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Mapping the Borderland: South African Identity, Memory, and Space Making in P. Mpe's "Welcome to Our Hillbrow" and P. Abraham's "Mineboy"

The proposed contribution will compare the novels *Mine Boy* (Abrahams 1946) and *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (Mpe 2001) regarding their use of urban mobility as a form of recurring spatializing practice and its role for (national) identity construction and memory production. Both novels narrate the story of a rural black man that comes to Johannesburg in order to become a part of the city. The metropolis of Johannesburg is a place of significance in the national imagination. It is where the nation's future is renegotiated especially at the beginning and end of apartheid (1948-1994).

Both characters exhibit similar spatialising practices in order to claim their place within the city and nation. Their movements map the urban environment and fuse it with the characters' rural place of origin. This act creates spaces for liminal identities that merge the peripheral and core of the nation. Johannesburg becomes thus a borderland bridging racial segregation as well as the nation's past and future.

However, the novels differ in their way of mapping. In *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, the process of orientation is informed by the racist past of the nation hence mapping becomes simultaneously an act of memory production reaching into the nation's past and future. *Mine Boy*, written at the onset of apartheid, points forward into the nation's future by incorporating Marxist ideology into the mapping process. In both cases, the city becomes a border space that questions imperial discourses of power (Anzaldúa 1987, Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006) while negotiating national identity.

The analysis combines a literary and cultural studies approach arguing for the relational and discursive character of identity forming categories of space and mobility. It is informed by Massey's (2005) definition of space as a process of materially embedded practices, which puts mobility at the centre of spatializing practices. Mobility and space are both objects of knowledge in the Foucauldian sense (Frello 2008) and as such give insight into the naturalization and subversion of discourses of belonging in a postcolonial context.

References:

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