

Cultural Identity and Societal Transition in the Southern Highlands of PNG

Voices of the Southern Highlands

An ethnographic interview on tribal identity, social transition, and the legacy of conflict in PNG.

#PATRILINEAL

#KEWABI_SPEAKING

#HOLWEI_TRIBE

SOCIAL STRUCTURE & TRANSITION

- ◆ **Patrilineal Dominance:** Men hold decision-making power; women provide "unseen" strength and support roles.
- ◆ **Communal to Individual:** Transitioning from collective labor (house building/gardening) to independent family units.
- ◆ **Spiritual Attribution:** Misfortunes (sick livestock, poor crops) are still often linked to ancestral or spiritual causes.

"I don't see myself as a Southern Islander too much... I see myself as a Papua New Guinean at the national level."

TRIBAL CONFLICT DYNAMICS

60+

Years of Debt

#1

Money Politics

KEY OBSERVATIONS

Modern Triggers: Election-related "Money Politics" has replaced land as the primary cause of tribal warfare.

Intergenerational Debt: The interviewee is currently mobilizing resources to settle a compensation claim from his grandfather's era.

Resolution: Shift from traditional "killer shells" to monetized compensation (e.g., 100,000 Kina + 100 Pigs).

Source: M-Southern.m4a • Speaker: Psychology Academic

Reading Time: 8 min

This document summarizes an interview regarding the Highlands Region of Papua New Guinea, focusing on the Southern Highlands' geography, ethnic identity, and social evolution. The discussion highlights the transition from communal traditions to modern individualistic thinking, alongside the complex legacy of tribal conflicts.

Detailed Points of Summary

Geographic and Ethnic Identity

The interviewee originates from the Moroma sub-district in the Southern Highlands, specifically Wepeinam village within the Holwei tribe [00:1801:58](#). The region is characterized by a mountainous environment situated between two major rivers, the Lie and the Nambe, located south of the Mendi central headquarters [00:47-01:47](#). The people are primarily Kewabi and Mendi speakers; while they share a common oral language structure across various districts, distinct regional accents exist [05:03-05:57](#)[06:03](#).

Physical Characteristics and Nutritional Context

Southern Highlanders generally possess similar physical features, typically having a slim build and an average height ranging between 155 cm and 175 cm [02:50-03:41](#). This physical profile is influenced by both the cold climate and a staple diet consisting of kaukau (sweet potato) and bananas, which the interviewee notes is relatively low in protein compared to other regions [03:42-04:12](#).

Regional Profile: Southern Highlands

Language Group	Kewabi-speaking (Oral)
Social Structure	Patrilineal (Male-dominant)
Staple Diet	Kaukau, Banana (Low protein)
Avg. Height	155 cm – 175 cm

Social Structure and Gender Roles

The society remains strictly patrilineal, a structure that has persisted since "genesis" [06:24-06:35](#). Men serve as the primary decision-makers and "bosses" in the domestic and social setting, while women occupy a supporting role [06:37-07:01](#). Although women are acknowledged as the "pillar" or strength of the household, they are rarely granted prominence or a public voice in the "house line," creating a persistent social barrier [07:16-08:03](#).

The Shift from Communalism to Individualism

While Papua New Guinea is traditionally a collective society, a transition toward "modern, civilized thinking" is occurring [08:24-10:48](#). In the past, communities worked together to build houses or plant gardens; today, these activities are more individualized [08:37-09:28](#). Communal gathering now primarily occurs during specific events such as funerals, elections, or large feasts, while daily financial responsibilities like school fees have shifted from the clan to the immediate family [09:30-10:09](#)[10:32-10:47](#).

Tribal Conflict and the "Money Politics" Era

Tribal fights, once caused by land disputes or women, are now predominantly driven by "money politics" and election-related resources [14:21-14:39](#)[15:54-16:26](#). Politicians often divert development funds to specific cronies, fueling tribal jealousy and revenge [14:46-15:46](#). These conflicts have devastating impacts, including the destruction of villages and the forced marriage of young girls as "rewards" for hired fighters [19:36-20:34](#)[21:22-21:57](#).

Drivers of Tribal Conflict

- **Primary:** Election-related "Money Politics" & Resource diversion.
- **Secondary:** Land disputes (prime land) & Jealousy over prosperity.
- **Social:** Disputes involving women or sorcery accusations.
- **Historical:** Ancestral revenge and unresolved deaths.

