

## Illness and the Development of Master-Slave Relations in Morrison's *A Mercy* and Lalami's *The Moor's Account*

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to analyze and compare Master-Slave relations in two historical novels by African-American novelist Toni Morrison and Arab-American novelist Laila Lalami. The study aims at examining the formation of Master-Slave relations in Morrison's *A Mercy* (2008) and Lalami's *The Moor's Account* (2014), with a particular focus on the role illness and healing play on their development. This will be done within three stages of before, during and after illnesses. Moreover, Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic theory will serve as the theoretical framework upon which Master-Slave relations will be examined within their historical and cultural contexts. Masters' illnesses in both novels represent a turning point in the course of Master-Slave relations, providing Slaves with a chance to prove to themselves and to their Masters that the two are involved in complex and multifaceted connections. However, the study shows that the way illnesses affect the development of the relation in each novel differs drastically. In *The Moor's Account*, illness offers an opportunity for Mustafa and his companions to add value to the services they offer to the Native American tribes they serve. In contrast, the emergence of illness in *A Mercy* negatively affects Lina's relationship with Rebekka as the latter loses faith in the former and substantially downgrades her efforts and labors. The results of this study reveal the importance of external factors, such as the appearance of illnesses, in defining and affecting Master-Slave relations. Hence, by reading both novels alongside each other, the study highlights sociopolitical, cultural and historical aspects in the two narratives that have not been fully explored previously.

**Keywords:** Laila Lalami; Toni Morrison; Master-Slave Dialectic; Illness; historical novel

### INTRODUCTION

Master-Slave relations are complex and open to different natural and cultural variables that play a great role in their development. Among the many variables that can affect the course of these relations is the emergence of an illness. The focus on racial and cultural aspects of the Master-Slave relation in many Slavery studies usually leads to overlooking or undermining the effect of different natural variables, such as illnesses, on the formation and development of the Master-Slave relation. This study analyzes and compares the Master-Slave relations in two historical novels by African-American novelist Toni Morrison and Arab-American novelist Laila Lalami with a particular focus on the role illnesses play on their development. In Morrison's *A Mercy* (2008) and Lalami's *The Moor's Account* (2014), Masters' illness represents a turning point in the course of the Master-Slave relations, providing Slaves with a chance to use their medicinal skills to prove the value of their work and the level of each side's

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dependency on the other. In this context, Georg Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic theory offers grounds for understanding the factors that lead to the formation of the Master-Slave hierarchy in a power relation and affect its progress (Hegel, 1807). It also suggests a possibility of change in its nature by reaching a balance between its two sides. In his theory, Hegel (1807) presents different stages for the formation and development of the Master-Slave relation. In this study, each stage presented in the theory will be applied to the Master-Slave relations between Mustafa and his Castilian companions and the Avavares in *The Moor's Account*, and Jacob, Rebekka and Lina in *A Mercy* to better understand the role illnesses play in the development of these relations. The application of Hegel's theory (1807) on these relations will be studied within the historical and cultural contexts of the novels. Using Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic, this article presents several questions that must be tackled: What are the factors that define the two sides of the Master-Slave relation? Does illness affect the Master-Slave relation and what are the factors that define it? What affects the Slave's ability to heal the Master? How can the Slave's in/ability to help his Master heal determine the course of their relation?

Slavery is a central motif in *The Moor's Account* and *A Mercy*. Lalami builds her story on Cabeza de Vaca's chronicles of the Narváez expedition to Florida between 1527 and 1536. In this expedition, only four men out of six hundred people survived in the New World and managed to return to Spain. The four survivors included three Castilian men, Andres Dorantes de Carranza, Alonso del Castillo Maldonado and Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, and one Black Moroccan slave, Estebanico (Lalami, 2014, p. 3). While the testimonies of the three Castilians were taken and recorded, Estebanico was completely silenced. Lalami decides to rewrite and retell these chronicles from the marginalized Moroccan slave's point of view. In the novel, Mustafa, Estebanico's original name, starts his journey to the New World as a slave whose sole responsibility is taking care of Dorantes' needs. However, the harsh circumstances that the explorers face in the New World gradually blur the social class borders between Mustafa and his Masters. In the face of illness, hunger and natural disasters, they are all the same. Moreover, Mustafa's surviving skills, his wit and his courage enable him to be part of the decision making process in many occasions even before he is acknowledged as a Master healer by the Native Americans.

On the other hand, *A Mercy* depicts the story of Jacob Vaark, an English settler who owns a farm in Virginia in 1690s. The novel is narrated by the slaves in the farm. The list of Jacob Vaark's servants includes Rebekka, the English wife he bought, Lina, a Native American servant, Sorrow, a mixed race servant, and Florens, a Black servant. In addition to the female servants, two White indentured servants, Willard and Scully, help in the farm when needed. By focusing on the life of the slaves during that period, Morrison attempts to shed light on a time in American history when slavery included White men and women, Native Americans, Africans and people of mixed race. In the novel, although Rebekka is the legal owner of Lina, Sorrow and Florens, her relationship with them differs from the traditional Master-Slave relation. She considers Lina as a companion, tolerates Sorrow's idleness and treats Florens with affection. She helps them with all kinds of work in the farm. She does not hesitate to ask them for advice when she does not know how to handle anything. However, this propitious pattern drastically changes with the appearance of illness.

