

“Research focus Wampar” (Prof. Bettina Beer, Doris Bacalzo MA, Prof. em Hans Fischer, Tobias Schwörer MA)

The Wampar (neighbours call them “Laewomba”) are a language group occupying the area of the middle Markham River in Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea. They were first mentioned in reports of German gold miners and colonial officers in the beginning of the 20th century. After peaceful initial contacts with the medic-ethnographer, Richard Neuhaus, and missionaries of the “Neuendettelsauer Mission” in 1909, a mission station (Gabmadzung) was built in 1910/11. Richard Neuhaus' „Deutsch-Neu-Guinea“ (1911) contains early photographs and some ethnographic information on the Wampar. The missionaries wrote reports, printed story books on Wampar (Panzer 1917) and left several unpublished texts written in the 1930s. The last-mentioned stimulated Hans Fischer's interest and led to his conducting anthropological fieldwork among them from 1958 to the present.

The usual pattern in ethnographic research has involved a single anthropologist investigating a specific problem in one ethnic group for a limited time. “Research Focus Wampar” has been developed as a reaction to this ethnographic approach. Our research does not pose one overarching question, theoretical orientation or definite time frame. Several anthropologists conduct research in different villages of one language group over a long time period. Results complement and control each other by revealing cultural continuity and similarities as well as differences between villages and local groups. Some of these, such as the extent of interethnic relations local groups are involved in, are relevant to longer and short-term relevant processes.

The intention is for anthropologists differentiated by gender, age, and anthropological education, with a broad range of research questions to work in the same or different villages, so that different – sometimes contradictory – conclusions can emerge. Restudies and long-term research mean that time is also a dimension of comparison. This approach encourages discussion of research results and a better understanding of methods, sources and local heterogeneity. The Wampar, like most other ethnic groups, were and are not isolated, and interethnic contacts and relations, and integration into the state and church organisations are taken into account. Sociocultural change, including the disintegration of aspects of culture as well as continuities can be understood and explained.

Hans Fischer, as mentioned, began fieldwork in Papua New Guinea in 1958, when he visited several Wampar villages, but conducted fieldwork at that time mainly in villages in the lower Watut, where Wampar went as missionaries. He conducted his first long bout of fieldwork in Wampar territory in Gabmadzung in 1965, and then again in 1971/72, 1976, 1988, 1990, 1993, 1997, 1999/2000, 2003/04 and 2009. He also made short term visits to Gabsongkeg village. His research was on various topics such as settlement and household organization,

kinship, language and oral traditions, and material culture including, for example, string figures.

Heide Lienert did fieldwork as MA student in Ngasawapum village on marriage and kinship. She returned for short time periods to Ngasawapum in 1984, 1994, and 2002.

Christiana Lütkes, together with her husband Piotr, did fieldwork in Tararan village in 1993. Her PhD research on cultural and social organisation of work has been published along with several articles on related topics.

Accompanied by her daughter, Rita Kramp did a PhD research on family planning in Gabantsidz village in 1994/95, the results are published in a monograph (Kramp 1999)

Bettina Beer did (for part of the time together with Hans Fischer) research on interethnic relations and the senses in 1997, 1999/2000, 2002, 2003/04 and 2009 in Gabsongkeg village.

The student Paulina Reimann studied children's play and games in context of a fieldwork practice in 2002.

In 2002 Juliane Neuhaus did research for her PhD on village courts and legal pluralism in Munun village, she returned for a short period of fieldwork in 2009. She is in the final process of writing up results for her thesis "Legal Pluralism and the challenges of state efficiency: Ethnography of the Local State in the Markham Valley, Papua New Guinea."