Compensation and Modern Identity

Unresolved deaths in tribal fights can lead to multi-generational debt, with compensation claims lasting over 60 years [22:41-24:19](#). While traditional compensation involved shells and pigs, it is now heavily monetized [26:19-26:48](#). Despite his heritage, the interviewee rejects regionalism and provincialism, viewing them as barriers to development, and identifies primarily as a Papua New Guinean at a national level [29:00-29:28](#)[30:17-31:17](#).

Key Data

- **Physical Metrics:** Average height of 155–175 cm [03:10-03:41](#).
- **Historical Conflict:** The last major tribal fight in the interviewee's district occurred between 1990 and 1997 [18:52](#)[27:27](#).

- **Modern Compensation Demands:** Current demands for murder cases can reach 100,000 Kina and 100 pigs [28:03](#).
- **Debt Longevity:** Compensation claims for a single death can remain outstanding for over 60 years and span four generations [24:14-25:22](#).

To-Do / Next Steps

- Mobilize financial resources to finally compensate the family of a man killed 60 years ago by the interviewee's grandfather. [24:5325:11](#)
- Lead the compensation ceremony this year to resolve the outstanding tribal debt. [24:5925:11](#)

Conclusion

The Southern Highlands is in a state of flux, balancing deep-rooted patrilineal and communal traditions with the pressures of modern politics and individualized economic structures. While tribal conflicts have largely ceased in favor of monetary compensation, the legacy of historical violence continues to shape family responsibilities and regional identity.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Okay. So the following day... this interview that I'm going to do is, um, on the Highlands, based on the Highlands Region of Papua New Guinea.

Interviewee: Yep.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : And I have a few questions to interview you.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : So can you state where you're from, your state, your home province, and your local village name?

Interviewee: Okay. I'm from the Southern Highlands, and I'm from, uh, from the nibble cut of electorate, uh, sub- sub-district is Moroma. My village name is, uh, uh, in the council ward, Ward, uh, Wepeinam Walumisa, and my little village is called Wepeinam.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : All right.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Thank you. So where's your place exactly located? Can you describe the physical environment of your place?

Interviewee: Okay. As I've said, uh, I- our village, uh, place is located just, uh, just south of the Mandi Headquarter Central, Mandi town. Then you take probably an hour, hour drive down and then, um, ride in the, in the, in the section where you would go to Kutubu and then go to Ella Province. There's a intersection there, that's my district r- located there. So just before you go to the junction, uh, the, the way I'm from, there are two big rivers that, that, uh, surrounds our district, that runs through our district. One, we call it a Lie River. The other one is called the Nambe River. So my area is b- between those two big rivers. Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And so my village is up the range. We call it the mountain ranges up. So we are up in the mountains, so we normally walk down to the main highway to catch bus and transport-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... to get services.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : All right. Thank you. Um, what do people ca- call or refer to your ethnic group or community?

Interviewee: Our-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Is there a certain name that they usually refer to your people?

Interviewee: Our ethnic group is... uh, our tribal name is Holwei. Holwei. Wei, Wei Bere. We call it Wes. The Wes, and that's the tribe's name, Holwei. And, uh, the, the bigger tribal, bigger tribe we call it the Harun tribe, which is made up of five council areas. But our own little tribe is known as the Holwei tribe. We's made up of two, two, two council wards.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Right.

Interviewee: So, yeah. So, yeah, that's, that's the... so my little clan is, is Yapla.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Yapla.

Interviewee: Yeah. The sub-clan, uh, that little clan within the tribe.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm. Okay. Thank you. Can you describe the physical appearance of your people that distinguish them from the rest of the Highlands region and the rest of the country as a whole?

Interviewee: Um, well, it's, they're more... the Southern Highlanders, they look alike in so many ways, similar features.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Uh, the, uh, there's some, few of them may be tall. Generally, majority of the population is a bit sh- average built-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... with 160s, 150s, 60s, and 70s cm, around there.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Okay.

Interviewee: So you're looking at between 155 to 175 or something around there, so that's a normal average height. They're brown-skinned like me. Some are darker, but because of the climate, the cold climate, many peop- many of our people will be a bit darker skinned, but a bit lighter, lighter, uh, uh, uh, body-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... yeah. And, uh, and a slimmer built.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Slimmer built because of the cold. And like this, big cold as well as the, the, as well as nutrients, the nutrient, nutritional value.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Because our people mostly live on, on, uh, basic staple food like cow, cow uh-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... cow, cow and banana and those village fo- type of food. So there's not much protein in there.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Yeah.

