Chapter 1

Place and Problem

Some Basic Information

The processes of change that we discuss in this book are a fundamental part of the lives of people in any place around the globe. From generation to generation, peoples’ lives are impacted by new influences, including new technologies, new religious and ritual practices, changing political regimens, and diverse other influences. The degrees of change that take place in particular regions over a period of time vary, as does the acceptance or rejection of introduced ideologies, but change is always taking place among all social groups.

We have only to think of a few examples of how alterations in one aspect of life have ramifying effects on many others. For example, the use of the Internet has changed the way that many people communicate with one another: it allows for electronic publishing, home shopping, e-mailing, and so on. Another example is the use of a common currency, the Euro, among the countries within the European Union, replacing the various national currencies and leading to major alterations in banking transactions. The shared currency and accompanying legislation allowing for the free movement and employment of the citizens of different European nation-states within the Union must over time influence the attitudes that people have toward one another; although in some ways senses of regional identities can also spring up in opposition to homogenizing influences. Hence the European Union becomes a dynamic arena for shifting senses of identity among its peoples, yet these peoples also may retain or develop strong feelings of their local ways of life. Similar processes take place within the small nation-state of Papua New Guinea. Accommodation to outside forces goes hand in hand with reassertions of local values.
The people that we are discussing in this book are the Duna people of the Southern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea (see map 1). We will be discussing the sorts of changes that have influenced the ways in which they lead their lives.

The Duna people living in the Lake Kopiago area are swidden and fallow horticulturalists.\(^1\) Their population is between 15,000 and 20,000. They speak a language that is related to that of the neighboring Huli people as well as to the Bogaiya language, which is spoken by a few hundred people on their southern fringes (Wurm 1964; Foley 2000). The Duna people make their lives in forested, mountain areas where many streams and lakes provide water. Their valley and hillside environment borders directly on the huge Strickland River. The vegetation is lush owing to frequent rainfall, although periodic droughts also occur. Many species of birds inhabit the environment, including white cockatoos, parakeets, and birds-of-paradise. Other animals and birds in the area are wild pigs, cassowaries (large flightless forest birds), and marsupials, all hunted for their meat. These birds and animals also play important roles in the mythological and religious beliefs of the Duna and provide sources of raw materials for body decoration. For example, bird plumes are used in headdresses, and marsupial fur and cassowary quills are also used as ancillary decorations.

The Aluni Valley contains a number of territorial parishes (\textit{rindi}),\(^2\) stretching westward to the Strickland River. The population of this whole valley and its environs is fewer than 1,000 persons. The people build their dwellings on hillsides or within valley pockets at altitudes ranging from 4,000 to 6,500 feet above sea level. Their houses are scattered throughout the area. The entire landscape is peppered with

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\(^{1}\) swidden and fallow horticulturalists

\(^{2}\) territorial parishes (\textit{rindi})