forum [KR] for Polycafe patrons (regardless of race) to come together and discuss 'just' the issues that affect us as individuals knowing such an effect will certainly impact the 'community'. Some of you may recall how I would initiate new discussions every week, posting 4-5 new topics once a week. That lasted for several months before the forum itself took on a life of its own as it CONTINUES TO DO SO TODAY .... (Al Aiono, 13/01/00)

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102 Sandy has this to say about his personal posting policy and thus himself (versus when he is an official KBAdmin poster).

Though I have occasionally used the Tongan translation of my name in the past, it is my policy to post personal opinions and observations under my own name. I do not apologise for being a palangi, nor do I feel my comments vis-à-vis KB are any less significant because I am not Tongan." (27/03/00)

I am Who I Am, in reply to Agreed, But I think a nom de plume would assist your post, sandy, Supporter of True Polynesian Values in re: Kava Bowl thread, at http://pacificforum.com/kavabowl/kc/messages/56060.html.

103 Thereby allowing "Tongans on the KB to represent themselves, in all their diversity, challenging stereotypes and resisting the typically limited representations of them, for example in their "traditional" dancing at multicultural festivals" (Morton 1998a:21). It is fairly safe to say that this also applies to the Samoans - and others in the KB and Polycafe.

104 See Chapter Six. Threads dealing with homo/sexuality, domestic violence and local scandals are in this category as well. Here the dominant role of the Pacific Island churches in the Islands and diaspora in regulating behaviours and social mores, and the relative lack of Press Freedom throughout the Pacific Islands are both being directly challenged by these online practices. Its bears repeating that three of the founders of these forums (Taholo Kami, Alopai Latukefu, Al Aiono) come from strong church-based families. In the case of the first two, their fathers were missionaries in Papua New Guinea.

105 "call patrons/visitors of the Polycafe, regardless of race, will always be served" (Al Aiono, 13/01/00 , in reply to Thank you Pua for enlightening me, KR, no longer on server)

106 THE DETERIORATION OF THE KAVABOWL, in reply to Here's my point of view (Fellow KB'er, 27/03/00) in re: Kava Bowl thread, at http://pacificforum.com/kavabowl/kc/messages/56053.html.

107 in reply to concerned, THANK YOU PUA FOR ENLIGHTENING ME. And if you miss Pua's message, here it is again. ... thread (KR, no longer on server)
On the one hand, there is the general spirit of these sites coupled with their open, public structures where, despite ambivalence on the part of participants and leaderships, anonymity is celebrated and, on the other, there are the countering forces of 'abuse' of the very same - however interpreted. This, again, is what these debates are about. Basically:

... anonymity was to protect one's privacy and to foster open and RESPECTFUL discussion. It was not to allow someone to personally attack and abuse others with immunity. It is completely within our cultural mores to exchanges views and opinions. However, such an exchange was always within the context of respect to one another. Unfortunately, too many of our newer readers do not understand that... Let us all try to teach those who need teaching that free speech is NOT obscenity and gossip. Free Speech is exchange of views and opinions under the underlying context of respect and love for each other, for our culture, and for our island Kingdom [Tonga] that is so far away from many of us. (Phil Tukia, 27/03/00)

Permissive features of online communications such as these and contestations around them trace a fracture line that can open up within these groups when established norms online are perceived to be under threat by conscious or unwitting counter-practices. The intense discussion thread that opened this chapter is one of the few - of this length - that addressed the moral economies directly. In the KR there have also been several substantial auto-critiques of late. A sign of online maturity, increasing self-awareness and demographic complexity, as much as anything else. However, for the online guardians, these developments - the ad hominem messages and other questionable ‘antics’ that piggy-back on them - have far-reaching representational and ethical implications:

Just because other "civilized' places are commonly defaced by graffiti is no reason that KB should stoop to the same level. The Kava Bowl was intended as a venue of higher principles and objectives, not the least was to celebrate the dignity of Polynesian cultures ... something that has been completely lost of late. ... it is [not] only Tongans who abuse this place, but it is Tongans who will reap the bad rap as a result since this is a Tongan site, just as PC [Polycafe] and KR [Kamehameha Roundtable] are Samoan sites frequented by those from other cultures. so, it behooves us all, Tongan and non-Tongan alike, to set an example in our posts ..... This attitude of it's a public forum and I can post what I want is pure garbage.... (Sandy Macintosh, 27/03/00)

Axis Four: Representing the Pacific Islands Online

All this brings us through to the fourth and final axis; the articulation of concerns about how the Pacific Islands - Polynesia (Tonga and Samoa in particular) - are (to be) represented on the internet/www for a potentially 'global' audience. Online moral economies, and the gender-power relations they designate are not straightforward for those who have lived abroad most of their lives.

