After a long marginalization in French history and culture, colonial slavery became a reference to the women, children and men who identified with those who had been enslaved in the French colonies. It was used to question the French national narrative and local pervasive inequalities, to explore the role and place of racial thinking in the making of French society and culture, and to analyze its contemporary legacies both in France and in its former colonies that had become French departments in March 1946.

The Taubira Law which recognized in May 2001 slave trade and slavery as a “crime against humanity” marked a turning point: in 2006, May 10th became the national day of commemoration of the memories of slave trade, slavery and their abolition and in 2012, the Memorial of the Abolition of Slavery opened in Nantes, the largest in the world dedicated to the struggle against slavery. Progress has been made in the fields of education, research and culture. Yet, it is fair to ask in which ways the field opened by the struggle for recognition has been led astray, emptied of its radical promise of bringing back the idea of social justice. And to wonder where and how memories are revived to escape their instrumentalization.

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