

The Postmodern Metanarratives and Chronotope: Reading Space and Time in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*

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سرديات ما بعد الحداثة والإطار الزمكاني:

قراءة المكان والزمان في رواية "رحمة" للكاتبة توني موريسون

ملخص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى استكشاف الخطاب المضاد لروائية أفروأمريكية بارزة هي توني موريسون. يتجسد الوقت في المكان، ونتيجة لذلك، يظهر الإطار الزماني المكاني مميزاً بحيث يتطلب صورة وهوية موثوقين. ينتمي الخطاب الزمني في رواية رحمة لموريسون إلى فترة تعتبر حجر الزاوية في تاريخ الأمة الأمريكية. يعود تاريخ الرواية إلى بداية حقبة العبودية في أمريكا في القرن السابع عشر. على الرغم من أن المكان في رواية رحمة لموريسون هو المزارع، إلا أنها تبرز موضوع العبودية من خلال تصوير أشكال مختلفة منها.

يستكشف البحث في رواية مميزة للغاية والتي تعتبر نقطة ثورية في سياق كتابات توني موريسون. يخلق الأساس البشري لكتابات موريسون خطاباً عابراً / داخلياً حيث إنها تحيي تاريخ أمتها في القضاء على الفساد من خلال تقديم سرد مادي للروايات المحلية والصغيرة لإضفاء الشرعية على النسخ المختلفة لـ "الحقيقة" في فترتين انتقاليين حاسمتين في التاريخ الأفريقي الأمريكي. تتحدى الرواية الروايات الكبرى السائدة حول العبودية والفساد في عالم ما بعد الاستعمار. كما أنها تضيف الشرعية على وجهة نظر تعددية حديثة لتاريخ الدول من خلال نشر نوع جديد من المعرفة يستدعي السرديات الكبرى للحرية التي بطلها هو الإنسانية. وفي هذا السرد المضاد لما بعد الاستعمار لموريسون، يتشابك نهج باختين عن الإطار الزمكاني ومفهوم ليوتارد عن السرديات الكبرى.

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Abstract

This paper tends to explore the counter discourse of a prominent Africa-American novelist; Toni Morrison. Time is materialized in space, and as a consequence, distinctive chronotopes appear pleading for an authoritative image and identity. The chronotopic discourse in Morrison's *A Mercy* belongs to a period which is accounted as a cornerstone in the history of the American nation. *A Mercy* goes back to the start of the epoch of slavery in the seventeenth century America. Though the space in Morrison's *A Mercy* is plantations, it seems to accentuate the theme of slavery through depicting various forms of it.

The paper investigates a very distinguished novel, *A Mercy*, which is accounted as revolutionary in the vein of the writings of Toni Morrison. The human basis of the writings of Morrison creates an inter/trans counter discourse. It revives the history of her nation in search for eliminating corruption through introducing a metanarrative for local and small narratives so as to legitimize the various versions of "the truth" in two crucial transitional periods in the African-American history according to which the features of the modern history of the nations are formed. The novel defies the prevalent metanarratives on slavery and corruption in a postcolonial realm. It also legitimizes a modern pluralistic view of the history of its nations by disseminating a new type of knowledge invoking metanarratives of freedom whose hero is humanity. In the postcolonial counter discourse of Morrison, Bakhtin's approach of chronotope and Lyotard's concept of metanarratives are intertwined.

Keywords: Metanarratives – Chronotope – A Mercy

Investigating the citizens' relationship with each other as well as their relationship with their nation needs studying the time, the space, historical and social geography of that nation. Consequently, Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of a chronotope is admonished to uncover the trans/inter textual and contextual relationships of time and space with the citizens of a nation throughout history. As a matter of fact, discussing the chronotopicity of a society is strongly related to Jean-Francois Lyotard's concept of metanarratives; his ideologies complement Bakhtin's use of the chronotope as an analytical lens. There is an inter/trans discourse between two concepts. This paper seeks to discover the inter/trans historical and social discourse of the American society through examining the chronotopicity of Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* from an interconnected Bakhtinian and Lyotardian approach.

Bakhtin, in his book *The Dailogic Imagination*, defines the chronotope as "the artistic connectedness of temporal and special relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. This term [space-time] is employed in mathematics, and was introduced as part of Einsteien's Theory of Relativity" ("*Forms of Time and the Chronotope*," 84). It will be referred to as "Forms of Time and the Chronotope" in citations as "FTC" Bakhtin's concept of a chronotope is a magnifier that is applied to study the temporal and spatial relationships in a literary text. Bakhtin affirms that this same concept is admonished in Einstein's Theory of relativity as the comparability between the literary and the mathematical use of the term "serves as a means of measuring how, in a particular age, genre, or text, real historical time and space as well as fictional time and space are articulated in relation to one another" (Gasner-Puhringer-Rheindorf 2). Bakhtin narrows the scope of his definition by further stating, "what counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time as the fourth dimension of space, "we understand the chronotope as a formally constitutive category of literature" ("FTC," 84).

Being associated with the inseparableness of time and space, the chronotope, becomes a fundamental device in literature. It is used to unveil complicated textual and contextual relationships and to consider them as historical forms which help the readers to comprehensively understand cultural and digressive texts. Moreover, the chronotope is an approach making a connection between the world outside and the world inside the narrative. As a confirmation, Bakhtin argues, "Out of

the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as a source of representation) emerge the reflected and created chronotopes of the world represented in the work" ("FTC 253). Since the chronotope provides the audience the opportunity to link and estimate their actual values through comparing them with those in a narrative, there is a social significance of a chronotope in a narrative.