I was born and raised in America. I have never in my life, at least not yet, been to Tonga (FELLOW KBER, 27/03/00)

...if I have offended anyone please forgive me... My posts and feedback is for everyone to read be you black, white, yellow, or brown, it is from my heart and although it is not a perfect one, I do want to correct my mistakes .....Do know that [i have learned so much from all of you. With every fiber in my body i wish to thank you all for your posts

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be it a little harsh or pleasing i love it all and glean from them what is best for me and my family and friends. (Salelava, 1/06/99) 111

In short, aggressive behaviour towards others, 'slander' and swearing have far broader repercussions in an internet/www context. Social mores become less clear when participants do not all concur with a given cultural 'set' (see Morton 1996). The threads of this last axis link the three other ones to processes of 'globalisation' (indeed this theme is re-echoed all the way through the other discussions as well). They acknowledge that the internet/www as a wide-open space for all to see what is going on, to the issues of scale and effect. They intersect directly with the many discussions on what constitutes post-colonial and/or diasporic identity for young Tongans and Samoans today (Chapter Five and Seven). The threads forming this fourth axis are reminders that navel-gazing of this sort is a very public act as participants are well aware of the (cyber)spatial dimensions to their own prognostications and internal struggles. These exchanges make explicit the moral economies delimiting these online traversals and also link them to the practice of everyday life both online and elsewhere. Moreover, these broader implications are spoken of in ethical terms (Kolko et al 2000) as these groups look at the relationship between their online interactions and the local-global symbolic and material dimensions of postcolonial diasporic everyday life. To paraphrase one prominent Pacific Island intellectual:

There are two forces working against the 'traditional polity' [in Tonga at least] in its entirety - international business and modern technology..... We have to be on top of these two things and control them. (Helu 1999: interview)

This is a complex interplay as arguments about online propriety, literary standards, and acceptable discussion content are compared to various cultural practices on the ground (see Chapter Seven). Neither are the latter just assumed however. They can be contested on their own merits precisely at the moment they are held up as examples for appropriate behaviour online - in cyberspace. Feelings run high because these participants are aware of the politics of representation at stake for these online scenarios, in diaspora and 'back in the islands' (see Chapter Six). Censorship versus Free Speech. Flaming versus rational argument, swearing or 'rap' idioms versus literary genres and strict observations of spelling carry a far greater burden of responsibility when occurring as contemporary and diasporic (cyber)spatial practices. The forums' respective leaderships take these pressures seriously as they too are conscious of the uneven effects of global market forces on the Pacific Islands, the socio-economic exclusion experienced by diasporic communities and the potentials of ICT's for both enabling and exacerbating these pressures 112.

This axis then is formed by this sort of particularly self-aware, outward-looking threads. They are addressed by one to the many, bringing us back full circle to the first axis as both participants and leaderships are implicated. The interweaving operational criteria - their various renditions and contentions - are as well. All these nuances are well represented and expressed in the re: Kava Bowl thread cited at the outset of this chapter; Sandy addresses the whole 'community' as a participant and as a moderator and the community duly responds. Of course, the three other axes also deal with, from different points of departure to be sure, the 'material manifestations' and implications of online communicative practices, particularly in terms of how these interact with overlapping 'beliefs, practices and disciplinary regimes' (Peterson 1998: op cit) both within and beyond the immediate environs of internet/www. But those around the fourth axis are strategically posted for this reason by a disenchanted regular who has something to point out to newer, yet-to-be-disciplined members 113, with an eye on (non)Polynesian viewers who are looking on. What is being discussed more explicitly are the internal and

111 in reply to X, Scratched Record Player thread, KR, no longer on server.
112 Taholo Kami, ' Alop i Latukefu and Al Aiono all see ICT's in one way or another as one way for the small island nations of the South Pacific to deal with 'globalisation' and its multifarious impacts on their own terms. Kami wants to "help shape identity" and to instil "positive stereotypes" for "troublemakers" (2001: interview).
113 The Polycafe began in early 2000 an email-based online magazine as an extension of its various forums. iMana 2000/1 has as one of its feature stories, "Dealing with the Haters (Hataz)". Here not only are the Ground Rules summarised but some advice is offered for those who are targets.
external politics of representation for groups that are well aware of the ‘global’ context in which they are speaking, living and writing.

