

Restitutions: ethics and methodologies for a contested heritage

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Africa e Mediterraneo's 100th issue will focus on the restitution of cultural objects and human remains to African museums and communities. A core theme of postcolonial thinking and community activism for decades, restitution has now gained centre stage, as more and more countries – including China, most recently – demand that objects and bodies (or parts thereof) violently removed by colonial powers and kept at European cultural institutions are returned to their country, or community, of origin.

Restitution is an aspect of the larger movement to decolonise relations between the Global South and the Global North. Museums contribute to discursively and materially shape the way we position ourselves in the world, based on selective and biased narratives of history and memory. Re-signifying and re-imagining those institutions is pivotal to acknowledging the violence of colonial history and resisting racist and discriminatory politics and practices in the arts and culture.

In August 2023, the G20 joined the debate, with an official statement by its ministers of culture in support of an open and inclusive dialogue on the return of cultural objects and human remains looted by colonial powers. As the pressure by the international movement for restitution grows, Western museums come face to face with a legacy of material and cultural appropriation that has a direct impact on how they engage with the historical archive. In addition to war looting and violent acquisition, ways of acquisitions include diplomatic donations, ethnographic and missionary collections, art markets. All that makes in-depth historical and legislative studies of the genealogies of existing collections topics that should be undertaken by museums. Effective cultural and political initiatives question Western knowledge, especially the colonial classifications that still shape conservation in museums in the Global North. At the same time, restitution impacts national and international political agendas, school and university curricula, countless cultural practices, etc.

The 100th issue of *Africa e Mediterraneo* aims at including articles that focus on national case studies to provide a comparative view of the state of the art in different European countries. In particular, we will devote a special section of the issue to the Italian context.

We invite scholars, experts, museum curators, activists, and artists to submit proposals on this timely topic. Authors are also encouraged to send in reviews of relevant books on restitution.

Possible topics include:

– Museum politics and policies of restitution and curation of returned objects, including studies on data collection, transparency, methodologies, etc.

- Restitution of human remains and their parts, which should no longer be exhibited in anthropological or medical contexts
- Issues regarding the physical return of objects and conservation
- Restitution in art practices
- Re-signification of colonial museums: restitution, re-appropriation, sharing
- The international politics of restitution
- The relationship between material restitution of cultural objects and their universal fruition
- The role of activist communities
- Restitution and cultural justice
- Alternative solutions to exhibiting actual looted artefacts and human remains – like Euro-African museums, or virtual installations – and what that would mean for museums
- Case studies

Deadlines

The deadline to submit an abstract of no more than 400 words is ****31 December 2023****. The abstract must be sent to abstract@africaemediterraneo.it. It will be reviewed by the editors of the issue. The deadline for submitting the finished article of 3000 to 5000 words, along with a 100-word abstract and short profile of the author, is ****17 May 2024****.

Africa e Mediterraneo is a blind peer-reviewed journal that publishes articles in Italian, English, and French.