that Muslim scholars' expertise on Islam is overpowered by their Muslimness whereas non-Muslim scholars, even if lacking, are considered objective in their understanding of the religion and community. Such an argument reflects the situation of teaching in general, wherein scholarship is given more importance than understanding. The author makes a case for going beyond the conventional teaching so as to pave the way for meaningful dialogue and creative learning.

This volume offers a fascinating introduction to Islam in a lucid language. The side boxes perfectly complement the flow of the text. Remaining true to its principle objective, the work does not get into debates except, briefly, in the last part. The authors have presented an informed account of Islam. By not typifying Shi'ism and Sunnism further and highlighting the overlaps between different sects, the authors have checked the arguments put forth by policy makers who push anti-Islam policies and, when questioned, keep asserting "whose Islam are we talking about?" At the same time, the volume strongly questions the image of Islam as a world religion, a stance that accounts for the rise of Islamophobia. Scholars interested in Islam and Muslims as well as sociology of Islam must read this book. Irfanullah Farooqi

MacGaffey, Wyatt: Chiefs, Priests, and Praise-Singers. History, Politics, and Land Ownership in Northern Ghana. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013. 227 pp. ISBN 978-0-8139-3386-3. Price: $ 37.50

Wyatt MacGaffey's "Chiefs, Priests, and Praise Singers" is a superb book and a valuable contribution to both the anthropology of Dagbon and the historiography of northern Ghana. The book presents a revisionist account of the history of the founding and political development of the Dagbon kingdom in Ghana's northern Region. Dagbon is one of four major centralized states in northern Ghana, with power concentrated in several "royal" lineages based in the city of Yendi. According to the oral traditions (drum histories) of the ruling elite in Yendi, this political structure developed in the 15th century when invading horsemen entered the region, displaced the local religious authorities (*tindanas*), and developed a system of secular chieftaincy. MacGaffey challenges the "Yendi tradition" by arguing that the supposedly indigenous *tindanas* and immigrant chiefs share an original cultural unity. Far from reflecting actual historical processes, the Yendi tradition was developed by the royal elite to justify their power, and then accepted as fact through the accounts of colonial anthropologists in the 19th and 20th centuries. To correct this picture, MacGaffey uses the *tindanas*' drum histories as well as a larger anthropological investigation of the region as a whole. The result is an admittedly conjectural alternative history, with allows MacGaffey to argue that *tindanas* have a justifiable claim to land and resources in the present.

Chapter 1 presents and critiques the Yendi tradition, which says that the Yendi political dynasty emerged in the 15th century when one of the invading warriors, Na Nyagse, installed himself as chief. This "official" history differentiated between immigrant chiefs and indigenous *tindanas*, and privileged the former as the founders of the Dagbon state. In the late 1920s, colonial officials recorded the drum histories as truth. One of them, colonial anthropologist R. S. Rattray, added an evolutionary twist to the story by arguing that the invading chiefs were superior because they were patrilineal, whereas the displaced *tindanas* came from "inferior" matrilineal societies. However, MacGaffey observes, the Yendi tradition is problematic because it fails to incorporate *tindanas*' drum histories, and, at a more basic level, because the *tindanas* in fact still exist.

Chapter 2 focuses on the paramount chieftaincy of Yendi as portrayed in the drum histories. The drum chants recite the official history of the paramountcy, and they reinforce the concept of *nam* (the ritual aspects of Dagbon chieftaincy). Through a meticulous and detailed presentation of the drum chants, MacGaffey concludes that they are deeply political and contested. They are political in that they exclude *tindanas* from land rights. They are contested in that, after 1865, two sons of the paramount chief created rival "gates" for the throne, and each gate developed drum chants promoting themselves as the rightful heirs. For these reasons, the drum chants must be seen as political tools in the struggle to capture *nam* and define the powers of the royal family.

Chapter 3 challenges the notion of a deep historical division between chiefs and *tindanas* in Dagbon, which supposedly marks kingdom off from other polities in northern Ghana by virtue of its unique foundation by invading warriors. To challenge these ideas, MacGaffey discusses a wide variety of *tindanas*, some of whom accepted the Yendi tradition and agreed to subordinate themselves to the paramount chief, others who claimed independence from Yendi and operated as chiefs themselves. More importantly, MacGaffey finds many similarities in symbols and clothing between *tindanas* and chiefs. Also, many chiefs ritually install *tindanas* in ceremonies similar to the installation of lower-level chiefs. *Tindanas*, in other words, historically have shared political functions with chiefs.

Chapter 4 reinforces the idea that *tindanas* and chiefs share a similar history and that it is difficult to distinguish between their roles in the present. In this chapter, MacGaffey constructs an alternative history based on the *tindanas*' versions of the founding of Dagbon. In this narrative, there existed an indigenous group of "big men" in Dagbon – the "Original Elders" – who allowed Na Nyangse to settle peacefully in the 15th century. Perhaps, MacGaffey surmises, therefore, the Original Elders were *tindanas*, and, therefore, the Dagbon chiefs had indigenous roots. MacGaffey uses two kinds of evidence to support this claim. First, the *tindanas*' version of Dagbon history is closer than the Yendi tradition to the oral traditions of other northern polities, including Nanun, Mamprugu, and Taleland. Second, it is difficult to distinguish between the roles of *tindanas* and chiefs in the present, which suggests a common history. MacGaffey also finds evidence that the Yendi paramountcy developed only after 1700, when the region found itself in a key position in

the Sahelian trade. More than this, the doctrine of secular chiefs versus religious *tindanas* only became solidified after 1948, when one of the Yendi gates (Abudu) replaced the divine, *tindana*-controlled selection of the paramount chief with a committee system.

