

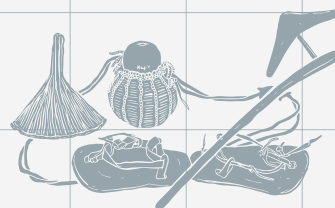
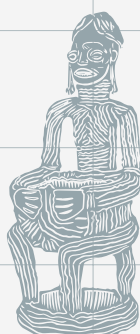
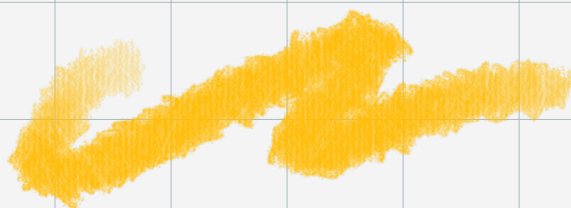
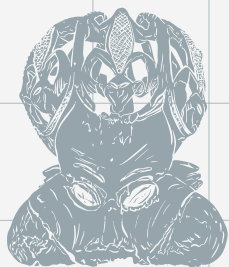
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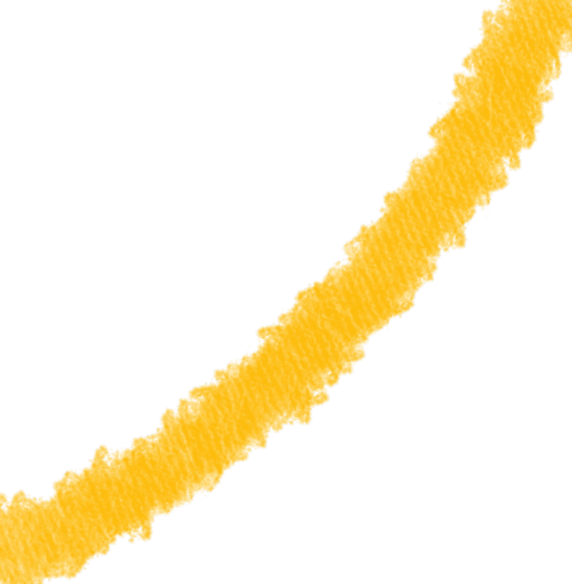


# RESTITUTION IN PRACTICE

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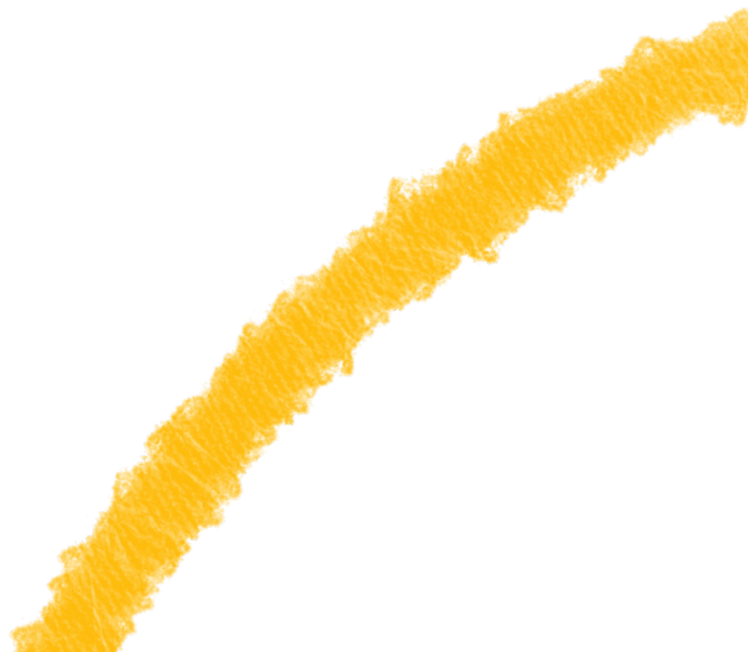
From Policy to Activation,  
Baraza Convening





## **Restitution in Practice: From Policy to Activation, Baraza Convening**

The Restitution in Practice workshop brought together restitution practitioners from across Africa. It was jointly convened by the Department of Historical Studies of the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in the framework of the research project 'Reconnecting Objects: Epistemic Plurality and Transformative Practices in and beyond Museums' (funded by Volkswagen Foundation) and Open Restitution Africa. It was hosted at the Iyatsiba Lab of UWC's Centre for Humanities Research, Woodstock, Cape Town.



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### **CONVENORS:**

- 'Reconnecting Objects: Epistemic Plurality and Transformative Practices in and beyond Museums' Research Project -funded by Volkswagen Foundation
- Open Restitution Africa

### **PARTICIPANTS:**

- [Hileni Ameinge](#) (Museums Association of Namibia)
- [Dr Wendy Black](#) (Iziko Museums of South Africa)
- [Nokulunga Buthelezi](#) (Restitution and Repatriation Office South Africa)
- [Raphael Chikukwa](#) (National Gallery of Zimbabwe)
- [Professor Kodzo Gavua](#) (University of Ghana)
- [Dr Goodman Gwasira](#) (University of Namibia)
- [Tuuda Haitula](#) (Museums Association of Namibia)
- [Robyn Humphreys](#) (University of the Western Cape)
- [Jinty Jackson](#) (Open Restitution Africa)
- [Rochelle Jacobs](#) (Jameel Policy and Action Lab)
- [Annelize Kotze](#) (Iziko Museums of South Africa)
- [Dr Kiprop Lagat](#) (Director of Culture, Ministry of Gender, Culture, The Arts and Heritage, Department of Culture, Kenya)
- [Mamokuena Makhema](#) (Morija Museum and Archives, Lesotho)
- [Chao Tayiana Maina](#) (Open Restitution Africa)
- [Dr Mary Mbewe](#) (Mulungushi University, Zambia)
- [Molemo Moilola](#) (Open Restitution Africa)
- [Patrick Mudekereza](#) (Centre d'Art Waza, DRC)
- [Abiti Nelson](#) (Uganda National Museum)
- [Troy Phili](#) (Restitution and Repatriation Office, South Africa)
- [Professor Ciraj Rassool](#) (University of the Western Cape)
- [Dr Sophia Sanan](#) (Stellenbosch University)
- [Dr Sophie Schasiepen](#) (University of the Western Cape)
- [Dr Valence Silayo](#) (Tumaini University Dar es Salaam)
- [Suzana Sousa](#) (University of the Western Cape)
- [Phumzile Nombuso Twala](#) (Open Restitution Africa)



Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

Participants arrive at the Centre for Humanities Research (CHR), University of the Western Cape (UWC), preparing to attend the 'Restitution in Practice: From Policy to Activation, Baraza Convening' in March 2025. [L-R: Susana Souza, Mamokuena Makhema, Dr Valence Silayo.]

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Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

Participants register their attendance at the Baraza Convening, ready to engage in two days of collective thinking on African-led restitution. [L-R, in foreground of image, signing the attendance register: Dr Sophie Schiasiepen, Dr Mary Mbewe, Prof Kodzo Gavua.]

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## ABBREVIATIONS

|        |                                                                  |
|--------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AUML   | African Union Model Law                                          |
| CHR    | Centre for Humanities Research                                   |
| CIRA   | Counter Intelligence Restitution Agency                          |
| DRC    | Democratic Republic of the Congo                                 |
| MAN    | Museums Association of Namibia                                   |
| MOU    | Memorandum of Understanding                                      |
| NHM    | Natural History Museum                                           |
| OTA    | Ondonga Traditional Authority                                    |
| RRO    | Repatriation and Restitution Office                              |
| SAHRA  | South African Heritage Resources Agency                          |
| TRC    | Truth and Reconciliation Commission                              |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UWC    | University of the Western Cape                                   |
| USD    | United States Dollar                                             |

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# FOREWORD

## **Beyond Return: Reclaiming Heritage, Restoring Dignity, and Rehumanising Africa Through Restitution**

**By Dr. Valence Silayo**

When practitioners, scholars, and community leaders gathered in Cape Town for the Baraza Convening, I was struck by something unexpected: the palpable sense of both urgency and patience in the room. Here were people who had spent years—sometimes decades—working on restitution, yet they spoke with a clarity that suggested we are only now beginning to understand what this work truly demands.

The timing felt significant. Across Africa, the call for restitution has moved from the margins to the centre of cultural and political discourse. Grassroots movements are converging with diplomatic initiatives. Global institutions are being forced to reckon with their colonial foundations in ways that would have seemed impossible a generation ago. The Baraza Convening positioned itself within this transformative wave—not as observers, but as active participants shaping what comes next.

This was more than a workshop. It was a convergence of visionaries bringing radically different experiences to a shared table: curators wrestling with institutional complicity, researchers documenting dispossession, community elders carrying knowledge that exists nowhere in colonial archives, policymakers trying to translate moral imperatives into legal frameworks.

### **Rehumanisation as Political Act**

The opening panel immediately established the stakes. Prof. Ciraj Rassool made a distinction that has stayed with me: the difference between restitution and repatriation is not merely semantic—it is political. Only Africans, he insisted, can define what these terms mean and how they should be enacted. What moved me most was his call for museums to become spaces of mourning rather than celebration, challenging everything we've been taught about these institutions.

Prof. Rassool rejected symbolic gestures outright, advocating instead for robust policy frameworks and claims-making infrastructure that empower African institutions. Dr Goodman Gwasira reinforced this through Namibia's experiences, outlining four pathways for return—state-to-state, regional-to-national, museum-to-community, and project-based. But what struck me was his critique of what happens after return: too often, objects arrive without planning, without community involvement, without resources for proper care.

Raphael Chikukwa brought Zimbabwe's unresolved cases into sharp focus, invoking Chimurenga philosophy—resistance as ongoing practice. His question about the ethics of European financial pledges lingered uncomfortably: when does support become another form of control?

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The second panel revealed tensions I've witnessed in my own work. There is often a profound disconnect between government-led restitution efforts and actual community needs. Examples from Uganda, Angola, and Tanzania showed sacred items returned without adequate consultation, risking not just misuse but spiritual harm.

Abiti Nelson's description of umbilical cords and ritual masks as 'living symbols of ancestral power' requiring ceremonial oversight stayed with me. These are not museum entities that can be handed over through diplomatic channels. They demand expertise from multiple fields and respect for knowledge systems that colonial institutions have systematically devalued.

