

Cultural Identity and the Impact of Tribal Conflict in Enga Province

Echoes of the Highlands

A Tribal Perspective on Identity, Structure, and Conflict in Enga Province

Oral History

GEOGRAPHIC & ETHNIC ROOTS

Province: Enga Province, PNG

Tribe: Kandawilin (4 Clans: Mopa, Kaiken, Saraken, Mayak)

Language: Engapi (Primarily Oral)

"Mountainous, deep-side environment."

SOCIAL DYNAMICS

"The maturity of the family is always the man... women are seen as inferior."

- **Patrilineal Structure:** Deeply effective and ancestral.
- **Generational Gap:** Youth increasingly underestimate traditional chiefs.

TRIBAL CONFLICT ANALYSIS

ROOT CAUSES

Lack of collaboration between leaders and youth; "High-class" individuals funding high-priced weaponry (millions in guns/bullets).

HUMAN TOLL

Displacement (refugees), loss of homes, and high vulnerability for pregnant mothers and children escaping via River Lai.

RECONCILIATION

Pigs & Cows

Cash Compensation

Coca-Cola (Symbolic)

Gun Surrender

#EngaProvince #Kandawilin #TribalJustice #Patrilineal

Est. Reading: 4 mins • Focus: Sociology & Conflict

This document summarizes an interview regarding the socio-cultural landscape of the Highlands region in Papua New Guinea. It explores the identity of the Kandawilin tribe, their patrilineal social structures, and the devastating modern consequences of tribal warfare in Enga Province.

Detailed Summary

Geographic and Ethnic Identity

The interviewee originates from Posa village in the Wapenamanda district of Enga Province. The community belongs to the Kandawilin tribe, which is situated in a mountainous, "deep side" physical environment. The tribe is composed of four distinct clans: Mopa, Kaiken, Saraken, and Mayak. While physical appearances vary significantly in terms of height and complexion, the speaker notes that people from this region are often perceived as muscular and can sometimes be distinguished from other Highlanders by specific facial features, such as the shape of the nose [00:00-01:2601:55-02:37](#).

Language and Social Structure

The indigenous language of the region is known as Engapi. Historically an oral language, it began to be documented in writing by missionaries in the early 1990s. The social structure remains strictly patrilineal, a tradition passed down from ancestors that continues to be highly effective today. In this system, men hold primary authority, often viewing women as subordinates whose role is to support rather than lead. However, a growing generational gap is challenging this structure; younger generations increasingly underestimate traditional chiefs and leaders, leading to internal friction and a breakdown of community collaboration [02:38-03:4404:29-05:19](#).

Tribe Composition: Kandawilin

Province: Enga

District: Wapenamanda

Village: Posa

Clans: Mopa, Kaiken, Saraken, Mayak

Tribal Conflict and its Consequences

Tribal fights are often ignited by a lack of compromise between community leaders and impulsive youth who "bluff" without understanding the consequences. The introduction of high-powered firearms, funded by wealthy individuals within the tribes, has escalated the violence significantly. The impact on vulnerable populations is severe: women and children have been forced to jump into the River Lai to escape gunfire, resulting in drownings, paralysis, and death. Many survivors now live as refugees, facing constant insecurity regarding food, water, and shelter [05:19-07:40](#).

Justice and Resolution Mechanisms

Traditional conflict resolution involves reconciliation and compensation through the exchange of pigs, cows, money, and symbolically, Coca-Cola. However, for lasting peace, the speaker emphasizes the need for law and order to take charge. This includes the surrender of illegal firearms to the government. Currently, the sense of safety in the community remains low, as houses continue to be burned by enemies, and it is estimated that it may take at least four years for the current generation to settle and find true stability [07:40-09:25](#)[09:42-09:58](#).

Conflict Resolution Framework

Traditional

- Pig/Cow Exchange
- Cash Compensation
- Symbolic Drinks

Modern/Legal

- Gun Surrender
- Police Intervention
- Government Oversight

Key Data

- **Tribal Structure:** 4 specific clans within the Kandawilin tribe [00:58](#).
- **Weaponry Costs:** Firearms and bullets reportedly cost thousands to millions of units [08:41](#).
- **Stability Outlook:** Estimated 4 years until the community might be settled well [09:51](#).

To-Do / Action Plan

- High-class and wealthy individuals from the villages must stop purchasing guns and bullets to prevent further destruction. [08:45-08:56](#)
- Tribes should surrender all firearms to the government and police to restore law and order. [08:03-08:13](#)
- Conflicting parties need to come together for reconciliation and formal compensation ceremonies. [07:55](#)[09:02](#)
- Community leaders must address the generational gap to ensure youth collaborate with elders rather than inciting conflict. [05:49-06:25](#)

Conclusion

While there is a deep sense of pride in being from the Highlands, the ongoing tribal violence has created a terrifying environment for residents. The path to peace requires a combination of traditional compensation and modern legal enforcement, specifically targeting the influx of illegal weapons that currently destabilizes the Enga Province [10:09-10:33](#).

