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Culture War Over Antiques:

A Content Analysis of Restitution Issues Surrounding the British
Museum in 2023 Across Six British Mainstream Newspapers

By

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It has been quite a journey so far, with those memories, pleasant and sorrowful. This marks a milepost – the end of a few years in my life, and the start of another few.

Returning to the topic, I would like to thank Dr. Alena, my supervisor, for her support and especially for lending me the book "The Brutish Museums," which the Pilkington Library was unhurried to get for its collection. Also, I would like to express my gratitude to my mother, for her unwavering backing, year after year.

Abstract

Should museums with colonial legacies return contested artefacts to their source nations? This question of cultural restitution has stirred debates in both the public sphere and academia. Increasingly, restitution requests target museums in Western nations, with the British Museum standing out as a beacon due to its extensive collection and symbolic ties to the once-mighty British Empire. This content analysis research sets against this backdrop, seeking to understand the discourse on cultural restitution surrounding the British Museum as shaped by mainstream British newspapers in 2023 – a year when 2000 artefacts stored in the British Museum were reported stolen and the museum became a focal point in political disputes between Britain and Greece. The analysis reveals subtle patterns in pro- and anti-restitution stances advocated by left- and right-leaning newspapers, along with the narrative strategies employed. Additionally, the research finds that while the British press generally acknowledges the moral justification for restitution, anti-restitution voices are more explicitly expressed than pro-restitution views. This reflects a contrast and tension within British media when addressing colonial matters in relation to material culture.

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Introduction

“Memory is never only about the past ... (it) is deeply entangled with both the present and the future” (Macdonald, 2013, p. 216). This holds true for artefacts and cultural restitution. Ancient possessions seem indivisible from national connotations: the Terracotta Army for China, the Nefertiti Bust for Egypt, the Domesday Book for England, the Parthenon Marbles for Greece, and the Laocoön and His Sons for Italy. They also become entangled in contemporary politics, especially when the nations in possession differ from those with the connotations. As an example, on November 28, 2023, a planned meeting between Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, which Mitsotakis regarded as an opportunity to discuss the restitution of the Parthenon Marbles stored in the British Museum, was abruptly cancelled by Rishi Sunak, igniting political disputes. The following day, Labour Party leader Keir Starmer confronted the Prime Minister in a House of Commons debate, questioning:

“Never mind the British Museum – it is the Prime Minister who has obviously lost his marbles. The Greek Prime Minister came to London to meet him ... the Prime Minister tried to humiliate him and cancelled at the last minute. Why such small politics, Prime Minister?”

And Rishi Sunak countered that:

“...The purpose of the meeting was ... to grandstand and relitigate issues of the past, it was not appropriate. Furthermore, specific commitments and assurances on that topic were made to this country and then broken ... in my view, when people make commitments, they should keep them” (House of Commons, 2023).

This case is a symbol blending of symbols. There also conceals political philosophies, the values to be held, and the cultural sensitivity to be considered. For Greece, the Parthenon Marbles stand as the symbol of national identity, a source of pride. This motivates politicians to pursue restitution. For Britain, it is about whether to entirely decolonialise the symbol, the British Museum, which represents the British imperial past with global-reaching power. Artefacts, to give or to keep, or simply arguing for a stance, here, are capitalised as the weight on a political scale.

Such an incident is not isolated. Upon broader contexts, there has been a rising cultural restitution force globally, especially targeting the museums in ex-colonist western nations. A culture war on the past, as argued by Cuno (2014), is being waged. Amidst the culture war, the British Museum particularly distinguishes itself. It serves as a symbol of Britain's imperial past, housing a vast physical assemblage of global historical artefacts, and remains one of the foremost targets of cultural restitution requests and longstanding debates (Simpson, 2012).

Operating within these landscapes, this research aims to explore the discourse of cultural restitution surrounding the British Museum, analysing its portrayal in six mainstream British newspapers in 2023: the *Guardian*, the *Mirror*, the *Independent*, the *Times*, the *Telegraph*, and the *Daily Mail*. The literature review contextualises the study by exploring museological practices, cultural restitution, the British Museum's contemporary adaptations, and the remembrance of the empire in Britain's political contexts. Following this, the method chapter presents the research questions, outlines the quantitative content analysis and computational text-mining techniques employed, along with the rationales for sampling and chosen analysis tools. The findings chapter then offers critical insights, covering coverage patterns, restitution stances advocated by each newspaper, and the narrative strategies employed. The conclusion reflects on these findings and shares thoughts for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter contextualises the current research. The first section outlines the hybridity within museological practices, highlighting decolonisation waves and the subtle remnants of symbolic violence. Following this, the second section introduces cultural restitution, which is seen as a culture war within material culture against the museum. The third section focuses on the British Museum, exploring its contemporary resistance and adaptation. The final section investigates the remembrance of empire in British media within relevant polarised political contexts.

2.2 Post-War Western Museums and the Dynamics of Hybridity: Cultural Restitution, Decolonisation Waves, Symbolic Violence, and Orientalism

The post-war museum landscape is intricately linked to broader political contexts, where decolonial waves initially emerged before extending to the realm of material culture. The end of World War II marks such origin of the subsequent waves. It signifies the downturn of the politically Euro-centric era with its once-glorious empires, accompanied by rapid decolonisation waves, the rise of new political powers, and globalisation. The British, French, and Dutch empires experienced a decline during this period, with many colonies seeking and gaining independence. Especially for Britain, its decreasing economic and military power further represented the transmutative changes in the post-war geopolitical landscape. This period saw the dismantling of colonial rule, as reflected in the independence movements across continents. From the independence of India and the dissolution of the British Raj in 1947, followed by the riots in Ghana and the outbreak of emergency in Malaya, to the Suez Crisis in 1956 (Brendon, 2008), and the "Wind of Change" speech in 1960 (Shipway, 2007, p. 199), the course showed a vital shift toward a post-colonial world. Britain's attempts to limit overseas military spending in 1965 (Darwin, 2006) and the changing domestic opinion in the late 1960s (Srinivasan, 2005) signalled the revaluation of its imperial commitments. Concurrently, the rise of geopolitical entities like the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Conferences (1957) and the pervasive trend of establishment of modern nation-states outlines the culmination of decolonisation and the emergence of a new era in global affairs (Kennedy, 2016), appertaining to self-determination of newly independent nations and the redrawing of political boundaries. Reposing on this context, the 1990s delivered a new chapter in the post-World War II era, represented by the emerging tenor of post-colonial studies. Notwithstanding the impetus of decolonisation waves, a nuanced form of imperialism, termed as neo-colonialism, persisted. The French motto "leave in order to remain" epitomised this phenomenon, illustrating an enduring imperial mentality even as political imperial status diminished (Kennedy, 2016, p. 94). Concomitantly, the era witnessed the onset of economic globalisation, strengthening trans-border partnerships and cultural exchanges. However, this phenomenon also suggests the rise of capitalist power as a permeative force shaping international relations, which still perpetuates imperial influences (Ashcroft et al., 2013).

As observed by Aldrich (2009, p. 145), “most European countries” intended to transition from the imperial era. Along with the decolonisation waves, the political changes thus catalyse the alteration of museological practices. One of the most significant milestones in the evolution of museum practices is marked by the UNESCO 1970 convention, a pioneering scheme focused on combating illegal artefact trafficking, with its principles aiming at prevention, restitution, and international cooperation. It tightly follows the increasing independence waves and the demands from those newly formed nations (UNESCO, 2023). At the turn of the 21st century, the 1998 Washington Principles inscribes another milestone in restitution initiatives (Oost, 2012), particularly addressing Nazi-looted art. Furthermore, the rebranding among European museums spreads widely, with institutions such as the Commonwealth Institute, the Museum of African and Oriental Arts, and the Africa Museum revoking colonialist vocabulary and images (Duthie, 2011). The Colonial Institute in Amsterdam separated itself into the Royal Tropic Institute and the Tropical Museum following the independence of Indonesia (Aldrich, 2009). In more recent years, the decolonisation trend has advanced further. French President Emmanuel Macron's 2017 speech at the University of Ouagadougou stamps a juncture point, he stated that African cultural inheritance cannot “solely exist in private collections and European museums” (Elysée Palace, 2017). This hinted at a new focus of restitution action between France and African nations, which is then substantiated by the detailed plan of the Sarr-Savoy report, commissioned by the French government in 2018. This case reflects a broader shift in European approaches to cultural property restitution. The Benin Dialogue group formed in 2007 coordinates discussions among museums from various European nations on the repatriation of Benin bronze (Hicks, 2020). The National Museum of World Cultures in Netherlands, inherited the collections from the Tropical Museum and initiated radical restitution plans of colonial objects since 2016 (UNESCO, 2020). Moreover, social movements such “Rhodes Must Fall” campaign (Kwoba et al., 2018) and “Why is My Curriculum White?” (Peters, 2015) have spread, echoing the decolonial struggles and advancements across various societal realms.

Despite the recent advance of decolonial measures, which can be situated integrally in the western cultural change (Bodenstein et al., 2022), European museums housing colonial collections are criticised as still subtly perpetrating colonist violence. Since museums engender social knowledge through their selective construction of meaning, providing justification to the dominant cultures (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Established western museums, rooted in standard museological representations, endorse the dominant narratives of the western experience (Hall et al., 2013). Those routinised practices, along with the decolonisation waves – or “post-colonial rebranding” (Eyssette, 2023, p. 101) – in the western museums, are questioned as merely employing a “buzzword” of decolonisation (Hunt, 2019, p. 6), lacking authentic agency and maintaining the status quo. Gillespie's recent argument (2020), drawing upon Edward Said's concept of orientalism, goes further to illustrate that Western museums, exemplified by the Victoria & Albert Museum and the British Museum in her case study, remain imbued with orientalist doctrine. On a similar theme, Amato (2019) employs Pierre Bourdieu's concept of

symbolic violence, criticises the narratives within the British Museum reinforcing Western superiority and the marginalisation of the foreign, this also extends further beyond the museum realm into the popular culture, such as the film *The Mummy's* (1999) use of alienated perspective to ancient Egyptian culture. The overarching point reveals that, the muted underpinning idea of prevailing Western museological practices, narratives, and knowledge pertaining to other cultures and historical periods serve not the purpose of fostering understanding and compassion, but rather the agenda of self-validation (Said, 2003).

2.3 Another Conflict Arises: a Culture War and Repatriation Claims

Repatriation requests directed at western museums have increased significantly in recent decades. Museums in Britain are particularly criticised for their responses to repatriation demand, with British authorities labelled as obstinate, uncooperative, and imperialist in matters related to repatriation (Bromilow, 1993; Simpson, 2012). On the other hand, nations seeking repatriation are not insusceptible to criticism, often exposing political motivations and strategic intent. China, for example, with its rise as a global superpower, is increasingly involved in claiming ownership over antiquities and art both in museum and auction realms (Jenkins, 2018). Germany, in contrast, by acknowledging the past wrongs, especially on the holocaust and related nazi-looted art issues, intends to integrate or even “flight into” into Europe in the post-war era (Macdonald, 2013, p. 217). Greece, maintaining a persistent stance on repatriation, initiated its demands in the 20th century when its culture minister called for the repatriation of the Parthenon Marbles from the UK (*New York Times*, 1983). This demand continues into the 21st century, with UNESCO formally urging a resolution on an intergovernmental level between Greece and the UK in 2021, which Britain rejected to reconsider its position (Scott, 2023). The debate heated again in 2023, when the UK Prime Minister Sunak unexpectedly cancelled a meeting with the Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis regarding this matter (House of Commons, 2023).

Whether to examine, as in the mentioned cases, the Greek continuous repatriation request, the denial of repatriation of British institutions and authorities, or Germany’s remedial approach to historical matters, the centrality of antiquity – more broadly, the archaeological possession and interpretation – validates the argument that it plays a crucial role in shaping the reputation of a modern nation-state (Carter & Robertson, 2016; Duthie, 2011). The use of assumptive antiquity and historical consistency is particularly key for legitimating modern nation-states’ identities (Silberman, 1997); Museums, on the other hand, as memorial sites and repositories of antiquities, contribute to the construction of public collectivity and national belonging (Macdonald, 2013).

