



Portrayal of Violence in Morrison's *A Mercy*

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Abstract

This research paper examines the portrayal of violence in Morrison's *novel A Mercy* through textual analysis. This analysis is done through the lens of Žižek's theory of violence: subjective and objective. Subjective violence includes the concepts of physical violence and terror, while objective violence deals with invisible violence like structural inequality in the form of systemic violence. Morrison's novel goes beyond subjective physical violence. It is found that *A Mercy* reveals Žižek's subjective violence in two ways. First, women are dominated through subjective physical violence. Second, they suffer from subjective sexual violence, too. Likewise, objective violence is depicted through systemic and symbolic violence. Systemic refers to the structural inequalities inherent in the structure through the domination and discrimination of men over women and the inferior attitude of women towards other women. Symbolic violence is portrayed through men's use of the language of discrimination and domination to control women.

Additionally, this paper addresses how women do violence against other women. Related to the impact of violence, the researchers found that the effects of violence on women's self-identity based on race and gender are shattered. They impose violence on their female community and question their own identities. Violence results in breaking the interpersonal relationships of characters, too. Objective violence (domination and discrimination) breaks the family unit and shakes the trust of family members against one another. However, not all characters passively accept the impact of violence; some female characters resist it too, and they reclaim their own identities.

Keywords:

Morrison's portrayal of violence,
Žižek's subjective violence,
systemic violence,
symbolic violence

Introduction

As an African American writer, Morrison deals with African Americans' lives. She has received a great acclamation in the history of African American literature due to her incredible works of art. Sharmely (2016) elucidates that Morrison's novels represent the complex lives of black people, their culture during slavery, and post-slavery society. Her insight into the theme of violence and victimization of black people questions the dominant racist ideology. Nehal (2016) explains that Morrison's novel is the best representation of the slave narrative, the experience of the Middle Passage, and the "socio-ideological condition under which anti-black racism developed" (p.56). Additionally, Morrison's novel *A Mercy* represents violence, sexual abuse, and the resistance of women towards violence. Nehal (2016) observes the novel from a feminist perspective as opposed to the academic and public discourse other researchers investigated in Morrison's novel *Beloved*.

Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2008) theorized the concept of violence in his book *Six Sideways Reflections* in detail and contributed to the array of existing literature. Žižek (2008) highlighted the triad of violence: subjective, objective, and symbolic. Subjective violence is visible because it refers to physical violence. Objective violence is invisible due to its unidentifiable agent. Symbolic violence appears in the form of language dominance. The critique presented of Žižek's theory of violence is mixed. Some critics find it valuable to understand the meaning of violence, while others maintain the opposite opinion. Zirnsak (2019) criticized Žižek's theory of violence based on "lacking of details" (p.4) related to objective violence while Linden (2012) rejected Žižek's notion of revolutionary

violence as a shock therapy. However, Mansouri (2017), Kuriakose & Kumar (2023), and Bharti & Sinha (2023) assessed novels through the lens of Žižek's theory of subjective, objective, and symbolic violence to validate the application of this theory. This research paper deals with the portrayal of violence in Morrison's novel *A Mercy* from the perspective of Žižek's theory of violence. First, it will explore how Morrison shows Žižek's theory of violence through male and female characters in the novel. Second, it will investigate how this violence has an impact on the lives of Morrison's characters.

Objective of the Study

1. to explore the portrayal of violence in Morrison's novel *A Mercy*
2. to investigate the impact of violence on Morrison's characters in *A Mercy*

Research Questions

1. How does Morrison portray the theme of violence in *A Mercy* in the light of Žižek's theory of violence?
2. What is the impact of violence on Morrison's characters?