Valka-Mir Foundation: Thank you. Um, following questions that I'm going to ask you is based on the research, um, about the Highlands region of Papua New Guinea, about your community. So, can you, um, can you tell me where you're from, your state, your own province, and your local village name?

Interviewee: Thank you. Um, my home province is Enga Province and, um, my district is Openamanda and the local village name is, um, Posa, and the tribe is Kaiken.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay. Thank you. Where is your place located? Can you describe, uh, your physical environment?

Interviewee: My place is located in the mountainous, um, area.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So yeah, kind of deep side.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: So what do people call or refer to your ethnic group or community?

Interviewee: Um, my ethnic group is, um, is basically called Kandawilin Tribe, Ika Kandawilin. So in Kandawilin Tribe, we have, um, five clans, which is Mopa, um, Mopa, Kaiken, which is my tribe, Saraken, Mayak. I think it's five. I mean, four. Sorry. Yes. We have four clans.

Valka-Mir Foundation: So your tribe is called?

Interviewee: Kandawilin. Kandawilin. Kandawilin.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Kandawilin. All right. Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: 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: It's really various. Like, we have different sizes people, short, tall, fat, you know, black, you know, orange, red. (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm. Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah. So, like, we have, um, you know, same, same islanders.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Same as other highlands-

Interviewee: Yes.

Valka-Mir Foundation: ... islanders?

Interviewee: Yes.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Of course. Is there any particular, like, feature, maybe like a facial feature or, of you that says that, "Oh, I'm from Enga"?

Interviewee: Uh, not really.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Not really.

Interviewee: They say that you can also, you know, identify them as, "Oh, Southern Highlands." So, you know, most of them, most of the people, like, around the country, they used see me and like, "Are you from Southern Highlands?" "No, I'm not from Southern Highlands, I'm from Enga." Like, yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Enga.

Interviewee: Yeah. Sometimes you can see it by, like, facial appearance, like nose.

Valka-Mir Foundation: The nose?

Interviewee: You can... Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Oh, okay. Okay. So you can tell the difference- (laughs)

Interviewee: (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: ... by a nose?

Interviewee: Muscular sometimes, you know.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Very muscular?

Interviewee: Yes.

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

Interviewee: Um, it's been oral but, like, lately, early '90s, um, our ancestors, they've been ... Well, not ancestors, the missionaries, they came in and they started writing a lot, but, um-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Oh, okay.

Interviewee: ... but we have only one, like, language-

Valka-Mir Foundation: For all of Enga?

Interviewee: ... on the c- yeah, all of the province.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay.

Interviewee: Sorry, yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: So do you know the name of that language? What is it called? What do people normally refer to your language?

Interviewee: (laughs) I say just Yatangtobu. I don't know what it is.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay. Thank you.

Interviewee: Engapi.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Engapi.

Interviewee: Engapi.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Oh, wow.

Interviewee: Engapi, yes.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Engapi. Thank you.

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Valka-Mir Foundation: What type of sociological structure do you practice? Is it patrilineal or matrilineal and is it still effective today?

Interviewee: Yes, it's patrilineal and it's very effective today. Yeah. We still practicing from, you know, the ancestors till now.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Still effective.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay. Thank you. So is your community socioentric or egocentric? Meaning that does your people work together as a community to achieve something or do they only care about themselves and have individualism mentality?

Interviewee: Sometimes yes, but sometimes not.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: It's because of the, you know, this, uh, generation-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... they underestimate the older, you know, the chiefs and leaders. And then they think that, "Oh, we can do it. You are too old to talk. You have to listen to me." And then the chief want to talk, "Oh, no, no, you don't have to talk." And then, you know, from there people, they start to fight and-

Valka-Mir Foundation: They heal.

Interviewee: ... sometimes, yeah, it's not really ... They don't like to get out of ... Not really. Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay. So it's both?

Interviewee: So, like, it's ... Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay. Thank you. So how does, how do your traditions, culture or social rules influence your people's thoughts and actions?

Interviewee: Mostly, um, since it's patrilineal society-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... you know, men used to look down on women, girls-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... and, like, they see them as, you know, their subordinate, like below them.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: "You should listen to me." Like, you know, "I should be the one talking and you should be the one supporting me. You don't have to, you know, give me direction, to do this and that." Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm. Sure.

Interviewee: So the maturity there of the family is always the man and then, like-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... woman is always seen as, you know, something, I don't know, inferior, like, you know-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Inferior, mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... something like that.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm. Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Thank you. What are the root causes of tribal fights? Can you describe what happen during tribal fights in your community?

