

## RESEARCH NOTE

# Viewing the non-governmental organisation Pazifik Netzwerk e.V. from a postcolonial perspective

Annkathrin Löffler<sup>1</sup>, Mats Garbe<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Annkathrin Löffler, Wandsbeker Chaussee 7, 22089 Hamburg, Germany

<sup>2</sup> Mats Garbe, Pazifik Netzwerk e.V. c/o Pazifik-Informationsstelle, Hauptstraße 2, 91564 Neuendettelsau, Germany

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*Abstract:* This article embraces a postcolonial view for analyzing the German NGO Pazifik Netzwerk e.V. In doing so the authors shed light on the critical awareness that an intercultural NGO should have, and thereby contributes to the political commitment many associate with postcolonialism. The NGO Pazifik Netzwerk e.V. is engaged in making the political, economic, ecological and cultural situation of the Pacific island states known to a broad public in German-speaking countries. Firstly, relying on different postcolonial theorists, four criteria of postcolonialism are carved out that are then matched against the NGO. Overall, the analysis shows how the NGO does not sit outside power relations, sometimes contributing to inequality and stereotyping, even though it aims to do otherwise and tries to counteract this. While some cases affiliated with 'othering' can and should be avoided, others prove to be more difficult given the NGO's western foundation.

*Keywords:* postcolonialism, post-colonialism, postcolonial, Pacific, NGO

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Postcolonial studies are currently among the most influential of critical interventions because the colonial period had such major impacts on cultures, societies and economies. Postcolonialism is concerned with representations, power relations and exploitation, often focusing on discourses and their impact. This article examines the work of an intercultural NGO, Pazifik Netzwerk e.V, treating it as an 'object' of postcolonial inquiry. The conception and activities of the NGO will be appraised. Pazifik Netzwerk (translated: Pacific Network) is a German non-profit organisation that aims to make the political, economic, ecological and cultural situation of the Pacific island states known to a broad public in German-speaking countries. There are two main reasons for this analysis. Firstly, "[t]he development of richer theories of nonprofits must include a sustained focus on how communication and organizing are inextricably linked with power" (Dempsey, 2012) because NGOs are not outside of power-relations and have their own dynamics. And postcolonialism is specifically attentive towards intercultural power-relations. Secondly, postcolonialism provides a framework which can (help to) dig up constraints or disclosures of traditional Western analysis as postcolonialism is critical of "[...] conceptual mastery and complete understanding typically desired by Western inheritors rationality and scientific searches for knowledge [...]" (Hanchey, 2018). Additionally, the authors hope to shed light on the critical awareness that an intercultural NGO should have from a postcolonial point of view, and thereby contribute to the political commitment many associate with postcolonialism.

**Die Tagung findet statt im Luitpoldhaus**  
(Großer Saal im Gebäude der Stadtbibliothek)  
Gewerbemuseumsplatz 4  
90403 Nürnberg

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**Dauer der Tagung:**  
Samstag, 9.30 bis 18.00 Uhr

Eine gezielte Teilnahme an einzelnen Vorträgen ist möglich.

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**Teilnahmebeitrag:**  
3,- Euro (für Getränke und Kaffeepause)  
Für Studierende und Azubis ist die Tagung kostenlos.

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**Verantwortlich für die Tagung:**  
Julia Ratzmann, Pazifik-Gruppe Nürnberg  
Werner Feist, Naturhistorische Gesellschaft

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**Weitere Informationen:**  
Julia Ratzmann  
Tilsiter Straße 6 F  
90453 Nürnberg  
Tel: 0911 63 299 63  
E-Mail: [info@pazifik-infostelle.org](mailto:info@pazifik-infostelle.org)  
Internet: <http://www.Pazifik-Infostelle.org>

## „Alles nur Wilde?“

Über künstlerische und kulturelle Ausdrucksformen der Pazifikinsulaner



**18. November 2006**  
**im Luitpoldhaus, Nürnberg**




Figure 1: Celebration Publication "All just Savages": 20 years of Pazifik-Netzwerk, 1988-2008.

### Method and Approach

Methodologically, the article is a theoretical analysis utilizing some of the criteria of postcolonial theory to examine the principles and activities of one NGO. The aim is to offer a perspective on the Pazifik Netzwerk from the standpoint of postcolonial theory. Empirical data on Pazifik Netzwerk is mainly based on sources from the NGO itself, and therefore is limited in scope. Likewise, it should be kept in mind that the authors are German and one of them is part of the Pazifik Netzwerk.

For this postcolonial examination, firstly a brief understanding of postcolonial theory is provided, naming four criteria of postcolonialism. The understanding of postcolonialism and the criteria we use have been debated, but this is not addressed. These criteria are then matched against the NGO, but with a certain degree of generalization, enough to develop a reasonable base for carving out a postcolonial perspective on the Pazifik Netzwerk.

