

# REPRESENTATIONS OF THE TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE IN SELECTED CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES

A thesis submitted by

**Oluyomi Abayomi Oduwobi**

**Student Number: 11639488**

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**Promoter: Prof. H Sewlall (University of Venda)**

**Co-promoter: Prof. O Abodunrin (University of Limpopo)**

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## ABSTRACT

The trans-Atlantic slave trade refers to the forced transportation of African people as slaves from Africa to the Americas across the Atlantic Ocean between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. Therefore, using the theoretical frameworks of postcolonialism, postcolonial feminism and postmodern historiographic metafiction, this thesis evaluates the theoretical and practical importance of reconstructing a historical past as well as counter-hegemonic proclivities in contemporary literary narratives. It sets an analytic focus on the extensive representations of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in selected contemporary literary narratives such as: Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* (1990); David Pesci's *Amistad* (1997); Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997); Caryl Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound* (2000); Manu Herbstein's *Ama: A Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (2000); Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* (2007); Prince Justice's *Tutuoba: Salem's Black Shango Slave Queen* (2007); and Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007). This study evinces the diverse approaches the selected writers of African descent employ to interrogate and destabilise the official history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in an attempt to reconceptualise it. As a result, this study examines how the selected writers deviate from the normative form of writing slave narratives to make the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its engendered discourses on racism, identity, gender, politics, socio-economic realities and the African diaspora relevant to the twenty-first century reader. An examination of the selected narratives for this thesis contributes to the knowledge on literary scholarship and exposes aspects of the trans-Atlantic slave trade that have been previously unexplored. The conscious efforts of the writers to interrogate the canonical slave narratives and subvert the hegemonic history through their imaginative techniques direct attention to the contemporary discourses of appraising the interdisciplinary links between literature and other subject areas such as history, law, as well as cultural and diasporic studies.

**Keywords:** African diaspora, contemporary literary narratives, D'Aguiar, Hartman, Herbstein, Hill, Johnson, Justice, Pesci, Phillips, postcolonial, trans-Atlantic slave trade, writers of African descent.