Morrison's novel *A Mercy* is set in the early 1680s, in the era of the slave trade. The two dominant male characters are Jacob Vaark and D' Ortega. Jacob Vaark is a farmer and trader from New England, while D' Ortega is a Portuguese Catholic slave trader in Maryland. The novel depicts four main female characters: Florens, Lina, Sorrow, and Mistress (Rebekka), who face visible and invariable violence due to domination and discrimination. Florens, the main protagonist of the story, is offered to Vaark by her mother, so she works on Vaark's farm. Now, she is sixteen years old and in love with the blacksmith, an African free slave. Lina is a native American whose tribe was wiped out by smallpox. She is the only survivor; she first used to work with the Presbyterians, and now she is working with Florens on Vaark's farms. Sorrow is another character who is brought to Vaark's farm by Jacob. In the house of Sawyer, she is sexually assaulted, and before arriving at Vaark, she is pregnant. However, she is maltreated by Lina and Rebekka too. Rebekka is from England. Her parents are unloving, especially her father, who sends her to marry Jacob Vaark to relieve him of paying for her care. She becomes the mistress of Florens, Sorrow, and Lina.

Previous Studies on Morrison's Novels and Žižek's Theory of Violence

Various studies have considered the theme of violence in Morrison's novels. Etang (2021) focused on systemic violence in Morrison's novel *Beloved*. The main argument of the study is that Morrison's character Sethe's individuality as a mother in *Beloved* is disturbed because she suffers from systemic racism. This study is directed at the concept of mothering and the tenets of gender discourse. This study concludes with the statement that a black mother's act of infanticide is safe for their children. However, the current study does not agree with this concept in the case of a mother, though this current study agrees with the concept of victimization in light of gender discourse. Another research study by Dung & Valdez (2019), analyzing violence from the racist point of view in Morrison's novel *The Song of Solomon*, focuses on the insight into life's purpose and meaning as a result of violence. The system is oppressive through verbal violence, and black women are mistreated in this system. Violence is analyzed from the perspective of discrimination. The scholars focused on the resistance of black women to violence. Lena's outburst on the violence is resistance to the maltreatment of women and male dominance in the black community. Pilate adopts non-violent resistance to show disregard for other people's thinking and focus on her own wisdom.

This research paper includes previous research on Morrison's novel *A Mercy* to reinforce the scope of this research. Studies done by Maryati & Khaouri (2014) and Kpohoue (2018) from the perspective of the experiences of characters during slavery in Morrison's novel *A Mercy*. The former study describes Florence's experience with slavery and her non-violent resistance, while the latter deals with different facets of slavery. The main argument of the study deals with the theme of violence because of slavery and resistance against slavery, which is shown by Morrison's character Florence. The framework of the study is the Marxist theory of resistance. Florence is controlled through slavery because the master has the authority to control her life. However, Florence resists this violence with the passage of time when she challenges the concept of slavery for the sake of her freedom. This article refers to the power of Florence too, due to which she can resist, and that is her education. Šator & Hidovic (2023) deal with gender-based violence in *A Mercy*. This study explains that slavery is regarded as the major source of black women's degradation. It argues that 17th- century colonies were responsible for the low position and exploitation of black women. Rebekka's father considers slavery an opportunity to use his daughter for his own business. Similarly, unmarried women are marginalized and "they are seen as the property of men" (p.299). A very valuable analysis by Sharma & Abbas (2022) is related to the sexual violence against women in Toni Morrison's novel *Mercy*. Florence and her mother are victims of rape, and their masters control them through this type of violence. Morrison's other characters, like Sorrow and Lina, are also discussed in terms of gender-based violence. It is a similar study, but the current study analyzes the novel from Žižek's perspective of subjective and objective violence.

The paper by Xingyu (2021) addresses the hybrid identity of Lina and sorrow. After facing the traumatic experiences as a result of slavery, they miss their own identity and are forced to become others. To regain their identity

in the colonial atmosphere, they are destined to seek their own identity to resist 'others,' and Bhabha calls it a hybrid identity. To get completeness, Lina tries to become the family member of Rebekka and to get rid of the status of Other. Simultaneously, Sorrow realizes that, after the birth of her baby, Twin is no longer in her life, and she starts to focus on her own independence. She begins to reconsider her own identity, not to be dominated by superiors but by herself. The study conducted by Sharmely (2016) deals with racial slavery while focusing on the character of Sorrow in Morrison's novel *A Mercy*. It is argued that Sorrow faces difficulty in the house of Jacob on the basis of her race. She is looked down upon by her other mates, like Lina and other slaves. The study is descriptive and can be called a review because characters have not been analyzed from any specific lens. However, it is relevant to the current study because it agrees with the discriminatory attitude that Sorrow faces in the plantation, and it will be examined from Žižek's theory of violence. While analyzing the novel from a post-modernist perspective, the study by Eliadi (2010) talks about the subaltern voices of the narrators in the story. Western literature highlights that subjugated people are taught and educated by them, and Florens exactly agrees with the statement when she underestimates her own voice and literacy. This study is relevant to the current research because it is further to be discussed in light of Žižek's perspective on how Florens is inferiorized after domination and discrimination (Eliadi, 2010, pp. 100-101). In short, all the studies deal with the theme of violence from different perspectives and from the perspective of Žižek's theory of violence. All studies are relevant to this study.