Interviewee: So when you look at compared to Western Islanders, uh, Western Islanders, they, they live in a fertile land, largely fertile.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So they, that's why the, the, they, they have, they have... the food they grow is mostly fertile and nutritious.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And they have, uh, access to many services.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Right.

Interviewee: So, so you realize that, uh, the difference between the body built, physi- the physical, uh, attributes. So my people, mostly my tribe, my area is mostly slimmer built.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Not, not too big. Yeah. Slimmer and average height. Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : All right. Thank you. So what is your indigenous language called and is it oral or written?

Interviewee: Uh, it's oral language.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And then it's... we come from the, uh, the language group called Kewabi-speaking, Kewabi and Mandi speakers.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Kewabi. K-E-W-A-B-I. Kewabi speakers, and then that's, that covers a lot of, uh, uh, districts. It covers... it cuts through Kagwa-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... Kagwa and to Embungo side of Yalibu. And then, uh, that's, so that's Kagwera District, Yalupang'a District, Embungo District, Mandi, Mandi Central lively, cuts across to neighbor side, and then coming our way. So in that, that central region of Mandi, we, we speak the Mandi-Kewabi languages. So its accent, slightly accent is different, but we can understand each other.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Yeah. (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Uh-huh.

Interviewee: Uh.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : So it's like the same language, all the-

Interviewee: Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : .. rest of the province?

Interviewee: Same, same, same language structure, but the accent is different.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Accent is different.

Interviewee: ... accent is slightly different from each other. But we can understand each other's language.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: We can r- we understand what they're saying. Yeah. (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Thank you.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : So, what type of sociological structure do you practice? Is it patrilineal, patrilineal or matrilineal?

Interviewee: Well, we are patrilineal.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : And is it still effective today?

Interviewee: We are patrilineal society since, since time. (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Hmm.

Interviewee: Since, uh, genesis. (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Hmm.

Interviewee: Patrilineal. Not, not one time we changed.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm. Is it still effective?

Interviewee: Yeah. Still, still current, the patrilineal society. So the, the, the men, the, the husband, the man is the overall-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... you know, bossa in, in the, in the setting. So they make all the decisions, they, they do the hard stuff. And so woman plays a sort of a supporting role only.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: They are in, in, uh, like ... some older people, they see their woman as a, their, they see the woman as their strength, their support-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... their, their pillar. Because the men, men cannot stand and stand in the house line and talk and do things without the mother, woman, the wife supporting at the back.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So they draw their strength from the mothers, from the w- woman.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: But then, so that, uh, so but they're not given prominence on the, in the house line.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Although they know, they acknowledge that, but they don't, they don't see, o- o- no obvi- no, uh, that is not given that, that, their space and their prominence in the house line, huh. But they acknowledge that they are at the back. They are at the back, but doing the support role only. Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Wow.

Interviewee: So that's, that's a barrier a bit for the ladies. Still up, still practiced now. That's a barrier.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Okay. So, um, is your community socioentric or egocentric?

Interviewee: Huh?

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Do you, uh, do you work together to achieve something, or do you know, you have individuals with like individually families?

Interviewee: Yeah, it depends, depend on the type of activity, yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Uh-huh.

Interviewee: Some are individual, but as we know, PNG largely is a collective society.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Collective nature. Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: We are communal living, so, uh, I can remember when I was growing up in the '70s, '80s, early '90s-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... we sort of, we do things together. We help each other, like someone wants to build a new house, the whole community will go and help build the house.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Okay. So it's just that, like, the mothers will go and, you know, g- gather all the, the kuna grass-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... just once, and that's it. The, the men will go up, and then the mothers bring it in, and then they do it once, and they covered the whole house.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: You know, so, so that's, uh, that's something we are missing today.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Because nowadays, it's, that, that culture is n- slowly dying out a bit. Yeah, that everybody coming together and help, and things like that. When someone's meant to make a garden, everybody comes and helps, and then finish, finish the garden quickly.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So now it's more individualized kind of families, their own, doing their own thing. But they only come together when there's something that is communal.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Comunal like, uh, they want to build a house made for a ... they want to do a, uh, you know, a, a feast, for funeral feast, huh.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So they want, they, that's common also, they come together.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Or they want to do a house made for elections. Somebody's contesting, and they want to ma-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... do contribute that. So those, those kind of, it's sort of, uh, changes, uh, th- there's a little bit of transition in that area. In the past, it was like individual families, everybody gathers and help, like making garden, houses.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Now, the only, that part of it, they had sort of, uh, they left it a little bit, that they're more into something that is more common.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: That ev- it, it, they, it concerns everybody, they come for that. (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: But not the other side, the other one that I talked about earlier.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So I see the transition going like that.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : That's right.