When cultural ministers from Italy and Turkey contended that “with nostalgia” “every antiquity ... should eventually go back to its homeland” (p. 119), James Cuno (2014) argues that such acts of demanding repatriation often incite cultural nationalism and foster a growing nationalist narrative, the similar increasing repatriation requests are primarily based on affirming fixed identities and continuities of modern states with ancient nations and cultures. This constitutes what Cuno terms

the phenomenon as a culture war and a “claim game” (p. 126) merely driven by political motives. Yet, this stimulates nuanced questions and reveals a corner of the long scholarly debates surrounding restitution, culture wars, nationalism, antiquities, and modern nation-state identities.

A critical dimension in the continuous debates of repatriation is around the universal – or encyclopaedic – museums. James Cuno (2014), an American art historian and a representative scholar opposing repatriation, argues that artefacts belong to all humankind, and universal museums facilitate a cosmopolitan worldview and cultural pluralism, contrary to a fixed nationalist idea of cultural identity. This is countered by Dan Hicks (2021), the author of “The Brutish Museums” on the case of Benin bronze, who argues that the universal museums defy universal human values and, with colonial legacies, remain as an infrastructure of white supremacy and colonist violence. His view aligns with Kynourgiopoulou’s (2010) idea that such global equilibrium rhetoric of universal museums entails indifference to other cultures.

Furthermore, another crucial dimension of repatriation debates is the ownership of cultural property and the connection with identity. UNESCO, in its online annotation of the 1970 convention, states that the restitution is central to the convention, not only for remembrance but also to “safeguard the identity of peoples” that foster peaceful societies and global unity (UNESCO, 2023). However, Cuno argues that such calls may encourage nations to make antagonistic repatriation claims, with deep rooting in the belief of cultural purification, concurrently leading to destructive xenophobia within those nations. Cuno further asserts that international agencies remain powerless in preventing actions against heretical identities, exemplified by UNESCO’s failure to prevent the Taliban from demolishing the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001. In contrast to Hicks’ (2021) proposal that, through cultural restitution, museums should serve as a locus for conscience and remembrance, which is to facilitate the reconstruction of current relationships among nations, and Simpson’s (2012) idea that neither lending nor returning artefacts suffice, both actions merely represent the starting points of an extensive process. James Cuno, however, asserts that “antiquity cannot be owned” (Cuno, 2010, p. 20), he maintains that there is a fundamental disconnection persisting between ancient cultures and modern nation-states, and the discovery of antiquities is merely fortuitous. Alternatively, Cuno suggests lending as an ultimate solution, an aspect currently overlooked by museums.

Such scholarly debates with complicated discourses endure in concert with real-world conversations activated by nations and public sentiments. These sentiments are exemplified by the Greek media’s emotional comments on the glorious past and the Parthenon Marbles (Angouri et al., 2017), synchronising with the Greek government’s persistent pursuit of repatriation from the UK. Similarly, following the agreement to return illegally exported relics to China, Chinese online public opinion frames the return of artefacts from Italy as a victory, attributing it to China’s growing global power (Wang et al., 2019). Such cases reflect an uprising trend of nationalist sentiments. Moreover, an internal report of the British Museum mentions that on the museum’s social media, the majority of comments hinge on looted artefacts and emotional restitution

requests (Frost, 2019), vividly illustrating public sentiments and perceptions of the British Museum and its history. The culture war persists.

2.4 the British Museum's Contemporary Resistance and Adaptation

Including Benin Bronze, Egyptian Mummies, Rosetta Stone, Parthenon Marbles, and Moai statues, the British Museum, a publicly funded institution, houses over eight million artefacts (the British Museum, 2023a). This legacy and the intricate history around the artefacts, to a substantial extent, make the museum the biggest repatriation request target in the UK since the post-war era (Duthie, 2011; Fforde et al., 2004). However, those repatriation requests confront prominent hindrances due to the 1963 British Museum Act, which has governed the museum since its enactment, establishing the non-repatriating policies of the majority of artefacts and retaining the trustee management convention (The National Archives, 2021). Criticism of this uncompromising non-repatriating regulation centres on its symbolism in fortifying imperialist policies and eighteenth-century "enlightenment identity" as a universal museum (Duthie, 2011, p. 19). The symbolic persistence, dating back to the museum's early foundation as the imperial executive centre (Hoberman, 2011), and its collection's purpose to represent the empire's powerful reach (Challis, 2006), appears to endure today. This long-lasting symbolism positions the British Museum as one of the most significant frontiers in the sustained discussion encompassing ongoing decolonisation waves, repatriation debates, and culture wars.

Responding to the pressures of decolonisation, changes in leadership have facilitated various adaptive measures at the British Museum over the past few decades. As the official states, the museum has diversified channels and enhanced transparency in acquiring objects since its establishment in 1753, which was based on the legacy of Sir Hans Sloane. This includes donations, excavations, commissions and beyond (the British Museum, 2023b). Moreover, the museum also signed an agreement on the 1970 UNESCO convention combating illegal artefact trafficking, although this commitment was postponed until 2002 (Eyssette, 2023). The following year, Neil MacGregor was appointed as the director, adjustments extended beyond the acquisition. 2005 saw the museum's landmark change in returning cremation ash bundles to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, which was prompted by the passing of legislation on human remains (Yasaitis, 2006). Neil MacGregor's broader approach to reformulating the museum was considered as sophisticated and radical (*Sunday Times*, 2007). Following a similar philosophy, Hartwig Fischer, MacGregor's successor, introduced plans for reinterpretation and reconsideration of the museum narrative and galleries (The Art Newspaper, 2017). Before his resignation ensuing the British Museum theft scandal in August 2023 (BBC, 2023), he called for greater candidness concerning related issues on the remaining colonial violence within the museum.

Nonetheless, the resistance to change lingered within the British Museum. Beyond being criticised for its firmly rejective stance to repatriation requests for major artefacts such as the Parthenon Marbles, the narrative of museum exhibitions is substantially called into question. In a

case study examining object biographies of the Throne of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Rosetta Stone, and the Wampum Belt at the British Museum, Gillespie (2020) argues the museum reinforces the British dominion by employing a narrative focused on Britain, with minimal acknowledgement of origins or indigenous voices. This case study offers a glimpse into a broader landscape. Attempts by the British Museum to redefine its public profile are profoundly confusing and troubled (Duthie, 2011). It still, as an imperialist institution in a post-colonial era, retains a complex of colonialist identities and perpetuates British superiority (Darwin, 2022). Stuart Frost (2019), the Head of Interpretation at the British Museum, also notes that the museum has neither engaged sufficiently in its colonial legacy and interpretation nor proactively participated in public discourse on related matters.

2.5 Remembering Empire in a Post-Colonial Era: Contemporary British Polarised Political Landscape, Divided Identities, and Partisan Press

Europe, conceptualised as a "memory land" by Macdonald (2013), has witnessed European nations increasingly valuing the preservation and interpretation of their history and heritage to affirm and legitimise their identities. Britain stands out in this pursuit: while it subtly glamorises its past to downplay decolonial implications (Saunders, 2020), it also rejected integration into a collective European identity, notably through Brexit. The Brexit referendum was not just a radical measure to counter decline based on a "nostalgic vision" of the past (Beaumont, 2018, p. 379); it also reflects the nation's deep divisions (Hobolt, 2016). In the wake of Brexit, a form of nationalism legitimised through racism, populism, and homophobia reshaped British public culture, imbuing it with a manifested sense of hope (Clarke & Newman, 2017; Koegler et al., 2020). Following the 2017 election, the British political landscape became increasingly conflictive (Vaccari et al., 2021).

"A global Britain," called for by Theresa May in the post-Brexit Lancaster House speech, advocated that Britain should "rediscover" its position as a global and powerful entity, and every Briton is "instinctively" drawn to global interaction since the inherent "internationalist" nature of Britain (UK Government, 2017). Such political discourses are criticised as carrying an imperial nostalgia, upholding the Brexit narrative (Ward & Rasch, 2019). The essence of Brexit, as Donington (2019) contends, is more of a cultural matter than economic considerations. It transformed and divided the main voter political identity labels into leaver and remainer from the traditional party identities (Duffy et al., 2019; Hobolt et al., 2021), with the leaver side centring on culture war related matters (Sobolewska, 2021), for example, opposing sex minority rights, hardening immigration policies, and advocating nationalism over globalism. Such value and affective polarisation (cf. ideological polarisation) brought an era of reactionary racism and rightist populism after the referendum (Hall, 2024).

Interestingly, in contrast with the political intention to revive a powerful status resembling the bygone British empire, public opinion appears to be moderate on this matter. For instance, in polls measuring the public's perception of the British empire, the percentage of participants who view it as "something to be proud of" dropped sharply from 59% in 2014 to 32% in 2019

(YouGov, 2014; 2020). And particularly on the question of whether Britain should return the Parthenon Marbles, the Britons' voice supporting restitution dominates (49%) in the poll (YouGov, 2023). Meanwhile, public perception of the societal division reached a peak, with 50% of the public, estimated based on surveys, believing that British society is more divided than ever. Moreover, 74% think that the media often exacerbates this division, making it feel more conspicuous than it is (Juan-Torres et al., 2020).

The perception of division in Britain is deeply rooted in its press landscape. National newspapers often adopt partisan stances, especially during election campaigns (Wring et al., 2022). However, despite this polarisation, there remains a capacity to attract readers from different political affiliations to some extent (Fletcher, 2022). This suggests that beyond core political coverage, there is room for diversity in reporting on other topics. Given this context, repatriation issues might not be at the forefront of the political agenda, leading to potentially varied news coverage across media outlets. Such diversity could offer interesting and nuanced insights into repatriation news coverage.

When it comes to news content associated with remembering the past, quantitative research on news coverage is noticeably absent. Nonetheless, Rasch provides insights from qualitative memory studies of contemporary Britain. She argues that many Britons employ strategies such as depoliticisation at an individual level to maintain a positive identity image. This involves a nuanced approach of "acknowledging wrongs, celebrating empire" (Rasch, 2019, p. 213), even in the face of their awareness of persisting colonial violence and racism. Furthermore, Rasch's recent work spotlights the public perception of the British imperial past, which is condensed into singularised representations (Rasch, 2023).

The British imperial past has become highly politicised, a development that was "unpredicted just a few years ago" (Lester, 2023, p. 763). Issues of imperial memories, divided identities, and culture wars intertwine closely with cultural restitution, given its cultural and symbolic sensitivity. Despite this, there is a distinct lack of academic studies on media discourses of cultural restitution or culture wars in the realm of material culture. Given its enduring interdisciplinary significance, scholarly attention on this topic is essential. This research aims to contribute to the investigation of these related matters.

Chapter 3: **Research Method**

3.1 Introduction

This chapter demonstrates the research method employed by this study. It firstly introduces and discusses quantitative content analysis, where the applicability, the cautions, and the rationales of this method in this research case are addressed. Then it dives further into the sampling strategy, including data source, sample size, time scale, sampling stages and beyond. Moreover, the construction of a coding manual and the application of text-mining techniques are explored, followed by a demonstration of data analysis and research ethics.

To understand the narrative trends of the coverage of the issue of restitution surrounding the British Museum, research questions are formulated to touch upon the basic patterns of the coverage, such as reporting interest and prominent representations. And it then further inquires into restitution stances advocated by the press alongside moral judgments, as well as the potential political alignment, narrative strategies, and rationales behind the advocacy of different restitution stances. The research questions are shown as follows:

1. What is the pattern of reporting interest exhibited by mainstream left and right-leaning British newspapers in 2023 regarding the British Museum and its associated restitution issues?
2. What are the prominent representations constructed by these newspapers, including key events, stakeholders, report focuses, contested relics, and other relevant elements?
3. What moral judgments and specific stances on restitution are advocated by these newspapers in their coverage?
4. Is there a discernible alignment between the political leaning of these newspapers and the restitution stances they endorse?
5. What narrative strategies are employed by these newspapers to advocate for specific restitution stances?
6. What rationales underpin the restitution stances articulated in the news coverage by these newspapers?

