

Zeitschrift: Tsantsa : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Ethnologischen Gesellschaft
= revue de la Société suisse d'ethnologie = rivista della Società svizzera
d'etnologia

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Ethnologische Gesellschaft

Band: 16 (2011)

Artikel: Processes of becoming : transcultural socialization and childhood
among the Wampar

Autor: Bacalzo Schwörer, Doris

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1007270>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

Download PDF: 18.02.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

PROCESSES OF BECOMING

TRANSCULTURAL SOCIALIZATION AND CHILDHOOD AMONG THE WAMPAR

Keywords: Transcultural kinship · Socialization · Children · Identity · Papua New Guinea · Wampar

Doris Bacalzo Schwörer

«I consider myself a Wampar when I am in other places, like in my mother's place, but not in Dzifasing. I consider myself a Wampar ... through some kinds of dressing, [with] the way I walk, talk, laugh and play because I have been brought up here.»
Elissa¹

«I see myself as a Wampar because I was born in a village called Dzifasing [...] to a local Wampar woman who is married to someone from outside Wampar. [...] I grew up in Wampar and I speak the Wampar language fluently and understand [the] cultures and traditions of the Wampar very well. Therefore, I see myself as an original Wampar.»
Greg

INTRODUCTION

For children, like Elissa and Greg, who were born in families resulting from interethnic marriages involving the Wampar ethnic group in Papua New Guinea, their notions of who they are, to what ethnic or cultural group they belong to, and the kin network that they associate or identify with are part of their everyday reality that they learn to deal with early in their lives. For Elissa and Greg, these notions are pertinent to what constitutes their identity, what makes them a Wampar or not, and how they negotiate through processes that may exclude them from either side of their transcultural kinship to come up with their own terms of inclusion.

In the anthropology of kinship, these are questions that are relevant in conceptualizing or defining what kinship is, and how it is constituted, particularly in transcultural settings where processes of constructing social relations and affiliations or definitions of ethnicity and identity are intertwined. By taking into account the agency of children, being active actors in the socialization process, this study explores their perspectives and the way they situate themselves in, or shape, transcultural kinship.

My study on transcultural socialization and childhood is one of the latest among other studies with the Wampar². As an ethnographic study, my dissertation project looks at locations and contexts of practices and processes

¹Names used in this article are pseudonyms.

²This study forms part of the project on «Interethnic Relations and Transcultural Kinship among the Wampar in Papua New Guinea» which is a collaborative effort between the University of Lucerne, with Prof. Dr. Bettina Beer, and the University of Hamburg, with Prof. em. Dr. Hans Fischer, and is supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

of socializing children and constructing kinship among families resulting from interethnic marriages, and how children negotiate through the transcultural relations and make sense of their own identity.

I approached this study through the framework of «relatedness», used by Janet Carsten (2000) in response to the challenge posed by Schneider (1984) on substantiating biology in kinship. I also contextualized the processes and practices of transcultural socialization, kinning and social identifications as well as personhood through the lenses of culture change and modernity. To access children's perspectives, I applied story-telling, drawing and writing, and focus group discussions along with participant-observation and interviews. I employed some of these methods within the primary school or church's Sunday school settings and through a community youth workshop with the secondary school students. The presence and assistance of my male partner in the field³ facilitated interactions with the boys and access to male clan leaders with more ease.

RESEARCH AREA: THE WAMPAR AND TRANSCULTURALITY IN DZIFASING

The Wampar who I refer to in this paper are a language group in the Markham Valley. I use the term Wampar to refer to a socially constructed cultural identity that individuals may enact, embody and continuously negotiate as it may also be contested. It is a relational, contextual and situated identity. As observed by Beer (2006a: 106, 2006b: 21-22) among the Wampar in Gabsongkeg, not only territorial boundaries are contested but also the identification to the group, signifying the situatedness of belonging. Since Fischer began his field studies in the Markham Valley in the 1950s, he has published volumes of ethnographies about the Wampar in Gabsongkeg (e.g. Fischer 1975a), that have since then stimulated further research in other Wampar villages⁴. Beer (2010b) noted that what these studies are about is not the Wampar but Wampar in particular settings, in a particular space and time.

