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Memory, slavery, nation: an analysis of representations of slavery in post-apartheid cultural and memory production

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Abstract
The continuing role of South Africa's past in the reconstruction of present-day identities is an area of study and investigation that crosses political, social, cultural and racial boundaries. It is also a field which, despite the post-apartheid political period and South Africa's change to a democratic dispensation, has not necessarily provided neat categories, instances or guidelines into which identity-formation can fit. As a result, studies abound which attempt to track, respond to, reflect on and reposition how this history of slavery, colonialism and apartheid may be viewed in relation to present-day society and socio-political circumstances.

This dissertation considers how and why representations of slavery emerge in discussions of what constitutes a national discourse of race and reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa. I argue that these resurgences of interest in slavery are tied to the symbolic work that the multiple memories of slavery are able to do in the post-apartheid period.

The study is broadly situated in a globally emerging interest in historic formations of slavery packaged in popular culture, and the current increase in human rights politics dealing with re-emerging and new forms of slavery. As a result, this study adopts an interdisciplinary approach to both the content and methodological focus of how representations of slavery re-emerge in post-apartheid South Africa; providing a consideration of the phenomena of power in relation to discursive and cultural constructions of slavery, memory, identity and nation-building.
Each of the areas considered (wine farms, museum and memorial practices and walking tours), suggest that the memory of slavery is able to function in relation to the immediate needs of those proposing and implementing the remembering and remembrance.