3.2 Quantitative Content Analysis

Content analysis, as a research technique for revealing replicable and reliable inferences to data and their context (Krippendorff, 2018), proves advantageous for addressing the research questions aligning with the focus of this study. The questions in this research, following the methodology of content analysis, explore the surface messages conveyed through news content, with a particular emphasis on quantification (Gilbert, 2008), which forms the foundation of this study.

Content analysis possesses deep historical roots in mass communication research, particularly in the study of newspapers. Max Weber proposed an extensive analysis of the press in 1911, which, although did not launch at the time, laid the groundwork and inspired subsequent research methodologies investigating mass media messages (Krippendorff, 2018). In this research, the benefits of applying content analysis incorporate various facets. Firstly, unlike structured interviews and questionnaires, content analysis accommodates unstructured textual materials, retaining the original patterns in the data and offering high flexibility. Secondly, it enables the analysis of large volumes of data, particularly beneficial for studying mass communication like news content, where qualitative methods such as discourse analysis may lack in terms of generalisability and overall content trends accuracy. Additionally, content analysis is inherently replicable due to its unobtrusive, relatively objective, and standardised research procedures with clear operationalised definitions. It also facilitates potential longitudinal analysis, revealing temporal patterns in the data (Bryman, 2016; Krippendorff, 2018).

However, cautions should be carried when conducting the content analysis. To achieve a more significant content validity, Bryman (2016) emphasises the need to scrutinise the representativeness and credibility of the materials, focusing on whether the sampling strategy of source and scope is valid for drawing inferences about the data context. Another challenge in content analysis lies in coding both manifest and latent content, as well as discerning the multiple meanings behind textual data. In the coding process, assuming a stable layer of manifest meanings in the text can be difficult, given its relative nature to communicators (Neuendorf, 2017). Researchers can navigate this challenge by contextualising the data, such as through a detailed literature review, to incorporate more symbolic frameworks that profile the social, political, and cultural contexts underlying the data. Additionally, since content analysis focuses on measurable and standardisable data (Blaxter et al., 2010), the coding manual guiding the measurement of information should be scrutinised to align with the depth of the research questions.

This leads to a discussion on the rationales underpinning content analysis. It is cautioned that content analysis is sometimes regarded as "atheoretical" (Bryman, 2016, p. 305), focusing more on what is measurable rather than what holds theoretical importance. This, in other terms, is perceived as the "significance versus validity dilemma" (Carney, 1972, p. 48). While quantitative content analysis might offer high validity by presenting an honest depiction of the data, this can come at the expense of academic significance – the theoretical depth worth investigating. As argued by Carney, pursuing greater significance may require some compromise on validity, suggesting the delicate balance between these two factors. The rationale discussion can probe further into the descriptive and interpretive aspects. Quantitative content analysis in this research is indeed descriptive, accounting for the factual traits emerged from the representations. While it does not generate a collection of gestalt impressions or comprehensively detailed descriptions (Neuendorf, 2017), it ought to make valid inferences and logical reasoning, which is somewhat interpretive. By following this thread of thoughts, in a more programmatic manner, it is suggested that there is no an absolutely clear cut between inductive and deductive, qualitative and

quantitative, inferential and descriptive in terms of research methodology (Blaxter et al., 2010). Essentially, it is more blend of attributes and a balance between factual elements and analytical arguments.

3.3 Sampling Strategy

To reflect the prominent British press discourse on issues of restitution surrounding the British Museum in 2023, six mainstream British newspapers are selected for analysis according to their public influence, political leaning, and newspaper types. They include the *Guardian*, a left-leaning broadsheet; the *Mirror*, a left-leaning tabloid (YouGov, 2017); the *Independent*, a centre-left broadsheet (Sirhan, 2021); the *Times*, a centre-right broadsheet (Information Commissioner's Office, 2021); the *Telegraph*, a right-leaning broadsheet; and the *Daily Mail*, a right-leaning tabloid (YouGov, 2017). It is noteworthy that despite the tabloidisation of the British press in recent decades – especially with the *Guardian*'s full digital transition and the *Independent* adopting a more tabloid format – newspapers like the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *Times*, and the *Telegraph* are still considered quality newspapers traditionally classified as broadsheets (Lefkowitz, 2021; Temple, 2008), a concept adopted by this research.

The data sampling strategy was initially systematic cluster sampling by month. This changed when the quantity of a census became manageable. Through manual identification during the coding process, repetitions and off-topic news pieces were omitted, resulting in a valid number of 229 news cases. This enables greater external validity (Riffe et al., 2019), as the census is largely devoid of selection bias compared to other sampling strategies, preserving an integral data pattern for analysis. The news data is sourced from the online commercial news bank Nexis (2024). To operationalise the data acquisition, the search entry is defined as “British Museum AND Repatriation OR Return OR Restitution OR Give Back,” with the capitalised words serving as special commands to filter search results. When a combination of these terms occurs, the corresponding news piece is extracted. Additionally, the inclusion of news data extends to both print and digital versions, encompassing Daily and Sunday editions of the newspapers where applicable.

There are two stages of sampling, comprising a pilot sampling stage for constructing the coding manual and a sampling stage for the actual manual coding with selected cases. For the pilot sampling stage, a duration of five years, from 2019 to 2023, was chosen to extract news data from these six newspapers using the search entry. A total of 1540 news pieces were collected to aid the construction of the coding manual, employing text mining techniques such as Named Entity Recognition (NER), which will be detailed in the next section. For the manual coding sampling, news data from the six newspapers for 2023 was selected. Initially, 446 cases were extracted, and after data cleaning, 229 news pieces were labelled as valid for manual coding. In the pilot sampling stage, unlike the meticulously cleaned data in the manual coding stage, some

noise exists in the data. Nevertheless, it still serves as a significant reference for understanding the frequency and occurrence of news content effectively.

3.4 Coding Manual Construction and Text-Mining Techniques

The coding manual (see appendix) was constructed using pilot sampling data of 1540 news pieces spanning five years from the selected six mainstream British newspapers. Computational text-mining techniques were employed, specifically Named Entity Recognition (NER) to identify main actors and other entities, Adjective Identification to pinpoint key narrative elements, and basic Sentiment Analysis to establish initial coding standards for sentiments. These text-mining techniques, which have been recognised for effectively aiding the data collection and analytical process of research (Miller, 2018), have gained popularity in recent years, particularly in content analysis (see De Caro, 2020; Lucy et al., 2020; Xing et al., 2020). Unlike traditional content analysis, which relies on either pre-existing theoretical frameworks or the researcher's ability to discern critical themes from qualitative data examination to construct a coding manual, text-mining techniques enable content analysis to better construct an objective coding manual by efficiently extracting key statistics from the data. This research utilises these techniques through open-source natural language processing software libraries in Python, namely SpaCy (Honnibal & Montani, 2024) and Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK, Bird et al., 2019).

Informed by the research questions, the coding manual is divided into five sections incorporating 29 variables. The first section captures basic information, including news source, headline, publication date, and news length. The second section categorises events, listing general event types followed by an open-text option for specific details. The third section focuses on actors, identifying main, alternative, and active speakers, with additional open-text fields for further actor specification. The fourth section centres on the main concepts and contested relics relevant to the British Museum restitution debates. The final section inquires into narrative strategies, examining elements such as reporting focus, emotionality, and restitution stances. This section is partly guided by the news framing theory (Entman, 1993, p. 52), particularly its elements of "make moral judgements" and "suggest remedies," translated here into moral evaluations and advocated restitution stances. Additionally, open-text variables are also attached after critical variables, enabling the potential for further re-coding to reveal nuanced patterns in the coverage.

To demonstrate the application of text-mining techniques in constructing the coding manual, an example focusing on the process of categorising actors in the coverage is offered here. Table 1 presents the 25 most frequently mentioned entities identified as persons or organisations through Name Entity Recognition (NER). This list informs several actor categories: the British Museum (e.g., the British Museum and George Osborne), other cultural institutions (e.g., V&A), media entities (e.g., BBC), political figures (e.g., Sunak and Mitsotakis), and commercial entities (e.g., Amazon). While this list offers an overview, it is not exhaustive and includes some noise like "Omicron," a Covid variant. After refining the entity labels and identifying additional categories

from the 2023 data, a more nuanced list for the actor variable is developed (see variable 7). This expanded list distinguishes between "Former Employees of the British Museum" and "British Museum and Its Current Officials." It also incorporates new categories such as legal actors, cultural actors, NGOs, academics, activists, ethnic and religious groups, and the general public. To further refine this list, prefixes "UK" and "International" are added to differentiate between domestic and international entities in the British news context. Additionally, SpaCy's NER function includes 16 label types, such as "Geo-Political Entities" (GPE) for identifying nations and "Works of Art" for recognising contested relics, which aid the coding construction. External sources, like the British Museum's (2024) official listings of contested objects, also contribute to constructing variable options.

Table 1
Simplified NER List of Main Actors

Label	Count
British Museum	4583
BBC	556
V&A	456
Rishi Sunak	387
NHS	342
EU	265
Labour	246
Elgin	221
Omicron	211
Queen	188
Oxford	175
Government	164
Greeks	148
Reuters	122
George Osborne	101
Boris Johnson	97
WHO	88
Trump	79
Hitchcock	75
Kyriakos Mitsotakis	71
Amazon	58
Prince Philip	58
SNP	57
Conservative	54
PCS	48

The operationalised definitions (OPD) for coding are incorporated into the coding manual. To validate its applicability, the manual undergoes revision following a trial coding of 10 news articles from the selected newspapers' 2023 coverage. Given the quantitative focus of this research, measurements predominantly utilise nominal and ordinal scales, rather than interval and ratio

scales where feasible. For instance, to determine if the coverage is emotionally charged, the measurement is simplified to a binary "yes" or "no" rather than a zero-to-five rating. This approach minimises subjective bias and enhances replicability.

3.5 Data Collection, Analysis, and Presentation

The coding sheet is created using the Online Survey platform provided by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC, 2024). This digital approach facilitates quicker data entry compared to traditional paper methods, while also ensuring secure online data storage and offering multiple options for data export. As only one coder is involved in this study, there is no need for inter-coder reliability tests and training. For data analysis, the research utilises the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software by International Business Machines Corporation (IBM, 2024) and Microsoft Excel (2024). In particular, the study employs descriptive statistical functions such as frequency listing and cross-tabulation; inferential statistical methods like analysis of variance (ANOVA); and tests for statistical significance, including chi-square tests. Data presentation in tables and figures follows the guidelines of the seventh edition of the American Psychological Association publication manual (APA, 2020).

3.6 Research Ethics

Ethics constitutes a critical aspect of integral research processes across various methodologies. Nonetheless, content analysis, unlike research methods that extensively and directly involve human participants, does not demand rigorous ethical standards. This is because it primarily deals with publicly available secondary data (Neuendorf, 2017), a characteristic particularly relevant to this study focusing on news content. However, certain ethical considerations in the content analysis should still be considered, such as the well-being of the coder when handling sensitive content that may pose risks and ensuring integrity in coding and data reporting (Signorilli, 2008). To address the latter, this study aims to mitigate issues like coding inconsistencies that might arise when coders become fatigued by implementing a structured work routine with regular and frequent breaks. Additionally, this research adheres to the Loughborough University guidelines on research ethics and integrity (2023) and has received approval from the ethics panel for communication and media studies within the School of Social Sciences and Humanities.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to present the key findings of the quantitative content analysis of news coverage surrounding the British Museum and related restitution issues produced by six mainstream British newspapers in 2023. It comprises five main sections aimed at addressing the research questions. The first section briefly touches upon the reporting interest of the global press, followed by a detailed examination of the average length and coverage distribution of the analysed newspapers over time. In the second section, the focus shifts to the common representations found in the coverage, encompassing events, actors, speakers, concepts, formality, and beyond. The third section then introduces the core discourse in the coverage related to restitution debates, revealing the pro-restitution and anti-restitution stances as well as moral evaluations adopted by each newspaper throughout the coverage in 2023. Subsequently, the fourth section investigates further how newspapers narrate these positions, while the fifth section unwraps the rationales behind pro-restitution and anti-restitution stances in the coverage. Discussion is included after the demonstration of key findings.