Significantly, both writers choose the historical novel genre to invite readers to look back on history from a different angle since historical novels, as Dalley (2014) argues, propose "new ways to explore the intersections of literary form and historical understanding" (Dalley, 2014, p. 6). They, to paraphrase Slemon (1988), help in changing the prevalent ideas of history (Selmon, 1988, p. 158). As De Groot (2016) reminds us, historical fictions "allow a culture to think in new ways about what historical engagement, and the writing of the past, might actually be, and to rethink the terms of historical understanding" (De Groot, 2016, p. 2). Being post-modernist writers and women of color, both Lalami and Morrison employ the subversive style

in their attempt to challenge the traditional historical narratives written by the winners and the powerful, the Whites. They celebrate the indefinite nature of history, deconstruct grand narratives and highlight mini-narratives by rewriting and revisiting certain historical events and periods from the slaves' point of view. In *The Moor's Account* and *A Mercy*, Morrison and Lalami take Master-Slave relations beyond the traditional White-Black frames and bring to the forefront other dynamics that substantially affect Master-Slave relations. Both novelists blur the boundaries between fiction and history, leaving the door open to new and different possibilities in the Master-Slave relation than the fixed one presented in traditional accounts. Thus, they offer a chance to study Master-Slave relations within a wider scope and explore factors that can work along with race and culture in affecting the course of these relations.

### HEGEL'S MASTER-SLAVE DIALECTIC THEORY

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel maintains that Master-Slave conflict presents itself whenever one self-consciousness meets another self-consciousness. This comes as a result of self-consciousness only existing in relation to another one; "it exists only in being acknowledged" (Hegel, 1807, p. 111). Kojève (1980) explains that the acknowledgment the self seeks from the other is to be recognized "as the *owner* of the thing," thus, proves its superiority over the other (Kojève, 1980, p. 40). Hegel (1807) explains that each individual's need to prove the truth of his pure self-consciousness and win recognition from the other lead to the emergence of a life-and-death struggle between them (Hegel, 1807, p. 113). The recognition that each seeks from the other during this struggle is one sided; each wants to be recognized by the other without recognizing him in return (Stern, 2001, p. 91). In this struggle, each self-consciousness tries to prove its subjecthood by showing that "it is prepared to sacrifice its existence as an object: that is, to show that it is prepared to give up its life" (Stern, 2001, p. 93). During the struggle, both self-consciousnesses realize that seeking each other's death will not serve the original purpose of proving one's self. The death of one side of the struggle will prevent the other from getting the recognition he risked his life for (Hegel, 1807, p. 114). The fear of death that leads the Slave to submit to the Master can either be a fear of physical death or torture or a fear of social death and exile. At the same time, one of them decides to submit to his fear of death by accepting that life is as precious as one's pure self-consciousness. This realization results in the appearance of two self-consciousnesses; "one is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or be for another. The former is lord, the other is bondsman" (Hegel, 1807, p. 115).

In *The Moor's Account*, Mustafa starts as a Master of himself and moves more than once between freedom and slavery. The constant change in Mustafa's status is affected by the circumstances that surround his encounters with others and their effects on his will and thoughts. These circumstances include hunger, illnesses and natural disasters. The fear of death that leads Mustafa and the Castilians to submit to the Avavares is a fear of physical death and torture. Similarly, Morrison widens the circle of those who were subjected to slavery in *A Mercy* by depicting the servants of Jacob's farm. In Morrison's depiction of slavery, illness, poverty and social constraints are among the different circumstances that affect the formation of Master-Slave relations. Thus, Morrison sheds light on the fact that, at a certain time in history, slavery was not restricted to a certain race and that there are different other factors that can govern and affect Master-Slave relations. The fear of death that leads Rebekka and Lina to submit to Jacob and accept him as the Master in *A Mercy* is a fear of social exile and punishment. Rebekka finds in marriage to Jacob the best option available to her as a poor young woman to be accepted in the society. Lina submits to Jacob too in order to escape the alien treatment she receives from the settlers as a Native American.

According to Hegel (1807), the Master holds the Slave in subjection and declares him as one of his “things” (Hegel, 1807, p. 115). He enjoys the things the Slave creates for him without having to work on them directly; he enjoys the dependent aspect of things and leaves the independent aspect of creating things and molding nature to the Slave who works on them (Hegel, 1807, p. 116). Yet, Hegel suggests that this relation between the Master and the Slave is indeed not fixed and there is a possibility of change in its unequal nature. This possibility presents itself once two realizations are reached; the first is the Master’s realization that the independent self-consciousness he achieved is actually dependent on the Slave and the things he creates, and the second is the Slave’s realization of his independence through his work that results in shaping and forming things (p. 118). Hegel argues that the fear of death leads the Slave to reach the essential nature of self-consciousness, which is the absolute negativity and the *pure being-for-self*. The Slave, Hegel (1807) explains, “has been fearful, not of this or that particular thing or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread” (Hegel, 1807, p. 117). More importantly, as the Slave is forced to work on the things his Master needs and leave them in existence, he realizes that he can leave his mark on the world (Stern, 2001, p. 99).

