

Cultural Identity and Conflict Resolution: An Interview with the Yangugun Tribe of Enga

The Yangugun Tribe: Voices from the Enga Highlands

Mode: Editorial Profile

An ethnographic profile of social structure, tribal conflict, and cultural identity in Papua New Guinea.

TRIBAL IDENTITY & GEOGRAPHY

Origin Enga Province	Tribe Yangugun
District Wabena-Munda	Landscape Bilimada Mt.

#Patrilineal #Sociocentric #Engalish

"We speak only one language... our moral values are still relevant today. I am proud to be an Engan."

CONFLICT DYNAMICS

- Root Causes:** Revenge for killing, theft, or physical harm between tribes.
- Tribal Role:** Yangugun rarely start fights; they intervene to assist vulnerable neighbors.
- Social Impact:** Women and children migrate to maternal villages for safety during escalation.

COMPENSATION EVOLUTION

Pigs (Traditional)

Cassowary Skins

Cash (Modern)

Soft Drinks (Coke)

Reading Time: ~4 mins • Subject: Cultural Anthropology

Highlands Region, PNG

Introduction

This interview provides an in-depth look at the cultural and social fabric of the Yangugun tribe within the Enga Province of Papua New Guinea. The discussion covers the tribe's geographic roots, their unique linguistic unity, the mechanics of tribal warfare, and the transition from traditional compensation to modern legal resolutions.

Detailed Summary

Geographic and Tribal Roots

The interviewee identifies as a member of the Yangugun tribe, hailing from the Wodipiya area in the Wabena-Munda district of Enga Province. The local geography is defined by the Bilimada mountain range, which separates the village from the main district town. The community's survival is deeply tied to its physical environment, specifically the rivers and various creeks that provide essential water sources for the population [00:00-01:1201:28-01:42](#).

Linguistic Unity and Physical Identity

In terms of physical appearance, the Yangugun people do not possess a distinct phenotype that separates them from other Highlanders, sharing common traits such as curly hair and dark skin. However, their primary distinction lies in their language. The Enga language (sometimes colloquially called "Engalish") is an oral tradition that serves as a powerful unifying factor across all six districts of the province. While accents vary by district, the language remains mutually intelligible, fostering a cohesive provincial identity [01:44-02:2502:38-03:18](#).

Tribe Profile: Yangugun (Enga)

-  **Location:** Wabena-Munda District, Bilimada Mountain.
-  **Language:** Enga ("Engalish") - Oral tradition, 100% intelligible across 6 districts.
-  **Social Structure:** Patrilineal; 4 sub-clans; ~2,000+ population.
-  **Tribal Philosophy:** Non-aggressive; historically act as "helpers" to vulnerable neighbors.

Social Dynamics and Tribal Conflict

The tribe practices a patrilineal sociological structure that remains highly effective today. Their social behavior is a hybrid of sociocentric and egocentric practices: while individuals pursue personal goals, the community—comprised of four sub-clans—unites instantly during tribal fights or social crises. Historically, the Yangugun claim they do not initiate tribal warfare; instead, they intervene to support neighboring tribes or protect the vulnerable. Conflicts typically escalate from theft, physical harm, or revenge killings rather than sorcery [03:19-05:0106:05-07:40](#).

The Impact and Resolution of Warfare

Tribal conflict forces a state of adaptation among vulnerable groups. Women, children, and elders often migrate to maternal villages for safety when violence escalates. Resolution has traditionally centered on "compensation" to reclaim land or settle scores. While historical compensation involved pigs and cassowary skins, modern practices have evolved to include currency and even soft drinks. Recently, there has been a significant shift toward using the legal system and modernized negotiations to maintain peace and return displaced families to their land [08:07-09:1909:32-13:20](#).

Evolution of Conflict Compensation

Traditional

Pigs
Cassowary Skins
Land Reclaim



Modern

Money
Legal System
Soft Drinks (Coke)

Current Safety and Cultural Pride

Despite a tribal fight that occurred between August of the previous year and the beginning of the current year, the interviewee feels relatively safe, partly due to residing in Port Moresby. There is a profound sense of pride in being Engan, specifically regarding the tribe's linguistic unity and the "Hausman" (men's house) moral values that remain relevant in the modern era [13:21-13:5814:59-15:49](#).