Various studies have been conducted on the theme of violence from different theoretical viewpoints. Also, many researchers have utilized Žižek's theory of violence in exploring the theme of violence in different novels. The following research studies are included due to their relevance to the current study. Kuriakose & Kumar (2023) investigate Žižek's systemic and symbolic violence in Burns' novel *Milkman*. The focus of the study is on the language of the community, and the social theories of the Northern Irish community by highlighting the issue of discrimination against certain groups and showcasing sexual harassment. The study investigated the political impact on the psychology of the characters and how they come to a state of fear and powerlessness. The woman's character reading while walking is termed by society as abnormal, and to make this abnormal into normal, force is applied. When the girl refuses to follow the norms of society, the milkman threatens to kill her boyfriend. This makes the connection between the study and the current research, which gives the implied meaning of gender-based violence through language. Mansouri (2017) highlights the positive aspect of violence in the fiction of Oates. It is argued that violence creates a positive impact too if it relates to traumatic experiences in life. Norma, one of the characters, is quoted as someone who likes war, and from Žižek's theory of violence, war represents violence. However, Mansouri (2017) elucidates that war and news related to war connected all the people in depressed and happy moments. In short, "The pleasant feeling of being united with other people in understanding is the positive outcome of war, according to Oates" (Mansouri, 2017, p. 116). It is further investigated that through violence, characters can chase their identities. Through Žižek's theory of violence, Bharti & Sinha (2023) analyze the representation of violence in Richard Flanagan's novel *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. Subjective violence is evident in brutal activities as a result of war and due to physical violence, which is done to the major character, Dorigo Evans, and other slave characters in the story. The objective violence is explained through the war machinery and the oppressive prison camp system used to control the characters. The study argues that it is through this systemic objective violence that people perpetrate subjective physical violence.

Theoretical Framework

This study is non-empirical, and it follows textual analysis as a research method with the help of close reading. This study picks Žižek's theory of violence as the framework of the study on account of his philosophical context of violence as a philosopher. Further, it is used by researchers. Sangar, Sabouri, & Massiha (2020) used Žižek's (2008) theory of violence to investigate the theme of violence in MacCarthy's novel *The Road*. Quirk (2018) investigated gender violence in an Australian play by Williamson's *The Removalists*, which shows its reliability. In his book *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Žižek (2008) defines violence as subjective and objective. The former refers to the physical display of violence, like a physical beat, while the latter deals with 'systemic' and 'symbolic' violence. Objective violence is invisible because it deals with injustice, domination, and discrimination in society. All structural inequalities are hidden, according to Žižek (2008). When subjective violence focuses on physical and visible violence and hurt, objective violence covers 'coercion and domination' (Žižek, 2008, p. 10). This paper deals with the holistic picture of subjective and objective violence in investigating the portrayal of violence in Morrison's novel *A Mercy*.

Discussion and Analysis

Morrison's novel *A Mercy* portrays Žižek's theory of subjective and objective violence. The section deals with the portrayal of subjective physical and subjective sexual violence against women. Žižek's theory of violence deals with objective violence too. It refers to invisible power and structural inequalities. Morrison's novel *A Mercy* exposes these inequalities through different situations. This study deals with different arguments in the light of Žižek's theory of objective violence. The first element of objective violence is 'systemic violence,' which is inherent

in the structure through domination and discrimination. Morrison's novel *A Mercy* exposes this domination in different ways. Firstly, it is exposed through the domination of men over women, where men are masters and women are slaves. Secondly, it is highlighted in the inferior attitude of one woman towards another woman.

