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Deutscher Titel

**Die Macht der Artefakte. Tanzkleidung und -schmuck auf Santa Cruz, Salomonen**

Englischer Titel

**The Power of the Artefacts. Dancewear and Adornment on Santa Cruz, Solomon Islands**

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## Contents

**1 Introduction**
1.1 Subject and Research Question
1.2 Theoretical Framework
1.3 Methodical Approach
1.4 Access to the Field: Travel Guide, Museum Anthropologist and 'White Man'
1.5 Structure of the Dissertation
**2 Santa Cruz – Histories and Their Consequences**
**3 Dancewear and Adornment as *kastom* Configurations**
3.1 Use of the Term *kastom* on Ndendö
3.2 Historical Reports about *kastom* Artefacts and Dances
3.3 Contemporary Occasions for *nelo* Dances
3.4 Interim Conclusion
**4 'Material Histories' of Dancewear and Adornment**
4.1 Historical Descriptions and Illustrations
4.2 Four Museum Collections from the 19th and 20th Centuries
4.3 Materiality of the Artefacts
4.4 Interim Conclusion

**5 Agency of Artefacts in Actor Networks**
5.1 From the '*nelo* Dance' to '*nelo* Dancers' – Actor Networks and their Genesis
5.2 Dancewear and Adornment – Entities of the '*nelo* Dancers' Actor Networks
5.3 The Effects of Dancewear and Adornment in the '*nelo* Dance' Actor Network
5.4 Interim Conclusion
**6 Dancewear and Adornment and their Manufacturers**
6.1 *Tema* and John Namiade
6.2 *Nelo* and Philipp Malu
6.3 *Lepanesa* and Selwyn Balu
6.4 Tapa and Ena Yamöli & Steven Mdewöt
6.5 *Nelo*- Dancewear and The Graciosa Bay Nelo Association (GBNA)
6.6 'Art Nexus' – Artefacts as Intentions
6.7 Interim Conclusion
**7 Summary and Conclusions**
**8 Index of Sources**
**9 Appendix – Index of the Artefacts in the Museums' Collections**

## Abstract

For several years now, an area of anthropological research under the umbrella of 'Material Culture Studies' has increasingly addressed the understanding of things. Questions under investigation include how relationships between people and things are represented, how things influence human actions, and whether they possess agency, in the sense of a power to act and their effects, and how they do not appear (only) as objects but (rather) as subjects. In this context, various authors in social and cultural anthropology speak of a 'Material Turn' or 'Material Return'.

Based on anthropological fieldwork, the dissertation takes up these fundamental questions and contributes to the discussions about the understanding of things. With the aid of concrete artefacts – the clothing and adornment of a dance on Santa Cruz in the Solomon Islands – it will be discussed in which various ways they appear, how they enter into relationships with people and what they mediate and effectuate. Discussions with local actors allowed for a reconstruction of the histories of these artefacts over the past 50 years; this in turn fulfilled a desideratum in the research of this region and reveals a renaissance also in this part of Melanesia of traditional expressions and practices.

During fieldwork it was shown that, as elementary components, the examined artefacts created manifold configurations with people and other entities, especially for the transformation of various forms of the rhetoric of *kastom* (debates about socio-cosmic affiliations, historical continuity, traditions, and their changes and discontinuities, as well as about ritual ceremonies). On diverse occasions the things imparted different contents, aroused feelings and atmospheres, or triggered ideas or memories, and always actively evoked something expected or unexpected. This is how the three guiding research questions came about, how the artefacts entered into what kind of relationships with people, why they were able to do this and what arenas of agency this concretely yielded for particular people or groups. With the help of two currently influential methodical as well as theoretical approaches to an action-oriented understanding of artefacts/things, it will be possible to examine and represent the complex interrelations on Santa Cruz in relation to these guiding questions. Through description, the 'Actor-Network Theory' – with the significant theoretical contributions coming from Michel Callon, Bruno Latour and John Law – focuses on the genesis of hybrid actor networks and their ability to transform, seeing non-human entities as equal or equivalent to humans on account of their materiality/material essence, and thus provide the basis for answering the first two questions. On the other hand the 'Art-Nexus' model developed by Alfred Gell offers a theoretical access to answering the third question.

The analysis confirms the original assumption that the examined artefacts do have agency and can thus by all means be understood as subjects. The dancewear and adornments are seen as constituting actants and practices in various actor networks, and are a cultural form of knowledge and existence. They are substantially related to people, locate them in space and time, and show, speak and are socio-cosmic relationships. Particularly the return to natural materials for dancewear and adornment, or rather to their 'essences', epitomises a renaissance of just these socio-cosmic relationships, suppressed for a long time by colonisation and missionary work, and allow the subjects in the so-called objects to become visible again, nullifying the supposed contradiction and showing "the power of artefacts".

## Key Words

Santa Cruz, Solomon Islands, Fieldwork, Artefacts, Dancewear and Adornment, Actor-Network Theory, Agency, *kastom*, Tradition, Revitalisation, Museum, Material Turn