It seems that Bakhtin, in his attempt to provide meaning, molds a historical plane to link content and form, in addition to, text and context. He contends, "Every entry in the sphere of meaning is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope" ("FTC," 258.) The chronotope provides meaning through merging temporal and spatial elements to mold a concrete whole. Therefore, the chronotope becomes an entry to both the real and symbolic realms. Tackling the larger parameters of space and time, a chronotope turns into an "optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring" (Bakhtin "The Bildungsroman," 425-26). Concisely, the chronotope as an analytical tool makes time visible and space correlated to time. Bakhtin, while exploring the relationship of people and events to time and space, discovers that the narrative genres of literature are the means in which "any contrast may crop up, the most various fates may collide and interweave with one another." Besides, the narrative genres are distinguished with their "destiny and concreteness" ("FTC," 243, 250.) They offer a parable to multiple ways helping people to comprehend their relation to the world.

Jean-Francois Lyotard is also concerned with the matter of narrative but from a different perspective. He is disturbed by the fact that history has transformed into a narrative. Lyotard's significant passion is truth, which is commonly known as the standard representing universal human reason; in other words, metanarratives. Despite that, he cannot find this truth in the metanarratives that are used to elaborate historical experience or knowledge due to the metanarratives' aggregation nature. Accordingly, a metanarrative simply means a story about a story; thus, a metanarrative is deficient. Lyotard asserts:

Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and

of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functions, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements—narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive and so on . . . Where after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside? (xiv)

Lyotard's approach toward a universal truth assessed through the metanarratives is 'incredulity.' A metanarrative, "is a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience" (Stephens 92). In comparison to metaphysical philosophy in the past, a metanarrative prompts the 'crisis' of inability to find a legitimating truth because Lyotard discovers that this 'global or totalizing cultural narrative schema' defined as a metanarrative is limited to a plain narrative in which truth is lost while taking into account to 'narrative language elements.' Hence, a metanarrative is diminished to a story. To approve it as a credible legitimating truth is to prove our evidence and to prove the claims in an eternal process. Owing to the impossibility of this process, Lyotard denies that a metanarrative can ever be a legitimating device.

Since the metanarratives neglect the variety of human existence, Lyotard denies them. He affirms "Each of us lives at the intersection of many of these. However, we do not necessarily establish stable language combinations and the properties of the ones we do establish are not necessarily communicable" (xiv).

From Lyotard's point of view, each society is divided into subgroups which consist of lots of minor contexts where people act and have specific roles. A metanarrative cannot legitimate knowledge and courses action plans in such minor contexts because of their variable forms which are not 'necessarily' public; 'communicable.' This may only occur when breaking up a discourse into thousands of localized roles which provide legitimation in their restricted contexts.

Consequently, denying metanarratives gives way to short narratives which efficiently judge actions and knowledge and build the kind of truth lacking in the metanarratives. Bakhtin's concept of chronotope and Lyotard's metanarrative are remarkably built upon three main props in which both concepts concur; they are: inter/trans discourse, unity and legitimation. In Bakhtin's opinion, a chronotope arouses an inter/trans discourse since it is not only symbolic of time and space, but rather of man as well. Although he

affirms that in "the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole," he also persists, most importantly to him, that "the image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic intrinsically chronotopic" ("FTC," 85).

Accordingly, space and time build with man an inter/trans discourse which analyses both the contexts of the novel and the reality; otherwise stated, the planes of culture and history. In Lyotard's perception, a chronotope is similarly a little narrative which explains the divergences and elucidates the old language games. "The little narrative," Lyotard believes, "remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention, most particularly in science" (64). Noticeably, Bakhtin and Lyotard agree in making of a chronotope and a little narrative, accordingly, the basic element of understanding both the narrative and the reality, studying the reality and legitimating the system which gives way to power, as Lyotard emphatically affirms. Consequently, the aim of the chronotope and the little narrative is homogenous and compared.

Unity is an essential component in both concepts of chronotope and little narrative, since they propose that understanding life is based upon digging into the smallest details, as human experience is not linear and cannot be monitored or standardized according to universal principles. Since adaptable human experiences should be put into consideration with regard to the changes of time and space within a specific culture, Lyotard's theory suggests a unity when he analyses the "state of culture" regarding "the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have changed the game rules for science, literature, and the arts." He places all "these transformations in the context of narratives" (xxiii). Therefore, he diminishes them all into 'narratives'; and this is a uniting principle. In addition, to affirm his rejection for universal regulating principles, he affirms, "Science has always been in conflict with narratives. Judged by the yardstick of science, the majority of them prove to be fables" (xxiv). He compares science with narratives because both of them make a plea to some world which is beyond the reality. As a result, justice is a distant possibility. He debates paralogy.

Lyotard believes that a knowledge legitimated by a big narrative neglects the protean forms of human natures and discourses, this contradicts the validity of the institutions proclamation for such a kind of knowledge as truth because in that case they are "obliged to legitimate the rules of [their] own game" (xxiii). Therefore, Lyotard rejects the universal principle of

justice the same way he rejects truth because they have distanced themselves to a form of a metanarrative, a fable, which does not depict the reality. Yet, when analyzing a novel, Bakhtin tackles the issue of unity; "unity not as an innate one-and-only, but as a dialogic concordance of unmerged twos or multiples" (Bakhtin *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, 289). He realizes that unity does not require uniformity since heterogeneity is anticipated between things existing under the same title. For instance, a novel contains adaptable chronotopes, nonetheless, it is depicted as a homogenous artwork.

