



HAL
open science

**Hoarding New Guinea: Writing Colonial Ethnographic
Collection Histories for Postcolonial Futures By Rainer
F. Buschmann Publisher: University of Nebraska Press
Reviewed by H el ene B. Ducros**

H el ene Ducros

► **To cite this version:**

H el ene Ducros. Hoarding New Guinea: Writing Colonial Ethnographic Collection Histories for Postcolonial Futures By Rainer F. Buschmann Publisher: University of Nebraska Press Reviewed by H el ene B. Ducros. EuropeNow, 2023, 53. hal-04212558

HAL Id: hal-04212558

<https://hal.science/hal-04212558>

Submitted on 20 Sep 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destin ee au d ep ot et  a la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publi es ou non,  emanant des  tablissements d'enseignement et de recherche fran ais ou  trangers, des laboratoires publics ou priv es.

*Hoarding New Guinea: Writing Colonial
Ethnographic Collection Histories for Postcolonial
Futures*

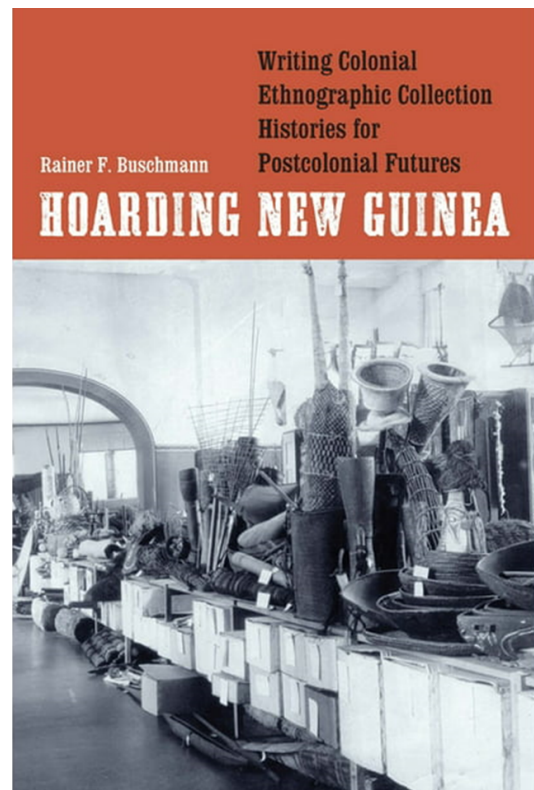
By Rainer F. Buschmann

Publisher: University of Nebraska Press

Recommended by **Hélène B. Ducros**

In *Hoarding New Guinea*, Rainer F. Buschmann relies on the link between the history of ethnographic and art museums and imperial histories to investigate how Europeans have engaged with Indigenous material culture in German New Guinea and how Indigenous populations have in turn reacted to the Europeans' acquisition quest and appetite for artifacts—a practice of systematic accumulation he captures in the term “hoarding.” The author focuses on Oceanic culture to tease out the notion of valuation of cultural objects (in terms of barter, commercial, prestige, or propaganda value) and the factors that guided Europeans in their collecting (ir)rationalities. In innovatively presenting both sides of this exchange, Buschmann offers a timely book that can be inscribed in the general discussion on the colonial archive and collections of Indigenous artifacts around the world—a topic Katrin Sieg and Hélène Ducros have taken up earlier this year in *EuropeNow* as part of [a special feature discussing the decolonizing of European memory cultures](#). However, while this book is anchored in the usual provenance and appropriation debates, the author here also complexifies the issue of local agency as he recognizes the power of Indigenous populations as producers and circulators of artifacts.

Across the book's four chapters, Buschmann uses the concept of fluidity to explain that value emerged through a two-way process in which both Europeans and Indigenous peoples reciprocated and that “ethnographic borderlands” developed in German New Guinea in ways that, far from being crystallized through European gazes, were embedded in regional networks and exchange systems not spatially fixed. Among many illuminating topics, the book addresses the connection between the materiality of colonial artifacts and governmentality, the transformation of Indigenous material culture in the face of European demand, the origin of the necessary investment capital for the acquisition of artifacts and the channels through which these artifacts were sold, and how different colonial populations took part in this market—for example how missionaries were able to obtain much needed cash flow by sourcing artifacts for collection curators in Europe. Also



of great interest is the volume's Appendix, in which the author provides several exhaustive listings surveying the number of pieces that were transported out of German New Guinea via five major collection networks between 1880 and 1920, yielding a ballpark figure of 200,000 extracted objects. This book will fascinate scholars in museum studies, postcolonial studies, memory studies, cultural geography, and anyone interested in tracing the history of material culture. Beyond the case study and geographic focus, this scholarship will also inform explorations into local colonial collections in other parts of the world, from Africa to Canada. By making space for Indigenous actions and reactions, the study will become a model for the decentering of historical studies on colonial artifacts.

Published on September 12, 2023.