# Restitution is not the only solution

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**Decolonising African heritage inside and outside the African continent, Panel B09, 19 January 2021**

This panel about decolonising African heritage was an example for the other panels at the conference. First, because the philosophical questions and the theories that were treated did not take away the space for engaging in a radical discussion. The panel offered space for more philosophical questions such as: what does restitution mean? How should restitution work? How do objects acquire meaning? How can restitution shape this meaning? How does ownership work? Nevertheless, in contrast to what happens quite often, in this panel, the abstract discussion did not limit the space for specific case studies. In other words, the theories did not take away the space for action. The panellists presented examples such as library decolonisation, postage stamp decolonisation, specific cases of national museum collections and the role of curators.

Second, even though these case studies were (extremely) disparate, they were still connected and made sense as a whole. The panel not only consisted of scholars presenting their articles in five minutes; rather, panellists engaged in a spirited dialogue with each other.



They responded and completed each other's arguments.

This dialogue between people presenting case studies made it possible to define a path for action. For instance, the panellists agreed that diverse collaboration is an essential step in decolonising African heritage. Specifically, it means collaboration between countries, museums, curators and societies.

Another step is to go further than limiting yourself to the current practice of restitution. The decolonisation of African heritage is not just about where the objects are, but also about what they mean and how the knowledge about them is transmitted. For example: museums in Africa still follow colonial ethnographic methods of collecting data, according to Charles Mulinda Kabwete of the University of Rwanda, and should abandon this.

The dangers of creating a universal path were also emphasised. Anna-Maria Brandstetter, an anthropologist at the University of Mainz, argued that there is no formula: real decolonisation requires a lot of research and individual solutions.

## Take-aways
• Collaboration is an essential step in decolonising African heritage
• Decolonisation of African heritage implies more than restitution
• Real decolonisation requires research and individual solutions