

Rallying cries associated with the current milieu and crisis in art collecting and museology is “Give it Back!”, reflecting the processes of restitution and repatriation of colonial artefacts from Western museums to the former colonies. Ultimately, the decolonisation of the museum. However, what does it mean to decolonise the museum? The following presentation will delve into this question and present a comparative study on the Post-colonial and Post-Soviet museums in South Africa and Lithuania. Postcolonial and decolonisation processes are often associated with Non-Western former colonies. Though, the process of de-Russification which occurred in Post-Soviet Eastern Europe i.e. Lithuania in the 1990s onwards, engaged with similar postcolonial and decolonisation processes of reaffirming cultural identity after oppressive rule. Lithuania’s independence was reinstated in 1990 after Soviet-rule. Similarly, in South Africa and in parallel, with the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990, began the process of ending Apartheid-rule. During both these instances, the role of the museum in being the custodian of collective and popular history, culture, community and popular memory was being re-evaluated. Poka Laenui (2000), in his writings on decolonisation, stated that the following steps need to be undertaken to decolonise a community/ culture:

1. Rediscovery and Recovery: In order for a community to be revitalized and rebuilt, there needs to be a rediscovery of their culture and identity.
2. Mourning: Acknowledging colonialism and the atrocities conducted.
3. Dreaming: Dreaming/ imagining of the future possibilities of a community and place.
4. Commitment: Commitment in applying these ‘dreams’ into reality.

The paper will refer to these steps in both the context of decolonisation and de-Russification of museums by referring to the following case studies from Cape Town (South Africa): District Six Museum; Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa; Iziko South African National Gallery, Norval Foundation and the following museums in Vilnius (Lithuania) namely: National Gallery of Art and Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum. Comparisons will be drawn between these case studies investigating the similarities and differences in the decolonisation and de-Russification of their collections. In addition, illustrating how these museum processes have shifted and differed from their historical and colonial pasts museum practices and displays after political transition. Moving beyond the Russo-Soviet narrative in Lithuania and the Dutch and British colonial rule historical narrative in South Africa. Highlighting the parallels but also interrogating their limits. To further theoretically frame this discussion, the essay entitled “Art History and Postcolonialism: A Lithuanian Case” by Linara Dovydaitytė will be referred to and the article by David Chioni Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique”.