Portrayal of Subjective Physical & Sexual Violence Against Women

Women are dominated in society through physical violence. It is portrayed in Morrison's novel *A Mercy* through subjective physical violence against Lina, Florens, Sorrow, and Rebekka. "Lina's swollen eye and the lash cuts on her face, arms, and legs were barely noticeable. The Presbyterians never asked what had happened to her, and "there was no point in telling them" (p.53). One night of ice-cold rain Sorrow shelters herself and the baby here, downstairs, behind the door in the room where Sir dies. The Mistress slaps her. This evidence explains the physical violence. Lina is one of the characters who is supported by the Presbyterians, who do not observe the physical suffering of Lina. "Her swollen eye" and "cut on her face" are manifestations of physical violence. The Presbyterians do not care. Similarly, the physical violence that Morrison's character, Sorrow faces, represents a different situation. Sorrow's Mistress 'slaps' her because she takes shelter behind the room, where her husband dies. This shows that she thinks that Sorrow does not have the right to sleep there without permission. Žižek's theory of subjective violence is expressed through the bad actions of the Presbyterians and the Mistress, and their oppressive apparatuses are 'hands' and 'evil intentions'.

Women in the novel are dominated by subjective sexual violence too. It is portrayed through different characters like Florens' mother, Lina, and Sorrow. "Sorrow was pregnant, and soon there would be another virgin birth (p.56). "Sorrow became their play" (p.100). Morrison's novel *A Mercy* exposes violence against women by the male protagonist of the story. Men on the ship rape Sorrow, but D' Ortega on the plantation rapes his slave Florens's mother. Morrison explains that Sorrow is a virgin, but she is raped by many men because they want to show their power to her. Similarly, Florens's mother says that she is unable to identify the name of her father, further showing the incessant raping of Florens' mother. On the plantation, Sorrow and Florens's mother face repressive apparatuses in the form of the use of the body. According to Žižek (2008), such men are the agents who commit subjective sexual violence against women. The study by Sharma & Abbas (2022) supports sexual violence from a feminist perspective. This study addresses it from Žižek's theory of subjective sexual violence. In short, Morrison's novel portrays Žižek's subjective violence in two ways. First, women are dominated through subjective physical violence. Second, they suffer from subjective sexual violence too.

Portrayal of Žižek's Objective Violence

Men exercise their power over women to control them, which is patriarchal oppression. This is apparent in Morrison's novel through the characters of D' Ortega, Jacob Vaark, and the Blacksmith. D' Ortega. D' Ortega is a Portuguese slave trader, whose dominance is on men and women altogether. His control is shown through his plantation called 'Jublio'. To pay Jacob's debt, he hands over Florens to him. Jacob is a farmer and land trader in New England. He is the son of a Dutchman, and he despises slavery; however, he purchases Florence from D' Ortega. He is kind, but his control over women has been displayed by keeping Lina, Sorrow, and Florens on his farm as slaves. They take care of his wife, Rebekka. Blacksmith is an example of someone who is a free slave but controls Florens through love and acts as dominion over Florens, like D' Ortega and Jacob. Apparently, it seems that no physical violence is done to Lina, Sorrow, and Florens, but they are controlled by D' Ortega when he keeps Florens mother and Florens on his plantation. He runs the system of control, but it is normalized. Jacob is kind like Garner in Morrison's novel *Beloved* but his intention to control is apparent in his act of mercy in bringing Florens to his farm for the sake of labour and giving happiness to his own wife as she is childless. After the death of Jacob, his wife Rebekka realizes "A commanding and oppressive absence (p.92). "Jacob believed giving her a girl close to Patrician's age would please her. In fact, it insulted her" (p.96). Blacksmith is a Blackman; but he is free, so he rejects Florens because her status is still considered that of a slave. This relation of domination and discrimination refers to the structural inequalities and injustice in society which are hidden because they are regularised (Žižek, 2008). Bharti & Sinha (2023) agree that oppressive systems and camps are used to control characters.