Interviewee: So it's ... yeah. So if you g- if you get what I'm saying-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... it used to be more common- communal, uh, when it was ... but there's so many aspects of it still communal.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Like, like paying school fees. Paying school fees for kids. In the past, you will see the, the whole clan contributing, huh.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Contributing and they paying the fees, like giving bus fee or something. But now it's only family.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Families.

Interviewee: And, uh, no. Only one or two will help, those who have the means to help, those kind of things. So it's, it's sort of, uh, died out. Some of those things have died out, and we are transitioning to the modern, civilized kind of thinking, and more independent thinking.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm. That's very true.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Okay. So, um, how do your traditions, culture, and social rules influence your thoughts and behavior?

Interviewee: Okay, that's, uh, that's a very important question. That's, uh, that's in, even in psychology-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... we talk about that. So that, uh, our languages can influence how, the way we think.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Our cultures and belief systems-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: .. can influence the way we think, and then that influence how we feel, and that influence how we behave.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So, yes, to some extent, yes. I've, uh, personally, I don't really ... I, I try not to really allow the village sort of things, belief systems-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... especially if it is bad.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: If it's not good for me and my family, I try not to associate with that. I try to just cut the tie off.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Like certain belief systems, huh, in the family that is not healthy for me and my family, I want to cut that out.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: But, but, but generally, overall- ... belief systems really see how people behave and how they think and their lifestyle, you know. They still believe in the death, for instance.

Valka-Mir Foundation: :Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: You know. For instance, uh, um, if something bad happens in a family, someone gets sick, or, uh, someone's pig is suddenly dies-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Hmm.

Interviewee: ... or, uh, develops some, you know, they will attribute that to, uh, ancestral thing or to the death or to something else.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: You know. You see? So it influence how they- they think and they behave. Or if- if the garden is not growing well, they will attribute it to something.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Speaker 3: True.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm. They would- they wouldn't under- understand that they- it's something to do with the nutrition of the soil-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Soil, uh-huh.

Interviewee: ... uh, the fertility of the soil and the weather and things like that.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: They won't attribute it to those things, they attribute the spiritual side (laughs) .

Valka-Mir Foundation: : They do?

Interviewee: So-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : That's right.

Interviewee: ... yeah, yes, yes, in so many, so many ways our people's- people's behaviors, their thinking, their beliefs and values are influenced by those kind of things.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Cultural value- cultural values and culture.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah, so much.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Even- even civilization and mo- modernization is go- going in slowly, but they still know. Still- still they are practicing this. The- the believing-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... their belief systems don't really change so much yet.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : That's true.

Interviewee: So, like, they can... they still like... i- if one- if one of their tribesmen is, uh, assaulted by another tribe, that they- that- that assault is means that it's assault on the entire tribe.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Yeah. So they don't take it as an individual person been attacked.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: They take it as that, you know, you attack that person, you attack the whole tribe.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Yeah. So that- that's their practice. (laughs) So that's why the communal, the collective thing is still strong.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : True, true. Very true. So, um, moving on to tribal fights.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : So what are exactly are the root causes of tribal fights? Can you describe what exactly happen during tri- tribal fights and what causes it?

Interviewee: Okay. Well, tribal fights, there are a lot of causes.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : m-hmm.

Interviewee: A lot of things can stir up a tribal fight. Uh, common these days, compared to the past, these days the election has taken over.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Politics. Politics and the money and the resource involved.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: If it was just politics, like it's way it's supposed to be, people- I don't think people will cause problems.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Now, the politicians are bringing them goods now, the money, that's meant for development, they give it to give it to personal, people, their cronies and families, and-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... and they put a lot of pressure and expectation on the member of parliament. And then so the next time election comes around, the other tribe is now watching what the other guy is doing, that, you know, all his tribe men is benefiting. All their families are benefiting from that politics

money, and that was supposed to be meant for the whole electorate. So they- they channel it... th- they make it in such a way that they're channeling it to their beneficiaries.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: All right. If they're given a project, they will just announce it, but the- the project is going to the bene- to the supporter.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And so the supporter gets much of it and then delivers a little bit.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Uh, or, and things like that happens. So because of that, that money mad... th- the money politics now. Money politics is now... is becoming a big problem now. So a lot of tribal fightings happening because of that money politics.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So politics and election related, uh-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... that's, um, one of the major factors now.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Major factor.