There was a time I frequented KB to review and interact with others...to instigate controversy and provoke thought for discussion. However, I have observed the same change in the culture of dialogue that presently plague the walls of KB. I feel I represent past patrons that see the garbage, and leave because there’s nothing worth the time.... But are you really surprised? Web sites are now competing for exposure and attraction, KB included, even if the service is nothing more than a message-board and chat-room. .. Sandy, responsibilities reside on both sides of the fence. The benefits of KB are boundless, but I am certain more can be done than chastising a general audience. (Makavili, 27/03/00) 114

On this fourth axis, the initial posts develop - and feed into - the other three by looking beyond the confines of these forums, as well as the internet/www itself. Here the politics of representation at stake are about effects, the ramifications of behaviour, policy, or content. First, with respect to racial stereotyping in general and second in terms of the concomitant need to present another more constructive face to a hostile world (Chapter Seven). As noted in an early appeal of this sort:

When we fight among ourselves we make a fool of Polynesians especially we Samoans in the eyes of the world .... every battle and war of words do not go unnoticed; and yes, the give a negative impression of this forum and all of us that come in here .... (New Kid, 30/01/99) 115

Two years later, this concern with in-fighting and ‘unruliness’ is couched in terms of how endemic racism experienced by many Pacific Island communities in their new homeland itself needs new approaches (see Chapter Seven).

There is a growing number of people who [write] with chips on their shoulder particularly how our race has been treated by other races. Now you may disagree and that’s fine ... I wouldn’t call it Reverse racism ... however [it] is sad as we harbour .... Resentment towards the white people....I think the stagnant nature of our thinking [that] reflects our resentments we have with the white people has been passed on generationally and we just keep passing them on to our children and their children’s children. One .. way of dealing with this is to try and expect the unexpected and try to build our confidence and build some cultural esteem (if there is such a thing). Not reacting to it, because we feel the only way to get back at them is to join them and beat then at their game.. (X, 31/05/99) 116

The follow-ups to the latter post are long, abstract, and thoughtful and show where online gender-power struggles have offline permutations of self/group identity formation, as we have already seen. Reflection has taken the place of quick-fire reactions as the intellectual and emotional complexities of diasporic life are inspected. For those living beyond the Pacific Islands the politics of race/ethnicity is an ever-present issue when living in the USA, Australia, New Zealand (Chapter Seven). For some commentators, this is in stark contrast to the relatively homogeneous societies in the islands, Tonga particularly 117. In diasporic contexts this relative

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114 in reply to re: Kavabowl, initial post, Sandy Macintosh, at http://pacificforum.com/kavabowl/kc/messages/56113
115 initial post, Let's Agree to Disagree; But not agree for an All -Out Brawl!“, KR, no longer on server.
117 This is related to the arrival of Chinese immigrants who have settled and 'set up shop' in mainly Nuku'alofa. Some very long, and difficult threads grew out of the intersection of this arrival of another cultural group in the Kingdom and how it related to the 'sale of passports' affair in which Tongan citizenship was granted to Chinese immigrants (Swaney 1994) by the Tongan government. These threads, with titles such as Chinese Tongans? Who are they? Why Tonga? (Soakai, 1/02/99, initial post, KB, at http://pacificforum.com/kavabowl/kc/messages/4050.html), or ON A POSITIVE NOTE . WHAT CAN WE
homogeneity is recalibrated, under pressure, in places where
races are physically marked. For racism was never important in our part of the world
[the Pacific Islands] before contact.” (Helu, 1999; interview).