Exploring the Greek romance, he comprehends that it "utilized and fused together in its structure almost all genres of ancient literature" ("FTC," 89). Consequently, one novel is an index of former genres experiences. Bakhtin debates, "The novel . . . dramatizes the gaps that always exist between what is told and the telling of it, constantly experimenting with social, discursive and narrative asymmetries ("Discourse in the Novel," 385). The problems that the scientific metanarratives face are solved if a novel is taken as a sample of a metanarrative, because it holds adaptable chronotopes and the narrative form bridges the gaps between them.

Legitimation is a crucial issue for Bakhtin and Lyotard. Novels, unlike metanarratives, are considered as a threshold for the symbolic and the real. They are legitimated through breaking them up into various chronotopes as "a literary work's artistic unity in relationship to an actual reality is defined by its chronotope" (Bakhtin "FTC," 97). The unity of the artwork is legitimated through the motives and other structural attributes of the novel which "enter as constituent elements into plot, not only of the novels of various eras and types, but also into literary works of other genres [. . .] although it is true the chronotope is developed in different ways in the various genres" (Bakhtin "FTC," 97). These attributes are controlling universal principles of the novel; yet, novels do not meet the same legitimation problem that metanarratives face since the chronotope depicts variety of discourse and protean experiences can be created according to these controlling universal standards. A novel has the ability to easily fluctuate between real and symbolic realms and in all cases it is approved with believability, however, a metanarrative has not.

Regarding Lyotard, he discovers that neither the metanarratives nor performativity (or how well knowledge performs) are the method to legitimate knowledge, however, paralogy is. Lyotard insists, "The grand narrative has lost its credibility regardless of what mode of unification it was,

regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation" (47). No matter what discourse big narratives use whether scientific philosophic or historical, it is inconvincible. Correspondingly, Lyotard denies performativity because he refuses any type of science in the service of performativity; it is more distressing and oppressive than satisfying. He persists:

The performativity of an utterance be it denotative or prescriptive, increases proportionally to the amount of information about its referent one has at one's disposal. Thus the growth of power, and its self-legitimation, are now taking the route of data storage and accessibility, and the operativity of information. (64)

The principle of performativity is not powerful enough as it does not represent the trends of the new age since a fair system of legitimation should highlight diversity and a creative search for new answers to old questions. It should innovatively search for 'instabilities' and anomalies in current theories. Through paralogy, it is possible to express new views regarding language games in modern life creating a system of power. In this sense, paralogy does not have the dictionary meaning of 'false reasoning,' but highlights the elements of the individualistic search for new meaning in old language games. This search corresponds with the current trends in society. He states:

We should be happy that the tendency toward the temporary contract is ambiguous: it is not totally subordinated to the goal of the system, yet the system tolerates it. This bears witness to the existence of another goal within the system: knowledge of language games as such and the decision to assume responsibility for their rules and effects. Their most significant effect is precisely what violates the adoption of rules-the quest for paralogy. (67)

From Lyotard's perspective, the current trends in society are getting closer to paralogy. For Lyotard, the trend toward the temporary contracts rather than permanent institution is considered paralogy. In his point of view, paralogy is not an innovation but opposition to totalizing metanarratives. Paralogy consents to and legitimates local or little narratives.

Briefly, the concepts of chronotope and little narratives converge in their attempt to reveal hidden contexts by accepting the heterogeneity of human existence. A chronotope describes the historical geography of a text in relation to temporal and spatial conditions, likewise, little or localized narratives crystallise little details reflecting the diversity and difference in

human nature. In addition, a chronotope depicts a part in a novel; similarly, little narratives are also a minor part in the course of history which is considered a metanarrative. Thus, the chronotopicity of Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* will be studied in accordance with an intersecting Bakhtinian-Lyotardian approach. In her novel, the African-American Nobel Laureate novelist Toni Morrison (1931-) attempts to examine her society in order to demolish the historical discourse from the perspective of heterogeneous human nature apart from the homogenous one offered by written history. *A Mercy* is considered revolutionary in the character of the writings of Toni Morrison. *Although A Mercy* (2008) is Morrison's ninth novel, it is her first to explore the roots of racism in the United States.

Reflecting back on the early days of slavery, *A Mercy* provides a pluralistic view of the American society showing that it is a chronotope that shapes people not the contrary. Slavery in the seventeenth century America is not restricted to Blacks, as the novel also depicts White and Native American characters who are working in enslavement. The novel, as Morrison declares it to be, is an attempt to "remove race from slavery" since there is not a difference between black slaves and white slaves; both are exposed to humiliation and degradation.

Unmistakably, it is Morrison who called ex-President Bill Clinton 'the first black American president' as if prophesising a pluralistic society where skin color has nothing to do with a dominating culture of servitude (Ulaby).

In order to explore the origin of racism, *A Mercy* goes back to the seventeenth century America to the early beginning of the epoch of slavery. Considering the space of narration, *A Mercy* takes place in plantations. Paradoxically, these two spots suggest unity and warmth. For a deeper insight, slavery seems to be the dominant tone. Remarkably, *A Mercy* indicates a historical discourse, a metanarrative; in Lyotard's point of view. Regarding Bakhtin, he has ever thought that "history has perhaps most often been compared with the novel because both presume a certain completeness of inventory. Each in its own way strives to give narrative shape to material of encyclopedic variety and plentitude" ("Discourse in the Novel," 395). Bakhtin realizes that the 'inventory of material' establishing the discourse of history is adaptable and abundant as the chronotopic analysis of novels shows to him. Accordingly, both novels are to be explored in terms of the major issues in which Bakhtin's and Lyotard's believed enhance and intersect; namely: inter/trans discourse, unity and legitimation.