Interviewee: Major causes of tribal fights up in the islands. Then the next one is, um, land.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Yeah.

Interviewee: They- they fight over land. Okay. Especially a prime lender.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Like somebody's land, and then the other tribe is trying to claim it, or something happens. They fight over land- land. But that's not, uh, really common. In the past it was common, but now it's not really common.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Okay.

Interviewee: The- the common one is, as I've said, the election, money politics, election related.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Okay, the other one is ladies, women, fighting over women. Okay, that's, uh, it has been the case before-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... and it is now in some- some extent. Woman plays a big role in the fight, fighting. Uh, what's the other one? Mm. That's, uh, maybe jealousy.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Jealousy. Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Jealousy like another tribe is, uh, tribe someone is prospering-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... in business or in education or something, and the other one probably they bring up a legacy from tribal issues in the past, and they- they take revenge and they kill- kill that person. And then the- then the tribal fight happens.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Like, li- like, for instance, in a- a neighboring tribe, there was a death in- in Kimbe. They were working on the plantation and that there was a death. And they said that Sibi caused the death, but then they weren't there. And the news that some- and the neighboring tribe was also involved with something-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... in the death of that person, so that also, that started the fight, and now they are fighting now, the neighboring tribe. (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Wow. Okay.

Interviewee: So death, death, even natural death can be attributed to something-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... that- that- that the enemies involved or something like that, they will start- start accusing. (laughs) And then another one is sorcery, sorcery accusations, so sorcery deaths. Now, I don't... there's no tribal fight around it, but the community all agree to ban or punish that person who is accused of causing sorcery.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Yeah. But I don't... I haven't seen any fighting as a result, because everybody agrees to punish that person.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Assault or...

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... give bodily, you know.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : ... um, um...

Interviewee: Yeah. So those, uh, uh, I don't think any other causes. Only cause-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Those are the main ones.

Interviewee: ... are the main one. Number one, number one priority, number one on the list is election-related money politics.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Money politics.

Interviewee: And big men.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Big men syndrome, big men politics. No. So competition, ah, competition-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... among the big, big men are there.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Okay. So how, how does this, um, tribal fights affect women, elders and children?

Interviewee: Children.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : How does it affect, um-

Interviewee: Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : ... their living?

Interviewee: It, it's very... It affects, uh, uh, there have been so many ways.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Uh, the last tribal fight I've seen was in 1990. From 1990, 1993 to 19- 1996 or something, '96, '97, around there. Almost five years after the fight-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... in my district. So they involved our whole district with the, the whole district been in there, but our district is made up, the Poroma District made up of 23 council wards. So this is one tribe, my tribe, the Aaran tribe that I've described before, is now fighting against the other tribe on the other side. Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So about nine, nine council wards on that side and five on this side. So they were fighting each other. So I've seen the impact of that.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Mothers, villages destroyed. Um, there are widows, the little children. And then, uh, yeah, because, uh, uh, for instance, one example is like one of the first guys to, to... The first casualty in the fight was, was a, was a man.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Was a guy and they... He had a daughter, a young daughter, just very, very tender age of 12, 13, 14, around there. And so they, they hired a guy from Western Highlands to come and fight for them.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So this guy from Aagan came and he was fighting for them and this... His, his, his prize or his reward, his incentive is that they had to give this young girl to him-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... to as in marriage. That's his payment and plus money and he gets up. So you see that little innocent girl has been given away in marriage because of the bri- fight.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: All right, that, that Sunday there I've seen, I've seen, uh, young girls and mothers-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... younger, younger mothers and young girls, if they are like, if they are cause of the tribal area-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... they will say you Asma fight. Look, you Asma fight.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So these o- other tribes who come to help, help them, to assist them-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... will now take advantage of that situation. They, they will take advantage. These other tribes coming to help support the, the fight.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Then they get rid of it and said, "You Asma fight."

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: "You're the cause of the fight and now we are, we are getting all these things," you know, "we are affected one or another."