4.2 Reporting Interests

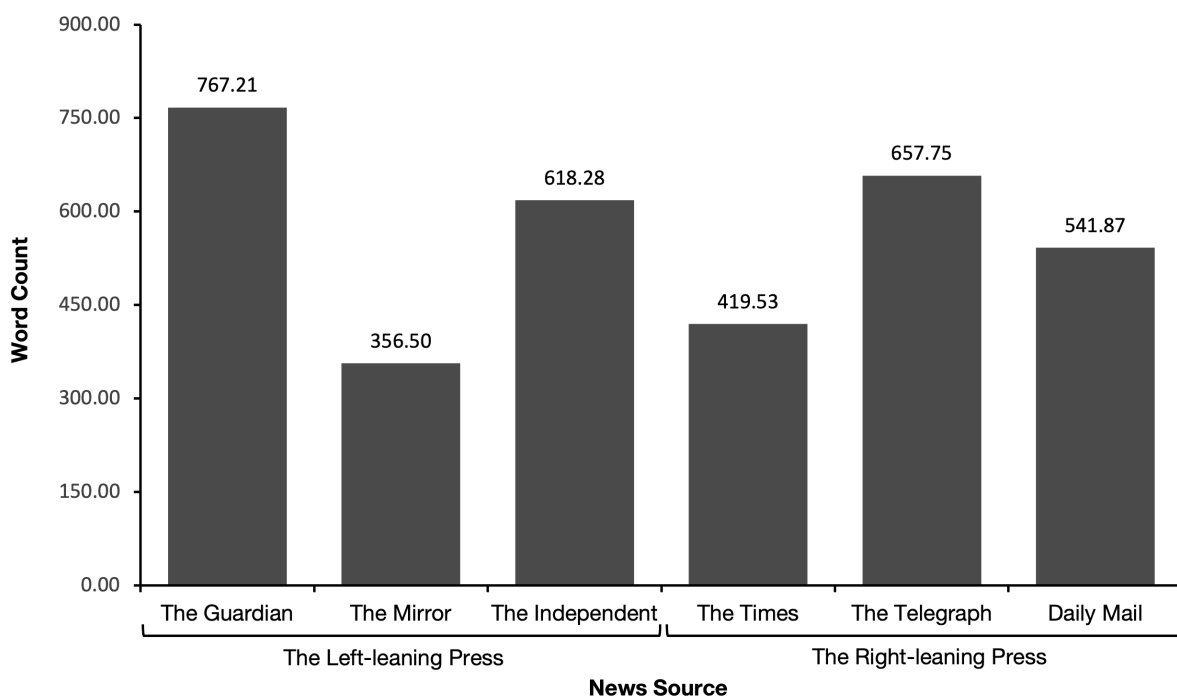
In recent years, news reports on issues surrounding restitution, especially concerning the British Museum, have garnered increasing journalistic attention. The year 2023, in particular, witnessed an unprecedented uprise in global news coverage on this topic, marking an increase of 57% compared to the coverage in 2022 and a substantial rise of 120% from 2021 (Nexis, 2024). This phenomenon can be attributed in part to the rising global political interest in the contested assertion of cultural identities and the ensuing conflicts over the ownership and restitution of cultural artefacts. A prime example of this was Rishi Sunak's determined commitment to pursuing the "retainer" approach against continuous restitution requests from Greece, highlighted by the abrupt cancellation of a meeting with Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis. However, such an event merely reveals a broader picture wherein the dynamics of media representation reproduce public discourse and shape public opinion, contributing to what can be perceived as a culture war and a war in media over the artefacts.

The newspaper analysis enabled the identification of the intensity of coverage around restitution issues in the UK. Among the six British mainstream newspapers analysed for their 2023 coverage of the British Museum and restitution issues, the *Guardian* produced 43 news pieces, the *Mirror* 20, the *Independent* 50, the *Times* 36, the *Telegraph* 57, and the *Daily Mail* 23. Noticeably, broadsheet newspapers (i.e. the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *Times*, and the *Telegraph*) exhibited significantly greater reporting interest compared to tabloids (i.e. the *Mirror* and the *Daily Mail*). However, this pattern displayed a variation in average news length across the press, as

illustrated in Figure 1. The *Guardian* possessed the longest average news length at 767 words, closely followed by the *Telegraph*, the *Independent*, and the *Daily Mail*. The *Daily Mail*'s average length (541 words) surpassed that of the *Times* (419 words), while the *Mirror* exhibited minimal coverage quantity and the lowest average news length. Furthermore, regarding ideological distribution, loosely defined as the *Guardian*, the *Mirror*, and the *Independent* representing the left-leaning press while the others represent the right-leaning, left-leaning newspapers had a fractionally higher average coverage length of eight per cent compared to their right-leaning counterparts. This balanced coverage distribution among both left-leaning and right-leaning newspapers suggests that the issues surrounding restitution at the British Museum attract comparable interest from the media affiliated with the two main parts of the British political spectrum.

Figure 1

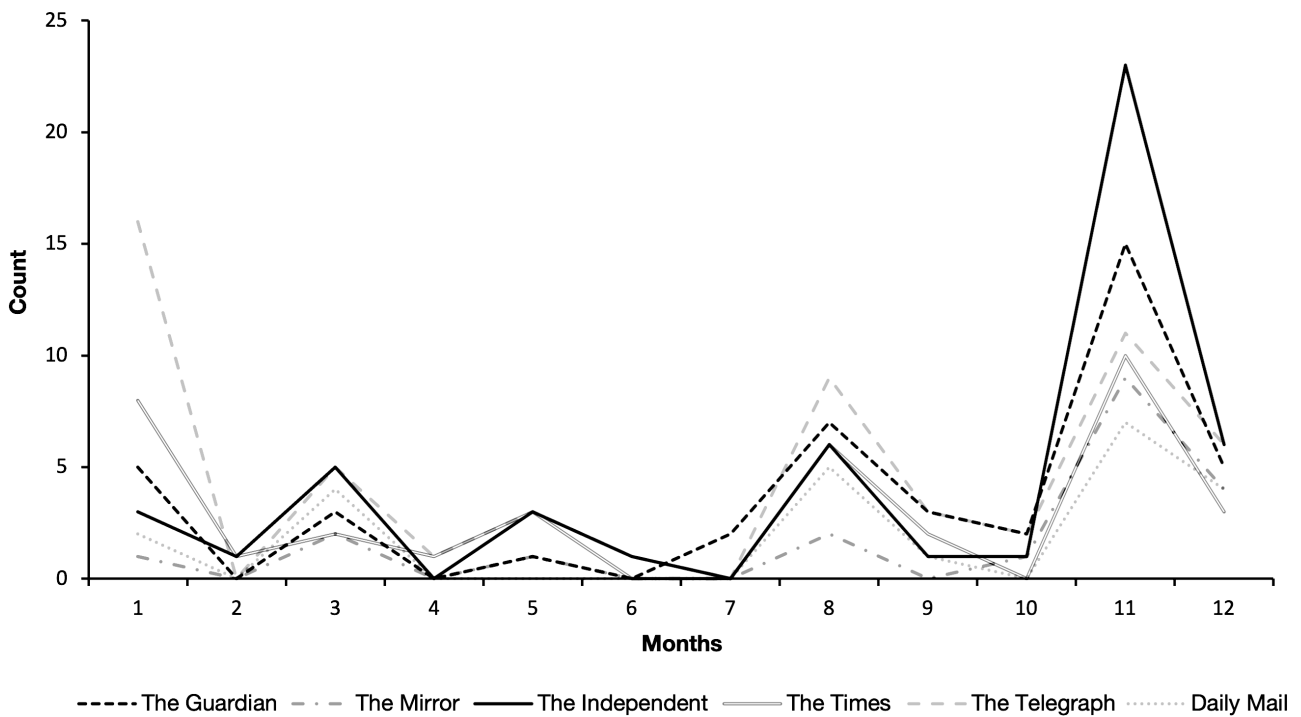
News Coverage Distribution by Month



Despite the minor difference in average length between the left and right-wing press, the newspapers' reporting patterns share significant similarities over time, as depicted in Figure 2. This pattern starts with a high point in January, followed by a subsequent lower point in March, and then ascends to another high point in August, culminating in the peak of coverage for 2023 in November. These fluctuations are propelled by real-world events, January saw a new round of negotiations between the British Museum and Greece, followed by political commentary, particularly from figures like Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak in March. The August high point coincides with the incident of theft at the British Museum, during which 1500 artefacts were reported missing, while the November peak corresponds to the incident of a cancelled meeting between British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

Figure 2

News Coverage Distribution by Month



Although December saw a decrease in coverage, it remained relatively high, reflecting the British Museum's continued negotiations with Greece following the political conflict in November. Noticeably, the *Telegraph*, serving as an indicator of right-leaning newspapers' interest, exhibited significant attention in January, surpassing other publications in reporting the negotiation between the British Museum and Greece, and also dominated coverage in August during the theft incident. Conversely, the *Independent* and the *Guardian*, representing left-leaning newspapers, took up predominant coverage in November, highlighting issues related to the British Museum and restitution when Sunak cancelled the meeting with Mitsotakis. This pattern suggests that left-leaning newspapers displayed a particular interest in international political conflicts, while their right-wing counterparts focused more on institutional-level reporting concerning the British Museum and related restitution issues.

4.3 the Locus of Representations: Basic Mediated Patterns and Narrative Tactics in the Coverage

The analysis in this section reveals the locus of the news representations surrounding the British Museum and restitution issues throughout 2023. Within the coverage, several common threads emerge. These include three primary types of main events, three central types of key actors, and three major kinds of active speakers. Furthermore, the analysis delineates two main types of report focuses, and a prevalent narrative revolving around the concepts of relics ownership and restitution requests, with a prominent coverage portion centred on the Parthenon Marbles. Moreover, the news mainly adopts a mixed tone, blending formal and informal language, and

exhibits a low emotional charge in the coverage, maintaining a chiefly neutral attitude towards the British Museum. In addition, there is a discernible high level of awareness regarding certain historical contexts and national identities permeating the discourse.