Private-personal concerns about whether cultural and political ‘identity’ is static,
flexible, physically marked or nation-state defined (Chapters Six and Seven) become articulated
as a public stance in these threads. At the same time, the ground-rules for online debates on
open, free-for-all forums intersect with ethical and political issues for minority groups dealing
with daily racism. For instance:

Racism, I agree is detrimental in whatever form it comes. Yet. Because I don’t agree
with standards set by a predominantly whitewashed academia. Doesn’t mean that I hate
the white man......I may be a notch disadvantaged because of gender in this male world
but I am not going to roll over and play dead for anyone. Furthermore, I certainly don’t
Teach my little one to hate indiscriminately......Yet, I caution that you really need to take
some time out and take the gist of the post with a proverbial grain of salt. What you
construct as something of ‘chip’ or ‘reverse racism’ could really be only a clear,
divergent perspective from the status quo. (Why, Why HoneyChile, 1/06/99)

I guess each of us spins, in the intimate recesses of our own psyche, a complex web of
inconsistent attitudes, values and beliefs......After all, the world is not place where social,
cultural, economic or technological changes move in straight lines, or in consistent
patterns. The world is a place where contradictory influences produce unpredictable
outcomes. I should lighten up... (X, 01/06/99)

...Tolerance was something I HAD to nurture because everything I stand for is one
huge bundle of contradictions... (., 1/06/99)

This thread then enters an autobiographical phase between X, and ..., where generational
differences in upbringing and/or Pacific Islands and modern-day mores, feminist politics and the
“extraordinary challenges posed by trying to maintain the momentum of life in fractured or
blended families” (X, it all seems so serious! in above thread) are all discussed. The focus is on
younger generations of diasporic women - whether themselves or others. From the point of view
of the argument that gender-power relations and ethnicity - the politics of identity formation in a
transnational context - are inextricably linked, the latter strands of this thread bear eloquent
witness.

The above reflections are also interwoven with explicit concerns about the quality and
future direction of the forums in themselves as an empowering medium, communicative
spaces/places for younger generations living on the margins in Western societies if not for
individual participants who face racial discrimination, structural exclusions, on a daily basis. In
this respect it is an empowering personal politics of self-representation (in both ethnic-racial and
gender terms) that is at stake when participants become ‘haters’ 121. As X, states in her initial
post:

I consider that most people who write in this lounge in one way or another have
concerns and interests about our Polynesian people. It is also a forum where people try

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118 in reply to X, The Kamehameha Lounge...The Scratched Record Player, KR, no longer on server
119 learning to live with ambiguity, in reply to above, KR, no longer on server.
120 Now that the straws are out of our hair, in reply to above, KR, no longer on server.
121 Haters - or Hataz - now a generic term in these groups for the ad hominem threads and their posters.
out their new found freedom to speak their minds and to be heard...However, we sound sometimes like a bunch of spoilt children who write with ships [sic] on their shoulders. It is sad as we harbour .. resentment towards white people...continually fall back on unproductive ideas and repetitive fundamentalism in an attempt to restore order..... I see our thinking has not changed, particularly in the past year that I have frequented this lounge. We regurgitate the same topics and have the same arguments over and over again. I understand that many different people come here at different stages of the year ...I am in no way trying to disrespect those who come in here and write what's on their minds ...[but]...we have reached a Plateau and our thinking appears to be stagnant right now. I wonder why? (X, 31/05/99) 122

By 2000 in both the Kava Bowl and the Polynesian Cafe, and with increasing intensity, the above passing remarks have become a central concern. The standing and image of the community - here and at large - are seen to be compromised as internal order becomes more difficult to maintain. In short, the limits of Free Speech vis-a-vis ‘South Pacific traditions' not only needs reinforcement, as opposed to simply reiteration, but also re-codifying for a space in which “the world is watching every move we make" (Troubled Mum, 27/03/00)

All Sandy and other admins are asking is that we try to be a little more decent as it is our identity that is projected here. Sandy is concerned for the content as well as the image, and you should too. (Langimalie'27/03/00, emphasis added) 124

.. I know, if you live in the United States (I cannot comment for NZ, Australia or UK), I am almost positive that your immediate reaction is Freedom of Speech; after all, you are correct - that is our constitution ... However .... What I saw in the Kava Bowl [recently was] not positive or constructive at all; instead it was childish! Let me remind you that this is not to change your style of posting, but to reiterate positive posting for a better tomorrow for our Tongan children ... to promote positiveness within our Tongan community (Ken, 38/03/00, emphasis added) 125

These disputes over the (online) politics of representation, and the cultural-moral norms entailed therein are further compounded by direct challenges from those posting to the leaderships' mandate to manoeuvre between their own Ground Rules and practicalities on the one hand, and the (negotiable) limits of Freedom of Speech and permissiveness in cyberspace on the other hand:

Hey, I just wanted to find out why they put a Hawaiian name on this Roundtable when Samoans are the only ones using it. Hawaiians see the ‘name', but then find nothing in this forum having to deal with any Hawaiian style messages. Is it fair to have a Hawaiian name on this Lounge when it doesn’t cater to any Hawaiians?.. (Concerned, 11/01/00) 126

... And as for myself being a proud Maori from New Zealand ... some people need to get off their high horse and recognise that US Polynesians need to stick together and love one another, regardless of what nationality you be (Hawaiian, Tongan, Samoan, Tokelauan, Rarotonga, Maori). (Serena, 26/01/00) 127

125 Consequences of Our Actions ...Is It Worth It?, in reply to re: Kava Bowl at http://pacificforum.com/kavabowl/kc/messages/53137.html
126 in reply to re: Relax and stay cool - its only a name posted by observer, Polycafe, no longer on server.
127 in reply RE: Concerned: Cool Down!!! Stop trippen!!! Stop Hating on your fellow Polynesian Brothers and Sisters. Not only Samoans post here, but Tongans as well. Kamehameha is a Polynesian King of Hawai'i!!! Aight then..., Sione, initial post, KR, no longer on server. Here, the long message heading (posted in capitals so also breaking a second ground rule) underscores the point as well.
Along the way, not only is the ‘Who/What are you’ criterion no longer self-explanatory in terms of identification or participation in these groups being fixed as ‘Polynesian’ and/or ‘Pacific Island’ per se (Chapter Seven), but the tension between expressing opinions, committing ‘slander’, the rights and wrongs of passive or active exclusion, has also become grist to the mill (whether tongue-in-cheek or not):

But if you (Polycafe) make a forum like this and call it Kamehameha Roundtable, don’t you think that the posts should be more focused on Hawaiian style issues and comments, if not, why call it the ‘Kamehameha Roundtable’ and not the Polynesian Roundtable’….OK, who is this Kamehameha Roundtable forum aimed towards? (concerned, 11/01/00) 128

The answer lies in everyday practice. It is perceived and experienced as relationships and is expressed on the computer screen.

**Conclusion**

It is through all four of these axes of self-reflection that online moral economies - rules, norms and ethics - can be charted. This is not forgetting their presence and operation in other discussions. Such robust re-articulations (as opposed to contingent sub-threads or spasmodic attempts in the larger context of other sorts of discussions) of these ongoing moral economies are relatively few and far between. Such consciously reflective posts do not occur, let alone crystallise, that often. It also bears mentioning again that how a thread develops, who gets involved in the discussion, what is actually being said on various levels and what it all signifies, does not flow immediately from the initial post. The content weaves in and out of all the axes and vice versa, engages all the criteria at the heart of these, and also refers to other issues and other arguments or relationships as well. As always, neither the initial post nor the thread it weaves is a transparent vessel for the initial intentions of the posters. The process - of an unfurling discussion - and the respective interrelationships decide how the thread develops, themes crystallise and take off, or an initial post remains unanswered. Moreover, provocation and strong stances are part and parcel of getting (these) discussion threads off the ground 129.

These moral economies not only permeate other discussions but they also encapsulate the broader conceptual and practical territory at stake. At the same time, they trace the structural gender-power relations that are at work in an online scenario. In so doing, they also present a politics of representation in its most basic articulation; who for, by whom and for what purpose? How they do so reveals some of the mechanisms of gender-power relations (see Gill & Law 1988:73 passim) that come into play in the practice of everyday life online. These include deletion of messages/software filters, scolding, protesting, affirming, moulding, conforming, withdrawal and, ultimately, silencing. The thing to remember is that these are open-ended, relational processes that carry their own postcolonial diasporic understandings of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ behaviour / online production. In turn, whilst they are occurring in new(er) public (cyber) spaces, they are also speaking to older political economic histories and sociocultural orders as seen by postcolonial diasporas who are learning and living these ‘second-hand’ or even ‘third-hand’ as some participants admit. In so doing, the practice of everyday life online becomes both locus and expressive space for the complexities of struggles for control and ownership of the highways and byways of cyberspace. So, also do the rules, norms and ethical assumptions - and sociocultural underpinnings - with which these are to be navigated.

128 *re: who is to judge? Not me.. Think and not judge for yourself*, in reply to you trippin big time!, who are you to judge? You ain’t no Queen Liliuokalani either!!…, KR, no longer on server.