Inter/trans discourse:

The 'intrinsic connectedness' of the temporal and spatial relationships in a text defined as a chronotope is the tool which shows to what degree "real historical time and place, as well as, fictional time and space are articulated in relation to one another" (Gasner 1). Proposing an inter/trans discourse between reality and fiction, time and space are rendered essential players that allow a chronotope to be "the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied" to study "the meaning that shapes narrative" (Bakhtin "FTC," 150). Fluctuating between the two realms of reality and fiction, the meaning with regard to its chronotopicity obtains a pluralistic nature in comparison to that of Lyotard's concept of a little narrative and, meanwhile, makes Lyotard's concept of a little narrative intertwined with Bakhtin's concept of a chronotope. Lyotard argues, "On the one hand, the system can only function by reducing complexity, and on the other, it must induce the adaptation of individual aspirations to its own ends" (65). Little narratives that 'reduce the system's complexity' turn to be like a chronotope that enables the 'knots' of a narrative to be 'tied and untied.'

The title of the novel is a chronotopic spot where behind it a little narrative examining facts about the history and the culture of the American society. *A Mercy* as a title suggests an individual act of mercy which points out that the novel is not about goodness or has religious and divine connotation. As the novel envelopes 'a mercy' is elucidated as an act of a desperate slave mother who gives her daughter to a stranger showing compassion towards slaves. The mother's peculiar act is in fact a petition for mercy hoping that it might give rise to a better future for her child. Actually, Morrison plans her title to describe the denouement of the novel and to limit its chronotope of meaning which now no longer indicates, says Morrison, "the large world of people doing nice things or . . . religious versions of God's mercy, but a human gesture . . . just mercy . . . and that worked for me" (Ulaby). The course of action argues that individual acts of mercy may end racism and help form an integrated society respecting the little narratives with their paralogical discourse while shedding light on the chronotopicity of a specific nation. Morrison agrees with patterning her novel as an aggregation of short stories, and each one of them is narrated by one character; that is to say, it is a novel of turns. "back and forth [A Mercy] goes over the same period, summing up this life" (Myers).

A Mercy is a sequence of flashbacks portrays Florens's journey towards maturity and disillusionment. Crystallising her unique experience, "the narrative tells other stories, meandering from character to character and from present to past" ("As she lay dying"). Affirming the importance of Florens's experience in a harsh world in which misfortunes and tolerance are inevitable, Florens narrates her story in the first person while the narrator tells the stories of her colleagues.

Opening 'the gates of meaning,' the patterns of the novel merge the temporal and spatial signals to create distinctive chronotopes exploring the historical discourse and affirming that the type of history that the chronotope as a lens enlightens is not a metanarrative to be denied the way Lyotard does. Bakhtin affirms:

Kant defies space and time as indispensable forms of any cognition, beginning with elementary perceptions and representations. Here we employ the Kantian evaluation of the importance of these forms in the cognitive process, but differ from Kant in taking them not as "transcendental" but as forms of the most immediate reality. ("FTC" 85)

As a history conveying the relationship between time and space, the chronotope disputes the totalizing nature of a metanarrative of history which turns it into a 'transcendental' narrative. Rather, it examines the different shapes of reality in a given time.

Accordingly, *A Mercy commences* a chronotopic discourse which is symbolic of America. Jacob Vaark, an orphan, consoles many other orphans through acts of mercy and settles with them his newly-bought plantation hoping that he builds a community based upon love and understanding which might make up for the yearned big family that he could not have due to the premature death of his children. In contrast to America, Morrison describes Jacob Vaark as follows:

His whole life had been a mix of confrontation, risk and placating. Now here he was, a ratty orphan becomes landowner, making a place out of no place, a temperate living from raw life. He relished never knowing what lay in his path, who might approach with what intention. (*A Mercy* 10)

Vaark's description illustrates the era of the 1680s in America when homeless and rootless people settled in America from different places in Europe and bloomed there. Opening the 'gates' of the real through fiction, Morrison

depicts Vaark as prominent for his love for 'confrontation, risk and placating.' He is adventurous whose affection for risk makes him a believer in liberty as well as, a successful trader. The novel opens on Vaark the successful trader who has a small piece of land to farm and holds firm beliefs in decent and ethical wealth.

In spite of his disapproval of slavery, he searches for consolation and prosperity in a community of slaves that he acquires through acts of mercy. Lina, his servant, is Native American whom he saves from the plague that destroyed her whole tribe.

His wife, Rebekka, is brought to him from England at a promotion for a capable wife to share him his hopefulness. However, misfortune strikes him. He loses three sons after their birth and his daughter is dead after being kicked by a horse.

Concerning his farm, it turns not as profitable as he wished. The opening of the novel highlights a turning point in Vaark's life. His principles are stumbling and his ethical beliefs are reformed in line with the social changes. They still sound ethical, yet, they are unethical from a human point of view. Vaark's beliefs are disturbed as a result of the animosity spreading in his society that he clearly feels in his journey from Virginia to Maryland to demand a debt from a tobacco plantation owner, a Sengor D'Ortega. Upon arrival, Vaark is astonished by the magnificence of D'Ortega's mansion and sophisticated style of living. He is also shocked to know that there is no money to pay the debt. D'Ortega, yet, offers him a payment inhuman flesh; slave. Though asserting that "flesh was not his commodity,"

Vaark agrees to take a little girl at the petition of her mother who hopes for her child a somehow better life other than the harsh one in D'Ortega's plantation" (*A Mercy* 20). He takes the girl, Florens, whose name means free change, who is almost at the same age of his dead daughter in order to make up for his wife for the loss of her daughter.

