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'Ruins of Memory': Fort Patiko, the Slave Trade, and Heritage-Based Education in Northern Uganda

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Abstract

This paper examines the architectural and material remnants of the slave trade at Fort Patiko by interrogating the mechanisms through which the slavery legacy is transmitted to younger generations. Employing a narrative research design grounded in constructivist theory, data was collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentary review. Thematic analysis guided the interpretation of findings. The research reveals that Fort Patiko retains both natural and humanly constructed structures that embody its slave trade history. These include the execution slab, gender-specific prison cells (female and male prisons), Baker's seat, the "Gate of No Return," as well as naturally formed trenches and ditches. Additionally, the simsim and millet granaries and an armoury highlight the multilayered functional roles of the site during the height of enslavement in the region. Findings indicate that the transmission of slave trade memory occurs through both formal and informal channels. Formally, the topic is integrated into primary and secondary school curricula. Informally, school-organised visits to the site and oral histories shared by elders contribute to intergenerational memory-making and the cultivation of place-based historical knowledge. The study concludes that the memory of the slave trade constitutes a vital component of Uganda's cultural heritage. It recommends the continued preservation and transmission of this history as a means of fostering historical consciousness, critical memory and cultural identity among future generations. Furthermore, the study urges the incorporation of heritage-based pedagogies that promote critical engagement with historical injustices and their spatial embodiments.

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