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: "We are... Our brother is killed, our uncle is killed because of your fight." So because of that, I have seen the young girls and the mothers in that area have been affected.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: They will take them. They, they will just grab them at their own accord. No, n- nobody will stop them. The, the, the owners of the fight will never say anything, uh-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... because they owe them, because they... It's because of them, the support they're given that they are winning the fight. (laughs) So it's like, so that's an incentive, but they, they have nothing to say. They go there at will. They do anything they want to do.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : True.

Interviewee: Yeah. So that's one way I've seen that-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... that's one way the mothers and girls are affected-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Are affected.

Interviewee: ... because of that, because of tribal fight. And so, yeah. So given in marriage, free marriage-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... they don't have to pay anything, but a bride price or whatever, because they're, they're helping to fight. So once you are the... you cause a tribal fight, a lot of battle come to them.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: (laughs) Uh, so even in the years later-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... e- even years later, generation down the line to, they will be, still be affected. I- as long as you cause the fight-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... and you cause the... one of the tribe men to die in the fight, especially the ones who are supporting, this, they will continue to talk about it.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: That you have to pay compensation to them. Even years, 10 years, 20 years has gone pas- ... Like now, there was a tribal fight caused by my, my, um, my great-great father, grandfather.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Grandfather. Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: My father and then his dad and then, and his dad.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: When there was a tribal fight, my dad was a small boy at that time. And so it involved our entire tribe as well. In the 1950s, I think.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: '50s or '60s, around there. So even we were not there, but, uh, they took still talk about the tribal fight. And so we had to... Every time someone dies from our tribe-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... or our little clan, those who ca- came and supported us, my grandfathers, we have to give something to them.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: We have to still give something to them. Okay. I'll give you one, one, one case, case in, in, in... Okay. The... There was that when that tribal, uh, the fight happened, one of my... one of our, I mean, the, the sub-clan in the village was the first one to die.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: The enemy, you know, speared him and he died. So that, that was the first guy to die. And then my grandfather did not compensate him.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And then my... Uh, he told my father to compensate him, give something to the, to the relatives because he was the first one to die. The others who died or got some injuries or something, he said he, he already showed to everybody.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: But this one is still outstanding. Just, just imagine this is 60 years later.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: : 60 years. Uh-huh.

Interviewee: Uh. 60 years or something plus. So my dad was around se- 90-plus years old, and he, he passed on, uh, in 2023.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And he told me. And he, he always said, said the same thing, but wh- before he passed on, one week before that, on a Sunday, I went to visit him before I came back to Mosby.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And the following Sunday, he passed on, and i- this is what he told me. He said, "No..." Which I recorded. He said, "No, this one, this one is still outstanding. You must still compensate that person." (laughs) I haven't done it, so now it's up to you. (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: : So, d- did you?

Interviewee: No, now we are mobilizing resources to co- compensate that person, uh, this year.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Okay.

Interviewee: So I'm g- I'm going to take the lead to compensate that one person who died in the tribal fight that happened-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Some 60 years-

Interviewee: ... years ago-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : ... back 60 years ago.

Interviewee: ... when I was not even there to... You see how, how-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : And this is, like, I don't know, three generations forward?

Interviewee: Yeah, three, four generations down the line. So I'm taking the lead. I'm getting the financial resources together, and I'm going to compensate that person, because my, my grandfather caused it, caused the death.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Then you have to compensate-

Interviewee: Yes.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : ... maybe his great-grandchildren now.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, children, yeah. Because th- th- they still talk about it. They still talk about that, talk about that, that, uh, "We would have been plenty... Our tribe would have been plenty, but because our father died young-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... that's why we are, we are small." (laughs) You see, you see that? (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Wow.

Interviewee: So we can use this one example to illustrate a lot of things-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... uh, the, the effects of tribal fight. Yeah. (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: : True.

Interviewee: So, and so, when something, when something bad happens to our clan, they will automatically point to that now. We, we need to compensate that person.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And then... (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: : (laughs)

Interviewee: Wow. So this a big story, big-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Yeah.

Interviewee: ... big story. I'm just, I'm just giving you a glimpse of it, but there is a big thing. (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm. Interesting.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Very interesting. So, uh, when you compensate, uh, what are some of the traditional ways of, um, compensation? Like, what do you usually do-

Interviewee: Uh, in the past.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : ... uh, in case of com- compensation?

Interviewee: In the past, they just, they use, uh, killer cells.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: They use, uh, they use s- traditional things-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Traditional things.

Interviewee: ... you know, and pigs.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Pigs.