The panel emphasised interdisciplinary collaboration as both practical necessity and moral imperative. The critique of European dominance in provenance research was sharp: African-led frameworks rooted in indigenous epistemologies are essential for dismantling colonial hierarchies of knowledge.

Dr Kiprop Lagat's presentation on Kenya's policy development brought abstract principles into concrete reality. His account of import duties charged on repatriated vigango funeral posts was almost darkly comic—except that it revealed how profoundly inadequate our bureaucratic systems are for this work. How do you explain to customs officials that these are not commodities but ancestors returning home?

Kenya's insistence that restitution must be ongoing, African-led, and grounded in cultural protocols demonstrated that policy development is not a technical exercise—it is cultural work. We must address colonial legacies embedded in the very institutions that now claim to facilitate restitution.

The fourth panel's focus on collaboration surfaced questions about the language we use. The shift from 'objects' to 'belongings', from 'source communities' to 'affected communities' might seem subtle, but terminology shapes policy and determines who has standing to make claims.

Phumzile Nombuso Twala's presentation on the Tukah Mask case study for Open Restitution Africa was particularly illuminating. The use of rituals and replicas to 'temporarily substitute' for physical return raised complex questions, though the presentation emphasised that these practices do not replace the imperative for physical return—they navigate ongoing dispossession whilst maintaining spiritual continuity.

Prof Kodzo Gavua's call for a Pan-African restitution movement rooted in mutual respect resonated deeply. The challenge to the 'Universal Museum' logic felt overdue—these institutions claim to preserve 'world heritage' whilst sitting on collections built through theft.

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The public panel discussion ventured into territory that professional conferences often avoid: the emotional toll of restitution work. Mamokuena Makhema and Robyn Humphreys spoke candidly about fear, anxiety, and vulnerability. Molemo Moiloa's phrase 'moving at the speed of trust' captured something essential—this work cannot be rushed, even when urgency demands action.

The critique of African higher education institutions maintaining colonial epistemologies was uncomfortable but necessary. The concept of 'barefoot professors'—local experts excluded from formal academia—challenged me to examine my own positioning. Who gets recognised as an expert? Whose knowledge systems are deemed legitimate?

Prof Rassool's vision of 'social museology'—museums as practice rather than place, as tools for activism and cultural resurgence—offered an alternative to debates about whether African museums can be reformed or must be entirely reimagined. The discussion of intra-African restitution—returning artefacts from national institutions to local communities—resonated deeply with my recent work with the Chagga community. Witnessing how localised approaches foster healing reinforced that restitution is not just about crossing international borders. Sometimes the most important journeys are within our own countries.

Prof Gavua's call to 'restitute ourselves'—to unlearn colonial conditioning and rebuild critical consciousness—challenged me personally. It is easy to critique institutions; it is harder to examine the colonial narratives we've internalised.

## **Moving Forward**

As I reflect on what emerged from these days in Cape Town, I'm sitting with a question: what does it mean to hold space for both the urgency of return and the patience required for transformation? We cannot wait for perfect policies or ideal conditions. Communities have waited long enough. Yet rushing processes without adequate consultation risks replicating the harm we're trying to repair.

My hope is that readers will find in these pages not just information but provocation. That cultural workers will see possibilities for their own practice. That government officials will understand why technical solutions are insufficient. That activists will discover strategies and solidarities. That academics will recognise the limits of their expertise and the value of knowledge systems they've been trained to dismiss.

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Restitution is not a single act but a collective journey. The Baraza Convening has shown me that this journey is already underway, carried by people who refuse to accept that what was stolen must remain lost. I invite you to join this movement—not as spectators but as participants in shaping what return means, what healing requires, and what futures become possible when we centre the voices of those whose heritage has been held hostage for too long.

What question will you carry forward from these insights?  
The work continues, and it needs all of us.



A gesture of greeting captures the collaborative ethos of the Baraza gathering, foreshadowing the spirit of the two days, which encouraged restitution practitioners to forge connections.

[L-R: Chao Tayiana Maina, Dr Valence Silayo, Raphael Chikukwa.]

Credit: Matthew Jordaan.



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# OVERVIEW

At the 'Restitution in Practice: From Policy to Activation, Baraza Convening' in March 2025, activists from across the African continent came together to share their expertise in restitution negotiations.

Currently, African nations pursue restitution independently, weakening their collective impact. If states coordinated their claims-making processes and pooled resources, they could mount more effective challenges to institutional resistance and achieve outcomes that isolated efforts cannot.

Public awareness remains critically important. Widespread campaigns help communities understand restitution processes, recognise their stake in heritage recovery, and see themselves as active participants rather than passive beneficiaries.

Finally, the gathering raised questions about externally-led inventory programmes that attempt to catalogue all of a nation's cultural belongings held abroad. This has emerged as a primary response to challenges in the restitution landscape, often leading decision-makers to consider this as a starting point in restitution. ORA is not opposed to inventories as such. Rather, it calls for a rethinking of this modality. Exhaustive external cataloguing initiatives are resource-intensive and often impractical given the constraints African governments face, and limited resources may be better directed towards community-led restitution efforts already achieving results.[a] There may be value in reconceiving restitution as living relationships, ongoing dialogues, and healing processes rather than bureaucratic procedures. What possibilities emerge when restitution is freed from purely administrative frameworks?

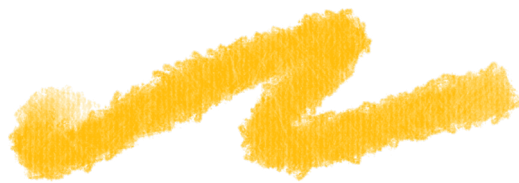
This publication situates the gathering within the broader landscape of African restitution. Insights from six thematic panels are explored, each examining lessons learnt from past efforts, current challenges facing the movement, and emerging solutions being developed across the continent. These discussions are complemented by outcomes from workshops that developed toolsets and methodologies that practitioners can possibly apply in their own contexts.

Summaries of public discussions capture the wider conversations and debates that animated the convening, complemented with visual documentation, including photographs and participant testimonials.

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The publication concludes with forward-looking action points that chart pathways for strengthened continental collaboration, offering readers not just reflection on what was discussed, but a potential roadmap for collective action moving forward.

AI assisted in drafting summaries from session transcriptions to efficiently process extensive material whilst preserving speakers' key arguments. Ethical safeguards ensured accuracy, contextual understanding, and human oversight throughout the editorial process. Care was taken to ensure that these summaries were subsequently reviewed and refined by the ORA team. All content reflects ORA's own analysis, positions, and editorial judgement.



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# DAY 1

18 March 2025

## Panel 1: Lessons Learnt From Ongoing and Completed Restitution Processes

**Speakers:** Prof Ciraj Rassool, Dr Goodman Gwasira, Raphael Chikukwa. **Moderator:** Suzana Sousa

The discussion revealed restitution as fundamental to healing colonial wounds and restoring African cultural integrity. Restitution, however, is far more complex than simply the return of cultural belongings, requiring comprehensive, African-led approaches that prioritise re-humanisation, community agency, and social restoration.

Based on practical experiences, speakers in this panel examined lessons learnt from ongoing and completed restitution processes across Southern Africa. Speakers from South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe discussed the complex dynamics of returning cultural belongings and human ancestors from European institutions to African communities.

The sharing of processes such as the return of Namibia's 'power stones'<sup>[1]</sup> as a form of enabling kingdom restoration demonstrates restitution's transformative potential. However, the current European-dominated discourse risks perpetuating colonial extraction patterns under the guise of 'good intentions'.

While some progress has been made, fundamental power imbalances persist, necessitating stronger African continental coordination and more sophisticated policy frameworks that serve African interests rather than European institutional agendas.

### Underlying Concepts and Principles

**Restitution requires de-objectification and re-humanisation work beyond physical return:** Ethical restitution transforms 'human remains' back into ancestors and 'objects' back into belongings, requiring social restoration work in addition to geographic relocation.

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1. Two sacred stones—the "Power Stone" of Oukwanyama (returned in 1995) and a regal symbol stone of Ombalantu (returned in 2014)—were restored to their respective Traditional Authorities by the Finnish Mission Museum and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Finnish Government after being removed from their communities in the 19th century. See: [https://www.museums.com.na/images/MAN\\_Finland\\_Visit\\_June\\_2015.compressed.pdf](https://www.museums.com.na/images/MAN_Finland_Visit_June_2015.compressed.pdf) Accessed: 2025/08/26.

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**Africans must lead restitution processes:** Namibia's experience has shown that decisions about what to return and when to return it have largely remained in the hands of European institutions. Speakers emphasised that meaningful restitution begins with African-defined claims-making mechanisms and community-driven priorities.

**Tensions between state and community actors create structural challenges**  
Multiple cases revealed conflicts between national governments managing diplomatic negotiations and local communities seeking direct engagement.

**Ad hoc processes highlight the need for systematic policy frameworks:**  
Before the South African Restitution and Repatriation Policy was issued, South African returns occurred through presidential intervention and improvised committees, while Namibia's draft policy still conflates repatriation with restitution, demonstrating the necessity for comprehensive policy infrastructure.

**European institutions maintain the disciplinary boundaries and categorical distinctions established during the colonial period:** German institutions returning the mortal remains of people, while retaining sound recordings collected simultaneously, and museums maintaining racial categories are examples for why true restitution must dismantle the knowledge systems that originally justified collection practices. Challenging European classificatory systems that separate cultural belongings, ancestral remains, and documentation that belonged together historically is important.



Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

Drawing on the Namibian 'power stones' case, Dr Goodman Gwasira challenges the current restitution paradigm, highlighting how existing restitution frameworks perpetuate institutional control. [L-R: Dr Goodman Gwasira, Prof Ciraj Rassool.]

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## Key Issues and Challenges

**Conceptual Confusion:** The distinction between repatriation (physical return) and restitution (the broader work of social restoration and re-humanisation) remains poorly understood, with many processes ending at repatriation.

**Power Imbalances:** European institutions continue to dictate what gets returned, when, and how, with African communities often serving as passive recipients rather than active decision-makers in their own restitution processes.