Discussions on notions of «Wampariness» amongst fellow Wampar ethnographers were heightened with the increasing influx of individuals or groups from other

places of Papua New Guinea to the Wampar villages whom the Wampar refer to as *ngaeng yaner* – a term they use to identify those who are not belonging to their ethnic group, which is often as contested / unclear / object of discussion as «Wampariness». Beer (2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2010a) has made this observation among the Wampar in Gabsongkeg, and raises important questions on what constitutes identity, kinship, and interethnic and transcultural relations. These are questions that have high relevance in my research site, Dzifasing.

Dzifasing is one of the eight villages of the Wampar. It consists of 31 hamlets or clusters of settlement. *Ngaeng yaner* are present in all of these clusters. Their settlements and presence in Dzifasing are due to migration facilitated by marriage, work, or social visits with some of them ending in marriage, as well as the presence of a primary school and two markets along the national highway. Some interethnic marriages began through meetings in these markets or in the city of Lae, which is just a one-hour drive away from Dzifasing and easily accessible by public mini-buses. The primary school in Dzifasing is also attended by children from outside Dzifasing, children of employees of a nearby National High School as well as of a big agro-industrial plant. Teachers are mostly non-Wampar, coming from various provinces of Papua New Guinea.

Types of interethnic marriages in Dzifasing consist not only of those between a Wampar and a *ngaeng yaner* but increasingly also of those between couples of mixed origins, the offspring of earlier interethnic marriages. How children from interethnic marriages negotiate their way through their transcultural environment, particularly in the transcultural socialization process, gives us clues not only about their strategies in the process of identity formation, but also about their notions of what constitutes kinship. I looked into these processes among transcultural families in Dzifasing. While recognizing the structural and institutional dimensions, as well as other cultural practices and mediating factors in the socialization process and identity construction, this article focuses on naming practices as an example of how transcultural kinship, ethnicity and identity are negotiated.

³I went to Dzifasing between 2009 and 2010 together with my partner and fellow ethnologist, Tobias Schwörer.

⁴Aside from Hans Fischer, others who did or have continuing studies in other Wampar villages are: Bettina Beer, Rita Kramp, Heide Lienert, Christiana Lütke and Juliane Neuhaus. These studies address the significance of long-term and collaborative fieldwork in a focus area, which as raised by Beer (2010b) has a lot to offer in terms of advantages and possibilities for new or other ways of doing ethnological field research and of using ethnographic data and their analysis in a reflexive and cooperative way.

NAMING PRACTICES: NAMESAKES AND CONNECTIONS

Naming practices of the Wampar have been described and analyzed by Hans Fischer (1975b, 2000) and I especially looked at the strategies and perspectives of children. Fischer (2000: 55) noted in Gabsongkeg that there appears to be an ideal of name transmission of male's names from mother's brother to sister's son, and of female names from father's sister to brother's daughter. This includes classificatory brothers and sisters and is similarly observed in Dzifasing. The practice of sharing one's name to a child, or to have a *nemsek* (namesake), is common. The child will receive all the names of his or her namesake which may include the old or traditional name(s), Christian or biblical name(s), and nickname(s).

Having a namesake is particularly important in the making of social relations. Namesakes have certain obligations and rights attached with the child who receives or carries on the name. An ideal namesake is one who looks after the well-being of the child from birth through adulthood. Supporting a child's schooling, particularly by contributing to the payment of school fees, is a highly appreciated move from a namesake. At the time of marriage, the namesake of a woman will have the privilege of getting a share of the brideprice while the namesake of a man is expected to contribute in the raising of the brideprice. This norm is extended to any namesake, regardless whether one is related genealogically or not, like a parent's friend. Namesakes and kindred from either side of the transcultural families also exhibit their connections with the child by choosing to call the child with the name that comes from them or their side of their kin.