At this stage, Jacob Vaark becomes a slave-owner. Going out of D'Ortega's plantation, he feels excited that he could mix with the upper class. The moment he decides to be as rich as D'Ortega hints to an upcoming social transformation which might imply a moral one. Vaark's first step towards the achievement of his dream is keeping up with the market economics which then was heading to trading in sugar, molasses and rum, as well as, mass slave labour.

In contrast to the attitude of Vaark is that of the society whose laws are changing towards highlighting racism and class divisions. This change is the outcome of the defeat of the army of "blacks, natives, whites, mulattoes-freedmen, slaves and indentured" in the war they fought against the local upper class. The defeat legitimized violence against the categories of which the army is made of.

Slaughter of opposing tribes and running Carolinas off their land -- spawned a thicket of new laws authorizing chaos in defense of order. By eliminating manumission, gatherings, travel and bearing arms for black people only; by granting license to any white to kill any black for any reason; by compensating owners for a slave's maiming or death, they separated and protected all whites from others forever [My Italics]. (*A Mercy* 8)

The state measures put the roots of racism and oppression in America. It promotes violence against the lower classes, as a whole, and the blacks, in particular, in favor of the upper class. Surprisingly, the new laws award brutality and discriminate between the blacks and the whites. While following the new economics, Vaark shows up after many years as another successful D'Ortega; a plantation owner who builds a grand mansion for him and his wife. Same as D'Ortega, there are slaves and apprenticed labor in his new and massive plantation. Clearly, the common state policy keeps deforming his stumbling ethics. Deep down, Vaark tries to stay as compassionate as he ever is. He treats his slaves and servants as though they were his big family. In his attempt not to be discriminating, Vaark treats the blacksmith, who is a freed black man, as a friend.

In *A Mercy*, the stumbling ethics of the seventeenth century America is pictured through the chronotopic lens. It does not only tell the well-known metanarrative of the history of the nation, but also investigate the little narratives of the histories of other people who lived in that period. Consequently, paralogy is given the chance to arise. Aiming to make of private stories public ones through the chronotopic analysis, the characters whose chronotopes are interlaced with that of Jacob Vaark add to the dominant metanarrative of history a more human attribute to a turbulent background.

In Tony Morrison's *A Mercy* we see life through the eyes of people physically and emotionally abandoned, orphans with names like Lina, Florens, Jacob, Rebekka and Sorrow. The storm is the clashing

cultures in pre-Revolutionary War America where the laws are not yet defined, everyone and everything is for sale, and all are threatened with annihilation by God, the environment or each other. ("Orphans of the Storm")

Representing the social history, Lina, Rebekka, Florens and Sorrow, whose chronotopes intersect with Vaark's and with each other, build an inter/trans discourse affirming their dependency upon each other. Their community that is existent within outlines of the American society is a unique chronotope which has to stand up to social and historical challenges.

Lina's chronotope highlights the change that the Native Americans went through. Exterminated by both the whites and the plagues brought by the whites, Lina, who was initially free is relegated to a quasi-slave servant who should tolerate the ill-treatment and the suspicion of Vaark's wife before gaining her trust. When she does, Lina's authority becomes secondary to her mistress. Nonetheless, she had to pay first to obtain such a status; she had to prove herself not against the dominant trend of relegating women like her. She did not only consent when ordered to abandon her set of notions and unique Native Indian appearance, but also became Christian. She knows that it's her destiny to have a stumbling identity to effectively find a place in the world. She applies the same way on everything including finding a cure for her mistress's disease.

Relying on memory and her own resources, she cobbled together neglected rites, merged Europe medicine with native, scripture with lore, and recalled or invented the hidden meaning of things. Found, in other words, a way to be in the world. (*A Mercy* 46)

Lina disliked being a prisoner of her native demolished chronotope. She blends her native beliefs with European ones in order to create an inter/trans discourse with the world around her. Being free, she has the opportunity to leave the house after her master's death but she does not. She cannot tolerate living in solitude in the city, since her developed techniques that offered her a special position in her master's chronotope need to be re-adjusted to keep up with the multiple ones in the outer racist society. Thus, slavery is her destiny. In contrast to her master, she is obliged to reconcile with slavery although she is against it. Through Lina's chronotope, the novel "elucidates the oppressive forces enabling slavery to happen at all" (Sethi 44).

Lina's compelling slavery is compared to the actual one of Florens and Sorrow. When compared with Florens, Sorrow is the daughter of a

deceased sea captain who is enslaved as an act of mercy. Jacob Vaark rescues her from a ship wreck which reduces her mental capabilities. In contrast to Florens, Sorrow rejects to be a prisoner in the pre-destined dialects of slavery. She is proud of the children she gives birth to. She overlooks any humiliation towards her while she hurriedly serves her baby no matter what chores she abandons on purpose. Sorrow is proud of being a slave to her child. As the novel uncovers, Sorrow refuses stamping her 'a jinx'. The first step she took to free herself from the cuffs of this name is changing it into 'Complete'. In comparison to Lina, Sorrow is obliged to stay in her master's house because her freedom is bartered with saving her life. Nonetheless, unlike Lina, she never compromises her notions or points of view in order to be accepted in society. She firmly believes that any change should arise from within not from demolished one's old self so as to keep up with the current morals of the society. Despite being a prisoner in her chronotope, Sorrow is far more powerful than Lina who is given authority next to her mistress. In spite of being a descendant of slaves, Florens is given the opportunity to improve her destiny.