Key Data

- Demographics:** The tribe consists of over **2,000** people divided into **4** sub-clans [03:56](#).
- Linguistic Scope:** **6** districts share the single Enga language [03:05](#).
- Recent Conflict Timeline:** A tribal fight began on **August 15th** of the previous year and lasted into the start of the current year [13:34-13:49](#).

Conclusion

The Yangugun tribe represents a blend of deep-rooted Highland traditions and modern adaptation. While tribal conflict remains a reality of their social landscape, their unified language and evolving methods of compensation reflect a community that values both its unique cultural identity and the necessity of peace in a changing world [15:12-15:49](#).

Valka-Mir Foundation: Thank you. So, um, following, uh, the interview that we are going to do is based on the Highlands Region of Papua New Guinea. I have total of 13 questions to interview you. So where are you from? Your state, home province, and your local village name.

Interviewee: Um, I am from Enga Province.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Uh, district Wabena-Munda. Um, country Wodipiya. Yeah, Yipia, Wabena-Munda.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Ah, okay, thank you. So where exactly is your place located? Can you describe the physical environment of your place?

Interviewee: Um, its physical environment, like, it's far away from, not that far away but just mountains separating the, um, my village from the main away-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... or from district town, Wabena-Munda town area.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay.

Interviewee: It is a mountain.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mountain.

Interviewee: It's called Bilimada. Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Mountain, and then rivers, a river that every, uh, we survive on it. There's a few creeks as well.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm

Interviewee: Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay, thank you. So what do people call or refer to your ethnic group or community? Uh, is there any certain name that they refer to your particular community? Like, what do they call you?

Interviewee: Uh, uh, my tribe-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... which I come from, it's called Yangugun, Yangugun tribe.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Uh, Enga?

Interviewee: Yangugun tribe.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Yangugun.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay.

Interviewee: Yangugun tribe.

Valka-Mir Foundation: So they refer to you as the-

Interviewee: Y- Yangugun.

Valka-Mir Foundation: ... Yangugun people?

Interviewee: Yeah, Yangugun people. And yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay, thank you. So can you des- describe the physical appearance of your people, um, your community, especially your tribe, that distinguishes them from the rest of the Highlands region and the rest of the country as a whole?

Interviewee: Uh, there's no specific or like a, a clear distinction.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: We are just, you know, we are part of the Highlands. How the Highlanders look-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... we look. So there's no clear difference.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Difference.

Interviewee: Curly hair.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Black skin, uh, Black skin, yeah. The same.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay.

Interviewee: There's no, um, a unique difference.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: In terms of, uh, some ways of solving problems and all this, we might have some-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Difference.

Interviewee: ... differences.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: But, um, in terms of appearance, no.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay, thank you. So what is your Indigenous language called? And is it oral or written?

Interviewee: Um, it is, it was written. I mean, it was oral from the beginning.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And it is still oral. Yeah, we have only, like, in Enga, we have only one language.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: So we speak on, um, different, different, districts have different accent.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Accent.

Interviewee: Yeah. But only one. We can understand each other. All six districts have one language.

Valka-Mir Foundation: So what is that language called?

Interviewee: Uh, Enga. Enga.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Enga, right.

Interviewee: Yeah. We sometimes refer to it as Engalish. Engalish.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Oh, Engalish. Okay. Wow. Thank you. So what type of sociological structure do you practice? Is it patrilineal or matrilineal, and is it still effective today?

Interviewee: Mostly patrilineal, and it is still effective.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: It is still effective.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay. So is your community sociocentric or egocentric? Meaning that, does your people work together as a community to achieve something or they have, um, individualism, like work, they do individual work?

Interviewee: Um, in terms of, uh, tribal fight and social issues, issues, um, we, we unite.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: They all, we have like 2,000 plus population. Um, four, yeah, four different sub-clans.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: But when it comes to matters that affects our community, our tribe, and then we unite.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Just, we just put all our differences aside and we unite. I mean, and sometimes-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... according, in relation to your question, um, sometimes we are sociocentric tribe.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And we, we have mixture.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Yeah.