4.3.1 the Events, Actors, Speakers, and Report Focus in the Coverage

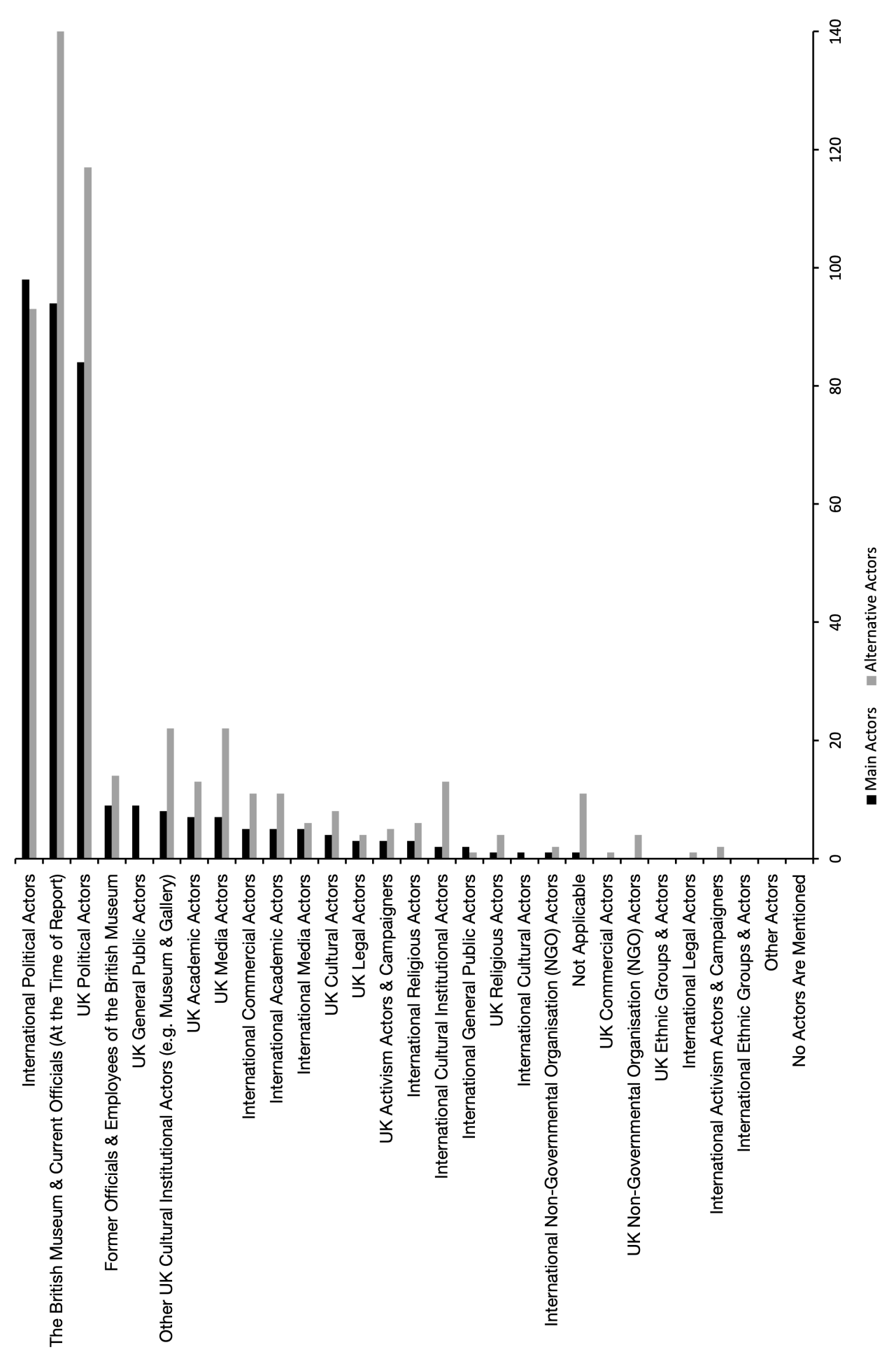
Three primary event types can be identified in the news content from the six mainstream British newspapers. Political events dominate the coverage, accounting for 45% of the news and encompassing politicians' speeches, political conflicts, and related developments like Lord Frost's public endorsement of returning the Parthenon Marbles (Lester, 2023) and the fallout from the cancelled meeting incident (Gibbons, 2023). Cultural events follow closely, making up 35% of the coverage. These events include the Vatican's return of Parthenon Marbles fragments to Greece (Winfield, 2023) and Boris Johnson's remarks on the Parthenon Marbles (Sparrow, 2023). While some may involve political figures, their primary focus is on cultural matters. Institutional incidents form the third primary focus, constituting 18% of the total coverage, with examples like the British Museum theft in August 2023. Additionally, 8% of the news content comprises pure journalistic commentary and letters to the editor that do not reference specific events. Activism events (3 cases) and media events (2 cases) are less frequently reported as the main focus.

The actors and speakers featured in the coverage reflect the key participants shaping the restitution debate. Predominantly, three primary actors drive this discourse: international political actors (42% of coverage), the British Museum and its current officials (41% of coverage), and British political actors (36% of coverage). While these three groups dominate, the coverage also spotlights a diverse range of fifteen other main actor types, including the British general public and various cultural institutions. However, these actors are less frequently highlighted, forming a long-tail distribution after the primary three. Moreover, for alternative actors who have a less significant role in the coverage, Figure 3 illustrates that they follow a similar pattern to the main actors but encompass a broader range and are reported more sparingly. On an overall outlook, noticeably, British actors appear twice as often as international ones across both main and alternative categories, indicating that domestic perspectives are given priority in the narrative presented by the six mainstream newspapers.

In the coverage, active speakers, the actors who have an active voice, are generally outnumbered by main actors, with primary types being British political actors (22%), international political actors (19%), and British Museum officials (18%). A long-tail pattern also emerges among less frequently featured active speakers. Moreover, the alignment rate, which refers to the consistency between these main actors and their active speaking roles within the coverage, is a crucial representation of subtle media framing. Alignment between main actors and active speakers is strongest for British political actors, with 96% speaking actively when featured. The British Museum and international political actors show similar, albeit lower, alignment rates of around 70%. Left-leaning newspapers tend to give a more prominent voice to international actors compared to right-leaning ones, with averages of 39% and 27% respectively.

Figure 3

Comparison of Main Actors and Alternative Actors Occurred in the Coverage



Report focus represents the journalistic lens through which news attention is directed. A news piece might predominantly feature political actors but still steer towards a cultural theme; this focus is not dictated by the events or actors but by the editorial choices – report focus. Two main dimensions shape this focus in the coverage: cultural and political. The cultural dimension dominates, accounting for 58% of the total coverage, spotlighting its prominence even when political events and actors are more frequently reported. Moreover, the political dimension comprises 37% of the coverage. When political framing is used, political actors appear three times more than cultural ones, and this ratio reverses when the cultural focus is adopted. Noticeably, international political actors have significant exposure across both dimensions, slightly less frequent than their political and cultural counterparts. Other dimensions like legal, moral, and technological are infrequently represented. Additionally, secondary focuses are largely absent, with 53% of coverage having only a primary focus. The remaining secondary focuses are evenly split among political, cultural, and ethical dimensions.

4.3.2 Commonly Employed Concepts and Relics in the Coverage

The concepts central to restitution debates and relics shape the core of the news narrative, spotlighting the locus of mediated disputes over restitution. While the coverage employs a variety of concepts, two stand out as dominant: relics ownership, featured in 80% of the coverage, and restitution requests, present in 65%. Less frequently, concepts such as law and regulations, international political conflicts, and museological practices are utilised. This suggests that the narrative predominantly hinges on ownership issues surrounding the contested relics at the British Museum, with a strong association with restitution requests. Intriguingly, the concept of a culture war, particularly relevant to understanding the restitution debate as noted by Cuno (2014), appears only in 2% of the coverage, mentioned explicitly in five instances. Noticeably, the *Telegraph*, known for its conservative stance, surprisingly avoids any mention of the culture war concept.

The Parthenon Marbles, also known as the Elgin Marbles, dominate the coverage with 88% of news explicitly mentioning it. In contrast, the Benin Bronze receives only 12% of the coverage, making it the second most mentioned relic. Relics like the Rosetta Stone, Maqdala Treasures, and Koh-i-Noor Diamond garner insignificant attention. This focus suggests the Parthenon Marbles' central role in the discourse, reflecting its significance and shaping the British Museum's public image.

4.3.3. Formality and Emotionality in the Coverage, and Attitude Towards the British Museum

The formality and emotionality of the coverage reveal subtle persuasion tactics employed by the press. While the news typically adopts a formal tone, reflecting its journalistic nature, the analysed coverage does not avoid incorporating an informal tone. Instead, it adopts a hybrid style when discussing the British Museum and related restitution issues. The predominant tone is a mixed

one, blending formal and informal elements, accounting for about 44% of the total coverage. Following this, a purely formal tone constitutes 36% of the coverage, with the informal tone being the least frequent but still significant at 20%.

For emotionality, indicating the degree to which news content is emotionally charged, the average shows that 82% of the coverage remains emotionally neutral, pointing towards a prevailing non-emotional standard in reporting on this issue. Despite this, the press exhibits varied levels of emotional tone, as illustrated in Table 2. The majority of broadsheets, including the *Guardian*, the *Times*, and the *Telegraph*, hover around an 18% rate of emotionally charged content. In contrast, tabloids like the *Mirror* and the *Daily Mail* possess a slightly higher rate at 30%. Noticeably, the *Independent* stands out with the lowest percentage of emotionally charged content at just 8%, significantly below the average.

Table 2

Distribution of Emotionally Charged Coverage by Press

News Source	Whether the News is Emotionally Charged		Total	Emotional Content %
	Yes	No		
The Guardian	8	35	43	19%
The Mirror	6	14	20	30%
The Independent	4	46	50	8%
The Times	6	30	36	17%
The Telegraph	11	46	57	19%
The Daily Mail	7	16	23	30%
Total	42	187	229	18%

The portrayal of the British Museum in the coverage reflects how the six mainstream British newspapers perceive this symbol of imperial power in the contemporary context. Noticeably, the tone towards the British Museum is predominantly neutral, with over 85% of the coverage maintaining a dispassionate stance. A 7% portion of the coverage adopts a negative view, which peaks in August, coinciding with the British Museum theft incident. During this period, more than half of the negative portrayals emerge. The *Guardian*, representing the left-leaning newspapers, contributes significantly to this negative narrative, accounting for 70% of the news with a critical tone towards the British Museum.

4.3.4 Temporality and Locality in the Coverage

The temporal and spatial dimensions in the coverage of restitution issues surrounding the British Museum reflect the perception of the complexity of these debates. The coding process of this research simplifies these dimensions into mentions of history and nations within the coverage.

The mention of historical context is prominent, with 69% of the coverage explicitly referencing the history of the relics. Within this historical context, 81% specifically relate to the Parthenon Marbles. Additionally, the representation of nations is also predominant, with nearly all news pieces, 98%, incorporating some form of national identity. Britain emerges as the most frequently mentioned nation, featuring in 95% of the coverage, followed by Greece at 85%. While over 22 other nations make appearances, their mentions are relatively infrequent. On an overall outlook, the coverage presents a rather homogeneous temporal-spatial image, centring on the history of the Parthenon Marbles and the national identities of Britain and Greece.

4.4 Give Back the Artefacts or Not: Discussed and Suggested Restitution Stances and Moral Evaluations in the Coverage

Arguably, the most debated aspect of the coverage centres on the stance taken regarding restitution and moral evaluations of longstanding issues. Restitution stances involve decisions to return or retain contested artefacts, while moral evaluations assess the moral justifiability of cultural restitution. The press's stance – whether on restitution or morality – can be conveyed implicitly, through discussions or portrayals, or explicitly, by advocating for specific approaches. In this content analysis, only the manifest meaning is coded, thus it categorises discussions or implications of stances as "discussed stances," and explicit expressions as "suggested stances." Analysing content from six British mainstream newspapers, 81% engaged in the debate about restitution stances and solutions, with 23% explicitly suggesting a restitution stance. Regarding moral evaluations, 63% discussed the morality of restitution, and 20% presented explicit moral evaluations related to cultural restitution.

In the news coverage, discussions of moral evaluations are predominantly positive, constituting 34.1% of all coverage, followed by mixed evaluations incorporating both positive and negative views in the same news piece at 19.7%. Similarly, in suggested moral stances, approximately half of the news articles explicitly advocate a positive moral stance on restitution. This suggests that the majority of the coverage views cultural restitution as a morally justified solution to the debates.

On the other side, discussions of restitution stances and solutions in the news predominantly feature mixed solutions at 37.1% of all coverage, followed closely by discussions of supporting restitution and lending at 18.4% and 18.3% respectively. Only 7.4% of news articles exclusively discuss retaining the artefacts without any additional measures. However, the explicit suggestions for restitution stances present a drastically different picture. Retaining emerges as the most voiced stance, with half of the coverage endorsing it as the preferred solution. Calls for pure return without conditions come next, representing 24% of the news. Restitution with other measures, such as financial compensation, and mixed treatments follow closely, each accounting for around 11% of the suggestions. In brief, while the coverage generally recognises the moral justification for cultural restitution and the nuances of the debates, retaining the artefacts – maintaining the status quo – remains the prevailing stance. This suggests that, despite the moral

desirability of restitution, there is a prevailing underlying caution against returning the contested artefacts.

