Title: **Beyond the colonial frame: Curating Resistance and Decolonial Praxis in the Mafalala Museum**

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Photo: Mário Cumbana


Photo: Museu Mafalala

Abstract

This paper examines the Mafalala Museum in Maputo, Mozambique, as a critical case of decolonial museological praxis. Unlike traditional institutions grounded in Western epistemologies and object-based collections, the Mafalala Museum operates as a living, community-driven space rooted in oral memory, urban cultural heritage, and political resistance. Located in one of Maputo's most symbolically neighborhoods, home to figures of anti-colonial struggle, poetry, and music, the museum redefines the notion of a "collection" by privileging intangible heritage, lived experience, and local knowledge systems. The paper argues that the Mafalala Museum, exemplifies a radical redefinition of museological practice grounded in community authorship and resistance. It explores how the museum challenges Eurocentric heritage paradigms by positioning oral histories and collective memory as legitims forms of knowledge. Drawing on decolonial theory (Mignolo 2009; Mbembe 2017) and critical heritage studies (Harrison 2013; Waterton & Smith 2009), the paper positions the museum as a counter-hegemonic space that contests both the epistemic violence of colonial heritage regimes and the inertia of national institutions in postcolonial contexts. Methodologically, the paper is informed on ethnographic fieldwork and participatory engagement with community curators, local artists, and heritage practitioners in Mafalala. These interactions reveal how the museum emerges as a living archive and space of everyday decolonization where storytelling, remembering, and curating are collectively enacted and politically charged. The museum's curatorial practice rooted in local storytelling, Afro-diasporic memory, and youth engagement, offers a bottom-up challenge to Western-centric museology. Rather than seeking restitution from Europe, it restitutes meaning, authorship, and historical, and collections are redefined as cultural narratives to be performed, debated, and lived. Keywords: Decolonial museology, black identity, participatory museology, postcolonial & urban history.

Short Bio

Maria Manjate, she is a cultural manager and heritage emerging professional, and co-founder of Own Heritage, a cultural consultancy dedicated to culture, heritage and creative industries. She works as Program Officer at the Observatory of Cultural Policies in Africa (OCPA), based in Mozambique, providing support and technical assistance to the development and promotion of cultural policies across the African continent through specific projects focusing on dissemination (research and publication), capacity building, networking, and advocacy, with close cooperation with UNESCO and African Union. She is also a member of ICOMOS Emerging Professional Working Group (EPWG).