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

While many studies have discussed slavery and some even touch upon Jacob’s death and the aftereffect of Rebekka’s illness in *A Mercy*, *The Moor’s Account* has not been the focus of many studies and academic writings so far. Lalami’s novel contributes to “the burgeoning oeuvres” of ideologically-diverse contemporary Arab American writers (Awad, 2018, p. 77). Awad (2015) offers an analytical reading of Lalami’s novel and compares it to Behn’s *Oroonoko*. In his article, Awad (2015) argues that Lalami’s choice to record Mustafa’s account of the expedition is an attempt to move the marginalized to the center and disturb “the power structures that rendered the Moroccan man invisible” (Awad, 2015, p. 194). Maszewski (2018) argues that the novelist makes the reader “aware of the pleasure of ‘literary’ freedom on a journey across various traditions, conventions, narrative patterns of discovery, with self-discovery at the very heart of the process of telling” (Maszewski, 2018, p. 324). Maszewski (2018) adds that Mustafa’s narrative “celebrates the act of writing as a fully democratic act of accepting difference” (Maszewski, 2018, p. 330). By writing his story, Mustafa wants to be “properly understood;” he also wants his story to be his child’s “guide to a new life” (Maszewski, 2018, p. 330). Elboubekri (2017) argues that the actual and metaphorical journey undertaken by Mustafa in the search for a home “ends up with recognition of the ample possibilities inherent in diaspora” (Elboubekri, 2017, p. 248). Elboubekri (2017) concludes that “[i]n remembering the past, reinventing the present and looking forward to the future,” the novelist “imagines alternative homes against the grain of insularism and homogenization” and presents readers with “a nomadic subjectivity that is willing to live a cosmopolitan life that is always in a yet-to-come process” (Elboubekri, 2017, p. 248).

On the other hand, Jacob’s death and Rebekka’s illness in *A Mercy* have been touched upon by a number of researchers. In her review of *A Mercy*, Jennings (2009) explains that Jacob’s death creates an isolated community of “unmastered women” inside the farm (Jennings, 2009, p. 646). However, Jennings (2009) points out, “neither their orphan status nor their status as figurative and literal slaves forges a common identity among them” (Jennings, 2009, pp. 646-47). Alternatively, Tedder (2013) interprets the women’s inability to connect in a common identity is due to the fact that there is an absence of a national history that unites the characters. He notes that the novel depicts a time when the American nation was still not formed and people did not have a common national history or common sources of pain that unite them together (Tedder, 2013, p. 145). In addition, Peach (2012) argues that Jacob and

Rebekka's infection with smallpox, the same disease that wiped out Lina's tribe, suggests "that slavery will enslave and destroy those in control as well as those that are controlled" (Peach, 2012, p. 241).

Quan (2019) argues that in Morrison's novel, "communicative memory is externalized and thus transformed into cultural memory via spatial media" (Quan, 2019, p. 566). Quan (2019) maintains that Jacob, as a representative of the early slave owners in antebellum America, constructs "a mansion, which actually turns out to be monument to slavery culture" (Quan, 2019, p. 566). Morrison challenges and interrogates this White memorial through "fashion[ing] the figure of a writer character, Florens" who establishes with her inscription cultural memory of the African female slaves" (Quan, 2019, p. 566). Quan (2019) states that Lina "integrates the quintessence of her tribal culture into her body and through performing remodels it as an embodied indigenous cultural memory" (Quan, 2019, p. 567). Quan (2019) concludes that Morrison communicates the interrelations between cultural memory and ethnic cultural identity construction, and invites readers to reconsider what makes a true American cultural memory (Quan, 2019, p. 567).

This paper explores how Masters' illnesses and Slaves' healing abilities affect the course of the relation and help it reach a balance or undermine it using Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic theory. The theoretical reading of the effects of illness and healing on the Master-Slave relation will be conducted within each novel's historical context. Therefore, the historical context of the facts introduced in both novels will be referenced in order to be able to explore what initiates the fear of death that leads one to accept being a Slave and what maintains it, and the constraints that affect the Master's acknowledgment of the Slave independent self-conscious and the Slave's sense of independency. The study of the Master-Slave relations in these two novels will be divided into three stages of before, during and after illnesses.

## BEFORE ILLNESSES

To understand and locate the difference that the appearance of illnesses presents to the relations between Masters and Slaves in both novels, one must first understand the nature of these relations before the appearance of these illnesses. Although Mustafa starts his journey in the New World as the Castilian men's slave, the ordeals and challenges they face undermine the Master-Slave relation between them and gradually turn them into comrades in fear and pain; "our shared experiences made fellows and allies out of us" (Lalami, 2014, p. 232). Mustafa and his companions' first official enslavement in the New World occurs when ten armed Carancahuas hunters appear from behind the trees in the area where Mustafa and his friends are resting. The Carancahuas hunters are not interested in enslaving anyone despite being stronger in terms of number, weapons and physical abilities. Instead, Mustafa and his friends are the ones who use flattering words and trade Dorantes' golden Yucatan earring to convince the Carancahuas hunters to take them to their camp. Aware of Native Americans' skillful ability to use the resources of their surrounding environment, and knowing the impossibility of their survival in the wilderness using only the skills they have, Mustafa and the other Castilians come to the realization that they cannot survive without the help of Native Americans: "in our state of utter exhaustion the Indians seemed to us more like guardian angels than men of flesh and blood" (Lalami, 2014, p.159).