Interviewee: Killer cells, pigs, and some traditional items, huh. Or, or they might give a piece of land to them or something.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : m-hmm.

Interviewee: But, uh, but now, that has changed.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So now, it's, it's, you know, mo- more, we monetize things a lot so m-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So it's mostly money and pigs.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Okay? We give mo- mostly money and pigs. So that's how we're going to compensate them. We are gathering money, contributing money-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... and then we're gonna give the money to them.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So I'm mo- it's mostly money now, it's money and pigs.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: In the past, it's, "Aja, you guys should have done that with just give one pig or a few killer cells and you should have solved the problem, and you left it to me, and I'm gonna poke out thousands."

Valka-Mir Foundation: : True. (laughs)

Interviewee: (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: : (laughs) Okay. So how safe does, do you feel in your community, like, currently?

Interviewee: Uh, at the moment, um, it's, it's okay.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: There's, there's no, no more fighting now.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : No more fighting.

Interviewee: The last tribal fight, as I said, as, uh, mentioned before happened in '96, '97.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And then after that, there was no tr- no tribal fight. It's all peace now.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: The whole district is okay. We don't have any more trouble. So because we have experienced fight in those 5 to 10 years window, in the '90s-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... they said, "No, anybody wants to cause tribal fight, then everybody goes there," and stopped the fight quickly.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So it's now compensation, death compensation. Even if any- if somebody or someone dies or someone kills an- another person, we have to compensate.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So they go for compensation first. (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: : True.

Interviewee: So that's how they resolve their problems now. It's 100,000 and 100 pigs. That's the demand for any- if anybody dies.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Especially if you, it's murder, the murder case, yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So no more tribal fights since then.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm. Okay. So, um, how do you feel about yourself being a Southern Islander? Like, overall, generally, how do you feel?

Interviewee: Uh, I don't feel anything. (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Like, are you proud? Are you-

Interviewee: Yeah, maybe. But, uh, because, because my mindset had been shaped, uh, by walking here at the university and, uh, exposed to modernization, exposed to civilization. Living in, lived in New Zealand for five years-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... and then teaching at the university, teaching Papua New Guinea for 20 years and so on, that my mindset have changed.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: I don't, I don't see myself as a Southern Islander too much. I see myself as a Papua New Guinean teaching Papua New Guinea at this level.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So I disagree with regionalism.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: I don't like the regionalism. I don't like provincialism. I don't like any of those groupings-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... that, that because to anyone who wants to s- when you promote groupings and ethnicity and provincialism, we got, we got big problem.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Yeah, true.

Interviewee: You know, all this, all this fighting in the settlements in the city and all of these things are because of, because they are, they are live, they lived in little groups-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... the little ethnic groups, and they, they, they, they, they're getting their st- their strength in the groups.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm. True.

Interviewee: So, and city government needs to address that issue. I don't know. Just spread them out.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Spread them out, and don't allow people to build settlement in groups like that in, in, in ethnic groups, but that's where the problem begins.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm. True.

Interviewee: (laughs) Even at the university, if you want to play games, don't put them into provincial groups.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Just let them play in schools-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... and some other groups like that, not, not in, uh, not the ethnic groups.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Oh, I see.

Interviewee: Yeah. No, don't promote provincial days too. That, that, that, that, that's not a good. That, that, you are, you are reinforcing what's already there.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Ah.

Interviewee: With... What we are trying to do is break that. That's a barrier to development. We just break that. Yeah, that's what I, that's how I'm seeing this.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: It's because I'm teaching psychology, so-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Psychology, yes.

Interviewee: ... what I want to teach this in social psych, social psychology, we teach that, uh, as long as they are... you create, um, barriers like that, then they will co- continue to cause problem like that.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: There is... The objective is to bring them together. How do you bring them together?

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: You know. They have to dissolve those barriers. It's different barriers, ethnicity and identity-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... issues which doesn't serve anything. It causes more problem for us. So, uh, to me, personally, I don't identify myself as a Southern Islander too much-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... although I'm a Southern Islander by birth and all that, but, uh, yeah, because I've come this far, living this way, and my thinking is always at the, at the national level-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... at that level. Yeah. I promote Papua New Guineans and Papua New Guineas-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... development in this and not, not for a province or-

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... district.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Thank you.

Valka-Mir Foundation: : That's all, Mister. Thank you so much for your time.

Interviewee: All right. Thank you.