**State vs. Community Tensions:** A fundamental challenge exists between national government control over restitution processes and local community rights to their ancestral remains and cultural belongings.

**Inadequate Policy Frameworks:** Most countries lack comprehensive restitution policies, with processes occurring on ad hoc bases without systematic approaches or claims-making mechanisms.

## Proposed Approaches

**African-Led Movement:** Speakers emphasised building a continental African restitution movement that defines restitution on African terms rather than accepting European frameworks.

**Re-humanisation Process:** Part of this process is to move beyond treating ancestors as 'human remains' or 'objects' to recognising them as ancestors who require mourning, cultural protocols, and spiritual care.

**Claims-Making Mechanisms:** Systematic processes for African communities to identify, claim, and negotiate the return of their cultural heritage and ancestral remains must be established.

**Regional Government Models:** The Baden-Württemberg<sup>[2]</sup> to Namibia model demonstrated how regional governments can bypass bureaucratic delays and engage more directly with communities while still respecting sovereignty.



2. Baden-Württemberg is a state in southwest Germany bordering France and Switzerland.

## Open Questions and Future Considerations

Critical unresolved issues include:

- How to balance state sovereignty with community rights?
- How to handle ancestral remains that can not be identified through the archive?
- What role should financial reparations play?
- How can African institutions build capacity to lead restitution processes?
- How do we prevent restitution from becoming another form of political manipulation?

## Conclusion

Ongoing lessons that continue to shape the mechanisms and protocols being developed on restitution are valuable, as they provide a guide on how to remain reflexive, even in the midst of the fast-paced changes within the ecosystem of restitution work.



Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

Through the case of Uganda's 'umbilical cord' return, Nelson Abiti illustrates Baraza's vision of restitution as living relationships and ongoing dialogues—showing how culturally grounded protocols enable spiritual reconnection between communities and their heritage.

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## Panel 2: The Relation of the Local/Community and the National/State in Restitution Negotiations

**Speakers:** Patrick Mudekereza, Abiti Nelson, Suzana Sousa, Dr Valence Silayo. **Moderator:** Chao Tayiana Maina

The discussion revealed restitution as fundamentally about restoring dignity as well as cultural and community agency. While communities possess essential cultural knowledge, States control diplomatic channels and legal frameworks.

This panel examined the complex relationships between multiple stakeholders in restitution processes, including local communities, national governments, and international actors. Panellists explored how such stakeholders navigate power dynamics, decision-making authorities, and practical challenges in returning cultural belongings and ancestral remains.

Cases such as the return of Uganda's 'umbilical cord'<sup>[3]</sup> demonstrate how proper cultural protocols can transform museum relationships with communities. Sustainable progress depends on creating inclusive processes that respect both community agency and state sovereignty which, in turn, builds African capacity to lead rather than merely responding to European-initiated restitution efforts. The risk of political manipulation remains high, however, with restitution potentially becoming an electoral tool rather than a matter of genuine cultural restoration.

The complexity of these processes demands significant resources and political commitments, making coalition-building and diverse stakeholder engagement essential.

### Underlying Concepts and Principles

**Historical vs. Political Communities:** Stakeholders distinguish between genealogical descent and historical/cultural connections when determining who speaks for ancestral remains and cultural belongings.

**Village Approach:** 'It takes a village' not only to raise a child but also to care for ancestors and navigate complex restitution processes.

**De-objectification:** Beyond treating cultural belongings and ancestral remains as museum 'objects', they must be recognised as living, active entities with ongoing spiritual and cultural significance.

**Rehumanisation Processes:** When handling ancestral remains, appropriate cultural protocols and mourning practices, such as purification periods and proper spiritual intermediation, must be implemented.

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3. Uganda's successful restitution of ancestral umbilical cord remains, previously held in Cambridge, involved rehumanising cultural belongings as named ancestors, implementing traditional Buganda protocols (including bark cloth covering and ceremonial reception), conducting 100-day purification rituals at the national museum, and prioritising community spiritual processes over Western institutional frameworks to restore cultural dignity.

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## Key Issues and Challenges

**Power Imbalances and Authority:** A fundamental tension exists between who has the right to speak for communities versus who has the political authority to negotiate internationally. Communities often discover restitution negotiations through media rather than being directly consulted.

**Cost and Logistics:** Restitution processes are extremely expensive (one example escalated from \$10,000 to \$65,000 USD), with complex legal requirements including tax clearances, endangered species permits, and specialised transportation requirements.

**Research Funding Dependencies:** European institutions control funding for provenance research, potentially steering the restitution discourse to serve their interests rather than African community needs.

**Cultural Sensitivity:** Many belongings in European collections are sacred items that shouldn't be publicly displayed or handled by certain individuals, yet museums continue to exhibit them inappropriately.

**Lack of Legal Frameworks:** Most African countries lack comprehensive policies for restitution, forcing processes to occur on ad hoc bases without clear guidelines for community consultations or state responsibilities.



Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

Susana Souza highlights critical challenges facing African-led restitution work, cautioning participants against political manipulation.

[L-R: Dr Valence Silayo, Susana Souza, Chao Tayiana Maina.]

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## Proposed Approaches

**Collaborative Models:** Several collaborative models for restitution emerged:

- community-state partnerships where governments negotiate with foreign institutions while communities provide cultural knowledge to validate processes;
- multi-stakeholder coalitions including traditional authorities, researchers, and artists who can shift strategies when one approach stalls;
- mediation through national museums that bridge communities and state bureaucracy;
- international academic partnerships that conduct joint provenance research and facilitate dialogue between source communities and holding institutions across borders.

**Community-Centred Approach:** Communities must define what they want returned, how objects should be treated, and what restitution means to them, rather than accepting European definitions.

**African-Led Research:** Developing independent African capacity for provenance research and community engagement can reduce dependency on European funding and agendas.

**Observatory Models:** Institutions like the Observatoire des Pratiques Culturelles (Observatory of Cultural Practices) bridge research, community engagement, and cultural programming around restitution.

## Open Questions and Future Considerations

Critical unresolved issues include:

- How can African countries develop independent funding mechanisms for restitution?
- How do we balance state sovereignty with community rights when governments exclude affected communities from negotiations?
- What happens to cultural belongings that communities decide should be destroyed rather than preserved?
- How can we ensure restitution knowledge benefits source communities rather than just academic archives?

## Conclusion

This discussion reveals critical tensions between state and community interests in restitution processes. The speakers demonstrated that successful returns and accompanying processes of repair are catalysed by genuine community consultation rather than top-down government negotiations as well as proper cultural protocols that respect indigenous knowledge systems. A recognition that restitution involves restoring spiritual relationships, not just transferring belongings between institutions, is essential.



Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

Dr. Mary Mbewe highlights a critical obstacle to comprehensive restitution—the persistence of colonial-era legal structures that constrain heritage recovery. [L-R: Dr Kiprop Lagat, Dr Mary Mbewe, Robyn Humphreys, Tuuda Haitula, Dr Sophie Schiasen.]

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## Panel 3: Issues Around National Restitution Policies and the Infrastructures that are Required to Enact Them

**Speakers:** Dr Kiprop Lagat, Dr Mary Mbewe, Robyn Humphreys, Tuuda Haitula. **Moderator:** Dr Sophie Schasiepen

Restitution emerged as a complex, multifaceted challenge requiring coordinated policy development, community engagement, and infrastructure investment. The discussion emphasised that, while some progress is being made through bilateral agreements, the lack of formal policies in most countries creates ongoing difficulties for restitution processes.

Restitution involves not just the return of cultural belongings, but a fundamental reimagining of the relationship between museums, communities, and cultural heritage. This panel examined the critical issues surrounding national restitution policies and the infrastructural frameworks needed to implement them effectively. Speakers from Kenya, Zambia, South Africa, and Namibia shared their experiences with restitution processes, highlighting both successes and ongoing challenges in returning cultural heritage belongings and human ancestral remains to their communities of origin.

### Underlying Concepts and Principles

**African-led processes:** Effective policies require independent African institutional capacities, locally-trained researchers, and autonomous funding mechanisms for the facilitation of restitution processes.

**A recognition of community governance:** Policies require infrastructure that recognises community spiritual authority over returned cultural belongings.

**Process-oriented policies:** Policies must establish ongoing community engagement mechanisms rather than one-time transfers.

**Knowledge restoration infrastructure gaps:** Policies must include infrastructure for cultural education and intergenerational knowledge restoration programmes.

**Archaeological policy framing critique:** Speakers challenged South African policies that maintain colonial age categories and scientific significance frameworks, demonstrating that restitution policies must dismantle rather than perpetuate colonial knowledge systems.

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## Key Issues and Challenges

**Lack of Formal Policies:** Most African nations lack comprehensive restitution policies, relying on outdated colonial laws or informal diplomatic efforts.

**Import Duties on Heritage:** Countries face the paradoxical situation of paying import duties to receive their own restituted cultural belongings.

**Housing of Cultural Belongings Disputes:** There is ongoing tension regarding whether returned belongings should be housed in national museums or directly returned to affected communities.

**Inadequate Infrastructure:** Many institutions lack sufficient storage and display facilities for returned cultural heritage.

**Knowledge Genocide:** Communities struggle with 'knowledge genocide,' making provenance research difficult due to lost familiarity with cultural belongings removed generations ago.

## Proposed Approaches

**Pan-African Solidarity and Regional Cooperation:** SAfrican heritage institutions must collaborate on knowledge sharing, intra-African restitution processes, and continental approaches to heritage protection. This includes addressing colonial collections within African museums and developing shared expertise networks.

**Address Policy Gaps and Infrastructure Deficits:** Comprehensive frameworks with clear protocols, dedicated committees, and appropriate storage facilities are essential for effective restitution processes.

**Restitution as Ongoing Process:** Rather than one-time transfers, restitution involves continuous relationship repair that addresses 'knowledge genocide' and cultural trauma. 'Successful' restitution must be redefined as long-term community engagement and healing of historical wounds.

**Community Authority over Heritage:** Communities should be primary decision-makers in restitution processes, with traditional authorities directly involved in the selection and reception of cultural belongings. This challenges museum expertise as the sole arbiter of cultural significance, prioritising indigenous knowledge systems.

**Decolonisation through 'De-ethnologisation':** Restitution requires moving beyond colonial racial categories and scientific frameworks that prioritise research value over community connections.



Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

Robyn Humphreys underscores a critical gap in African-led restitution work: the need for formalised policies and institutional capacity to transform aspirations into reality

## Open Questions and Future Considerations

Critical unresolved issues include:

- How can African institutions gain greater control over restitution processes currently dominated by Western funding and research?
- What constitutes 'successful' restitution when colonial damage to community relationships cannot be fully repaired?
- How should countries handle competing claims for cultural belongings, particularly ancestral remains with unclear provenance?
- The question of infrastructure responsibility—whether governments, communities, or international partners should fund necessary facilities—requires urgent attention.
- Finally, how can restitution work address not just cultural belongings held abroad, but also problematic collections within African museums themselves?

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## Workshop : Claims-Based Databases and African Restitution Networks

Two workshops examined how to translate restitution research into actionable tools, focusing on:

- Claims-based databases versus traditional inventories;
- Sustainable networks for African restitution movements

Externally-led inventories cataloguing a nation's cultural belongings held abroad have increasingly become the assumed starting point in restitution, yet this warrants closer scrutiny. ORA does not oppose inventories as such, but argues that this approach demands fundamental rethinking.

[The evidence](#) points towards community-driven, demands-based approaches that start with what communities have lost, rather than what museums hold, supporting existing mobilisations, respecting cultural protocols around sacred knowledge, working within varying levels of digital access, and prioritising sustainability and local ownership.

This workshop proposed African-centred alternatives that place communities at the centre, reframing restitution as liberation rather than bureaucratic procedure. It aimed to develop actionable, community-centred approaches by refining claims-based databases that prioritise what communities want returned rather than traditional inventories.

The emphasis on claims-based rather than inventory-based approaches could fundamentally shift power dynamics, making communities the starting point of restitution processes. The counter-intelligence model proposed draws explicitly from anti-colonial resistance, positioning restitution as a continuation of liberation struggles.

### Underlying Concepts and Principles

**Claims vs. Inventory Tension:** There is debate over 'outside-in' (cataloguing what's abroad) versus 'inside-out' (documenting what communities want back) approaches to restitution documentation.

**Fragmented National Systems:** Different countries have varying restitution frameworks (Namibia's museum-based system, Uganda's MOU system, Ghana's committee approach), complicating unified continental approaches.

**Claims Infrastructure Gaps:** Existing repatriation and return models start 'outside-in' (mapping what's globally dispersed in collections) rather than 'inside-out' (creating infrastructure for communities to document their priorities and assert claims). This gap is further complicated by knowledge genocide and

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intergenerational disconnection, which mean that communities may not initially know the full extent of what was taken. A claims-based approach acknowledges this reality—communities can begin by asserting what they do know they’ve lost or seek to recover, while the process itself can facilitate discovery of additional belongings or ancestral remains through iterative engagement with collections data.

## Key Issues and Challenges

**Inventory Limitations:** Traditional inventory projects face massive costs (Digital Benin cost 3.9 million euros), reproduce colonial misrepresentations, often exclude affected communities, and create data overload. The development of comprehensive inventories requires massive resources, often making this financially prohibitive.

**Traditional Inventories Perpetuate Colonial Misrepresentation:** Traditional inventory approaches risk perpetuating the exclusion of affected communities from decision-making processes despite creating vast databases.

**Network Sustainability:** Fragmentation is perpetuated by financial limitations, political institutions treating restitution as low priority, accessibility barriers, and varying national definitions of heritage processes. Gender inequality and cultural protocols further complicate community engagement.

**Legal Framework Challenges:** African countries remain bound by colonial legal structures, with practitioners questioning whether current laws truly serve African contexts and communities.

**Knowledge Gap Crisis:** Communities often don’t know what heritage items they’ve lost, while older generations with crucial knowledge are disappearing before information can be preserved.

## Proposed Solutions and Approaches

**Claims-Based Database Model:** Inspired by Germany’s Lost Art Database<sup>[4]</sup>, this approach would centre on community needs rather than museum inventories. Communities would document what they’re seeking, with spiritual leaders and curators building networks to maintain long-term relationships.

**Pan-African Coordination:** Multiple models emerged, including a Counter Intelligence Restitution Agency (CIRA) for strategic information sharing, Pan-African institutions for accountability, and university centres for documentation and archiving.

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4. The Lost Art Database connects Nazi-looted art victims with current owners through search requests, supporting stakeholders in finding fair restitution solutions. See: <https://www.lostart.de/en/start>. Accessed: 2025/08/29.

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**Ground-Up Policy Development:** Rather than imposing top-down frameworks, policies should emerge from existing practices, learning from countries like Namibia (community representative involvement), Uganda (MOU-based systems), and Ghana (committee intermediaries).

**Collaborative State Networks:** Community curators, academic activists, political educators, and community exhibitions could ensure local ownership of restitution processes.

**Pan-African Coordination:** Partnerships between African countries could establish unified claims processes while respecting different national models and cultural protocols.

## Open Questions and Future Considerations

- When should countries formalise restitution policies, and how can ground-up practices inform longer-term frameworks across different political contexts?
- How can claims-based databases overcome connectivity, digital literacy, and equipment barriers that prevent community participation in documentation processes?
- What heritage items can be publicly documented versus kept private, and how can diverse cultural sensitivities be accommodated across regions?
- How can disappearing knowledge from elders be urgently captured while engaging younger generations who may lack awareness or interest?
- How can unified continental restitution approaches be developed while respecting varied national systems, heritage definitions, and governmental structures?

## Outcomes

The workshop revealed that traditional inventory projects are prohibitively expensive and risk perpetuating colonial frameworks by excluding affected communities from decision-making processes.

Participants proposed community-centred, claims-based databases that prioritise what communities are seeking rather than cataloguing what exists abroad.

The discussion highlighted diverse national restitution frameworks across African countries, emphasising the need for ground-up policy development that emerges from existing practices rather than imposed top-down structures, while addressing technological accessibility and cultural protocol challenges.



Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

Workshop participants collaborate on mapping out approaches.



Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

Workshop participants engage in small group discussions, exploring how to shift power dynamics in restitution processes.



Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

Participants work together to identify challenges in traditional inventory systems.



Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

Why inventories?



Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

Workshop attendees map out Pan-African coordination strategies, envisioning networks that would enable unified claims processes and counter European institutional coalitions.



Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

[Images 1-3] In a collaborative brainstorming session, practitioners developed actionable tools for community-led restitution, focusing on accessibility and cultural protocol considerations in documentation systems.



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# Public Panel Discussion: South African Restitution and Repatriation Policy: Status Quo, Challenges, and Activation

**Speakers:** Dr Wendy Black, Annelize Kotze, Troy Phili  
**Moderator:** Prof Ciraj Rassool

This panel discussion examined South Africa's National Policy on Repatriation and Restitution of Heritage (adopted 2021), focusing on its implementation challenges and practical applications for returning human remains and heritage objects from museums worldwide back to South African communities.

South Africa's repatriation policy, while groundbreaking in scope, faces significant implementation challenges. Success depends on sustained community-led approaches, adequate funding, and regional collaboration to address shared colonial legacies.

This policy represents groundbreaking integration of anti-apartheid struggle remains with colonial-era victims, creating the first framework globally to address both legacies simultaneously. It establishes precedents for other African nations developing repatriation policies and challenges international museums' retention practices. It uniquely combines human ancestral human remains with material culture restitution, emphasising re-humanisation and healing rather than just physical return, though funding constraints and institutional capacity remain significant obstacles.



Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

Troy Phili explores the gap between policy and activation, detailing SAHRA's experiences navigating the complexities of repatriating ancestors and heritage objects—transforming formal frameworks into meaningful cultural restoration and spiritual reconnection for South African communities.

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## Underlying Concepts and Principles

**Restorative Justice:** The policy operates within broader post-apartheid frameworks of healing and reconciliation, extending Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) principles to museological contexts.

**Decolonisation:** Challenging colonial museum practices that treated human bodies as scientific 'objects' and cultural material as 'curiosities,' this policy recognises them instead as ancestors who deserve respect.

**Memorial Complex:** It is important to address how nations decide 'which dead to remember' and the role of physical human remains in national memory projects.

## Key Issues and Challenges

**Policy Implementation Gaps:** The Repatriation and Restitution Office (RRO), established by the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) in 2022, operates with limited resources and lacks detailed guidelines for museum engagement and community consultation processes.

**Prioritisation Conflicts:** The policy's hierarchical priorities (liberation struggle remains first, colonial-era remains later) don't align with practical realities, as multiple claims emerge simultaneously across different historical periods

**International Complications:** Complex cases create diplomatic and ethical dilemmas, while some international museums selectively identify returns rather than conducting comprehensive audits.

**Community Trust Deficit:** Historical museum practices have created deep mistrust among communities, particularly Khoe and San peoples, who view museums and archaeologists as extractive institutions that profited from their ancestors' human remains.

**Funding Constraints:** Community engagements, repatriation processes, and reburials are expensive and time-intensive, with unclear long-term funding mechanisms.



Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

Annelize Kotze discusses community mistrust that stems from historical exploitation, highlighting Iziko Museums' community-led methodology that gives Khoe and San communities agency over their ancestors' repatriation. [L-R: Annelize Kotze, Dr Wendy Black]

## Proposed Solutions and Approaches

**Community-Led Methodology:** Iziko Museums pioneered a community-driven approach, giving communities agency over their ancestors' human remains rather than imposing institutional decisions. This includes extensive community consultations and bringing curators to affected communities.

**Collaborative Regional Framework:** The panel advocated for Pan-African cooperation to address shared colonial trauma, suggesting joint approaches to locate and return human remains from European institutions.

**Te Papa Model Adaptation:** New Zealand's bulk repatriations used single military aircraft to reduce costs and create temporary mourning spaces before community-specific reburials.

**Re-humanisation Process:** Moving beyond clinical 'de-accessioning', the panel acknowledged the spiritual and cultural significance of both human remains and associated material culture.