### Understanding of post-colonialism

Postcolonial theory is a collective

term for a large number of theories that deal with historical and current power and knowledge relations that are related to colonialism and its ongoing influence to this day (Mignolo, 2005). It therefore helps us understand the network of relationships between the past and the present. The concept of postcoloniality contains three dimensions: the description of historical situations after the end of colonialism; how knowledge is shaped by colonialism; and an analysis of the aftermath of colonial power - among the colonized and the colonizers (Messerschmidt, 2007). Postcoloniality is not limited to the period following the end of colonialism, but marks the persistence and presence of the colonial experience (Ha, 2004).

Edward Said's study "Orientalism" (Said, 1978) is often considered the founding document of postcolonial theory, concerned with the impact of representations on power relations between the colonized and colonizers, as well as their interdependence. Since then postcolonial theory has, on the one hand, combined a multiplicity of dissonant voices and perspectives, and on the other, it counteracts the stan-

dardization and unification of scientific theorizing (Ha, 2011). Nevertheless, four central concerns can be formulated, which will be the basis for the analysis of Pazifik Netzwerk:

1. The analysis of the construction of othering, meaning the personal and external representations of people and cultures in a historical process characterized by structural inequality (Amos and Parmar, 1984; Mohanty, 1997; Said, 1978). Othering describes the process of positively highlighting oneself or one's social image by branding another or something else negatively and classifying it as different, i.e. 'foreign', be it because of race, geographical location, ethical position, environment or ideology. In this differentiation lies potential hierarchical and stereotypical thinking to legitimate and improve one's own position (Spivak, 1985).

2. The study of power relations, exploitation and hierarchies stabilized by cultural representation and political control (Bhabha, 1994; Hooks, 1989; Spivak, 1988, 1994). Within postcolonial theory, the importation of Western knowledge into the former colonies, and its significance, is considered. Beyond that, the interdependence of knowledge production and imperialism as well as the destruction of pre-colonial knowledge are problematized (Conrad, 2008).

3. The analysis of colonization as a violent process of subject constitution, that creates the 'domesticated other' through pedagogical and performative practices (Hooks, 1994; 2003; 2010). For example, development assistance and charitable acts conceal economic and geopolitical interests. Here, within the framework of a Eurocentric epistemology based on the modernization approach of development theory, the origins of the wealth of the countries of the 'First World' are detached from the conditions of colonialism and instead linked to discourses of progress and rationality, as products of European enlightenment. 'Those' people, following 'our' example, experience 'development' (Kapoor, 2008).

4. The transformation of colonial concepts that construct the colonial subject as an object incapable of action into (self-)empowering action concepts (Bhabha, 1994; Hooks, 1989).

Furthermore, it should be noted that many postcolonial authors consider their theoretical view is also a political commitment, and they demand practical interventions and show commitment to overturning colonial language, discourses and hierarchies.

## Introduction of Pazifik Netzwerk

Pazifik Netzwerk is a German non-profit organization which was founded in 1988 and consists of Pacific groups joining forces from all over Germany. It is secular and politically independent. The Pacific groups of which the Pazifik Netzwerk consists are mainly groups of German and Austrian citizens with some Pacific Islanders migrants among them. The groups operate independently, engaging in different activities from political and educational to cultural and leisure focused.

It has set itself the task of making the political, economic, ecological and cultural situation of the Pacific island states known to a broad public in German-speaking countries. It supports non-governmental organizations in Europe and Oceania to promote a nuclear-free and independent Pacific. Promoting international understanding and respect is an important part of its work, along with supporting the right to self-determination of the peoples of Oceania, and counteracting environmental degradation and its impact on the Pacific Islands (Pazifik Netzwerk e.V., 2019a).

The organisation's main foci are: Nuclear tests and their consequences, climate change and sea level rise, rapacious mining, conflict management and peacebuilding, the endangerment of biodiversity, clearcutting of forests, and the sinking and burning of industrial and nuclear waste (op. cit., 2019a).

## Pazifik Netzwerk and Othering

We begin with the first characterization of a postcolonial view above, comparing it with Pazifik Netzwerk's work.

The organization clearly addresses the traditional myths of a Pacific paradise and barbaric savages, as well as newer external representations of Pacific peoples as underdeveloped, poor, small, isolated and insignificant. In the mission statement: "It is at the heart of the Pacific Network's work to contribute to the deconstruction

of biased perceptions and to promote a more realistic and comprehensive view, through vivid connections to this area of the world and through public outreach" (Struck-Garbe and Garbe, 2008).

An example of work relating to this is the conference "Alles nur Wilde" (all just savages) which aims at countering the stereotypical views of savage and barbaric Pacific islanders (Fig. 1) (Pazifik Netzwerk e.V., 2019b).