Here is an example of a brother and a sister with different naming circumstances. Their father is a Wampar and their mother is from the Highlands.

Yasi, an eight-year old boy, has namesakes from both places. He is called by his Wampar name by everyone in Dzifasing with the exception of one woman. She is the wife of a church pastor who suggested giving him a biblical name, and she would be the only one calling him with this name. When he is in the Highlands, he is not called Yasi but Romeo, his namesake's name from there, who is an elder cousin. When he gets married, both of his namesakes (from the Highlands and the Wampar one) are expected to contribute to the brideprice. Yasi is aware of his several names and of the connections that come with each name.

Yasi's sister, however, has neither a Wampar nor a Highlands namesake. She was named after a friend of her father, who was a church missionary from the Sepik. When Yasi's sister will get married, her namesake should normally receive a share of her brideprice. But they have long lost contact with her. Since Yasi's sister is being groomed as a young woman from the Highlands, her brideprice will be set according to the Highlands practice, meaning a much higher price than by Wampar standards. Yasi's parents, however, qualified who will receive a share of the brideprice. Generally, it is shared with members of the family who have been helpful to them, and this includes the namesake. If the namesake has not done anything to look after the interests of the child, the mere sharing of the name is not a guarantee enough to enjoy the privilege of getting a share of the brideprice.

The naming of children from interethnic marriages can be a site of competing interests that are either accommodated, like children having namesakes from both sides of their parents' kindred, or asserted, when non-Wampar fathers in particular give their sons some names that are symbolic of land rights and clan connection to their place of origin.

Alex, from East Sepik province, married a Wampar woman. Alex wants his children to have Sepik names and not just Wampar names. In his own words,

«I do not want them [the Wampar] to put more namesakes on my children. [...] I must give them names from my place since they are my children. They should know their father's place and origin.»

Alex takes his sons to the Sepik whenever possible so they will be able, as grown-ups, to claim their land rights there. Rufus, another man from East Sepik, gave his sons names belonging to his clan to secure their land rights in his place of origin. The Wampar in Dzifasing are nominally patrilineal and sons of non-Wampar fathers do not enjoy the same rights to land as sons of Wampar fathers do. For non-Wampar fathers like Alex and Rufus, the naming of sons with names that belong to their own clan and are associated with land rights from their place of origin is a strategy to facilitate the connection, thus leaving open a possible avenue for their sons to claim land rights at their non-Wampar place of origin in the future.

Nevertheless, children also enjoy self-naming and switching of names which they do to position themselves socially. Many children in Dzifasing prefer to have

their own names or nicknames. They adapt nicknames that they consider trendy or unique, with some taken from names of celebrities in the entertainment world. With the use of an official name as required in school registration, baptism and the national census, another name, usually but not in all instances the father's name, is added after the child's name. In this paper, I refer to this as the public name.

Siblings of a Wampar mother and a Hagen father switched their public names while in school. The father did not take residence in Dzifasing. The children stayed with their mother in Dzifasing until she passed away. Two of the older children started using their mother's brother's name for their public name because he represented their absent father during their baptism rites. The son later changed it to his father's name when he moved to Mt. Hagen to study in the high school there. The older daughter did the same when she pursued college studies there. When the younger daughter first went to school in Dzifasing, she used the name of another Wampar man of a different clan. She knew that her mother did not like them to use the name of her mother's brother as he did not help in sending them to school. However, when she reached her third grade, her Wampar teacher insisted on the use of her Hagen father's name. She too has moved to Mt. Hagen and now takes pride of her Hagen identity.