Morrison exposes that women also discriminate against their own women to control them. This discrimination is done based on race. It is evident through the characters of Lina and Rebekka. "Whenever Sorrow came near, Lina said 'scat' or sent her on some tasks that needed doing. Kept as distant from the new girl as she had been from Patrician, Sorrow behaved thereafter the way she always had- with placid indifference to anyone, except Twin (Morrison, 2008, p. 124). This narration reveals that Lina is one of the labourers in the house of Jacob, but she exercises her own power over Sorrow, who was recently brought by Jacob. Sorrow has an upsetting history. She needs connections and support from other women. However, when she tries to make a relationship, she is ordered by Lina to do her work. It is the manifestation of Žižek's theory of violence, where the relation of domination is maintained by Lina with her own supportive community, Sorrow. This normalized attitude of domination reveals the discrimination between slaves too, who are working under the control of Jacob but fail to make connections (Žižek,

2008). Sharmely (2010) agrees with this study that Sorrow faces race-based violence in the house of Jacob, but the current argument shows evidence that it is Lina who further controls Sorrow through her discriminatory attitude. In short, the first element of Žižek's objective violence is systemic violence, where the researchers observe that violence is inherent in the structure instead of the depiction of any physical injury.

Portrayal of Symbolic Violence

The second element of Žižek's objective violence is 'symbolic violence'. This violence appears in the use of language of domination and discrimination. First, the study addresses the circumstance that men use the language of discrimination and domination to control women. Second, it further highlights how women do it to other women. Žižek's symbolic violence is portrayed through the discriminatory attitude of men towards women. It is evident in Morrison's novel *A Mercy* when Florence says that Blacksmith is a black man, but he is free, so he offers his love for Florens, but at the end of the story, Florens and Makail clash. He insults Florens by saying that "She is a slave body is wild; You are nothing but wilderness. No constraints, no mind" (p.141). This narration has the connotation of domination, on the basis of which Florens is discriminated against. It explains that slaves are not humans. The word 'wild' refers to something unnatural that has no status but can only be called 'wilderness' or 'deserted'. This may be the reason that Blacksmith offers his sexual love to Florens, but he rejects her later. She is further humiliated using the words 'no constraints, no mind'. It seems he puts the blame for his sexual love on her or he refuses to even love Florens. Perhaps he is a free man, and he adopts the white man's ideology of power, but he refuses his own identity. By adopting the cultural norms and language of the dominancy to control Florens, Blacksmith employs symbolic violence (Žižek, 2008). Dung & Valdez (2019) support this study by investigating that systemic violence is done to women through verbal violence.

Žižek's symbolic violence is portrayed through the discriminatory attitude of women towards women too. This violence is portrayed through the characters Lina and Rebekka on Sorrow in Morrison's novel *A Mercy*. Rebekka is the wife of Jacob, who has a farm. On this farm, he brings Lina, whose village was destroyed by Europeans in war. He purchases Sorrow from the sawyer and Florens from D' Ortega. Rebekka is addressed as a Mistress in the story. In the novel, the Mistress says "Outside sleeping is for savages" (Morrison, 2008, p. 159) When sorrow goes behind the trader's post, her Mistress calls her "fool" (p.68). Lina says, "She [Sorrow] was useless, ... bad luck in the flesh.... less reliable" (p.53-56). These evidences show the discriminatory attitude of Rebekka and Lina towards Sorrow. Rebekka's use of 'savages' reveals that Lina and Sorrow are uncivilized, and therefore, they deserve to sleep outside. If they are condemned with this title of barbarism, they are no longer human beings, according to Rebekka. Sorrow is a fool because she crosses her boundary to chase the trader's post. Similarly, Sorrow is insulted by Lina too. Lina does not accept the presence of Sorrow on the farm of Jacob. She considers her useless and less reliable. Lina adopts the dominant culture by implementing symbolic violence against Sorrow. Rebekka exerts her power over Lina and Sorrow, and Lina wants to control Sorrow through the use of language of dominance (Žižek, 2008). Kuriakose & Kumar (2023) analyze symbolic violence in Burn's novel *Milkman* from the perspective of man's control over women through language. However, this study observes that women may also show dominance through language. In short, symbolic violence is represented by men and women together to control and threaten one another.