Additionally, each of the six British mainstream newspapers expresses a distinct restitution stance ($P < .001$). They also have a nuanced partisan alignment on the restitution stance. Left-leaning newspapers – the *Guardian*, the *Mirror*, and the *Independent* – largely advocate for cultural restitution. Particularly, the *Guardian* strongly supports restitution in all its coverage with explicit suggestions on restitution stance. Meanwhile, the *Independent* adopts a more balanced approach, evenly covering both supporting restitution and mixed treatments. Surprisingly, the *Times* exhibits a 50% stronger advocacy for restitution than for pure retention, aligning less predictably with its right-leaning standpoint. Furthermore, the remaining right-leaning newspapers – the *Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail* – firmly oppose restitution, yet they occasionally endorse alternative restitution approaches. Noticeably, lending as a restitution stance is absent from their coverage. Overall, in spite of nuanced partisan differences, the right-wing press holds an 11% stronger voice advocating retaining compared to the left-wing press's call for restitution. This suggests that left-leaning newspapers might be more reticent in explicitly stating their restitution stance relative to their right-wing counterparts.

4.5 Narrating for Suggested Restitution Stances and Moral Evaluations

This section's analysis sheds light on the narrative strategies employed to advocate specific restitution stances and moral evaluations within the coverage. Firstly, it identifies three critical moments in 2023 where the coverage distinctly emphasises restitution stances and moral evaluations, creating points of convergence across newspapers. Secondly, it outlines the key narrative strategies used to advocate the restitution stances, revealing thematic priorities, stakeholder framing differences, and persuasive tactics. Thirdly, in coverage explicitly taking a stance and evaluating the morality of restitution, it becomes clear that narratives with an explicitly suggested moral stance – whether positive or negative – may tend to reinforce existing beliefs rather than persuade the audience.

4.5.1 Distribution of Restitution Stance and Moral Evaluation Over Time in the Coverage

Three distinct temporal mileposts emerge in the coverage regarding major restitution stances, as depicted in Figure 4: Early January, Late August, and Late November. The majority of coverage orbits around these key moments, aligning with significant events such as the negotiations between the British Museum and Greece in January, the theft incident at the British Museum in August, and the cancellation of Sunak's meeting with Mitsotakis in November. As highlighted in the previous section, the analysis reveals that only 24% of the coverage explicitly addresses restitution stances, and 20% explicitly suggests moral evaluations, indicating a discernible threshold for clear stance expression. Particularly, the coverage against restitution surpasses that advocating for it, representing a lower threshold for explicitly suggesting the retaining stance. This trend is supported by the temporal distribution of coverage advocating for restitution. While

articles advocating for return predominantly present their stance during these three pivotal periods, those favouring retaining articulate their position not only during these times but also during months with lower coverage, such as March and June. Moreover, a higher density of explicit retention advocacy emerges during major events, such as noticeable in January. This suggests that arguments for restitution are inclined to be presented during major events, potentially indicating weaker perceived rationales – or motivations – compared to retaining, which advocates for maintaining the status quo.

Figure 4
Distribution Plot of News Cases Suggesting Restitution Stances

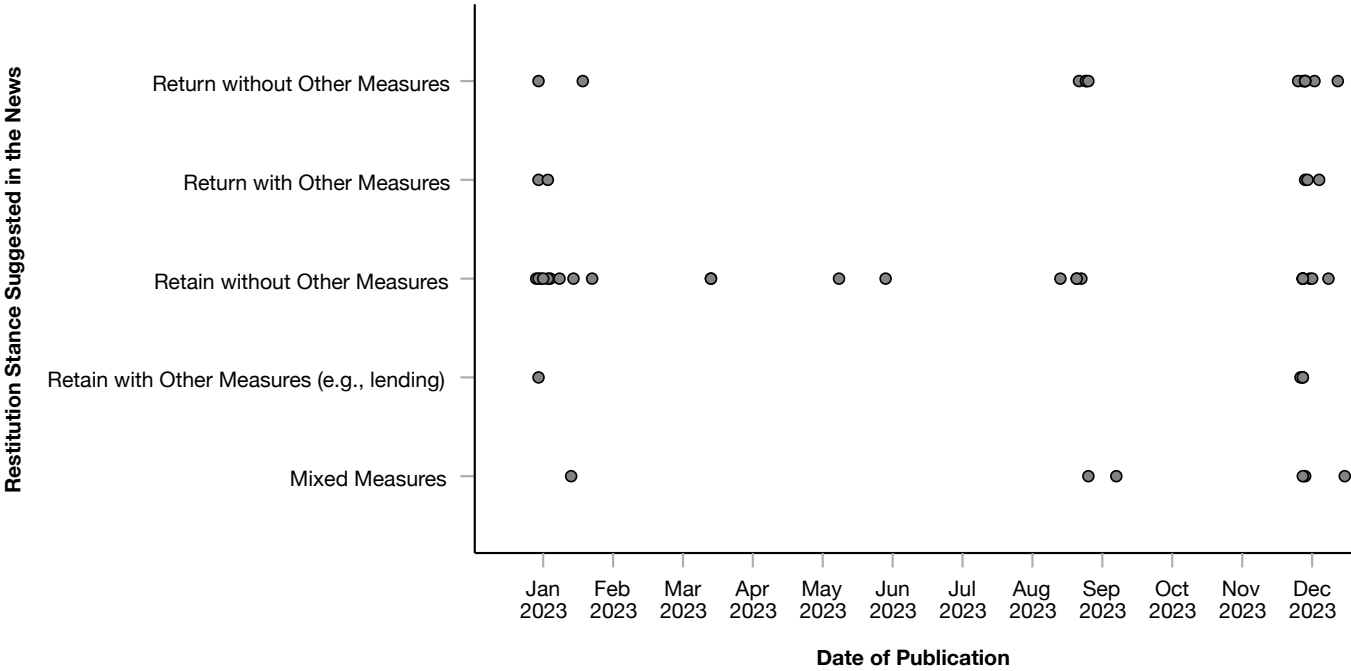
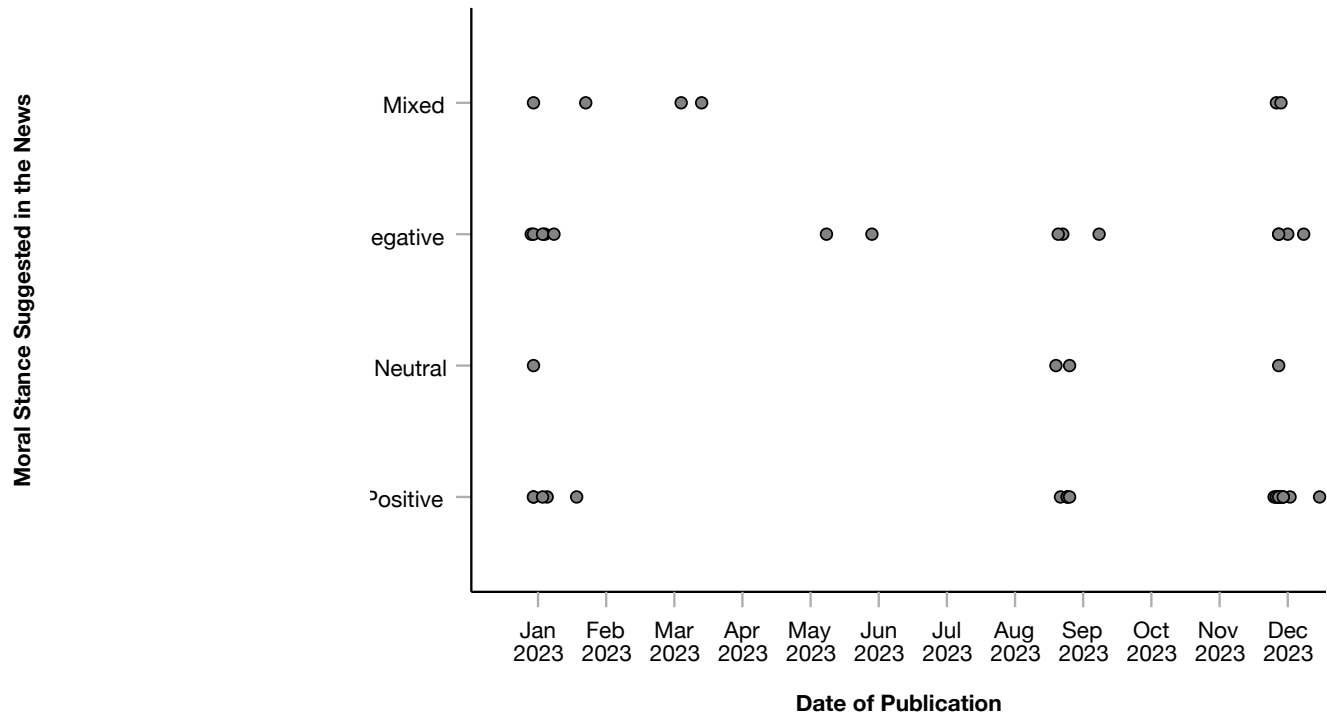


Figure 5
Distribution Plot of News Cases Suggesting Moral Evaluations



As shown in Figure 5, the distribution pattern for coverage suggesting moral evaluations resembles that of the restitution stance, with three distinct time points dominating the majority of such coverage. Additionally, there is a contrast in the distribution between explicit negative moral evaluations against restitution and positive moral evaluations for restitution. While the overall volume of coverage advocating positive moral evaluations exceeds that of negative ones, the latter is spread more evenly across time.

4.5.2 Narrating for Suggested Pro-Restitution and Anti-Restitution Stances

Analysing the coverage advocating for or against restitution reveals diverse narrative strategies. These encompass underlying thematic priorities, stakeholder and voice framing, and persuasive tactics. Firstly, thematic priorities are manifested through the selection of main events and the report focus in the coverage. Pro-restitution narratives draw upon a range of events, encompassing political, cultural, and institutional ones to create a comprehensive narrative. In terms of reporting focus, pro-restitution coverage predominantly highlights cultural and political dimensions, with ethical considerations serving as a secondary focus. In contrast, narratives opposing restitution predominantly hinge on cultural events, using a cultural reporting focus, and occasionally integrating political or institutional references. This approach suggests a targeted strategy to capitalise on cultural concerns about restitution. In essence, pro-restitution coverage embeds its content within cultural and political contexts, with ethical elements complementing the narrative, while anti-restitution coverage predominantly revolves around cultural interests.

Secondly, the selection of main actors and active speakers within these narratives illustrates the strategic framing of the debate in both pro-restitution and anti-restitution coverage. Pro-restitution narratives prominently feature the British Museum alongside a diverse range of British stakeholders, including political figures, media entities, and the general public, as well as international political actors. This reflects a broad domestic spectrum in support of restitution. In contrast, coverage opposing restitution predominantly emphasises the presence of international political actors and the British Museum. This spotlights the framing of the restitution debate within the context of international political issues and key institutional figures. The choice of active speakers further shapes the narrative. While both sides grant significant representation to the British general public, pro-restitution coverage allows a considerably more active voice to the British Museum, potentially reflecting its active engagement in restitution negotiations with Greece in 2023.

Lastly, the examination of emotionally charged content and formality of language in the coverage reveals persuasive tactics employed by both pro-restitution and anti-restitution narratives. While both sides strategically use emotional appeals – accounting for 60% of the coverage that suggests a stance – pro-restitution narratives tend to intensify these appeals slightly more (69%) than those against restitution (56%), indicating efforts to influence public opinion towards restitution. Tone also characterises the stances, with pro-restitution adopting a more informal style, whereas anti-restitution narratives utilise a mixed tone blending formality with informality.

Furthermore, when examining the narrative perspective and tone towards the British Museum, both sides predominantly use a third-person subjective perspective. While both sides also maintain a predominantly neutral tone towards the British Museum, pro-restitution leans towards a negative portrayal (26%), while anti-restitution exhibits a slightly positive spin (13%), revealing subtle attitudes towards the institution in each context.