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## Open Questions and Future Considerations

- **Institutional Capacity:** How to scale up from SAHRA's small RRO unit to handle the anticipated flood of claims, particularly from European institutions?
- **Funding Sustainability:** How to establish permanent funding streams for ongoing community engagement and repatriation processes?
- **Regional Coordination:** How to formalise pan-African collaboration mechanisms for shared colonial heritage issues?
- **Memorial Spaces:** How to develop appropriate alternatives to museum storage that respect diverse community practices while ensuring accessibility?

Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

[Images 1-5] Moments in between: where solidarity takes root.



[1]



[2]



[3]



[4]

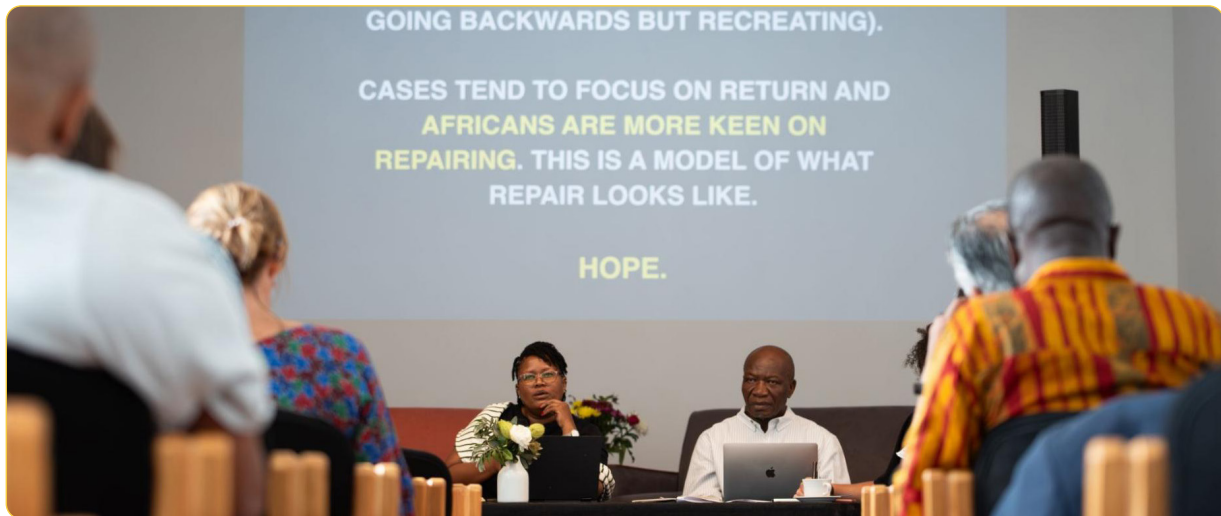


[5]

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## DAY 2

19 March 2025



Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

Panellists explore cross-continental partnerships in restitution work, analysing experiences from Cameroon, Lesotho, and Ghana to identify what transforms collaborations from perpetuating power imbalances into genuine partnerships that restore relationships between communities and their heritage.

### 8. Panel 4: Ways of Collaborating with Different Stakeholders

**Speakers: Phumzile Nombuso Twala (Open Restitution Africa), Prof Kodzo Gavua, Mamokuena Makhema. Moderator: Robyn Humphreys**

The panel discussion highlighted that successful restitution hinges on diverse, balanced partnerships that prioritise African agency and community-defined repair processes.

The discussion examined collaborative approaches between African and non-African stakeholders for cultural restitution, using case studies from Cameroon, Lesotho, and Ghana, as well as those explored throughout the Open Restitution Africa <sup>[5]</sup> project.

This panel revealed that successful restitution requires diverse, balanced partnerships that prioritise African agency and community-defined repair processes, while warning against exploitative collaborations that perpetuate colonial knowledge extraction patterns.

5. See: Open Restitution Africa: <https://openrestitution.africa/case-studies/> Accessed: 2025/08/28.

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The panellists offered different but complementary perspectives on collaboration in restitution work, from community mobilisation success stories, to institutional vulnerability, to systematic stakeholder mapping.

## Underlying Concepts and Principles

**Repair Over Return:** African communities prioritise spiritual and cultural repair in addition to physical repatriation.

**Partnership Versus Collaboration:** The distinction emphasises mutual planning, execution, and benefit-sharing from project inception, contrasting with extractive 'collaboration' where one party's agenda dominates.

**Spiritual Dimensions:** Cultural belongings often serve as spiritual receptacles housing community souls, making their loss genuinely traumatic and their return existentially necessary.

## Impact and Significance

These discussions challenge Western museological frameworks while proposing African-centred approaches to cultural heritage. The emphasis on repair and spiritual restitution offers alternatives to purely legalistic or diplomatic restitution models, potentially transforming how both African and global institutions conceptualise cultural stewardship.

## Key Issues and Challenges

**Stakeholder Imbalances:** Research has revealed that restitution efforts fail when undertaken by isolated actors. The Bamendou Tukah Mask<sup>[6]</sup> case demonstrated that unsuccessful attempts typically involve limited stakeholders (e.g., only museum directors and community leaders), while breakthroughs require diverse, balanced representation of both African and non-African participants.

**Exploitative Partnerships:** Lesotho's experience with Yale University highlighted how institutions can enter 'collaborative' agreements that ultimately disadvantage African partners: their archives were digitised but placed behind paywalls, making them inaccessible to the originating communities.

**Institutional Resistance:** European institutions employ various tactics to retain control, from outright denial to offering digital copies of material culture and ancestral remains, while retaining original versions thereof, or even imposing prohibitive repatriation costs.

**Definitional Challenges:** Terminology continues to evolve rapidly, with debates over 'source community' versus 'affected communities,' and movements from 'objects' to 'entities/belongings' and 'human remains' to 'ancestors'.

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6. The Tukah Mask is 'the material representation of traditional power in Bamendou'. It is brought out for public viewing on two special occasions: the enthronement of a new king and as part of a community gathering held every five years in Bamendou in West Cameroon..



Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

Mamokuena Makhema presents at the Baraza Convening. Drawing on Lesotho's experience with Yale University—where digitised archives were placed behind paywalls, rendering them inaccessible to the very communities they belong to and perpetuating institutional control over African heritage—she distinguishes genuine partnership from exploitative 'collaboration'

## Proposed Approaches

**Multi-Stakeholder Engagement:** Sustainable restitution processes require 'making the circle bigger' by involving community leaders, diaspora members, academics, artists, government officials, spiritual leaders, and international partners working collaboratively.

**African Restitution Movement:** Ghana's 'Forum for African Restitution' aims to create continent-wide advocacy, recognising that national-level efforts may inadvertently reinforce colonial boundaries.

**Community-Centred Processes:** The 'Ngim Nu Festival'<sup>[7]</sup> demonstrated how communities can reclaim agency through cultural celebrations, conferences, and spiritual ceremonies that prioritise repair over mere physical return.

**Strategic Patience and Education:** Rather than confrontational approaches, methodical stakeholder education, including ministers and museum directors, can convert resistance into advocacy.

See: Open Restitution Africa. Case Studies: Chronology of Restitution Efforts. Accessed: 2025/08/28. <https://openrestitution.africa/case-study/bamendou-tukah-mask/>

7. The 'Ngim Nu Festival' is a festival founded in Bamendou, Cameroon. In 2019, a brother mask [also referred to as a replica] of the original Tukah Mask was created by local sculptors, and the Ministry of Arts and Culture assisted in bringing the 'Ngim Nu Festival' to fruition. The festival offered an opportunity for community members to celebrate their culture, to network both personally and professionally, and to learn more about the Tukah Mask and its value through an academic conference. The festival received support from community members, local businesses, other Cameroonian chiefdoms, and media houses.

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## Open Questions and Future Considerations

- How can African institutions prevent exploitative partnerships or other arrangements that ultimately disadvantage communities while appearing collaborative?
- What structures can build continental solidarity for restitution claims without replicating colonial boundaries?
- How should both African and European museums fundamentally change their narratives and practices if restitution principles are taken seriously? This includes housing decisions, community control, and moving beyond colonial-era interpretive frameworks.
- What alternatives to problematic terms like 'source community' better reflect African perspectives?
- Should restitution focus on transferring spiritual power to replicas or securing physical return of original cultural belongings?

## Conclusion

The panel exposed tensions between idealistic collaboration goals and persistent power imbalances that disadvantage African institutions. Lesotho's Morija Museum & Archives and Yale's digitisation case exemplifies how well-intentioned projects become cultural extraction without proper safeguards.

The discussion challenged European museum frameworks and traditional advocacy by evolving restitution concepts beyond physical return toward repair, spiritual restoration, and community empowerment.

Critical questions persist about preventing exploitative agreements, developing appropriate legal frameworks, balancing physical repatriation with spiritual repair, exploring replicas and digital restitution, and building sustainable pan-African networks.

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## 9. Workshop: Building Pan-African Networks for Restitution

The workshop aimed to develop coordinated Pan-African strategies for cultural restitution by bringing together heritage practitioners, museum professionals, and community representatives to identify shared objectives and establish sustainable collaborative networks.

Participants focused on articulating common goals centred on healing, justice, and cultural restoration while developing practical frameworks for meaningful partnerships between communities, institutions, and governments.

The session emphasised moving beyond fragmented national approaches toward unified continental advocacy, drawing on liberation movement histories to create strategic counter-intelligence mechanisms for sharing information and building collective power in negotiations with current holders of African cultural heritage.

### Underlying Concepts and Principles

**Restoration as Healing and Justice:** Restitution serves multiple purposes: healing communities, restoring language/culture/memory, achieving social justice, and rehumanising cultural belongings through reconnection with ancestral heritage and identity.

**Community-centred Partnerships:** Meaningful partnerships include community leaders, traditional authorities, and affected populations while ensuring transparency, accountability, and respect for cultural protocols in all restitution processes..

**Legal Framework Reform:** Moving away from imposed colonial legal systems toward consensus-based African approaches, existing frameworks can be formed, rather than re-created, while partnering with legal allies like Attorney Generals.

**Pan-African Unity and Coordination:** Coordinated African movements, united claims processes, and Pan-African institutions can counter European museum coalitions and create sustainable networks for collective advocacy and resource sharing.

**Counter-Intelligence and Strategic Activism:** Restitution can draw from liberation movement histories to develop tactical approaches, including instituting due diligence, identifying allies, and creating intelligence-sharing mechanisms for strategic decision-making.