Another woman, whose father is from Milne Bay and mother from Dzifasing, changed her public name during her primary grades. She substituted her father's name by the one of her paternal grandfather, which is known to originate from their village in Milne Bay. She said that by doing so it would connect her identity directly to her father's place of origin where a matrilineal system is observed. While she has a Wampar namesake, she mainly uses her Milne Bay namesake's name, who is her father's first-born sister. She wants to be able to go back to her father's place of origin, to keep active connections with her relatives from there and possibly start up a business, like buying and selling goods between Milne Bay and Morobe province.

CONCLUSION

Naming practices among transcultural families in Dzifasing reflect a process of negotiating between multiple belongings, rights, obligations and kinship relations. Families, parents and children use it to appropriate and affirm their kinship connections. For many chil-

dren from interethnic marriages, being born and growing up in Dzifasing qualifies them for being Wampar, while they also acknowledge their other ethnic identity and kin network. Multiplicity of identities is, for them, an everyday reality. They position and represent themselves along with their notions of identity and relatedness. Using various names, children can shift or switch between identities and the associated ethnicity and kinship affiliation. They make use of their names to facilitate their connections and express their desire for affiliation with either side of their transcultural kin network, along with the associated rights that they may enjoy through those links. Transculturality as negotiated by the children blurs and challenges strict borders of ethnicity and boundaries of kinship.

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

BEER Bettina

2006a. «Stonhet and yelotop: Body images, physical markers and definitions of ethnic boundaries in Papua New Guinea». *Anthropological Forum* 16(2): 105-122.

2006b. «Interethnic marriages: Changing rules and shifting boundaries among the Wampar of Papua New Guinea», in: Reginald BYRON, Barbara WALDIS (Eds), *Migration and Marriage. Heterogamy and Homogamy in a Changing World*, p. 20-39. Münster: Lit Verlag.

2008. «Buying betel and selling sex: Contested boundaries, risk milieus, and discourses about HIV/AIDS in the Markham Valley, Papua New Guinea», in: Leslie BUTT, Richard EVES (Eds), *Making Sense of AIDS: Culture, Sexuality, and Power in Melanesia*, p. 97-115. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

2010a. «Interethnische Beziehungen und transkulturelle Verwandtschaft an einem Beispiel aus Papua-Neuguinea», in: Erdmute ALBER, Bettina BEER, Julia PAULI, Michael SCHNEGG (Eds), *Verwandtschaft Heute. Positionen, Ergebnisse und Perspektiven*, p. 145-171. Berlin: Reimer.

2010b. «Possibilities and challenges of long-term and collaborative fieldwork: The Wampar as a research focus». Paper presented in the panel, *Current anthropological research in and about Oceania*, SEG Annual Meeting, Bern, 12-13 November.

CARSTEN Janet (Ed.)

2000. *Cultures of Relatedness. New Approaches to the Study of Kinship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

FISCHER Hans

1975a. *Gabsongkeg '71. Verwandtschaft, Siedlung und Landbesitz in einem Dorf in Neuguinea*. München: Klaus Renner.

1975b. «Namen als ethnographische Daten». *Abhandlungen und Berichte des Staatlichen Museums für Völkerkunde Dresden* 34: 629-654.

2000. *Wörter und Wandel. Ethnographische Zugänge über die Sprache*. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag (Materialien zur Kultur der Wampar, Papua New Guinea, 7).

SCHNEIDER David

1984. *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

AUTHOR

Doris Bacalzo Schwörer is a Ph.D. student at the Ethnologisches Seminar, University of Lucerne. Her geographic areas of research are Melanesia (Papua New Guinea) and Southeast Asia (Philippines). Prior to her current research among the Wampar, she did fieldwork in the Eastern Highlands Province (2006) on women's perspectives on violence and warfare. For her M.A. in anthropology, she studied indigenous women, gender and customary/indigenous law among a Mangyan group in Mindoro, Philippines. Her other interests are development and public anthropology, indigenous peoples, postcolonial processes, modernity, and anthropology of representation.

Ethnologisches Seminar, Universität Luzern, Kasernenplatz 3 PF 7455, 6000 Luzern 7
dbacalzo@gmail.com