Interviewee: Yes. That was because, um, there was a conflict where there's a, like, yeah, there's a scenario that they actually happened, like, last year now three years ago. Um, the enemy tribe,

we came and we were about to reconcile that, um, yeah, the issue. And then, like, as I said, you know, those young kids, you know-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Yeah.

Interviewee: ... kids they don't know what they are saying. They're just bluffing. They don't know. They ... Yeah. And like the chief also thinking about himself, the person of- I blame it like, he didn't think about the community and then like, they, they just drop some words where, you know, "Arrest those enemies."

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Yeah, and then there was no collaboration-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... with, um, you know, the community and the leaders.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm. Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And then, like, from there, the tribal erupt because we don't come together and collaborate and compromise and yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm. True.

Interviewee: That's why the others erupt and every other, you know, parts of the provinces.

Valka-Mir Foundation: True.

Interviewee: It's so messy. (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: (laughs) Okay, thank you. So how does tribal fights affect your daily life in the community and how does it affect elders, especially women and children?

Interviewee: Oh, it's really vulnerable like the elders and, you know, some of them, they died.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Hmm.

Interviewee: Yes. The women, they, you know, they jump to the rivers and, you know-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Suicide?

Interviewee: ... pregnant mothers, kids even they got paralyzed. You know, they, gun rain are firing all-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm.

Interviewee: ... all the direction, so only thing that they can, you know, escape from is the water, the river.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: There is a huge river called River Lai and then, like-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Right.

Interviewee: All of them are dead, like my mother.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Yeah, she has this problem with these enemies.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Sure.

Interviewee: So, um, it is, you know, still now, like, right now, right now they are dying-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm.

Interviewee: ... you know, worrying about their place, the food-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Yeah.

Interviewee: ... the water, you know. So when being a refugee, it really, really affects individual life.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So yeah, it really affecting elders, women and children.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay. Thank you. So how, how do you solve, uh, conflict and justice is, uh, good in your community? Are there any, um, traditional ways of solving issues? And if there is, can you give like a brief description of it?

Interviewee: Yeah. So the only thing that the tribal fight should be resolved is that, um, you know, the enemy side and like tribe needs to come together-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... reconcile and those, you know, just ban all those guns, so, you know, surrender and give it-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... to the government. Yeah, the police or whatever, you know-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Law and order.

Interviewee: Yeah, law and order should be, um, in charge of that. So, um, compensation.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Yeah, compensation, they can do that too. But only thing is like, you know, buying a gun, especially those, um-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... those rich-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... like my tribe and their tribe, they are the ones that they are buying guns and-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Right.

Interviewee: ... bullets. Like those people out there, they don't, they don't, they don't know how to buy guns, you know?

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Those guns and bullets, they cost millions and, you know, thousands.

Valka-Mir Foundation: True.

Interviewee: But that's why those rich and those, um, high class people from our village-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... need to stop buying those-

Valka-Mir Foundation: True.

Interviewee: ... guns and bullets because that's the only thing that's destroying our village and-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... from there, like, you know, surrendered those guns. Just forget everything.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Start moving on and compensation.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay. So when you say compensation, what are some of the, like the traditional things that you will do to compensate? Like-

Interviewee: Oh, yes, pig-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Pigs.

Interviewee: ... COWS.

Valka-Mir Foundation: COWS.

Interviewee: Money, Coca-Cola. Oh, Coca-Cola is like-

Valka-Mir Foundation: A drink.

Interviewee: Yeah. (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: (laughs) I think that's a very-

Interviewee: Very.

Valka-Mir Foundation: ... symbolic, yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah. Pretty good, you know. Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm. Okay, thank you. So how safe do you currently feel in your community? Like currently, how safe do you feel?

Interviewee: Um, not really.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay.

Interviewee: No, not safe.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Feel-

Valka-Mir Foundation: There's still, uh, tribal-

Interviewee: Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: ... fights going on?

Interviewee: Yeah, they are building houses but then they are, the enemies are going again, you know, burning the houses.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Oh.

Interviewee: And it's really not safe there this time.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Maybe it will take approximately maybe four years time, all of our generation will be-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... you know, settled really well.

Valka-Mir Foundation: SAD.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay, thank you. So, um, overall, how do you feel about yourself being a Highlands woman, being a Hangan woman from-

Interviewee: Um, proud of be- proud of being an, you know-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... Highlands and from Hangan, but the thing is right now, honestly-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... from the day where I lost my home and everything-

Valka-Mir Foundation: True.

Interviewee: ... I just want to migrate out of that (laughs) province.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Yeah.

Interviewee: You know, it's really terrifying.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Yeah. Or the province or the kind of country. I just, you know, need to just live somewhere peaceful.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Thank you so much. That's all.