In his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, Kojève (1980) explains that the Slave is the one who "has subordinated his *human* desire for *Recognition* to the *biological* desire to preserve his *life*: this is what determines and reveals-to him and to the victor-his inferiority" (p. 42). Hegel (1807) explains that after the loser of the life-and-death struggle submits to his fear of death and becomes a Slave, the Master "holds him in subjection" (Hegel, 1807, p. 116). He places the Slave between him and nature by forcing him to work on what fulfils his desires

as the Master (Hegel, 1807, p. 116). At this stage, the Slave's existence becomes confined to the work he executes for the service of his Master (Kojève, 1980, p. 42).

Mustafa and the Castilians enjoy Native Americans' hospitality; they are allowed to build their dwellings near the tribes' camps or inside them and, as Mustafa confesses, "they gave us freely of whatever they had" (Lalami, 2014, p. 175). However, after a week or two of their stay, all the tribes declare that they have to work for the meat that the hunters give them. The change in Native Americans' attitude can be related to their intolerance of idleness. Mustafa points out that "in the eyes of a Carancahua, there was no greater shame in the world than idleness" (Lalami, 2014, p. 207). Mustafa and the other Castilians are asked to become active members in the community they are living in. Internalizing their inferiority and realizing their need of the Native Americans' help to survive in this land, Mustafa and the other Castilians start to work. However, not having the experience, skills or physical strength that are needed to perform the tasks Native American tribes set for men, and refusing to learn them, the tasks they manage to perform all fell under the "easy work" that women are responsible for.

In Morrison's novel, the Master-Slave relations concern those between Jacob, Rebekka and Lina. Rebekka's encounter with Jacob is already heralded by different circumstances through which she has submitted to her fear of death and accepted becoming this man's servant even before meeting him. Rebekka's submission to Jacob can be explained through Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949). In her book, de Beauvoir (1949) points out that a woman does not occupy the Slave position because she lost a life-and-death battle against a man, but rather women grow up finding themselves caught up in a society where men compel them to assume the status of the Other, the inferior (de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 17). Thus, a woman does not have to go through a battle; she is labeled as the inferior in the relation ever since she is born a female. In *A Mercy*, the oppression that Rebekka has experienced by her family and society life before coming to Virginia leads her to submit to Jacob as the Master. It is worth stressing here that the fear of death that Rebekka submits to is a fear of social exile and punishment. Rebekka's family has treated her as a burden than a family member. Different reasons contribute to such treatment, all of which are related to her gender. Rebekka appears to be "the stubborn one, the one with many questions and a rebellious mouth" (Morrison, 2008, p. 86). This shows that she does not conform to the passive silent image the English society sets for women. Moreover, being a female born to a poor family, Rebekka's family expects her to find herself a job through which she can provide for herself. Crawford and Gowing (2000) point out that the opportunities offered to poor women in the seventeenth century were restricted and that the majority of single young women worked as domestic servants or in agriculture in rural areas. With poor wages and restricted job opportunities, it was very difficult for a female to support herself (Crawford and Gowing, 2000, p. 73).

Rebekka knows that without money, her only options to relieve her family from her burden are by either becoming a servant, a prostitute or a wife. While the last 'career' seems to her the safest of them all, she knows that this option is not available at request; her father has been eager to wed her to any man who would "relieve him of feeding her" (Morrison, 2008, p. 86). At the same time, becoming a servant or a prostitute stirred Rebekka's fear as it meant that she will become an open land to any man drunk or sober. Wiesner (2000) points out that in early modern Europe, unmarried women often found it difficult to avoid sexual contact (Wiesner, 2000, p. 60). She explains that this comes as a result of the fact that many of them worked as domestic servants where they were forced into sexual contact by their employers and their relatives (Wiesner, 2000, p. 60). This led many servants to turn to prostitution believing that it will not be more degrading than working as domestic servants and hoping it will be better (de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 682). Thus, by the time Rebekka's father discovers Jacob's advertisement declaring his need of a wife to be shipped to America on his account, marriage

has already imposed itself on her as a savior from the misery she is living. Believing that marriage will provide her a protection from the exile and oppression she fears, she decides to submit to the rescuer and accept him as the Master. Thus, the relation between Jacob and Rebekka starts with Jacob as the Master and Rebekka as the Slave from its very first encounter.

Although Rebekka accepts to become the Slave in her relation with Jacob, she enters the relation with Lina, the Native American servant, as the Mistress. Although in reality both are the same man's servants, Rebekka still holds the title of the wife and the Mistress of the house while Lina is a slave in it. In order to understand how Lina manages to reclaim her sense of freedom and how this affects the first encounter between her and Rebekka, one must take a look back at Lina's life in the farm before Rebekka's arrival. Lina submits to Jacob out of fear of loneliness and being left with no protection or support. Witnessing her family and whole tribe's death by smallpox, Lina suddenly finds herself among foreign people who have no tolerance of her different culture and beliefs. Thus, when Jacob buys her, she perceives him as a potential rescuer from the loneliness she feels and fears and accepts to submit to him as her Master.

