

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 fas-

cinating, 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

Big Man by his constituency, and spends some time repeating the details of the gossip that arose at that time. He posits that although Kaputin had been referred to as a Big Shot previously, it was its universal acknowledgement that led to his defeat. Without disputing such a causal link, of the type Martin criticizes in traditional Melanesian ethnography, it may be that the willingness of all to openly criticize this politician of thirty years was more a recognition of his loss of power rather than a cause of it.

More generally, ambiguity underlies key points in the structure of this ethnography. First of all it is not clear, whether it is an ethnography of Matupit and the new resettlement site, or of the Tolai in general. This may appear a fine distinction but it is within the confines of a historically comparative village study that Martin is at his best. In his discussion of the Big Man / Big Shot he casts about more broadly and reveals a lack of comprehension of both the uniqueness of the subject of his study and the appropriate methods for its study. Several times, Martin commences an account of his actions with the phrase, "Like a good Melanesian ethnographer ...". This is an ironic usage and it is not clear what he is signalling to the reader. Reference and comparison of his observations to the work of Bruce Knauft among the Gebusi and Joel Robbins among the Urapmin suggests that he sees a similarity between what he is doing and research among very small, relatively isolated communities. Although in the introduction he recognizes the fact that the Tolai are an exceptional case and have a very long history of six or seven generations of integration into global cultural and economic forms, he does not seem to grasp that this very history places him as an ethnographer differently in relation to the subject of study and provides new and different opportunities to study *kastom* and individuation. Far from accepting the author's contention that in the early 21st century the Tolai big man is dead, I would suggest that evidence of him needs to be recovered from other venues around the Gazelle and the country and may indeed be found in a variety of easily accessible texts including that of the nation's newspapers. Many Tolai do not live in villages, nor in East New Britain, nor in Papua New Guinea for that matter. What I find disappointing in this ethnography is that there is no new insight provided into this Tolai exceptionality.

Secondly, Martin struggles to establish clarity about the value of the sign and its referent in his own research. He insists initially that Volosinov's theory allows him to focus exclusively on the contextual usage of the sign and ignore the referent. But then, as he develops his approach to the Big Man / Big Shot duality, he resorts to Volosinov as a justification for an assumption of ontological change in the referent. In some ways his usage of local rhetoric in the form of the "grass roots" and the "Big Shot" approximates a class analysis, at least in the sense of those who can afford to indulge possessive individualism and those who can not. But this simplistic folk classification, although not without explanatory power, seems inadequate to the anthropological analysis of data. At Sikut apparently some people were still living at the reception center and could not afford to even start building a house, others were

actively involved in building but over the long term, some were unemployed, while others worked for wages and so on. It is not clear whether there are Big Shots represented here. The economic data that Martin claims to have collected in household surveys of both Matupit and Sikut could possibly provide a clarification of socioeconomic class. It is ironic that an ethnography that draws on the work of Marx and Engels, a Marxist inspired linguist and invokes the ethnographic tradition of A. L. Epstein and Max Gluckman provides not a single evocation of the concept of class.

Marta Rohatynskyj

Martin, Luther H., and Jesper Sørensen (eds.): *Past Minds. Studies in Cognitive Historiography*. London: Equinox Publishing, 2011. 206 pp. ISBN 978-1-84555-741-8. Price: £ 19.99

The last two decades of historical writing has shown that while no new "turn" has captured the imagination of the discipline, there are several identifiable trends that indicate that the extreme cognitive relativism associated with postmodernist linguistic and cultural theory has lost its momentum. Rather than bemoaning the very possibility of historical knowledge, even as some of the insights afforded by the linguistic turn were adopted in an amended fashion, historical writing continues as it always has, based on evidence from a past regarded as real, even as interpretations of this past have changed over time. In short, the postmodernist claim that history is nothing more than a form of literary fiction has had little impact on actual historical writing. Further, recent trends show that the postmodernist decentering of science, and the critique of its objectivity as a discipline, based on erroneous expectations of what science is about, has lost much of its steam. On the contrary, there appears to be, in the last decade, a return to the interdisciplinarity reminiscent of the "social science" orientation of the 1970s and 1980s, when history was regarded as a science, albeit a social one, and when intensive engagement with the neighbouring disciplines of sociology, economics, psychology, and geography had made for a more comprehensive and contextual study of the past. Today we have an effort to understand the past and the mental practices of historic agents through insights afforded by the cognitive sciences, including cognitive psychology, cognitive anthropology, cognitive sociology, evolutionary biology, and neuroscience. The founding of the *Journal of Cognitive Historiography* in 2013 is a testament to this radically new and exciting social science history, one that hopes to bridge the divide between the scientific and the humanistic disciplines in complementary ways.

This is the subject of "Past Minds," a collection of essays based on a conference held in 2007 at the Institute of Cognition and Culture in Queen's University Belfast, Belfast. The book is divided into four parts, of which the first and last discuss the relationship between historical writing and evolutionary and cognitive theory. The second and third parts contain articles that exploit insights from the cognitive sciences and evolutionary biology to throw light on aspects of past culture and history. The ma-