However, the Pazifik Netzwerk does not always make counteracting these prejudices its primary objective. It sometimes uses stereotypes to make its activities catchy and to reach a less critically aware audience. For example, the romanticized representation of a Pacific paradise is used for an advertisement stating "Westpapua – zerstörtes Paradies" (Westpapua – destroyed paradise) (Fig. 2) (Pazifik Netzwerk e.V., 1994; Kleiner, 2003). Other images used include include women dancing on Pacific beaches, and Tahiti music and hula dancing. Also, Pazifik Netzwerk does this while being part of structural inequality as a German organization, dominated by German citizens in contrast to the Pacific Islanders and hence, responsible for the curation and display of 'othering' imagery. Admittedly, this is an advertisement trying to *disclose* external representations and therefore fighting the othering process. Perhaps the cause therefore justifies the means. Nevertheless, it still has to be acknowledged that this type of imagery of 'wildness' contributes to external representation.

## Pazifik Netzwerk, Power Relations and Exploitation

The second aspect of a postcolonial view is more concerned with the perpetuation of power inequalities. Pazifik Netzwerk fights nuclear testing in the Pacific, clarifying its consequences, and it strongly opposes the USA's and France's continued exploitation of the Pacific Islands. Exploitation was supported by cultural representations and political influence and control, which Pazifik Netzwerk tries to counteract. The misconception that Pacific nations are small, isolated and insignificant was a big contributor to the efforts of the hegemonic powers to test nuclear weapons in the Pacific. For example, Henry Kissinger, US National Security Advisor 1969, said:

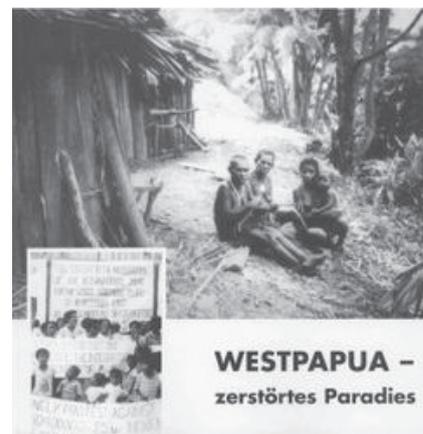


Figure 2: West Papua: destroyed paradise.

"There are only 90,000 people out there. Who gives a damn?" (Henry Kissinger, cited in Pazifik Netzwerk, 2011). The Network exposes this quotation (Pazifik Netzwerk, 2011; Göbel 2007). An activity relating to this is "Kein Bravo für Bikini – 50 Jahre Atombombentests im Pazifik" (No bravo for Bikini – 50 years of nuclear testing in the Pacific) (Fig. 3) (Pazifik Netzwerk, 2011). This is just one of several cases where the Network challenges exploitative assertions of hegemonic power.

However, there are further complexities. Consider the concept of "giving a voice" that is significant in representations of the Pacific. Every time the Pazifik Netzwerk publicizes the Pacific Islanders, it speaks for them. This is partly because there are hardly any Pacific Islanders active in German speaking media. So, it is a Western organization that takes their place. Even if Pazifik Netzwerk goals may be about equality and justice, they are still a German organization trying to give a voice to Pacific islanders. The NGO only has a few Pacific Islander members, and it has difficulties involving them in campaigns and activities. From a postcolonial perspective, more change is needed, or at least 'owning' and making the issue of inequality transparent. As Varela and Dhavan wrote, the critical intervention must not end at national borders and an analysis that operates with hegemonic categories should at least demonstrate deconstructive vigilance. Political strategies and tactics require the most precise analyses possible of historical social inequalities and lack of freedom. These must at the same time be context-specific, and provide opportunities for political resistance (Varela and Dhavan, 2015).

Source: <http://www.pazifik-infostelle.org/publikationen/39883.html>

# Kein Bravo für Bikini



## 50 Jahre Atombombentests im Pazifik

Zwischen dem ersten Test „Able“ der USA am 1. Juli 1946 in der Lagune des Bikini-Atolls und dem letzten französischen Test am 27. Januar 1996 auf Fangataufa fanden im pazifischen Ozean über 300 Atomversuche statt.

Inseln und Menschen wurden dem Machtkalkül der Atom-mächte untergeordnet.



Pazifik  
NETZWERK

[www.pazifik-netzwerk.org](http://www.pazifik-netzwerk.org)  
[www.pazifik-infostelle.org](http://www.pazifik-infostelle.org)

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Konzept und Erstellung von Mitgliedern des Pazifik-Netzwerkes e.V.: Ortrun Allius, Katja Göbel, Maja Messner, Beatrix Mettler-Frercks, Angelika Regel, Ingrid Schilsky  
Grafik und Layout: Heiko Schiefer, Mediendesign

Figure 3: Exhibition poster of the touring exhibition "No bravo for Bikini: 50 years of nuclear testing in the Pacific".