Interviewee: Sometimes we are egocentric. We practice egocentric. Some have their own ways, ways of achieving their own goals.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And also, while sometimes, um, the community stay between well. Yeah, but in terms of travel, fight, and, uh, social issues that affect the entire community, that's the time where we all put our-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... own differences aside.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Work together.

Interviewee: And we stay within, yeah, deal with this, yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Thank you. So how do your traditions, culture, and social roles influence your thoughts and actions and behaviours?

Interviewee: Um, it, it, it influences me a lot-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... in the way I see myself previously. And when I was a kid, it was quite different, but when I came to understand my tribe and their, uh, and their role in the district.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And my tribe is a political tribe.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: As we refer to ourselves as, because su- yeah. So it has influenced my youth.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Up-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Upbringing.

Interviewee: Upbringing.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: This influenced my youth upbringing and yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay. Wow. Thank you. So, uh, when it comes to tribal fights, what exactly are the root causes of it? Can you describe what are the root causes and exactly what happens during tribal fights?

Interviewee: So, you asking me this question in terms of Pinga as a whole or my tribal district?

Valka-Mir Foundation: Um ...

Interviewee: Like general.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Maybe you start at your, your tribe.

Interviewee: I mean, we are not, we are not a fan of tribal, but we don't like to start tribal fights.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm. Tribal fight.

Interviewee: It is f. Traditionally, and you know, from our history, we ... Our- my ancestors, our Yangkoong tribe, we don't like tribal fight.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm.

Interviewee: We don't start tribal fight. Our ancestors, my ancestors don't tr- start tribal fight. But we tend to step in to help the neighbouring tribes.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Neighbouring tribes.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Aha. Okay.

Interviewee: And those who are vulnerable and like this.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm. Okay.

Interviewee: Yeah. And the root cause of tribal fighting, from my, from my point of view, or from the, from my tribe's point of view, um, we don't, we don't start the tribal fights. I mean, we solve our problem by negotiating conversations and all this. But when it started, we just, I mean, my ancestors, my fathers, they just step in for tribal fight.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay.

Interviewee: So, what causes tribal fight to happen between other tribes is that, you know, it's the empathy that they have to show. We don't have like sangoma poison and all this.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Yes.

Interviewee: So, when a person kills another brother from another tribe, or, um, yeah.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm. Okay.

Interviewee: Hurts another person, steal from an- another tribe, and then the only means to escalate, I mean only means to take revenge when the situation is still hot is by paying it back the same way. So, and then, you know, sometimes they tend to solve it by negotiating. Other times, it escalates and then turns to tribal fighting.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Hmm. Okay. Wow. I saw when tribal fights occurs, how does it affect women, children, and elders in your community?

Interviewee: They-

Valka-Mir Foundation: What exactly happens to them? How, how are they affected?

Interviewee: They just ex- ex- ... And they, we don't, they don't plan for it.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And they don't prepare anything for it. But when it comes, they embrace it.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm.

Interviewee: Then they adapt to it because it has been the lifestyle of, you know ...

Valka-Mir Foundation: Yeah. It's an ongoing life.

Interviewee: It's an ongoing thing. And every, every time there's a tribal fight-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm.

Interviewee: ... the community just adapt to it. Woman knows what to do.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Used to it. Mm.

Interviewee: And sometimes, you know, they are ... if, you know, in a vulnerable situation, they migrate to another place, maybe to a place where ... their mother's place, you know, men, men may send their, send his kids and his wives to their mother's place.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay.

Interviewee: And yeah, same thing.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay. How is conflict resolved? How do you solve this, um, tribal fights in, in your community? How do you solve it?

Interviewee: Sometimes by, um, mostly by traditional way.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Traditional ways, okay.

Interviewee: By doing compensation.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: You know, if it is solved within a ... by negotiation in the first place-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... when, you know, somebody starts a thing by killing or stealing thing from another person, and then, uh, we have to talk, talk about this and solve it.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm.

Interviewee: And then it is solved.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay.

Interviewee: Like that, that by negotiating, maybe by magistrate and all this. But if, you know, it escalates from the first place and then brothers come in to join hands and, you know, formalize to fight and, you know, start a tribal fight.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm.

Interviewee: Then what happens is that we don't ... the tribal fight continues and then the tribe who's victorious is gonna demand-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm.