4.5.3 Tendency of Reinforcement Over Persuasion in Moral Evaluations

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) reveals a significant relationship between the length of news articles and both the moral evaluations discussed ($P=.004$) and suggested ($P=.002$). However, no such relationship is found between article length and the discussed or suggested restitution stances. This suggests that the emphasis and framing of moral viewpoints influence the depth or extent of coverage. In contrast, the lack of a significant relationship for restitution treatments indicates that the detailed discussion or proposed type of restitution does not substantially impact article length.

In particular, the distribution of article lengths reveals distinct patterns based on the moral evaluations suggested in the news. Articles taking a stance on mixed moral evaluations are the longest on average at 1248 words, followed by those with a neutral moral evaluation at 859 words. This suggests that a balanced or neutral viewpoint on moral evaluations is achieved through more detailed coverage. Conversely, articles that avoid suggesting moral evaluations rank third at 584 words, with those suggesting a positive moral evaluation following at 542 words, and those suggesting a negative moral evaluation at 448 words. Noticeably, articles with an explicitly inclined moral stance, either positive or negative, are substantially shorter than those with a balanced or neutral stance, averaging between 58% to 178% less in length and falling below the overall average length of 559 words. This indicates that such coverage may aim more to reinforce existing moral beliefs surrounding restitution than to persuade the audience.

4.6 Justifications for Pro-Restitution and Anti-Restitution Stances in the Coverage

In this section, core rationales supporting both pro-restitution and anti-restitution stances within the coverage are explored, alongside an examination of how the narrative portrays the history of relics in connection with these positions.

4.6.1 the Rationales for Pro-Restitution and Anti-Restitution Stances

There are various categories of justifications supporting different restitution stances in the coverage. For the coverage supporting the return of the contested relics in the restitution debate, which includes return without measures (i.e. pure restitution) and with measures (e.g. in exchange for financial compensation), a pragmatic approach is favoured over excessive emphasis on historical injustices or moral necessities. The primary justification offered by pro-restitution coverage is that it will benefit international relations, constituting 38% of the justifications

provided for the pro-restitution stance. This rationale is frequently referred to in left-leaning coverage, apart from the *Times*, which subtly supports restitution without heavily relying on this concept. Such a strategy echoes the left-leaning newspapers displaying an increased interest in November, particularly concerning the incident of Sunak's meeting cancellation with Mitsotakis that caused international political conflicts, transcending the attention of right-leaning newspapers on this issue. Other justifications, such as the historical injustice of acquiring artefacts and cultural benefits for restitution recipients, are presented less frequently yet still serve as the main reasons for cultural restitution. Contemporary moral obligation and the imperative of decolonisation are the least mentioned justifications for restitution within the coverage supporting it, taking up only 13% of the reasons provided for pro-restitution coverage.

The coverage opposing restitution presents a strategic sequencing of rationales, starting with less confrontational arguments. Primarily, accounting for 27% of justifications provided for anti-restitution coverage, the notion of the British Museum as a universal museum and its global accessibility serves as a cornerstone justification, emphasising the institution's role in making cultural artefacts globally accessible. Following this, justifications revolve around themes of cultural exchange and better infrastructure for artefact preservation, both theme comprises around 17% of the reasons provided. The argument of cultural exchange accentuates the relics' inherent role in the broader exchange of cultures throughout human history. Meanwhile, the assertion of better infrastructure for artefact preservation posits that the origin countries lack the necessary resources for artefact preservation and research, contrasting with the superior capabilities of institutions like the British Museum or Britain itself. Furthermore, legal ownership emerges as the least utilised justification, compromising 13% of the justifications provided to oppose restitution. This is indicative of a deliberate deflection from the contentious topic of ownership, which features prominently in the discourse within the coverage, mentioned in 80% of cases. The justification of legal ownership appears analogous to cultural exchange, both touching upon the history of artefact acquisition and belonging. However, the latter is softened through its integration with cultural and historical elements, thereby bypassing direct confrontation with the ownership issue. This strategic arrangement of justifications spotlights a rather delicate approach to framing opposition to restitution, steering disputed themes while advocating for the retaining of cultural artefacts.

4.6.2 Narrating the Past of Relics

The coverage surrounding the British Museum and the contentious issue of restitution is intertwined with the historical contexts of relics, particularly evident in the reporting on the Parthenon Marbles, which possesses the most significant portion of attention within the coverage. Noticeably, historical contexts of relics are prominently presented in a neutral light, with over half of the mentions devoid of explicit positive or negative attributes related to restitution, such as the legality or illegality of relic acquisition. Particularly in the historical narration of the Parthenon Marbles, the narrative is split between two distinct spins, one presents Britain's acquisition of the

Marbles as rightful, while the other portrays it as illegitimate, emphasising instances such as its acquisition during the foreign occupation of Athens.

A dichotomy emerges when examining the approaches of left-leaning newspapers that support restitution, exemplified by the *Guardian* and the *Mirror*, which tend to maintain a neutral stance on historical narratives. Although they position themselves as pro-restitution, this is not based on an evaluation of the negative history of the contested artefacts (e.g., the illegality of object acquisition). In contrast, the *Independent*, while also supporting restitution, it adopts a seemingly neutral strategy while subtly infusing its narrative with a spin on history. Despite having the least emotionally charged content and the least explicitly suggesting restitution stance compared to other newspapers, the *Independent* contributes the most substantially to the discourse on the illegitimacy of acquiring the Parthenon Marbles, with 44% of such content being produced by it.

Similarly, the right-leaning broadsheet newspapers, namely the *Times* and the *Telegraph*, also engage with historical narratives related to the illegitimacy of relic acquisition, particularly addressing the history of occupied Athens regarding the Parthenon Marbles. While the *Times* subtly lends support to restitution, it is understandable for the newspaper to include such a narrative; In contrast, the *Telegraph*, which strongly opposes restitution, appears to adopt an intended approach of acknowledging the darker aspects of history. This approach seems to echo the strategy described by Rasch (2019) as "acknowledging wrongs, celebrating empire," wherein past colonial injustices are acknowledged while advocating against restitution. However, it should also be noted that the portrayal may not precisely align with a celebration of empire but rather highlights a stance advocating for the retaining of relics to preserve the symbolic power of the bygone imperial era.

4.7 Discussion

In an area of research that has received relatively little scholarly attention, this study offers empirical insights into the mainstream British news discourse surrounding the British Museum and its restitution issues in 2023. It explores the mediated dynamics of the debates and disputes surrounding these issues. The current research confirms the existence of a significant domestic debate on cultural restitution within British news representation, revealing a nuanced alignment of political leanings toward both left and right on the political spectrum regarding restitution stances. Furthermore, it identifies a subtle tension in expressing a pro-restitution stance among newspapers. While scholars argue that the majority of European countries are transitioning away from the imperial era (Aldrich, 2009), with UK public perception of the British Empire as a source of pride declining sharply from 59% in 2014 to 32% in 2019 (YouGov, 2014; 2020) as well as a majority of 49% of Britons support the restitution of the Parthenon Marbles as estimated by a survey (YovGov, 2023), the anti-restitution voice remains more prominent than the pro-restitution voice. Interestingly, this tension echoes criticisms of Western museological practices, accused of using decolonisation rhetoric as a mere "buzzword" while perpetuating symbolic violence and

sustaining imperialist narratives (Hunt, 2019, p. 6). Moreover, the concept of a culture war is not explicitly voiced, casting a veiled undertone to the tension. Further research and critical cultural analysis are needed to understand the underlying factors driving this tension, potentially regarding British cultural identity in the contemporary era, as pure quantitative content analysis alone may not suffice for future academic inquiries.

Conclusion

With quantitative content analysis, this research examined the discourse of cultural restitution issues surrounding the British Museum as constructed by six mainstream British newspapers in 2023. The analysis revealed increasing journalistic attention to this issue, while left- and right-leaning newspapers possess an identical reporting interest, broadsheets show greater interest than tabloids. Within the coverage, relatively homogeneous representations are composed; several threads, such as events and actors, as well as thresholds like formality and emotionality, emerged. Additionally, in terms of cultural restitution, the six mainstream British newspapers generally acknowledge the moral justifiableness for restitution, the voice undermining moral grounds for restitution is relatively muted and subtle. However, despite such a moral justification, the coverage supporting a pro-restitution stance is noticeably less than that of anti-restitution. Furthermore, the arguments presented by pro-restitution advocates are offered in a pragmatic manner, while anti-restitution coverage is presented in a less confrontational way. This seems to hint at British cultural sensitivity when addressing issues related to colonial legacy, with no explicit mention of “maintaining British pride from the past,” and there is also less explicit support for “giving back the artefacts.”

In an under-researched field, the current research offers critical insights into the discourse of restitution issues – the culture war in the realm of material culture. It combines quantitative content analysis with computational text-mining techniques, enabling better objectivity in constructing the coding manual. Additionally, a census of news cases in 2023 is conducted, providing valid generalisability. However, this study has limitations. Despite the census, the sample size, which is still below the “300” threshold for robust generalisability (Neuendorf, 2017, p. 245), could be expanded. Moreover, the coding manual is, to some extent, influenced by subjective factors, as there is rarely existing theoretical underpinning in this field, especially concerning the culture war within material culture and news narrative.

For future research, several areas for betterment have been identified. Firstly, similar studies on this issue could be conducted with an expanded sample size, including more media channels from different regions. As an example, newspapers from the United States and Greece could be considered, or specifically investigating local news outlets in England and Scotland. This inclusion aims to examine a broader range of discourses that vary across cultural contexts. Secondly, the combination of quantitative content analysis and text-mining techniques could be better implemented. The current study lacked an in-depth application of text-mining due to time and resource constraints; future research could improve this by engaging deeper with computational natural language processing, such as training a language model using relevant content. Lastly, to provide more analytical insights, a mixed-method approach is recommended. For instance, incorporating critical discourse analysis (CDA) alongside content analysis, which is a common

scholarly practice (Bennett, 2015; Neuendorf, 2017), would help incorporate more critical cultural evaluations. This would situate relevant issues within contemporary cultural and socio-political landscapes and enable methodological triangulation for improved significance.

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Appendix

Coding Manual	
I. Basic Information	
1. News Source	1. The <i>Guardian</i> 2. The <i>Mirror</i> (Daily & Sunday) 3. The <i>Independent</i> 4. The <i>Times</i> 5. The <i>Telegraph</i> 6. <i>Daily Mail</i> (& Mail on Sunday)
2. News Headline	
3. Date of Publication	(DD/MM/YY)
4. Length of News	(Numeric Value Only)
II. Events	
5. What are the main events this news piece based on? <small>OPD: The contextual events that the coverage is primarily based on and responding to.</small>	1. Institutional Events 2. Cultural Events 3. Political Events 4. Legal Events 5. Academic Events 6. Activism Events 7. Religious Events 8. Media Events 9. Public Opinion 77. Other Events 88. No events are mentioned 99. Not Applicable
6. Please specify the events if applicable	
III. Actors	

<p>7. Who are the main actors occurred in the coverage?</p> <hr/> <p>OPD: The agents, entities, and individuals who are given significant coverage weight regardless of report tone.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The British Museum & Current Officials (At the Time of Report) 2. Former Officials & Employees of the British Museum 3. Other UK Cultural Institutional Actors (e.g. Museum & Gallery) 4. UK Political Actors 5. UK Legal Actors 6. UK Cultural Actors 7. UK Commercial Actors 8. UK Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Actors 9. UK Academic Actors 10. UK Activism Actors & Campaigners 11. UK Ethnic Groups & Actors 12. UK Religious Actors 13. UK Media Actors 14. UK General Public Actors 15. International Cultural Institutional Actors 16. International Political Actors 17. International Legal Actors 18. International Cultural Actors 19. International Commercial Actors 20. International Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Actors 21. International Academic Actors 22. International Activism Actors & Campaigners 23. International Ethnic Groups & Actors 24. International Religious Actors 25. International Media Actors 26. International General Public Actors 77. Other Actors 88. No Actors Are Mentioned 99. Not Applicable
<p>8. Please specify the actors if applicable</p>	