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## Key Issues and Challenges

**Colonial Legal System Dependence:** African countries remain bound by colonial legal frameworks that don't reflect indigenous values or consensus-building approaches. This creates fundamental misalignment with traditional African legal systems.

**Power Imbalances and Fragmented Approaches:** European museums form coalitions while African efforts remain siloed; the lack of a coordinated Pan-African strategy means that communities go alone rather than build united claims processes.

**Knowledge Loss and Generational Gaps:** Knowledge disappears with elders, and younger generations are disconnected from cultural heritage. This creates difficulty filling knowledge gaps created by what participants termed 'knowledge genocide' through colonial disruption.

**Resource and Capacity Constraints:** Limited financial resources, lack of sustained funding, technological gaps, and insufficient human capacity to support comprehensive restitution networks and maintain long-term community engagement across diverse contexts comprise major challenges.

**Communication and Translation Barriers:** In addition to addressing multiple languages across regions, there is a need for cultural brokers to translate between community languages and institutional/legal terminology in order to maintain authentic community voices while meeting formal requirements.

## Proposed Approaches

**Counter-Intelligence Restitution Agency:** Establish a small, agile agency modelled on liberation movements to share strategic information, conduct due diligence on institutions, identify allies, and enable tactical decision-making across African restitution efforts.

**Pan-African Institutional Framework:** Create Pan-African institutions including specialised universities with restitution centres for documentation/archiving, accountability mechanisms, and regular exchange networks between affected communities and countries to enhance coordination.

**Community Curator and Academic Activist Networks:** Deploy community-based curators, academics, and activists to provide grassroots education, raise awareness, conduct political education, and facilitate knowledge transmission while respecting cultural protocols and community consent.

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**Legal Framework Reform Strategy:** Reform existing colonial legal systems rather than creating new ones, partner with Attorney Generals, apply consensus-building approaches reflecting African values, and critically assess conventions for contextual relevance.

**Cultural Broker and Translation Systems:** Develop professional networks to translate between community languages and institutional terminology, preserve claims in original languages while providing translations, and support articulation of community needs to legal/museum frameworks.

## Open Questions and Future Considerations

- How should proposed Pan-African restitution institutions be governed, funded, and organised to avoid bureaucratic inefficiency while maintaining continental coordination?
- Can African countries successfully transition from colonial legal frameworks to indigenous, consensus-based systems while maintaining international legal compatibility?
- What specific mechanisms would enable a Counter-Intelligence Restitution Agency to operate effectively across diverse political systems and cultural contexts?
- How can authentic community voices be preserved in formal restitution processes while ensuring informed consent and avoiding exploitation?
- What sustainable funding models can support long-term restitution networks, community education programmes, and institutional capacity building across Africa?

## Outcomes

The workshop revealed consensus around restitution as a tool for healing, justice, and cultural restoration, with participants identifying the need for coordinated Pan-African approaches to counter fragmented national efforts.

Key findings included proposals for a Counter-Intelligence Restitution Agency, legal framework reforms that move away from colonial systems toward consensus-based approaches, and community-centred networks using cultural brokers and academic activists.

Participants emphasised the urgency of addressing knowledge loss from disappearing elders while building sustainable partnerships that respect cultural protocols and maintain authentic community voices in formal restitution processes.

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## Summary of Workshops

The workshops revealed consensus around moving from Western inventory models to African claims-based approaches, emphasising community agency, Pan-African coordination, and strategic intelligence-gathering. Participants proposed concrete mechanisms, including specialised agencies and university centres, while recognising the need for legal reforms that reflect African rather than colonial values. The focus shifted from managing European data to building African-controlled infrastructure for restitution claims.



Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

'The youth have entered the chat,' declares Hileni Ameinge, expanding on critical gaps in youth engagement and the uncertainty surrounding what African museums should become post-restitution as well as emphasising the importance of intergenerational continuity.

[L-R: Dr Mary Mbewe, Mamokuena Makhema, Hileni Ameinge, Robyn Humphreys, Molemo Moiloa.]



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## 10. Public Panel Discussion: Reflections on Practice and Future Directions

**Speakers:** Hileni Ameinge, Mamokuena Makhema, Dr Mary Mbewe  
**Moderator:** Molemo Moiloa

This final panel discussion brought together practitioners from across Africa to reflect on two days of conversations about heritage restitution, focusing on personal experiences, challenges, and the emotional dimensions of restitution work while identifying gaps and future priorities for the continent.

This reflective session revealed restitution work as an emotionally demanding practice that requires significant personal resilience and community support. While celebrating progress in African agency, participants identified critical needs for continental coordination, educational reform, and institutional transformation.

The conversations emphasised moving beyond technical approaches to embrace restitution as holistic cultural healing, which requires long-term commitment to relationship-building and trust development at sustainable paces determined by African communities themselves.

### Underlying Concepts and Principles

**Moving at the Speed of Trust:** Recognition that meaningful restitution cannot be rushed; it requires time for relationship-building and healing processes that may not fit external timelines or political pressures.

**Community-Driven Approaches:** Prioritising affected communities' agency and leadership in determining how restitution should proceed, rather than institutional or expert-led processes.

**Holistic Healing:** Understanding restitution as part of broader processes of cultural resuscitation, memory recovery, and identity reconstruction that extends beyond the return of cultural belongings.

**Continental Solidarity:** Emphasising pan-African collaboration and shared experiences rather than isolated national approaches to address common colonial legacies.



Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

Panel speakers underscored that meaningful restitution cannot be rushed but must 'move at the speed of trust'. [L-R: Robyn Humphreys, Molemo Moiloa.]

## Key Issues and Challenges

**Emotional and Psychological Toll:** Participants highlighted the significant personal cost of restitution work, including fear, anxiety, anger, and trauma when dealing with issues of cultural loss and injustice. The work involves confronting painful histories while constantly requesting denied returns, which takes a psychological toll.

**Isolation and Lack of Support Systems:** Many practitioners work in isolation, lacking clear leadership structures, reporting mechanisms, and peer support networks. The absence of coordinated 'foot soldiers' and mentorship creates vulnerability and burnout among those doing this demanding work.

**Knowledge Production Challenges:** Universities and higher education institutions continue to perpetuate colonial knowledge systems, with African students still required to defer to external 'specialists' rather than developing indigenous knowledge frameworks and methodologies.

**Missing Youth Engagement:** Despite the importance of intergenerational continuity, youth voices and perspectives have been insufficiently integrated into restitution discussions and leadership structures.

**Institutional Futures Unclear:** Questions remain about what African museums

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should become post-restitution: whether to maintain colonial exhibition frameworks or develop entirely new museological approaches rooted in African contexts.

## Proposed Solutions and Approaches

**Continental Coordination Networks:** Establishing structured support systems with clear leadership, reporting mechanisms, and peer networks to prevent isolation and provide emotional and practical support for practitioners.

**Educational Reform:** Integrating restitution, decolonisation, and African knowledge systems into university curricula across disciplines, not just technical museum studies programmes, while promoting 'barefoot professors' and indigenous knowledge holders.

**Social Museology:** Adopting Latin American models of social museology, where museums integrate practices of community mobilisation rather than static collections, exemplified by institutions like District Six Museum.

**Self-Restitution:** Beginning decolonisation work with personal 'unlearning' of internalised colonial education and rebuilding minds based on African worldviews and epistemologies.

**Youth Leadership Development:** Deliberately targeting and supporting young people as current leaders (not just 'future leaders') in restitution processes.

## Open Questions and Future Considerations

- What is the best way to balance engagement with international conventions (UNESCO 1970, AU Model Law) while maintaining African-centred approaches and sovereignty over restitution processes?
- How can the need for restitution from African national institutions to local communities, not just international returns, be addressed?
- How can post-colonial African museums be redefined, and how should they function within African societies?
- How can comprehensive strategies for transforming educational institutions and knowledge production systems across the continent be developed?
- How can lasting infrastructure for emotional, practical, and financial support of restitution practitioners be created?

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## Conclusion

This gathering demonstrated a significant shift in restitution discourse over the past five years, with practitioners speaking more boldly and confidently about African agency.

The creation of safe spaces for honest discussion about failures, emotions, and vulnerabilities represents important progress in building sustainable restitution movements.

The emphasis on African-led solutions and continental coordination suggests growing confidence in indigenous approaches rather than deference to external frameworks

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# Reflections

## 11. Reflection on the Panel: Issues around National Restitution Policies and the Infrastructures that are Required to Enact Them

**By Tuuda Haitula**

At the time of the convening, I served as a Museum Development Officer at the Museums Association of Namibia (MAN), where my work centred on strengthening museum practice across the country through capacity-building, exhibition development, and heritage policy engagement. As a cultural practitioner, my role involved supporting community-based museums, facilitating dialogues around heritage restitution, and contributing to national efforts that aimed to redefine how Namibian museums engage with their histories and audiences. This position provided me with direct insight into the institutional and infrastructural realities that shape Namibia's readiness to receive and care for restituted cultural materials.

The panel I participated in addressed one of the most urgent (yet complex) issues facing African cultural institutions today: the restitution of cultural heritage. My presentation focused on Namibia's specific context, particularly the absence of a formal restitution policy, the reliance on existing legal frameworks and collaborative agreements, and the infrastructure challenges that frame our work. What emerged from both the talk and broader discussions is the reality that restitution is not a linear process. It is, instead, a negotiation between policies, institutions, communities, and infrastructures, both tangible and intangible.

In Namibia, as emphasised during the session, there is currently no dedicated national policy on restitution of cultural heritage. Although a draft repatriation policy exists, which is envisioned to be completed by October 2025, it will primarily address human remains. The country lacks a comprehensive framework for the restitution of material culture. This gap poses significant challenges, particularly in terms of clarity and consistency in how restituted items are handled, interpreted, and integrated into Namibian heritage landscapes.

In the absence of such a policy, Namibian Heritage practitioners and institutions have relied on other instruments, most notably the National Heritage Act (2004), which designates the National Museum of Namibia as the central repository for restituted items. This framework has provided a measure of stability, allowing practitioners and institutions to receive material culture, undertake provenance research, and determine appropriate custodianship. However, without a tailored policy, many decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, often dependent on the goodwill of institutions or individuals, and not necessarily grounded in national guidelines.