Interviewee: ... the tribe who is not victorious to compensate.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Compensate.

Interviewee: Compensate.

Valka-Mir Foundation: So-

Interviewee: Compensate the tribe that's, um ... Yeah. Do the compensation to pay back. I mean, if a, he's vic- victorious, yet he might lose a person or, you know, he might lose the person at the same time, you know, they have chased, they have chased the other tribes out of their place, cook the house and do all those operation, operational things. So, to get back to the place where they used to locate-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm.

Interviewee: ... you know, they, the defeated tribe, in order to come back he has to do compensation and, you know, do all this to reclaim his place. The community, because tribal fight and you know, when he's defeated, his family is moved to somewhere else. The elders and the women, children, they all move to somewhere else too, during the fight. So, when they want to move into the place, they have to compensate the victor, yes tribe, and then they move in to stay. Until then the conflict is not, you know, resolved.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Resolved.

Interviewee: But recently, um, you know, because of the legal system that is in place and the modern way of understanding how we should resolve issues, you know, in my, my district have- ... gone through a lot during the-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... last two to three years. Especially my tribe is engaged in a fight as well.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Not that we want to, but, you know, the other tribe opposed us to. So we want, want to battle. After everything is done, we just, you know, do it in a modernized way.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Give back the land, let them come and sleep. And, you know, we maintain peace in the community. That's what we did it recently. But previously, as I've explained.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hm.

Interviewee: That's how it was done.

Valka-Mir Foundation: So for the compensation, what do you usually give to compensate them?

Interviewee: Um, like pigs.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Previously pigs, and, you know, some of, yeah, precious items. Traditionally, like, uh, skin of cassowaries.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And, you know, all these traditionally pigs, and because there was no money-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... involved. But now, it's money, pig-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... drinks. I don't know. Yeah, that's it.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Drinks. Especially cola.

Interviewee: Yeah, Coke and-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay.

Interviewee: ... you know, soft drinks.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay. So how safe do you f- currently feel, like, currently feel in your community? How safe is it? Did you recently have any tribal fights, or, uh...

Interviewee: As I've said, we had a-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... tribal fight, um, at the end of August 15th.

Valka-Mir Foundation: August. Just this year?

Interviewee: Last y- yeah. August 15th-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Or last year?

Interviewee: ... last year.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Oh.

Interviewee: And then it continued towards the beginning of this year.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And then it just, I mean, the tribal-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Have they resolved th- this?

Interviewee: Yeah, they have resolved it-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Okay.

Interviewee: ... the way I-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... just said it.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Just said, uh, yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah. So yeah. They, um, sorry, what was your question again?

Valka-Mir Foundation: Um, how safe do you currently feel in your community?

Interviewee: Right now?

Valka-Mir Foundation: Yes.

Interviewee: Yes. Safe enough. I mean, I'm living in Port Moresby, so-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Yeah.

Interviewee: ... it's safe.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Not that safe, people who knows me, but, you know, as a innocent person.

Valka-Mir Foundation: (laughs)

Interviewee: You know, we don't, we don't like fight and all this, so with this idea-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... in the back of mind, back of our mind, you know, we feel safe to talk and move around.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Because we don't instigate anything.

Valka-Mir Foundation: True.

Interviewee: We just dance on the music that you guys have played, so-

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: ... afterward, you guys are not our enemy. You, you may make us become your enemy, but we are not. So, you know, we don't, we talk freely and move around freely, but we, we still watch our back. (laughs)

Valka-Mir Foundation: So, um, how, generally, how do you, like overall, how do you feel about yourself being an Angan person? Like, how do you feel about yourself being an Angan, Angan person?

Interviewee: Uh, I'm proud to be an Angan.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: I'm really, really proud to be an Angan.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Really proud, okay.

Interviewee: About a lot of things, but most importantly, um, we speak only one language.

Valka-Mir Foundation: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And, yeah, we speak only one language apart from other, and our, you know, like Hausmann talk talk is very unique, and it still has to be some moral values that even relevant today moving forward. So yeah. Because of this, I'm proud to be an Angan.

Valka-Mir Foundation: True.

Interviewee: And will always be. (laughs)

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

Interviewee: Oh, I think we asked all the questions.