### Pazifik Netzwerk and Subject Constitution

The analysis of colonization as a violent process of subject constitution that creates the 'domesticated other' focusses on the recasting of subject identities.

Pazifik Netzwerk thematizes the consequences of climate change and how Pacific people are affected by

it. This comes with some degree of victimizing and dramatization. In Western media there has been a tendency to portray the Pacific islanders as the first "climate change victims". Some people in the Pacific have adopted this persona and view themselves as victims, while others like "The Pacific Climate Warriors" say: "We are not drowning we are fighting" (350.org

Pacific, 2015). As with many other issues, Pazifik Netzwerk is aware of problematic victimization and tries to counteract it. Nevertheless, it deploys this victimization and dramatization in its publicity. An example is the touring exhibition "Landunter im Pazifik! Die Folgen des globalen Klimawandels für die Pazifischen Inselstaaten" (Sinking Pacific Islands! The consequences of global climate change for the Pacific Island States) (Pazifik Netzwerk e.V., 2008). Therefore, there is some problematic forcing of that representation onto Pacific islanders, although they do address this problem extensively elsewhere. Again, it could be argued it is a means to an end, but problematic.

### Pazifik Netzwerk and Transformation to Self-empowerment

Lastly, the postcolonial view transforms colonial representations of defeat and subjugation into (self)empowering action concepts. Pacific Netzwerk e.V. invites and supports Pacific islanders to speak for themselves and tries to provide them with opportunities in the German speaking media. Furthermore, it provides unbiased translations of news and information from the Pacific. An example would be the "Der pazifische Weg" (The Pacific Way) (Pazifik Netzwerk e.V., 1992). The term refers to the development of a transpacific identity in the 1990s, and it has been discussed by postcolonial thinkers. On the one hand it has been categorized as an important historical concept for decolonizing Pacific Islanders' identities (Mishra 2005) and on the other hand it is has been assessed as a discourse of the elite and thus seen critical for embracing indigenous hegemony (Lawson, 2010). Lawson (2010) points out:

"Although the Pacific Way acquired some 'postcolonial' characteristics in subsequent years, it was evidently anything but in its original formulation. Rather, it was a conservative discourse embracing notions of class hierarchy common to elites among both colonizers and colonized. This brings into question the status of the Pacific Way as a postcolonial discourse, and whether postcolonialism's 'anticoloniality' is in fact hospitable to indigenous hegemony, thus undermining its general anti-hegemonic credentials."

Another example is the support for contemporary modern art from Oceania. Through Pazifik Netzwerk, artists from the Pacific Islands have a platform for exhibiting in Europe. The artists decide themselves how they exhibit. Network assistance enables them to earn money without the usual market obligations, thereby providing opportunities for self-empowerment.

## Conclusion

The German NGO Pazifik Netzwerk was analysed from a postcolonial perspective, and we find, as in other cases, that non-profits like these are not removed from power relations, sometimes contributing to inequality.

The ambitions and actions of the organisation generally align with counteracting 'othering'. The organisation is aware and addresses prejudice in western representations of the Pacific islanders. Nonetheless, it can use stereotypes in representing islanders, thereby magnifying 'othering'. It opposes exploitation, as its fight against nuclear testing illustrates, but it is still a developed world organisation and involved in "giving a voice" to Pacific islanders, placing them in a dependent position.

The dramatization of sea level rise and the victimization of the people affected requires media exposure, but Pazifik Netzwerk has to capture the interest of the German speaking public, for which it sometimes relies on expressions affiliated with 'othering'. The Network's publicizing of contemporary Pacific art is valuable.

The cases in which Pazifik Netzwerk chooses to use stereotypical external representations to attract people and advertise should be avoided, in accordance with the postcolonial rewriting of intercultural relations. This is a moral issue. There is, however, no obvious way to avoid appropriating unequal and sometimes hierarchical imagery and representations, given its western funding base and audience. Greater reflexivity is needed, even though a lot of Pazifik Netzwerk's operations are successful at transcending colonial and unequal relationships with the Pacific.

This short article can only begin to expose these issues as topics for wider

debate and reflection. Nevertheless, a postcolonial lens is useful in scrutinizing the actions of any organization.

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**Corresponding Author: Annkathrin Löffler [a.loeffler@posteo.de] studied sociology at the University of Hamburg. Recently she started her master studies in educational sciences at the same university. Her focus is on non-violent communication, the theories of intersectionality and inclusion. Currently she conducts political seminars for youth groups with a focus on intercultural education.**