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Negotiating social memory in postcolonial Mozambique: the case of heritage sites in Mandhlakazi District

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Abstract

This research deals with the construction, contestation and negotiation of social memory involving the postcolonial state of Mozambique, elites and subaltern social groups with a focus on heritage sites in Mandhalakazi District, Mozambique. Construction of social memory is current in Mozambique, mainly dominated by state attempts at reproducing national memory by establishing a national historical narrative, and in continuity with colonial practices. This is strategically used by Mozambican and South African elites, and contested by subaltern groups in Mandhalakazi. Subaltern contestations outline critiques of precolonial, colonial and postcolonial state power and mainstream historiography. Elites' use suggests future contests relating to precolonial politics and future dynamics of national and transnational memory and potential heritage tourism involving South Africa and Mozambique. Research was conducted using multi-sited ethnography, participant and non-participant observation, semi-structured individual and group interviewing, and archival research in Maputo City, Mandhlakazi and Xai-Xai, for ten weeks, between June and September 2007.