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Despite the lack of a policy, Namibia has been actively engaged in restitution processes, such as the return of the Ovakwanyama Power Stone in 1995 from Finland and the return of 23 cultural belongings from the Berlin Ethnographic Museum in 2022, just to mention but a few. These restitution activities are often guided by pragmatic approaches and collaborative agreements, such as the agreements between the National Museum of Namibia and the Berlin Ethnographic Museum, which have enabled the return of cultural material even without a national restitution framework.

The Confronting Colonial Pasts, Envisioning Creative Futures project, initiated in 2017 by the late Dr. Jeremy Sylvester, has also been a cornerstone in restitution work. Beyond research and institutional collaborations, it produced practical outcomes such as artistic expression, scholarship, provenance research, a documentary, and even the establishment of the Museum of Namibian Fashion. A significant milestone under this project was the aforementioned return of 23 belongings from the German Ethnographic Museum in 2022.

The process highlighted both progress and challenges. Selection was based on criteria such as rarity, cultural continuity, and community relevance. Yet, provenance research revealed a profound rupture: many communities could no longer identify or explain the use of certain items because they had been absent for generations. This knowledge genocide underscores the deep cultural losses that accompany physical dispossession.

In another example, the return of the fragments of the Ondonga Power Stone from Finland in 2023 demonstrated the importance of community involvement in restitution processes. Since the provenance was clearly established—the Ondonga Traditional Authority (OTA), the rightful custodian of the Power Stone fragments—was engaged from the outset to ensure that the process was culturally sensitive, inclusive, and grounded in the local authority. The OTA participated in discussions concerning the return, contributed to the agreement signed between the National Museum of Finland and the National Museum of Namibia, and attended the official handover ceremony to receive their material culture. They also collaborated with the National Museum of Namibia in identifying a temporary holding location for the fragments within the museum, while plans are being finalised for their permanent placement within the Ondonga community. Furthermore, the OTA and the National Museum of Finland have continued to honour the terms of the restitution agreement, which include the development of the Ondonga Cultural Heritage Shrine, where the fragments will ultimately be housed. This process exemplifies how genuine community participation can transform restitution from a symbolic act into one of cultural restoration.

These examples illustrate how, in the absence of a formal restitution policy, Namibia has relied on pragmatic and context-specific approaches to manage restitution processes. Each case becomes a learning experience, shaped by collaboration, negotiation, and cultural sensitivity, rather than a strictly codified

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procedure. They demonstrate that restitution in Namibia is an ongoing process of rebuilding relationships between institutions and communities, guided by ethical imperatives and shared heritage values rather than fixed regulatory frameworks. In this way, practice often precedes policy, gradually laying the groundwork for a more formalised and inclusive restitution framework in the future.

## **Challenges of Provenance Research**

One recurring theme in the discussion was the challenge of provenance research. Too often, European institutions treat restitution as a box-ticking exercise, an opportunity to appear progressive on the global stage by returning large quantities of African cultural belongings in one sweeping gesture. Namibia has not been exempt from this approach. To date, over 21,000 Namibian cultural items are recorded in collections across German-speaking countries. A digital database of these belongings was shared with the Museums Association of Namibia (MAN), where the Director and I were asked to review the entries for accuracy and cultural sensitivity. This request, though well-intentioned, proved impossible to fulfil. Coming from Namibia does not make one an expert on all Namibian cultures; our knowledge is shaped by specific lived experiences and historical encounters. What this process revealed is that meaningful restitution cannot be achieved from behind a computer screen; it requires engaging directly with communities who are the true custodians of the meanings attached to these belongings.

Moreover, the digital format of such databases raises issues of accessibility. While they may enhance European visibility and suggest transparency, the reality on the ground in Namibia is different. Many communities lack electricity, internet access, or the devices required to consult these databases. Thus, restitution processes risk becoming another example of European institutions 'ticking boxes' for international approval, rather than truly engaging with the communities most affected.

Perhaps the most pressing issue is infrastructure. Even as more and more institutions abroad express willingness to return cultural belongings—often as part of their own efforts to signal progressiveness—Namibia is confronted with the question of where, how, and under what conditions restituted belongings will be housed. Museums and storage facilities were not designed to absorb the sudden influx of thousands of items.

Infrastructure is not limited to physical buildings. It also encompasses skilled personnel, conservation expertise, financial resources, and community networks that ensure restitution is not simply the relocation of belongings, but the revitalisation of heritage. Without investment in these infrastructures, restitution risks becoming an unsustainable burden rather than a transformative opportunity.

During the presentation, I emphasised that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to restitution. Each case is unique, requiring sensitivity to context, history, and community voices. The example of the fragments of the Ondonga Power Stone illustrated how restitution can succeed when communities are directly involved.

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On the other hand, the 23 belongings from Berlin highlighted the limitations of community consultations when cultural memory has been severed. Community-driven approaches are essential not only for legitimising restitution, but also for ensuring that returned belongings are reintegrated into living cultural practices.

## Looking Ahead: Questions of Responsibility

As we concluded on the panel, the central question remains: who is responsible for the much-needed infrastructures that restitution requires? Is it the responsibility of European institutions that held these belongings for decades or centuries? Should African governments take the lead, despite resource constraints? Or is it the role of international partnerships to bridge the gap?

Equally important is the evolving meaning of restitution itself. Five years ago, restitution primarily meant the physical return of belongings. Today, it encompasses issues of access, knowledge transfer, and cultural revitalisation. Five years from now, the concept will likely expand further, reflecting shifting global dynamics and local priorities.

This panel underscored that restitution is not a destination, but a process that is complex, contested, and constantly evolving. Namibia's experience demonstrates both the possibilities and limitations of working without a dedicated national policy. While collaborative projects and community-driven approaches have enabled meaningful restitutions, challenges in provenance research, infrastructure, and inclusivity persist.

Ultimately, restitution must be understood not only as the return of belongings, but as the restoration of dignity, knowledge, and cultural continuity. For this to be realised, strong infrastructures—material, institutional, and cultural—must be established. Until then, the critical question remains: who holds the responsibility for making restitution genuinely attainable?

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## 12. Reflections on South Africa's New Restitution Policy

By Robyn Humphreys

In 2021, the South African Parliament passed the National Policy for the Repatriation and Restitution of Human Remains and Heritage Objects (moving forward the policy) (Department of Sport, Arts and Culture, 2021). The policy is the outcome of various calls for the return of family members, comrades, and ancestors who were the victims of colonial and Apartheid violence. The policy is unique because it addresses the return and reburial of ancestral remains from different periods of South Africa's past. Although the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was not mandated to facilitate reburial, during hearings, families made calls for the return of family members who went missing during Apartheid (Rousseau, 2017). At the same time, the history of race science and the foundational role of collecting ancestral remains and objects to establish modern museums locally and abroad was recognised (Rousseau et al., 2017). Communities made calls for the return of ancestors such as Sarah Baartman who were held in overseas collections. These different calls for the return of ancestors shaped the new policy.

In 2002, the ancestral remains of Baartman were returned to South Africa from France (Crais and Scully, 2009). In 2012, the ancestral remains of Klaas and Trooi Pienaar, which were held in the Natural History Museum (NHM) in Vienna, were also returned (Rassool, 2015). These returns, however, occurred on an ad hoc basis, with various museums, scholars, communities and governmental departments working together to facilitate the returns without a clear policy. Similarly, there were the returns of liberation fighters who died in exile (Rousseau, 2017). Given the scale of colonial collecting of human remains and missing persons who were victims of Apartheid political violence, a coherent policy was necessary to put resources aside to facilitate the restitution processes. In both instances, additional resources are required to trace what happened to the ancestral remains after their death and facilitate their return to families and communities.

The policy recognises that the return of ancestral remains is an important act of restorative justice that requires institutional support. The policy established the Repatriation and Restitution Office (RRO), which will facilitate restitution processes. Dr Wendy Black, the Chief Curator of Social History at Iziko Museums of South Africa (Iziko), reflected on the importance of a policy that guides how to work with ancestral remains before and during restitution processes. Iziko has had the Policy on the Management of Human Remains since 2005, which provided guidance on how to manage unethically collected human remains. In the case of Iziko, individuals who were collected for race science are classified as unethically collected (Black and McCavitt, 2020).

Provenance research—by scholars such as Prof Martin Legassik and Prof Ciraj Rassool (2000), resulting in the publications such as *Skeletons in the Cupboard*—were important for establishing new policies. Provenance research details the

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contexts in which ancestral remains were collected and for which purposes they were collected. In the case of Iziko, ancestral remains that were unethically collected were often collected for race science, without the consent of the individual or family members. Collecting effectively took the form of grave robbing (Rassool, 2015; Rassool and Legassick, 2000). The Iziko policy identified 225 ancestors whose human remains were unethically collected.

Given the history of collecting, Dr Black discussed the steps Iziko has taken to recognise the dignity of ancestors, such as deaccessioning unethically collected human remains. Deaccessioning means that ancestral remains are taken off the registry of objects held in the museum's collections. The process recognises the humanity of the ancestors and prevents any further research on the human remains. The national policy builds on the Iziko policy, because any human remains that are identified as unethically collected in South African museums or museums abroad need to be deaccessioned.

My own interest in the RRO is how it deals with human remains that were discovered in graves that were deemed archaeological sites. The case of Prestwich Street Burial Ground, dated to the late 18th or early 19th century, showed that ancestral remains from older sites are still connected to communities. The informal burial ground, which was built over in the 1800s, was rediscovered during development, uncovering the burials of the underclass of colonial Cape Town, including the enslaved. Activist community members rejected attempts to do research on ancestors. They argued that the underclass, and especially the enslaved people of colonial Cape Town, were already objectified and commodified in their lives; they should not be objectified and treated as data in their death. Another example is the return of the ancestral remains to the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape in 2007. The ancestral remains were originally buried around 1100 to 800 years ago and were excavated during the colonial and Apartheid period by archaeologists. In the case of Mapungubwe and Prestwich Street, ancestral remains from what are considered archaeological sites were deemed as important ancestors that should not be kept in museums for research. However, the new policy treats ancestral remains from archaeological sites as ethically collected. The policy also makes it difficult for communities to make claims to ancestral remains older than 300 years old, stating that it is unlikely that these remains are connected to living communities. Thus, many human remains that have been collected from archaeological sites, and some that have been used for race science, remain in museum collections, accessioned as research resources.