At the beginning, Lina submits to her social fear of death and accepts Jacob as the Master. Her fear of being abandoned again leads her to become an obedient servant who tries to offer all the help and knowledge she has. However, as Jacob basically buys Lina to help him in the land, it does not take Lina a long time to discover that he does not know anything about taking care of the land and that he depends on her services and knowledge as much as she depends on him for protection; "she was the one who taught him how to dry the fish they caught; to anticipate spawning and how to protect a crop from night creatures" (Morrison, 2008 p. 57). Even when her knowledge fails to help, they have to learn and try together. Thus, by working on the land, Lina manages to realize Jacob's dependence on her work. Lina reaches the psychological freedom Hegel discusses in his Master-Slave Dialectic theory. Hegel (1807) points out that the Slave can attain psychological freedom when he realizes that it is in his work that he acquires "a mind of his own" (Hegel, 1807, p. 119). He explains that "having a 'mind of one's own' is self-well, a freedom which is still enmeshed in servitude" (Hegel, 1807, p. 119).

Although it is already legally decided that Rebekka is the Mistress and Lina is her slave, the actual life-and-death battle that happens between them makes each one of them realize her need of the other. It does not take Rebekka and Lina long to discover that what they have in common is much more important to them than what separates them. This realization comes as a result of the fact that they are both alone in an almost isolated farm; neither of them has a companion except one another, especially when Jacob travels for long periods of time. Moreover, both of them have to perform shared tasks in order to keep the farm in order, and both need to please the same man. More importantly, mistresses and slaves are aware that they are both in the category of the Other as females in the society. For these reasons, both of them come to the realization that they have a choice in turning their environment into a pleasant one by minimizing the effect of their class and racial differences (Khaleghi, 2012, p. 276). As a result, instead of building walls between them as a Master and Slave, they decide to bond with each other and create a sisterly relation between them.

## DURING ILLNESSES

As aforementioned, Mustafa and the Castilian men enter the relation with the Carancahuas and then Avavares while completely submitting to their fear of dying in the wilderness and accepting to become their slaves. Mustafa and his companions' fear of death moves them toward working hard on whatever the Native Americans ask them to do, knowing that showing any sign of idleness might provoke intolerance toward them. However, the quality and type of

hard work Mustafa and the Castilian men perform do not live up to what is expected of a male member of the tribe; all of it falls under the “easy work” that any woman or child in the tribe can do.

The first illness appears while Mustafa and his fellow travelers are living with the Avavares. It is a stomachache that Dorantes wakes up suffering from as a result of eating too much the night before. However, this incident acquires its great importance from the way Mustafa deals with it and the fact that the Avavares’ shaman, Behewibri, happens to be observing them during it. One of the reasons why Mustafa’s cure catches Behewibri’s attention is the fact that it is a new remedy. Portman and Garrett (2006) point out that wellness, healing practices and spirituality were strongly connected in the beliefs of many Native American tribes (Portman and Garrett, 2006, p. 455). In order for the medicine person to be able to help others reach a balance between their bodies, minds and spirits, he must acquire a link with the spiritual world. Lovern and Locust (2013) highlight the fact that medicine people were believed to see into the spiritual world (Lovern and Locust, 2013, p. 81). Znamenski (2004) further explains that Shamans were distinguished from the other members of the tribe by their ability to deal with and affect the supernatural powers (Znamenski, 2004, pp. xxxiv-xxxv). Hence, Behewibri suspects that Mustafa might have access to the spiritual world, an assumption that he finds worth being tested. Thus, this incident offers Mustafa and the Castilian men a new opportunity to be viewed as much more than a mere addition or a burden to the tribe.

At this stage of their Master-Slave relation with the Avavares, Mustafa and his companions are fully aware that their existence depends on their ability to fulfill their Masters’ desires. Mustafa fears that his inability to heal as expected of him will provoke the Native Americans’ perception of him and his Castilian companions as idle and incapable of adding any value to the tribe. He believes that his failure might lead the tribe’s members to treat them with much violence and hostility. He states that “I was certain that I would be blamed if I failed” (Lalami, 2014, p. 230). Another reason that stirs Mustafa’s apprehension in the new interest in him is his knowledge that failure can be misunderstood as an attempt to withhold his medicinal knowledge from Behewibri.

Behewibri puts Mustafa under the test to prove his healing abilities. The first illness Behewibri asks Mustafa to heal is a young boy’s headache. Mustafa simply massages the boy’s temple for a long time and explains to them that the result of his healing method will not appear immediately. To Mustafa’s relief, “the boy improved the next day and was even better the day after that” (Lalami, 2014, p. 226). After this successful attempt, the Avavares reward him with a small piece of turquoise. The illness that Mustafa is asked to heal next is a back pain the leader of the Susolas, a neighboring tribe, himself suffers from. The fact that the man he is asked to cure is from outside the tribe, and that he is not a normal man but the cacique of that tribe, makes it even more difficult for Mustafa to reject: “I was afraid of causing some offense that might complicate our stay with the Avavares” (Lalami, 2014, p. 229). Luckily, Mustafa remembers that his father managed to cure his back pain through *hijama*. Although Mustafa has never practiced *hijama* in his life and has only seen it being performed once, the intensity of his situation pushes him toward believing again that doing something is better than doing nothing. To Mustafa’s relief, his *hijama* succeeds and the cacique stands up on the third day of the treatment.