<p>9. Who are the alternative actors occurred in the coverage?</p> <p>OPD: The agents, entities, and individuals who are given minor coverage weight regardless of report tone.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The British Museum & Current Officials (At the Time of Report) 2. Former Officials & Employees of the British Museum 3. Other UK Cultural Institutional Actors (e.g. Museum & Gallery) 4. UK Political Actors 5. UK Legal Actors 6. UK Cultural Actors 7. UK Commercial Actors 8. UK Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Actors 9. UK Academic Actors 10. UK Activism Actors & Campaigners 11. UK Ethnic Groups & Actors 12. UK Religious Actors 13. UK Media Actors 14. UK General Public Actors 15. International Cultural Institutional Actors 16. International Political Actors 17. International Legal Actors 18. International Cultural Actors 19. International Commercial Actors 20. International Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Actors 21. International Academic Actors 22. International Activism Actors & Campaigners 23. International Ethnic Groups & Actors 24. International Religious Actors 25. International Media Actors 26. International General Public Actors 77. Other Actors 88. No Actors Are Mentioned 99. Not Applicable
<p>10. Who are the active speakers?</p> <p>OPD: The agents, entities, and individuals who have their own voice in the coverage</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The British Museum & Current Officials (At the Time of Report) 2. Former Officials & Employees of the British Museum 3. Other UK Cultural Institutional Actors (e.g. Museum & Gallery) 4. UK Political Actors 5. UK Legal Actors 6. UK Cultural Actors 7. UK Commercial Actors 8. UK Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Actors 9. UK Academic Actors 10. UK Activism Actors & Campaigners 11. UK Ethnic Groups & Actors 12. UK Religious Actors 13. UK Media Actors 14. UK General Public Actors 15. International Cultural Institutional Actors 16. International Political Actors 17. International Legal Actors 18. International Cultural Actors 19. International Commercial Actors 20. International Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Actors 21. International Academic Actors 22. International Activism Actors & Campaigners 23. International Ethnic Groups & Actors 24. International Religious Actors 25. International Media Actors 26. International General Public Actors 77. Other Actors 88. No Actors Are Mentioned 99. Not Applicable

11. Please specify the actors if applicable	
IV. Concepts	
12. What concepts are primarily addressed?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Relics Theft Incident 2. Relics Theft Allegation 3. Relics Monetary Value 4. Relics Cultural & Artistic Value 5. Relics Ownership 6. Restitution Request 7. Restitution Case 8. Restitution Protocol 9. Artefact Preservation 10. Artefact Provenance 11. Artefact Trafficking 12. Art Trade & Auction 13. Cultural Identity 14. Cultural Pluralism 15. Cultural War 16. Globalisation & Cultural Exchange 17. Nationalism 18. Colonialism, Slavery & Imperialism 19. Decolonisation 20. Tourism 21. Universal Museum 22. Museological Practice 23. Museum Collaboration 24. Museum & Education 25. Regulations & Laws 26. International Political Collaboration 27. International Political Conflicts 28. UK Domestic Political Conflicts 29. Public Opinion & Media Representation 30. Activist Movement 31. Indigenous Rights 77. Other Concepts 88. No Concepts Are Mentioned

13. What relics are primarily addressed?	1. Ain Sakhri Lovers Figurine 2. Asante Gold Regalia 3. Benin Bronzes 4. Cyrus Cylinder 5. Elgin Marbles (Parthenon Marbles) 6. Gweagal Shield and Spears 7. Hoa Hakananai'a (Easter Island "Moai" Statue) 8. Hopi Katsina (Kachina) Figures 9. Koh-i-Noor Diamond 10. Lewis Chessmen 11. Looted Iraqi Artifacts 12. Maqdala Treasures 13. Maori Heads 14. Nefertiti Bust 15. Rosetta Stone 16. Sarajevo Haggadah 17. Sutton Hoo Helmet 18. Tipu's Tiger 19. Human Remains (e.g., Mummy) 77. Other Relics 88. No Relics Are Mentioned
<h2 style="text-align: center;">V. Narrative Strategies</h2>	
14. What is the primary reporting focus?	1. Legal Dimensions 2. Cultural Dimensions 3. Political Dimensions 4. Economic Dimensions 5. Ethical & Moral Dimensions 6. Technological Dimensions 7. Social Impacts 77. Other Dimensions 99. Not Applicable
15. What is the secondary reporting focus?	1. Legal Dimensions 2. Cultural Dimensions 3. Political Dimensions 4. Economic Dimensions 5. Ethical & Moral Dimensions 6. Technological Dimensions 7. Social Impacts 77. Other Dimensions 99. Not Applicable
16. Is the writing style emotionally charged? <small>OPD: The rhetorical features of the report focus on emotional appeals, including utilisation of expressive languages (e.g. powerful adjectives & metaphors) and other devices.</small>	1. Yes 2. No
17. What is the level of formality in the news?	1. Formal 2. Informal 3. Mixed

18. What is the primary narrative perspective?	1. First Person 2. Second Person 3. Third Person Subjective 4. Third Person Objective 5. Mixed of First and Second Person 6. Mixed of First and Third Person 99. No Applicable
19. Temporality: Is historical context regarding the relics present?	1. Yes 2. No
20. Please specify the context if applicable	
21. Locality: What nations are particularly addressed?	1. Australia 2. Britain 3. Cambodia 4. China 5. Cyprus 6. Egypt 7. Ethiopia 8. Germany 9. Greece 10. India 11. Indonesia 12. Iraq 13. Ireland 14. Mexico 15. Mongolia 16. New Zealand (Maori Tribe) 17. Nigeria (Benin) 18. Sudan 19. Sri Lanka 20. Syria 21. Turkey 22. Wales 23. Zimbabwe 24. Other European Nations 25. Other Asian Nations 26. Other African Nations 27. Other North American Nations 28. Other South American Nations 29. Other Oceania Nations 88. No Nations Are Mentioned 99. Not Applicable
22. What is the report tone towards to the British Museum?	1. Positive 2. Neutral 3. Negative 4. Mixed 99. Not Applicable
23. Moral Evaluation: What moral stance regarding restitution is present in the news?	1. Positive 2. Neutral 3. Negative 4. Mixed 99. Not Applicable

24. Moral Evaluation: What moral stance regarding restitution is explicitly suggested in the news?	1. Positive 2. Neutral 3. Negative 4. Mixed 99. Not Applicable
25. Restitution: What restitution treatment is discussed in the news?	1. Return without Other Measures or No Measures Mentioned 2. Return with Other Measures (e.g., with financial compensation) 3. Retain without Other Measures 4. Retain with Other Measures (e.g., lending) 5. Mixed (i.e., case by case) 99. Not Applicable
26. Restitution: What restitution treatment is explicitly suggested in the news?	1. Return without Other Measures or No Measures Mentioned 2. Return with Other Measures (e.g., with financial compensation) 3. Retain without Other Measures 4. Retain with Other Measures (e.g., lending) 5. Mixed (i.e., case by case) 99. Not Applicable
27. If applicable, what concept is the suggested return treatment regarding restitution based on?	1. History Injustice of Acquiring Artefacts 2. Cultural Benefits for Restitution Recipients 3. Benefits for International Relations 4. Contemporary Moral Obligation & Decolonisation Imperative 77. Other Reasons 99. Not Applicable
28. If applicable, what concept is the suggested retain treatment regarding restitution based on?	1. Legal Ownership 2. Universal Museum & Global Accessibility 3. Better Infrastructure for Preserving Artifacts from Damage or Loss 4. Cultural Exchange 77. Other Reasons 99. Not Applicable
29. If applicable, please specify what concept is the suggested mixed treatment regarding restitution based on?	

The British Museum: 'It's all Mine. Mate'.

Investigating UK Newspapers' Discourse of 'Relics Theft' and Repatriation Issues Surrounding the British Museum

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Research Questions:

This research intends to uncover the key actors, various narratives, and debates around cultural heritage, theft allegations, and relics restitution within the coverage of the selected mainstream British newspapers during the chosen time frame related to the British Museum.

The research questions framed for investigation are:

- I. What are the key events, actors, and stakeholders associated with the British Museum?
- II. What are the key concepts and themes associated with the British Museum?
- III. What are the most frequently employed narratives representing the British Museum?
- IV. Is there a correlation between the ideological standpoints of the selected newspapers and the discourse they present about the British Museum?

IV Methodology:

Methodology & Method: Deductivism; Quantitative Content Analysis with abductive reasoning.

Source, Sampling Strategy, and Size:

Accessing the news from the Guardian (left-wing), the Independent (neutral & left-wing), and the Telegraph (right-wing) through databases such as Nexis and Newsbank UK. Systematically selecting news pieces from the year 2023, with each month being randomly sampled with 30 pieces.

Data Collection Phases Include:

- I. Pivotal Collection: Employing Computer-Aided Text Analysis software and 'Text Mining' techniques to assist in creating a coding book.
- II. Formal Collection: Using the coding book to code the selected pieces of news, preparing them for data analysis.

Why is it relevant?

- I. Over 2000 artefacts were reported stolen by the British Museum on August 18, 2023, heating debates on restitution and related public discussions again.^[1]
- II. There is an increasing international demand for repatriation from countries such as Benin, China, Greece, Nigeria, Sudan, and beyond.^[2]
- III. Ongoing interdisciplinary academic debates on repatriation incorporate researches in post-colonial, restitution, museum, and media studies.
- IV. However, a significant current knowledge gap exists regarding the media discourse on the British Museum, and on the western museums with colonial legacies more generally.
- V. Some academic works tend to generalise this "public discourse" based on assumptions. This research originally contributes to media studies, providing insights into related matters.

V Expected Contributions:

- I. This research will fill a crucial knowledge gap in mainstream British newspaper discourse on the British Museum, especially in the context of contemporary nations with colonial legacies tackling with cultural restitution issues.
- II. This research will enrich post-colonial, media, museum, memory studies and beyond, highlighting concepts such as cultural wars and nationalism.
- III. This research will pave the ground for future studies investigating into the relationship between internal museum discourse and public press narratives.
- IV. This research will also serve as a critical study to inform the public. It encourages individuals to reflect on their personal beliefs.
- V. Beyond academia, this research will particularly inform the British Museum and similar cultural institutions.

Literature:

- I. There have been waves of decolonisation since the end of World War II, which have influenced material culture and museums practices. For instance, the UNESCO 1970 convention^[3] aims to prevent illicit trafficking of artefacts. Nevertheless, scholars argue that Western museums still employ the narratives such as orientalism to perpetuate symbolic violence.^{[4][5]}
- II. While some scholars support the increasing demand for repatriation^[6] critics debate that it is associated with the growing nationalism of 'cultural wars'.^[4]
- III. The British Museum has implemented some adaptive measures^[5] in response to decolonisation, yet it still faces criticism for maintaining an imperial essence and refusing to repatriate any artefacts.^[6]
- IV. Certain segments of the British media view remembering the imperial past as a depoliticised celebration. A 2014 YouGov poll shows 59% of the public is proud of the British empire.^[7]

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4. Flynn, T. B., Tom (Ed.). (1997). *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203350883>
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6. Gillespie, H. E. (2020). *Imperialism, Identity and Image: Looking at Colonial Objects in the British Museum's 'Ancient Egypt' Gallery*. <https://www.britishmuseum.org/education/publications/imperialism-identity-and-image>
7. Rasch, A. (2019). 'Keep the Balance': The Politics of Remembrance in the British Museum. *Journal of Global Postcolonial Studies*, 7(2), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.33469/jgps.42019.1007>
8. Shah, S. (2023, September 27). *British Museum Asks the Public for Help Finding Artifacts*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-63180172/british-museum-stolen-artifacts-help>
9. Tythcott, L., & Anwarita, K. (2016). *Museums and Repatriation: New Practices, New Approaches*. Routledge.
10. UNESCO. (2020, February 12). *UNESCO 1970 Convention*. UNESCO. <https://en.unesco.org/repatriation/1970>

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