Impact of Žižek's Violence on Morrison's Characters in *A Mercy*

Women in Morrison's novel *A Mercy* encounter violence, both visibly and invisibly. This violence disturbs their own attitude, and they offer their response to violence differently. The data from the novel shows that characters like Lina and Mistress [Rebekka] follow the same pattern of control over other women, while Florens and Sorrow resist violence to reclaim their own identities. Women impose violence on their own women community as a result of subjective violence, and they question their own self-identity. It is expressed through the characters Lina and Mistress in the novel. Morrison explains, "Whenever Sorrow came near, Lina ... sent her on some tasks that needed doing.... kept as distant from the new girl" (Morrison, 2008, p. 124). Rebekka "slaps Sorrow" (p.68) to control her. These narrations have the connotation of control through power. Lina stops Sorrow to intermingle with them. Lina's own village is destroyed, and then she starts to live with her Mistress, her own beliefs are shaky, and she fails to communicate with Sorrow. Rebekka was struck by her own mother in the past, and now, as a Mistress she reveals her own power to threaten Sorrow. This style of power challenges their real identity as women, and they try to imitate the power of dominant culture, which violates their self-identity. The response of Lina and Rebekka towards violence is passive, and they do not go against it, but they are "inferiorized by violence (Žižek, 2008). Dung and Valdez (2019) agree that racial oppression results in "people's acceptance of the oppressor's prejudices," and they adapt to the conventions of society.

Morrison represents violence as breaking the interpersonal relationships of characters. Objective violence (domination and discrimination) breaks the family unit and shakes the trust of family members against one another. It is evident in the novel through the characters of Florence and her mother. Florens, one of the main characters, narrates, "Minha Mae was standing and telling [sic] take my daughter" "Sir [sic] saying, he will take instead the woman

and the girl, not the baby boy, and the debt is gone” (pp. 5-6). This narration depicts the impact of slavery and systemic violence on Florens. This represents a misunderstanding between a daughter and a mother, who thinks that the mother is responsible for handling the daughter in the dominant society. Florens thinks that her mother is responsible for making her alone, and she suffers from an inferiority complex. Florens considers herself inferior. She experiences slavery, but more than that, she recalls the bitter truth about the impact of slavery on her own life, which splits her family unit. She lives her life with the misconception that her own mother rejects her. Also, the discrimination between boys and girls is another trauma that pinches Florens, and she thinks of her own position in society, which is lesser, further disconnecting her from her mother. The study by Etang (2021) observes the impact of systemic violence on Florens’ mother like Sethe, in Morrison’s *Beloved*. However, this study considers the impact on the mother-daughter relationship on the one hand and the impact on the self-identity of Florens on the other. Situation makes her lost in the novel after facing this separation.

Systemic race-based discrimination disturbs the identity of women on the basis of race in the novel. It is shown through Florens in the novel. Amid white men, she faces symbolic violence on the basis of her race. “I have never seen any [sic] human this black. She is Afric [sic]... The Black Man is among us” (Morrison, 2008, p. 112). This comment challenges Florens’ identity as a black woman and she is humiliated by being marked as an invisible thing. At the same time, it becomes a traumatic experience in her life to justify her position through the letter of her Mistress. She is ordered to place the letter on the table so that its seal can be broken. “She is owned by me and can be known by a burne [sic] mark in the palm of her left hand” (p.112). It shows that Florens does not hold her own identity; she is recognized through her own Mistress’ letter. Sharma’s (2022) study is in line with this research, which explains the oppressive side of Florens, who is under the pressure of race-based and gender-based violence.