While the three illnesses that Mustafa has cured are common noncontagious ones, the illness that appears in *A Mercy* and affects the relations between Jacob, Rebekka and Lina is an epidemic one, the smallpox. The first to catch smallpox in the farm is Jacob. Morrison does not give many details on what happens during Jacob’s illness. She only provides the reader with two pieces of information: the first is the isolation that Jacob’s farm faces as soon as the news of his illness breaks; and the second is a description of his death scene. Before the appearance of the smallpox, Jacob and Rebekka decide to isolate themselves from the society

around them; “they leaned on each other root and crown” (Morrison, 2008, p. 102), believing that they do not need to put up with a hypocrite society or a religion they cannot stand. Moltubakk (2012) explains that Jacob’s choice to live outside the settlement turns him in the eyes of the settlers into an outsider (Moltubakk, 2012, p. 45). This image is further reinforced by his and his wife’s choice of not making any real social interaction with them or attending the church. Smith (2008) points out that many of the seventeenth-century America’s societies were created around a religious group’s beliefs (Smith, 2008, p. 93). Thus, Jacob and Rebekka’s choice of not attending the church can be considered as a declaration of their disinterest in becoming part of the society they are living in (Morrison, 2008, p. 67).

Effectively, this complete isolation brings Rebekka face to face again with her social fear of death, a social exile and punishment that will leave her with no male protection or support “With him, the cost of solidarity, unchurched life was not high,” but it is totally different without him (Morrison, 2008, p. 109). Ortega (2017) stresses that Jacob’s illness forces Rebekka to acknowledge how dependent on him her existence was (Ortega, 2017, p. 25). With this realization, Rebekka’s fear of death revives itself once more. With the actual death of Jacob, the Master-Slave relation between them dissolves and Rebekka becomes unmastered.

Rebekka discovers that she is infected with smallpox immediately after Jacob’s burial. Being completely aware that no one will come to her rescue other than Lina, Sorrow and Florens, Rebekka decides to depend on them in her attempt to survive. At this stage, Rebekka continues to perceive these women, especially Lina, more as companions than slaves. She also realizes that she is the Mistress and they are slaves. Rebekka comes to this realization the moment she decides to send Florens on a journey to find the blacksmith who has medicinal knowledge and is from outside the settlement. When Rebekka decides to send Florens in search for the blacksmith, she is hit with the fact that, to the outside world, Florens is just a slave, and therefore, Florens’ attempt to bring the blacksmith, as a Black slave, would be useless without a proof of authorization from her as her White Mistress. This realization helps boost Rebekka’s sense of mastership over Florens in particular and the other females in the farm in general. At the same time, Lina, Florens and Sorrow also come to the realization that they are on a different status than Rebekka’s and that they need her now differently. Hence, this task, which is imposed by Rebekka’s illness, represents the beginning of the formation of a status division between her and the other women in the farm. As the Master-Slave relation between Rebekka and Lina, Florens and Sorrow starts to take a clearer shape, the existence of the three of them becomes bound to the services they can offer Rebekka. As a result, she reaches the realization that now “there is no one except servants” in her life (Morrison, 2008, p. 117).

Lina decides to attempt to heal Rebekka with the medicinal knowledge she has. Rebekka’s illness revives Lina’s social fear of death since she knows that she has to face an animal-like treatment if she becomes an unmastered slave: “Female and illegal, they would be interlopers, squatters, if they stayed on after Mistress died, subject to purchase, hire, assault, abduction, exile” (Morrison, 2008, p. 69). With Jacob’s death, Rebekka becomes the only source of protection that Lina can depend on as the legal Mistress the society around acknowledges. Thus, that Rebekka’s life is threatened means Lina’s life is threatened too. Rebekka is no longer a friend to Lina, she is the savior and Mistress she depends on for survival. In her attempt to heal Rebekka, she combines Native American practices with some western practices she has learnt during her life with settlers. When the blacksmith arrives, he finds that Rebekka’s body has already defeated the illness and that it is a matter of days before she restores her health. However, instead of acknowledging Lina’s efforts, Rebekka decides to neglect it completely and consider God as her only rescuer. She even starts praying for the God she was always indifferent and hostile to.

## AFTER ILLNESSES

In *The Moor's Account*, Mustafa's successful healing attempts work as a confirmation of his healing powers. Hence, Mustafa witnesses a great and immediate change in the way the members of the tribe treat him. He receives a grand welcome from the tribe: "The entire tribe came out to greet me and I was hugged like a long-lost brother" (Lalami, 2014, p. 231). Thus, the fact that the members of the Avavares tribe decide to take Mustafa out of the alien refugee image he filled so far and put him in the medicine man image means that he is moved from the low position of a slave to the high position of a free medicine man. Many of the Avavares' allies start sending their sick ones for Mustafa to heal. This increases the number of sick people Mustafa must attend to, which also contributes to the positive development of the Master-Slave relation between the Avavares and Mustafa and the Castilian men. On the one hand, the increase in the number of the sick people Mustafa has to attend to gives Dorantes, de Vaca and Castillo a chance to step in and prove their healing abilities too, thus, enjoy the privileged treatment that Mustafa enjoys. On the other hand, the gifts they receive from other tribes in return of their healing services add to the wealth, prestige and position of the tribe. Consequently, their position in the tribe becomes even more important as a source of supplies. The change in the value of the work Mustafa and his Castilian companions offer the tribe moves us to the last dialectic of the Master-Slave relation presented in Hegel's theory. As mentioned earlier, Hegel (1807) believes that a balance can be reached in this relation. He argues that the Slave can reach a psychological freedom through his work (Hegel, 1807, p. 117). At the same time, the Master realizes that his free subjectivity is actually dependent on the existence of the Slave and the work he offers him. He realizes that his realized self-consciousness is not completely independent (Hegel, 1807, pp. 116-7). The Avavares and the neighboring tribes' attitudes toward Mustafa and the Castilian men's healing powers show that they acknowledge their dependence on the services they offer. Aware of the importance of what they offer to the Native Americans, Mustafa, Dorantes, de Vaca and Castillo reach a new self-realization. As a result, their fear of death is withdrawn to the background and they become more confident in themselves and their own services (Lalami, 2014, p. 232).