In her master's house, Lina treats her with maternal affection and she is kindly treated by Vaark and his wife; pointing out that Sorrow who is almost the same age as her does not enjoy the same treatment. Since Florens has delicate feet, it was necessary for her to wear shoes since childhood; this symbolizes her delicate world where she lives protected from the savagery of both the real world and the world of slavery. Besides, Florens is privileged by being the preferred to the blacksmith who treats her like a free woman and showers her with exceptionally satisfying love and sex. He respects her as a human being even in sex. Feeling free, Florens voluntarily offers herself a love-slave to the blacksmith.

Facing the reality, however, changes Florens as she figures out that she is only a slave. In the aftermath of her master's death, her mistress falls severely sick. Being the only one who does not have real forced chores in the plantation, Florens is sent in an errand to New Amsterdam, in the North, to get the blacksmith whose medical experience qualifies him to cure small pox. Leaving the South where slavery is prevailing, Florens faces great danger in the new chronotope of the North where witch hunting is a plague. She discovers that her former chronotope of tranquility is fading away by being replaced by one of the unknown. "I am losing something with every step I take. I can feel the drain," says Florens, "Something precious is leaving me. .

. . I am not afraid of anything now. The sun's going leaves darkness behind and the dark is me. Is we. Is my home" (*A Mercy*). During the journey, Florens ends up experienced and loses her innocence and hope. Her perspective of the world is not as bright as before; it is replaced by darkness. The journey deprives her of everything: her boots, food and warm clothes are stolen and she is left to suffer in the freezing weather. The only safety guarantee she has is the letter she keeps that is written by her mistress to assert that she is a slave in an errand.

Considering the mistress, she is not in a much better position than her slaves;

She is a slave with a marriage contract. While Rebekka was only sixteen, she had to choose between the "prospects of servant, prostitute or wife, and although horrible stories were told about each of these careers, the last one seemed safest" (*A Mercy* 75-76).

Much like Florens, Rebekka's early journey to maturity is an uneasy one from England to America in which she had to travel alone on a ship and blend with strangers who were mostly prostitutes and thieves.

In contrast to Florens, in the background of Rebekka's journey is the historical reality of the immigration to America. In common with Florens, the love of Jacob Vaark overwhelms Rebekka protecting her from the wickedness of the outer world. Short after his death, Rebekka embarks on another journey which toughens her and completely changes her into one of the famous stereotypes of plantation owners in that period.

Apparently, the chronotopic analysis of *A Mercy* uncovers various entwining chronotopes whose inter/trans discourse pictures the pre-War history of America. Exploring the chronotopicity of the novel also proves that "the chronotope restores a historical dimension to poetic analysis, functions as a tool for perceiving the relationship between socio-historical contexts and symbolic texts, and provides us with a theory of the production of meaning" (Mutnick 5). The chronotopic analysis highlights the historical discourse in the seventeenth century America and relates it to the social transformation, and also, expands the scope of meanings within the text.

Unity:

Bakhtin's view of a chronotope repeatedly hypothesizes the idea of unity. A chronotope is where unity exists. In a chronotope "time . . . thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible, likewise, space becomes charged and responsible to the movement of time, plot, history" ("FTC," 84).

Although Bakhtin's perspective in unity in regards to time and space is positive, from a chronotopic opinion,, it is dreadful if it has a totalizing influence. Morson and Emerson assert, "Unity – with respect not only to individuals but also to art, culture, and the world generally – is usually understood as conformity to an underlying structure to an overarching scheme." Bakhtin, however, believes that this idea of unity is opposing to creativity because "if everything conforms to a pre-existing pattern, the genuine development is reduced to mere discovery, to a mere uncovering of something that, in a strong sense, is already there."

Surprisingly, "Bakhtin accepted that some concept of unity is essential" because without it, "the world ceases to make sense and creativity again disappears, this time replaced by aleatory. There would again be no possibility of anything meaningfully new" (1). This unity should be between 'multiple' things. Similar to Bakhtin, Lyotard views that a totalizing unity is a terror. "by terror I mean," says Lyotard, "the efficiency gained by eliminating, or threatening to eliminate, a player from the language game one shares with him."

He is silenced or consents, not because he has been refuted, but because his ability to participate has been threatened" (65). From Lyotard's point of view, unity is a process of eradication which intimidates any one to make effective contribution. His denial of metanarratives arises from the fact that "most people have lost the nostalgia for the lost narrative," to them it is a terror (45). Nonetheless, they are not "reduced to barbarity" since they understand that "legitimation can only spring from their own linguistic practice and communicational interaction" (45).

Lyotard, similar to Bakhtin, believes in the type of unity that involves various elements. Morrison feels that she is an inseparable part of her society. This feeling of unity encourages David Gates to entitle Morrison "as a conscious inheritor of America's pastoral tradition, even as she implicitly criticizes it" (30). Morrison's feeling of unity makes her a distinctive sign in the American society no matter what her skin color is.