Women are treated and accepted as commodities based on their gender, which disturbs their self-identity. It is evident in the characters of Sorrow and Lina. She narrates her own trauma when she is found in the river by Sawyer. She is named ‘Sorrow’ by Sawyer’s wife. Later, she is offered “the care of the customer” (Morrison, 2008, p. 51). Lina thinks about the advertisement of slave women in slavery. “Hardy female, Christianized and capable in all matters, domestic, available for exchange of goods or species” (p.52). These narrations show that both female characters are caught in a different environment, but they face a similar imposition of dominant culture. Sorrow is found by Sawyer and named by Sawyer’s wife, where she is sexually assaulted, and then she is purchased by Jacob. Lina’s village is set on fire, and she is taken to live among ‘kindly Presbyterians’; and “they were pleased to have her because they admired native women, worked as hard as they themselves did, they named her Messalina” (p.104), but she is also put for sale, and Jacob takes her into his custody as a kind master. Lina and Sorrow are exploited due to their gender. Lina submits to the dominant culture in exercising power over her friends because she is inferiorized by violence (Žižek, 2008), and therefore she questions her own identity. Xingyu (2021) agrees that after a traumatic experience of slavery, Lina is forced to become ‘Other’. While considering herself a family member, Lina exercises power over Sorrow. In brief, subjective physical and sexual violence and objective violence appear in the form of race-based, gender-based, and other structural inequalities that disturb the self-identity and relationships of families, as mentioned above in the investigation of the impact of violence on characters. Mistress and Lina accept this violence and question their own identity by applying similar violence within their own community.

Resistance Against Violence

Not all characters accept violence, but some characters resist it too. Florens and Sorrow respond to violence differently. They are exploited as the result of gender and race-based violence; nevertheless, they resist violence and reclaim their own identity. Dung and Valdez (2019) explain that resistance is a result of coercion. People show defiance towards structural inequalities, consciously or unconsciously. This study agrees with the statement, as Florens and Sorrow show their boldness and resist violence.

Women in the novel reclaim their own identity by resisting violence. It is evident in the novel through the characters of Florens and Sorrow. Florens is one of the major characters in the story. She is abused on the basis of gender and race, but she resists violence by uttering, “I am become wilderness but I am also Florens.... In full unforgiven. Unforgiving. Hear me? Slave. Free. I last” (p.161). She loves Blacksmith, who is a free slave. She helps her Mistress by calling Blacksmith to treat her from the disease. When she visits to call the blacksmith, she observes a boy named Malaik in the house of the blacksmith. She takes a stand for herself and makes an attack on Malaik to let him know about his reality. As a result, she faces symbolic violence from Blacksmith which she resists boldly by surviving with autonomy. She rejects systemic and symbolic violence against her and thinks about her own real self as Florens, not as a slave. She has made a choice to love Blacksmith, but she does not surrender to violence. She thinks to herself that she is free and ready to save her soul. In brief, the researchers found that Florens takes pride in her own originality as a black woman and rejects the concept of wilderness created by society against her. Maryati (2014) agrees with this current study by discussing the resistance of Florens against violence.

Similarly, Sorrow faces sexual violence, but she gives birth to a child, and Sorrow gives birth to a baby without support. "I am your mother; my name is complete" (Morrison, 2008, p. 128). This narration has the connotation of self-identity and resistance against violence. In the house of Sawyer, Sorrow is helpless when she is sexually abused and when Sawyer's wife selects a name for her. She is helpless when she is put on sale, and Jacob purchases her as a kind master. Amid this violence, Sorrow does not fail to make choice and show her personal independence by talking to Twin, when she is excluded by Lina and physically abused by her Mistress. This discussion with Twin is her own choices. Despite being enslaved, Sorrow's effort to search for agency and autonomy in her life by taking action is a delicate form of resistance against violence. Morrison narrates that "Sorrow plans to escape" (p.159). After her completeness, her struggle to escape is yet another strong resistance against violence. Dung and Valdez (2019) validate this argument that oppressed people's responses are different to different forms of violence. Lina and her Mistress accept the dominant ideology and are inferiorized by violence (Žižek', 2008), but Sorrow and Florens fight against violence and resist it.

Conclusion

This study investigated the portrayal of violence in Morrison's novel *A Mercy* in light of Žižek's theory of violence. The first part of the study focused on the portrayal of violence in Morrison's novel, *A Mercy*. It showed that Morrison's novel has aptly displayed Žižek's subjective and objective violence. Women characters like Mistress [Rebekka], Lina, Sorrow, and Florens face violence. Men exercise their power over women and women display the same violence towards their women whenever they find the opportunity. The second part includes the impact of violence on characters who faced violence in the novel. It is revealed that characters are inferiorized by violence, according to Žižek (2008). It records the different responses of characters to violence. Lina and Mistress accept violence, and they impose power on their community. However, Florens and Sorrow resist violence and make their own choices to reclaim their own identities.

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