Moreover, with the spread of the news of their healing powers, they start receiving invitations from faraway allying tribes to come and attend to their sick instead of them coming to the Avavares. With every invitation Mustafa, Dorantes, de Vaca and Castillo accept, their image in their eyes and Native Americans' become grander: "We received a warm welcome everywhere we went" (Lalami, 2014, p. 243). The grander image Mustafa and his fellows acquire through these visits moves them from the position of exotic healers to the position of spiritual leaders. What started as four healers and their wives traveling turns into a traveling band. With time and as their powers seem to acquire greater force, the number of the members of their traveling band expands from twelve people to twelve hundred. Most of them are disciples and followers who seek the knowledge, wisdom and blessing of the four healers. Hence, as Awad (2015) puts it, Mustafa, who starts the journey in the New World as the Castilian men's slave, is the one whose medicinal skills and important suggestions lead to the success and wealth of all four of them (Awad, 2015, p. 200).

While Masters' illnesses represent an opportunity for Mustafa and the Castilian men to break free of bondage, the appearance of illness in *A Mercy* appears to be of a completely different case. One may argue that in the patriarchal society Rebekka lives in, Jacob is both the oppressor and protector. The freedom that Rebekka acquires by the death of her Master does not leave her with the sense of mastery one expects an unmastered person to reach. With Jacob's death, Rebekka loses that wall that stands between her and the patriarchal society where her bigger fears lie. She eventually realizes that the man whom she always believed to be her source of strength, liberation and happiness turns out to be the source of her psychological and

emotional weakness (Ortega, 2017, p. 27). Ortega (2017) points out that with Jacob's death, Rebekka completely forgets who she was before (Ortega, 2017, p. 27). His death leaves her weaker in her encounter with the society outside the farm.

Furthermore, Ortega (2017) relates Rebekka's inability to reach her sense of mastery to the fact that religion, state and family were intertwined in seventeenth-century America. She explains that because of this strong connection, power division in the family continued even after the death of the patriarch, creating more troubles for women and widows than liberating them (Ortega, 2017, p. 15). As mentioned earlier, women were raised to be dependent on men since they are born females. This dependency was introduced within a religious frame. Westerkamp (2005) points out that the evil was connected with the feminine in religious beliefs (Westerkamp, 2005, p. 53). She explains that women were believed to lack the ability of distinguishing between the good and the evil, which marks their spiritual weakness (Westerkamp, 2005, p. 53). Because of that, they necessarily needed to follow the judgment of men in order to be able to become virtuous (Westerkamp, 2005, p. 53). Moreover, in seventeenth-century America, virtue was also constructed within a gender frame (Westerkamp, 2005, p. 53). The more religious the woman is, the purer and more pious she is perceived by her community and the more she is welcomed and tolerated. Rebekka's choice of leading an unchurched life is perceived by the society around her as a sign of her impurity and defiance. Living in a society with these beliefs, Rebekka knows that choosing to become the Mistress of herself and to continue living the same way as during Jacob's life is not an option. She is fully aware that such a choice will leave her face to face with her fear of social exile and punishment which controls her. As Hegel (1807) explains, the fear of death becomes "the absolute Lord" (Hegel, 1807, p. 117).

During her illness, Rebekka starts searching for another source of support and protection she can lean on. Hence, Rebekka decides to search for a Master that she can ultimately trust with no fear of being left in the middle of the road. She starts seeking a Master who is well-accepted by the society and has an unshakable position in it, a Master her relation with will solidify her position in the society instead of weakening it. As a result, she decides to submit to God as the ultimate Master and she starts praying to him. As her relation with God starts to take shape during her illness, she prefers to believe that it is almighty God with His supernatural powers who saved her, rather than believing that an uneducated weak Native American slave saved her using methods of exorcism. She announces that "God alone cures. No man has such power" (Morrison, 2008, p. 157). So, Rebekka insists on denying Lina's healing attempt any credit in her healing process.

Rebekka does not believe that Lina's healing methods are what actually helped her heal. To her, someone who has no control over her own fate cannot possibly be able to control someone else's. Moreover, a weak uneducated person like Lina cannot possibly have the knowledge needed to fight a contagious deadly illness like the smallpox. Rebekka's refusal of giving Lina's attempt any credit in her recovery process is accompanied with Lina's lack of confidence in her ability to heal an illness such as the smallpox. Through allowing the readers into Lina's inner fears, Morrison makes it clear that she does not perform her healing remedies in the hope of healing her Mistress; she only tries to protect her until the blacksmith arrives. Her lack of confidence in the value of her healing abilities hinders her from reaching the psychological freedom discussed in Hegel's theory. To Rebekka, Lina failed at protecting her and the farm. As a result, Lina's inferior position in her relation with Rebekka is further highlighted.