The chronotopic analysis shows that there are two types of unity in A Mercy: unintentional and intentional. The unintentional unity develops from love, coziness, friendship, friendliness and mercy. It is the type of unity praised by Bakhtin as an essential source of creativity. It is also Lyotard's desirable unity since it shows respect to the differences between different types of people who unite to fulfill a certain goal. Including unity under a

restricting category is exceptionally the outcome of exerted efforts. On the other hand, intentional unity is a consequence of violence and undesired obligation. It is the type of unity that horrifies Bakhtin and is denied by Lyotard as a terror because it is based upon eradication due to its totalizing nature.

In *A Mercy*, Jacob Vaark unintentionally inaugurates a unity between various races, whites, a Native Indian, Africans and a mongrel, who are landlord slaves and enslaved male servants. Through acts of mercy, he unites them all. When he and his wife are deprived of having children of their own, the slaves and servants compensate their longing for children and become the big family they have always aspired. Under the shades of this unity covered by an ambience of love, other unities go into service. Lina and Rebekka become two close friends, although Rebekka used to suspect Lina at first. Lina also develops her longing for tribal unity of which she is deprived by being a mother to Florens and playing the role of the tutor of the mentally retarded Sorrow. In comparison with Jacob Vaark, the blacksmith creates unities during the duration of his work in Vaark's mansion. The blacksmith does not only become a friend of Jacob Vaark, but also wins the friendship of Scully, the enslaved male servant. Moreover, he captures the heart and the loyalty of Florens. In such a community of unity, peace predominates.

In *A Mercy*, after her husband passed away, Rebekka purposely keeps her plantation united but in a way highlighting discrimination between her and the plantation workers who are now degraded to mere slaves not members of a big family as they once used to be. The big mansion, that Vaark established and constructed its gates to look like a heavenly garden, symbolizes a type of unity in accordance with equality. Unfortunately, after his death, his wife deserts the mansion and decides never to move in. This act is an indication that she will not follow her late husband's path and will abide to the new laws which put lines of boundaries between the upper class and their slaves and servants. Regarding Florens that Rebekka used to pamper and treat like her deceased child, she is sent on an arduous journey to the North from the South; a journey in which she finds out that she is not any more a member of Vaark's family, but merely a slave to be brutally treated by every white person. Florens recalls:

They tell me to take off my clothes. Without touching they tell me what to do. To show them my teeth, my tongue. . . . They look under my arms, between my legs. They circle me, lean down to inspect my

feet. Anked under their examination I watch for what is in their eyes.
(*A Mercy* 111)

Through the way the whites look to her, Florens finds out that she is different. Her dark black skin marks her as a social outsider who should be treated like an animal under the assertion that she might be a devil. Her humiliating physical analysis does not prove that she is as human as they are, but only a slave. Florens's original slavery has never troubled her before to the extent that she willingly offers herself a love-slave to the blacksmith. However, he rejects her claiming that he does not want any slaves, rather, he seeks freedom. Consequently, Florens is obliged to be united with her people; the slaves, who are treated based on a totalising discourse disdaining their humanity and depriving them of the right to have their own chronotopes completely intersect with those of the free people. The blacksmith, effectively, rejects Florens's love because he develops a discriminating attitude towards his likes; black natives, in contrast to that of the whites with whom he mingles.

A Mercy highlights this danger and warns that negative social transformations dismiss the unintentional unity. The opening scene in the novel hints to this reality. In *A Mercy*, Florens's mother who devotes herself to the wellbeing of her child intentionally splits her unity with her child on hopes that it makes a positive change to the life of her daughter, although she does not know whether Vaark is really a kind compassionate man or as heartless as D'Ortega.

In *A Mercy*, the background of the new unfair discriminating laws and witch hunting acts in the North legitimate savagery and animosities and create radical social divisions that label the disadvantaged poor people into either slaves to be maltreated and abused or witches to be hunted. The death of Vaark completely changes Rebekka into a typical member of the upper class. She resorted to the gossiping and relentless church society and haughtily treats her slaves and enslaved male servants.

Obviously, Morrison in *A Mercy* warns against spreading negative social transformations by probing into the jargons of her society. "Morrison has always been interested in unspoken histories," says Elinor Teele, "not especially those of slaves and women, but everyone, even the white man, has [sic] a voice here" (19). She attempts to create a united voice which is the first step to an authentic actual unity based upon equality.

Legitimation:

Legitimation is the result of realizing that the universe embraces protean chronotopes and that each chronotope has its own special discourse.

Different genres represent different possibilities for the exploration of space-time through the chronotope. It is important to be able to understand the limitations and possibilities, as well as, the differences. (Chang 250)

Examining the chronotopicity of a text varies from a genre to another because each genre produces special spacio-temporal relationships. Thus, a totalizing discourse has not the capability to highlight the differences, a process which also involves understanding the 'limitations and possibilities' of each chronotope.

Therefore, a totalizing discourse is not a device of legitimation by setting famous paradigms but one of eradication and terror. In contrast to parody, realizing the differences, restrictions and possibilities are the entrance to legitimation. Lyotard assumes, "Knowledge is no longer the subject, but in the service of the subject: its only legitimacy (though it is formidable) is the fact that it allows morality to become reality" (39). It is legitimacy that depicts the uncertainties, differences, restrictions and possibilities to paradigms of morality; considering that legitimation offers morality the opportunity to turn into reality, or as Bakhtin assumes 'fleshes' it.