Chapter 5 shifts the focus to Tamale, the capital of the northern Region, where British colonial officials appointed the Dakpema – a *tindana* – as the chief after the town was created as an administrative centre in 1907. Several decades later, in an effort to revive "traditional" authority as a foundation for indirect rule, Chief Commissioner Blair replaced the Dakpema with the Gulke 'Na, a chief connected to Yendi. Based on the Yendi tradition, Blair believed that he was reviving a tradition that had been lost when the Gulke 'Na left Tamale and appointed the Dakpema in his place. At the same time, the colonial administration passed a land ordinance that vested control of land in the paramount chiefs as trustees of their communities. The Dakpema's exclusion from control over land in the 1930s became a major issue when land became commercialized during the 1960s. At this time the Dakpema tried to asserting his right to land, but the Yendi tradition blocked his attempt.

MacGaffey's analysis peaks in chapter 6, where he argues that the commercialization of land in recent times, coupled with government policies towards chiefs, have allowed the royal chiefs of Yendi to develop as a landed class at the expense of *tindanas*. When the *tindanas* lost control over land in the 1930s, in the absence of land markets they survived relatively. With commercialization, however, the paramount chiefs became more interested in land-grabbing. In 2008, the government created a new Lands Commission, which empowered the paramount chiefs to developed Customary Land Secretariats (CSLs) to protect their land rights. The result has been a process of class formation in which supposedly "traditional" chiefs have transformed themselves into a modern, landlord class at the expense of the *tindanas*.

In the book's conclusion, MacGaffey argues that the Yendi drum histories are political constructions that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries. This "Yendi tradition" grossly distorts the history of Dagbon. In MacGaffey's alternative story, the *tindanas* were not eliminated by more "progressive" invaders in the 15th century. Instead, they were stripped of their power by a political project hundreds of years later. In the interests of justice, MacGaffey implies, the Yendi tradition must be overturned and the *tindanas* granted their historical rights to land. Although based on circumstantial evidence, MacGaffey's argument is thought-provoking and the book deserves a wide readership. Jeff Grischow

Martin, Kier: The Death of the Big Men and the Rise of the Big Shots. Custom and Conflict in East New Britain. New York: Berghahn Books, 2013. 256 pp. ISBN 978-0-85745-872-8. (ASOA Studies in Pacific Anthropology, 3). Price: $ 95.00

"The Death of the Big Men and the Rise of the Big Shot. Custom and Conflict in East New Britain" is a fascinating, at times brilliant but often troubling ethnography. Its ability to, at times, puzzle can be traced, in part, to the fact that two quite different types of arguments are presented. The one leads to a theoretical appreciation of the nuanced relationship between questions of group formation in PNG ethnography of several decades ago and contemporary debates surrounding forms of reciprocity, personhood, modernity, and the evocation of *kastom*. This is accomplished largely in the first six chapters of the book which center on a close empirical study of the tension between individual, family, and clan land claims and the efficacy of big men in these conflicts both historically and in the present experience of residents and former residents of the Tolai village of Matupit. Conducting his initial research between 2002–2004 the author is faced with the question of whether traditional forms of land claim would reemerge in the Sikut resettlement area after Matupit village itself had been devastated by the volcanic eruptions of 1994. Having at his disposal A. L. Epstein's village ethnography of some forty years earlier , as well as other "classic" writings on the Tolai, including that of Jacob Simet, a Matupit ethnographer, a perfectly structured laboratory experiment is presented. With these resources at hand, Martin does not disappoint. The acuity of his discussion, his observation of the uses and contextual meanings of *kastom* within this particular case study justify its reading and rereading as a valuable addition to the anthropological literature on the shifting morality of forms of reciprocity. Theoretically, he draws on the work of the post-structuralist linguist Valentin Volosinov whose general orientation is presented as hinging on the belief that the evolving meaning of words are the most sensitive index of social changes and the author often editorializes on how ethnography is best equipped to document shifts in the contested meanings of inherently ambiguous ideologically significant terms. It is Volosinov's focus on the individual use of words and contextual meaning, drawing on historical usages which allows Martin to bridge the gap between earlier theoretical concerns with group formation and contemporary issues.

The second argument is considerably weaker, although highly evocative. Based on the distinction made by members of the community between the terms "Big Man" and "Big Shot," the author is forced to justify his rendering of the term "Big Shot" as ideologically significant by recourse to Volosinov's writings: just the appearance of the new term indicates it is ideologically significant. On the basis of destructive gossip and resentment directed at a handful of members of the Matupit community, Martin renders the use of the term a form of critique of those in power who have abandoned their relations of reciprocal dependence and taken on the guise of the possessive individual. This allows him to enter into a wider discussion of the reaction of impoverished populations to the abuses of neoliberal politicians as in Africa, for example. Although accomplished with fine rhetorical flourish, the argument rests on considerably less firm ethnographic ground. For example, Martin attributes John Kaputin's loss of his parliamentary seat in the 2002 elections to the identification of him as a Big Shot and not a