Troy Phili, the Manager of the RRO, discussed how the unit will facilitate returns in the coming years. The unit's priority is to facilitate the return of ancestral remains of fallen liberation heroes who were buried outside of South Africa and whose burials are unknown. There is also the ongoing search for missing persons whose burial place in South Africa is unknown. The office is prioritising individuals who died between 1960 and 1994. Families continue to suffer as a result of not knowing what happened to victims of political violence who went missing during Apartheid; there is an urgent need for closure through repatriation and reburial.

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A secondary priority for the RRO are human remains collected for the purposes of race science during the colonial period. However, Annalize Kotze, an Iziko Curator, has engaged with communities to show that the return of ancestors collected for race science during earlier colonial periods is also a pressing issue. Many are aware of the intimate connection between the systematic inequality that they face and the history of race science, which has produced dehumanising images of various communities that justifies their continued marginalisation.

The process of return can facilitate healing by recognising the humanity of ancestors. Rassool questioned the need for priorities when the return of the victims of colonialism has been a long time in the making. Restitution processes offer opportunities to recognise the humanity of those who were made into museum objects. The return of Klaas and Trooi Pienaar recognised their humanity through reburial processes that involved coffins instead of boxes and ceremonies conducted by descendant communities to welcome home ancestors (Rassool, 2015).

Kotze views museums as spaces that can facilitate healing through returns of ancestors and inviting communities into museums to engage with collections. Kotze put together the Inter-RESTING Times exhibition in 2018, which was made up of the empty boxes that once held human remains in museums in South Africa and abroad (Williams, 2018). The exhibition allowed the public to witness how museum practices dehumanised ancestral remains. The boxes were marked with information useful to researchers, such as where individuals came from, when they were collected, and racial categories. Important parts of ancestors' identities, such as their names, were removed as they became research specimens. Kotze shared that, during the exhibition, a community member from Uitenhage was surprised to see her town listed on a box; they learned about a history of collecting in the region that they were unaware of.

Provenance research is necessary because the policy requires ancestors to be returned to descendant families or communities with which they have cultural affiliation. Prof Rassool noted that there is an urgency to facilitate the returns of ancestors collected for colonial race science. Many European institutions have identified individuals who need to be returned but for which no descendent community has been identified. Rassool suggested that a transitional space of care for returned ancestral remains be set up at Iziko, for example. New institutional arrangements are necessary so that human remains can be held in local museums and can be engaged with by communities until they are reburied. Iziko is a possible space because the museum has consistently worked towards facilitating restitution and rethinking its own museum practice in the process. The new policy can offer guidance for other African countries who are yet to put in place the infrastructure necessary for return. Lessons will also be learnt as the RRO tries to grapple with different restitutions processes and priorities with the resources available to it.

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## 13. From Policy to Activation: Reflections from Cape Town

By Hileni Tuhafeni Ameinge

From 18–21 March 2025, I found myself in Cape Town for the very first time, stepping into the Iyatsiba Lab at the University of the Western Cape. The space was alive with voices, stories, and visions from across the African continent. Heritage practitioners, scholars, artists, community custodians, and restitution advocates gathered with a shared purpose: to confront the realities of returning cultural belongings, human remains, and knowledge systems to the communities from which they were taken. The convening, co-hosted by Open Restitution Africa and the University of the Western Cape, sought to move beyond statements of intent into tangible and actionable restitution.

What struck me most from the outset was the diversity of experience in the room. Each participant carried their own history, shaped by the political, cultural, and emotional landscapes of their countries. Yet, beneath these differences, there was a shared heartbeat: the urgent desire to see restitution not as an isolated event, but as a deep human process of rehumanisation, healing, and justice. This was not just about the return of cultural assets and cultural belongings, it was about the restoration of memory, language, dignity, and the threads that bind communities to their past and their future.

The first day brought honest accounts of where countries currently stand in their restitution journeys. Some have begun crafting legal and policy frameworks grounded in their own traditions, while others are still navigating early stages, faced with the dual challenges of limited resources and external pressures. Across these stories ran common sentiments: the absence of legal structures that reflect African worldviews, the tension between national/state priorities and community needs, and the urgent necessity of collaboration. It was both humbling and affirming to realise that Namibia's struggles are shared by many across the continent.

My own entry point into matters of restitution and repatriation goes back to my time as an undergraduate student at the University of Namibia, with my bachelor's degree in Education (Arts and History). In 2022, I joined the summer school programme 'Engaging the Past, Sharing the Future', which took a group of us to Germany to engage directly with colonial collections in museums. At that stage, I understood restitution and repatriation only in broad terms: repatriation as simply the return of something to its place of origin and restitution as part of that process. Yet, as the programme unfolded, my understanding deepened. I was introduced to concepts such as restoration, which I now see as central to restitution, because it speaks to rebuilding relationships with repatriated belongings, not just moving them from one location to another. Another concept was 'loan', which I had previously thought of as temporary or neutral. In practice, I learnt that it often

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disguises the reality that communities are still denied permanent access to what is theirs, since legal and institutional regulations create barriers to outright return. This experience taught me that restitution is not as simple as 'giving back what does not belong to you'. Instead, it is entangled in regulations, power dynamics, and negotiations that make the process much more complex. At the same time, it opened my eyes to the responsibilities of heritage practitioners, because behind these policies are communities who live with loss.

My second entry point came a little later, when I was pursuing my Postgraduate Diploma in Heritage Conservation and Management at the University of Namibia. This was a turning point, because I had the opportunity to engage with cultural belongings and cultural assets that had been returned to Namibia in May 2022 under the Confronting Colonial Pasts, Envisioning Creative Futures project. What began as an academic encounter soon grew into professional involvement, as I later joined the Museums Association of Namibia (MAN) as an intern working directly on this project in late 2023. The project, a collaboration between MAN, the National Museum of Namibia, and the University of Namibia, and generously supported by the Gerda Henkel Foundation, aimed to awaken the healing and creative potential of Namibian collections that had remained in Berlin, Germany for over a century. Through this work, these colonial collections were reconnected with their communities of origin as well as Namibian scholars and artists, while also opening spaces for hands-on learning in provenance research, conservation, documentation, and curation.

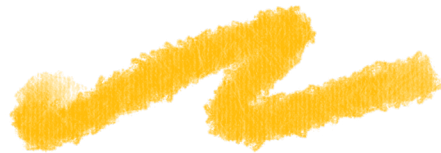
For me, being part of this project sharpened my understanding of restitution in practice. I witnessed firsthand how cultural belongings are not only sources of pain, tied to histories of violence and dispossession, but also sources of inspiration, knowledge, and creativity for contemporary Namibia. I saw how workshops with community custodians, researchers, and artists turned 'collections' into living archives of memory and creativity. The project also broadened my awareness of the language we use: whether we call them 'objects,' 'artefacts,' or 'cultural belongings' fundamentally shapes the way they are valued and understood. These debates taught me that restitution is not just about where cultural belongings and cultural assets are located, but also about how they are framed, cared for, and spoken about. With this grounding, the diversity of voices I encountered in Cape Town spoke deeply to me. When participants spoke of the absence of African worldviews in legal structures or the gaps between state priorities and community needs, I recalled the frustrations and hopes I had witnessed both in European museums and in Namibian community workshops.

The second day shifted into workshops, where conversations turned into collective problem-solving platforms. We explored the sustainability of networks, the need for shared resources, and the potential of Pan-African coordination to track and archive restitution claims. We spoke of frameworks built on community consent, youth inclusion, and respect for knowledge holders. The discussions felt like planting seeds; some ideas are ready to take root immediately, while others need time, nurturing, and cross-border support to grow.

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For me, the emotional weight of these days came from the recognition that restitution is not solely a matter for lawyers, curators, or policymakers. It belongs to the communities that have lived with loss, often for generations. It is in their hands that true restoration must rest, and it is our role as practitioners to ensure that processes are shaped WITH THEM and not for them. This gathering reminded me that restitution is as much about listening as it is about returning, as much about care as it is about correction.

I left Cape Town with a sense of responsibility and hope. Responsibility, because the path ahead demands persistence, courage, and the willingness to challenge structures that resist change. Hope, because the convening proved that when African voices meet on equal ground, solutions grounded in justice and humanity can, and will, emerge. Restitution, in this vision, becomes more than the sum of policy and process. It becomes a living, breathing act of restoration for the continent and its people.



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## 14. Insights

### Foundations: What we now know

- Restitution requires de-objectification and re-humanisation work beyond physical return.
- Ethical restitution transforms 'human remains' back into ancestors and 'objects' back into belongings, requiring social restoration work rather than simple geographic relocation.

### Transitions: What we are learning

- Moving at the speed of trust, we recognise that meaningful restitution cannot be rushed; it requires time for relationship-building and healing processes that may not fit external timelines or political pressures.

### Applications: What we are doing

- Sustainable restitution processes require 'making the circle bigger' by involving community leaders, diaspora members, academics, artists, government officials, spiritual leaders, and international partners working collaboratively.

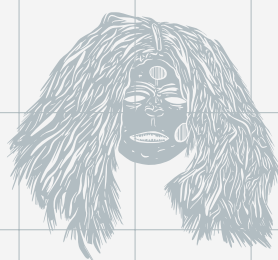
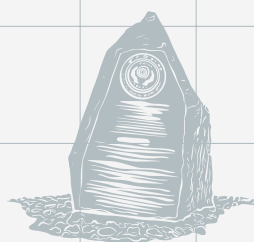
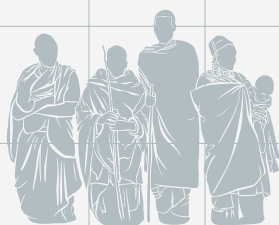
### Impacts: What we are working towards achieving

- Ultimately, restitution must be understood not only as the return of belongings, but as the restoration of dignity, knowledge, and cultural continuity.



Credit: Matthew Jordaan.

Building the Future Together: A Pan-African Commitment to Restitution. Baraza participants stand together, marking a shift from isolated national efforts to united continental action. Together, they built networks and shared a common vision to turn restitution from words into action.



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