A Mercy is a process of legitimation which works on two levels: personal and historical. On the personal level, they underline Morrison's attempts to legalize her existence and writings. Morrison's recent production, *A Mercy*, legalizes her success as a human being who, similar to her ancestors, was noticed for the sake of her skin color. "Every civilization in the world relied on [slavery]," says Morrison, "The only difference between African slaves and European or British slaves was that the latter could run away and melt into the population. But if you were black, you were noticeable" (in Ulaby). Unfortunately, being negatively noticed for more than three hundred years, persecution and living as social outsiders is the share of the blacks. *A Mercy* as an effort to split race from skin color, in Morrison's approach, uncovers that she has conquered her historical wounds as a persecuted and a discriminated black person.

Thus, *A Mercy* is written with an objective history perspective legitimizing the existence of the blacks and finds a solid ground for them in the American society. Morrison's *A Mercy* is praised as a 'history lesson', it is assumed, "Black authors need to come out of their hidden narcissistic

injuries. Stop blaming and start inspiring" ("*A Mercy* by Toni Morrison" Brooklyn Book Talk). All the blacks, through *A Mercy*, are encouraged to legitimate their existence and talents the same manner Morrison does.

On the historical level, *A Mercy* reveals a triple strategy for legitimation; known as, resistance, laughter and documentation. The strategy of resistance is the tool used by most of the characters to highlight their objection to the existing discourse disturbing their personal chronotopes. Jacob Vaark, in *A Mercy*, withstands his condition as a low class poor orphan. He builds for himself a big family and works hard to establish a big plantation which boosts him up in the social ladder until he becomes one of the upper class.

Rebekka, the poor English girl, and Sorrow, the mongrel slave girl, resist slavery. Sorrow, mentally retarded as she is, is joined to slavery against her will. However, she succeeds in building a world of her own in which she enjoys mastery. Motherhood enhances her mastership and enables her to express her personal opinion no matter what the others think of or disapprove of her. Likewise, Rebekka who is almost forced to take up the role of a wife, owing to her limited career choices, could gain her husband's affection and mastership over the house.

Following the death of Vaark, Rebekka avoids all her past disagreeable practices which may make of her a social outsider; most importantly is association with the church society. Her symbolic slavery past becomes totally eradicated when she shows up in the society as a typical member of the South upper class whose authority source is having a plantation and slaves.

In contrast to Rebekka, Lina, voluntarily, gives in to slavery. She allows herself to be infinitely shaped and re-shaped by the others. "We never shape the world [Lina] says. The world shapes us" (*A Mercy* 69). This satisfaction concept is a primary reason behind the extinct Natives. Upon surviving the brutality of the whites, they did not strive enough to legitimate their existence. Actually, Lina and her likes did pave the way to corruption to prevail. The unjust new laws protecting the upper class as an inevitable reality were established as a result of lack of resistance. After a period of time, they pass as legitimate. Moreover, lack of resistance legitimated the brutal witch hunting acts, despite its inhumanity; it wrongfully victimized a lot of innocent people.

Laughter is not a common element in *A Mercy*. It shows up only two times. The first time is when Jacob Vaark watches the young Florens who wears the ragged boots of her master D'Ortega, he laughs on her funny appearance. However, this is not an indication of his amusement; yet, the scene arouses his sympathy toward the humiliating status of the slaves and motivates him to accept to take the useless five-year-old slave, Florens, as his debt payment.. Laughter is also used as an instrument to describe the different types of immigrants to America.

Rebekka's encounter with thieves and prostitutes on the ship is compared to a humorous intermission within the psychological examination of *A Mercy*. Laughter makes their appearance neither repulsive nor undesired. Yet, it points out that America is not a place for the upper class only, but also for everyone; common people and the desperate miserable people who seek a better life. In addition, the thieves and the prostitutes are the symbols of the other available career alternatives for Rebekka. They assert that wives, prostitutes and thieves are all destined to a journey to the unknown.

As final strategy, documentation is the most effective instrument to which historians resort to maintain their metanarratives of history. However, the case for the underprivileged is different. They need to document their untold stories; in other words, their little and local narratives, to legitimate their being. Her long and harsh journey from the South to the North shows that there is no place for tenderness in this harsh world. Although joined to slavery forever, her soul is free. "I am become wilderness but I am also Florens. In full. Unforgiven. Unforgiving.

No truth, my love. Hear me? Slave. Free. I last. . . . the soles of my feet are as hard as cypress" (*A Mercy* 159). Florens will maintain her wild spirit which is the highlight of her free soul, although slavery stamps her actions as unforgiven. For her, she will never forgive those who hurt her particularly the blacksmith who rejects her loyalty. Her tough feet symbolize her 'full' maturity. In contrast to a historian or the slaves who showed up a century later and documented their narratives, Florens documents her little narrative by carving it with her nail on the walls, floors and ceilings of the abandoned mansion of her former master Vaark who sought pluralism. Unfortunately, her narrative is destined to be wiped because Lina loves to make fire in the mansion for warming. Obviously, Lina and her content likes and their acts of never resisting are a direct reason behind depriving the

discriminated people of color of the fulfillment of equal rights and making them judged according to a totalising metanarrative. Apparently, Florens did not surrender, yet, her narrative is erased unintentionally by those who seek to legitimate their humiliating status through illegitimizing their distinctive racial identity; as is the case of Lina.

Conclusion

Exploring the chronotopicity of *A Mercy* uncovers an inter/trans discourse in the American society which is a consequence to the inter/trans discourse among the citizens. The chronotopic analysis also highlights that corruption damages any rational development and disables creative unity, in addition to, legitimation. Noticeably, entwining Bakhtin's concept of chronotope with Lyotard's metanarrative depicts *A Mercy*, that is written in opposition to crucial historical and social turning points, into both historical and fictional studies; it efficiently stands on 'the gates of the symbol and the real.'

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