Rebekka realizes that the only way she can survive in the society is through adopting its religious and social beliefs. In her desperate attempt to become a welcomed member in the society, Rebekka starts adopting the settlers' beliefs and ways of dealing with their slaves. She makes Lina, Florens and Sorrow sleep in the cowshed or the storeroom, strikes them when she

is not pleased with their work, and keeps them busy with chores that make no sense. She does not allow Lina to bathe in the river or sleep in the open even when the weather is nice (Morrison, 2008, p. 187). This also affects Lina's sense of independence as Rebekka's new oppressive rules sever the strong connection she once had with the nature surrounding her. Moreover, Rebekka avoids doing any of the tiring tasks she willingly used to do during Jacob's life. Instead, she only cooks and mends, while all the other work is left for the servants. This was also a way through which White Mistresses distinguished themselves from their slaves and imposed their control and superiority over them. In her study of *A Mercy*, Strehle (2013) explains that the slave and savage treatment that Rebekka adopts is an attempt to reach the elect safety promised to White settlers. She stresses the fact that she does this for the sole purpose of winning approval from the Anabaptists congregation (Strehle, 2013, p. 114). As a result, one notices that Rebekka becomes the Mistress of the farm, but she never becomes the Mistress of herself.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the role that Masters' physical illnesses and Slaves' healing abilities play in the development of the Master-Slave relations in the two historical novels of Morrison's *A Mercy* (2008) and Lalami's *The Moor's Account* (2014). The encounter between Mustafa and his Castilian companions and the Avavares tribe in *The Moor's Account* and the relationship between Jacob, Rebekka and Lina in *A Mercy* are the focal points of this study. The application of Hegel's (1807) theory in the study of these two novels has provided a chance to explore some of the dimensions of the theory itself along with the role illnesses can play in shaping the Master-Slave relations. It has provided a chance to study the fear of death Hegel presents in his theory within a wider range. The study has shown that the fear of death that Slaves submit to is not only a direct dread that is initiated by the direct struggle with the other self-consciousness. In both novels, the fear of death that leads Mustafa and his companions to submit to the Avavares and the fear of death that leads Rebekka and Lina to submit to Jacob are only parts of bigger fears they have already developed before the encounters occurred. The study has also highlighted that the nature of the death that is feared can differ from one struggle to another. While Mustafa and his Castilian companions' fear of death is a physical one, Lina and Rebekka's fear is a social one.

The study also accentuates the fact that race and culture are not the sole determinants of one's superior/inferior position in a Master-Slave relation. The study of the effect of the appearance of illnesses in *A Mercy* and *The Moor's Account* emphasizes that Master-Slave relations are not fixed and that an actual or a psychological change can happen in them. In both novels, the appearance of Masters' illnesses represents a turning point. However, the study has shown that the effect illnesses have on the development of Master-Slave relations can differ drastically. In *The Moor's Account*, illnesses offer an opportunity for Mustafa and his companions to add a value to the services they offer the tribe. In contrast, the appearance of illness in *A Mercy* has proved to have a negative impact on the Master-Slave relations. The study has also shown that the way illnesses affect the development of the Master-Slave relation and the Masters' perception of the Slave's healing abilities differ in relation to the culture and circumstances that surround the relation. Although both Mustafa and Lina succeed in healing the illnesses they deal with, Mustafa's healing attempts have been acknowledged while Lina's endeavor to rescue Rebekka has been shrugged away. This comes as a result of the Native Americans' focus on the results and their indications in their beliefs. However, in Lina's case, Rebekka focuses more on the methods than the results. Lina's use of methods Rebekka does not believe in affects her perception of the success of the healing attempt.

The aftereffects of illness and healing differ completely in both novels. The effect of illness and healing in *The Moor's Account* highlights one of the limitations of Hegel's theory. In his theory, Hegel (1807) presents the psychological freedom as the only freedom the Slave can acquire in the relation. He does not discuss the possibility of a Slave acquiring an actual freedom or becoming the Master in the relation. However, Mustafa's successful healing attempt moves him to the healer position, a position that is fulfilled by lords rather than bondsmen in Native American communities. The success of Mustafa and his Castilian companions' healing methods does not only offer them a psychological freedom; they also reach to the position of spiritual leaders with followers of their own. On the other hand, the appearance of illness in *A Mercy* does not help Rebekka and Lina reach a psychological or actual freedom in their relations. Instead, it actually further reinforces their positions as inferior slaves. As a female who lives in a patriarchal society where women are raised as inferiors and religiously incapable of taking the right decisions or leading an independent life, Rebekka internalizes her inferiority. She adapts to the society's religious beliefs and accepts God as her ultimate Master. She also adapts to the society's perception and treatment of slaves. To win the society's acceptance, she starts treating Lina, Sorrow and Florens as savages instead of companions. Rebekka's refusal to acknowledge Lina's effort in healing her, accompanied by Lina's lack of confidence in her ability to heal an illness such as the smallpox, does not help Lina reach the through-work independence Hegel (1807) suggests. This again pushes the relation to the Master-Slave hierarchy between them.

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