

# An Analysis of the Construction of Female Identity in *A Mercy* Under the Perspective of Homi Bhabha's Post-Colonial Theory

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## ABSTRACT

Toni Morrison (1931-2019), the only black female Nobel laureate up to now, has made her name by her novels with the outstanding depiction of the living condition and mentality, poetic language and unique style of narration. The post-colonial elements in her fictional works also appeal to post-colonial critics. Published in 2008, *A Mercy* tells a story about a few American residents on a farm in the colonial American continent, enunciating their living situation, mental state and destiny by multi-angle narration. Homi Bhabha (1949- ) enjoys the reputation of "one of the three most acclaimed post-colonial theorists" with his creative literary and cultural critiques and the contribution to the development of post-colonial criticism. His theories including hybridity pave the way for and usher in a new era of the post-colonial literary criticism, and the main points of his theory will be employed to examine the construction of female identity, focusing on the two female roles, Lina and Sorrow, in *A Mercy*. Characters of Other in this novel, Lina and Sorrow have traumatic experience involving loss of family and enslavement. However, the results of their searching for the rebuilding of their identities differentiate, which can be concluded that only independence and self recognition can solid foundation of identity construction, instead of salvation or mercy from others in the post-colonial discourse.

**Keywords:** identification, post-colonialism, Toni Morrison, Homi Bhabha, *A Mercy*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. An Introduction of Toni Morrison and *A Mercy*

Toni Morrison (1931-2019), the only black female Nobel laureate at present, has made her name by her novels with the unique plot, impressive characters, passionate and poetic language style and themes that show the universal empathy for peripheral women especially African Americans. A female writer with dark skin and African blood, she was informed about conflicts among races and her congeners' miserable life by the world she lives, and she continuously applies herself to depict what she has seen and experienced. Most of her fictional works, like *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992) and *Sula* (1974), "negates narrative continuity and the cacophonous comfort of words" [1] and purport to show the process of the pursuit of self. *A Mercy*, a novel published in 2008, is one of her works with these unique literary

features. It has made a stir since its first publication. It is considered by some critics as the companion novel of *Beloved* which probes into the common theme of slavery narration [2], and used to be praised as a work "stands alongside *Beloved* as a unique triumph" by *The Washington Post Book World*.

*A Mercy* tells a tragic story about the residents in the 17th-century American continent. The protagonist Florens, a black girl, is abandoned by her mother when Jacob, a well-off rancher and the hero in the novel, deliberately commends that Florens' mother should be used to mortgage the debt in order to impel her master to return the debt because she is the master's favourite slave. She implores Jacob to take Florens away instead of herself or her little son. It is the traumatic memory of Florens and she has not recovered even after the arrival of Jacob's farm, a place with peace and racial equality because of mercy from Jacob and others, like Mistress Rebekka, a British white woman who has traversed the ocean to marry Jacob; Lina, a diligent Indian servant

who loves Florens so much and treats her as her own child; and Sorrow, a hybrid girl and the milkmaid on the farm. Each of them, however has their own traumatic experience. They have lost their home and original family in various ways. Like Florens, Rebekka is abandoned by her parent, and Lina and Sorrow lose their family due to natural or factitious calamities. Lina's family and cognates has perished in the conflagration and European intruders' massacre. Before being sold to Jacob, she lives with Presbyterians and becomes a Christian. Born on board, Sorrow experiences the familial loss because the ship is drowned and all the people including her father suffocate. She once lives with the sawyer and is brought to Jacob's land after being raped by the sawyer's sons.

This novel distinguishes itself due to the complex perspectives of narration consisting of both the first person narration—Florens in odd chapters, and a third person narrator who presents a panoramic view of other characters in the evens. Apart from exploring the black female slave's identity in America by spinning the tale of “abandoned child (Florens) and helpless mother” [3], the novel also investigates other characters with their own anguished experience and whether affected by this experience or not, they experience a transformation on both their characteristics and destiny, through which Morrison implicitly suggests that colonialism deteriorates both colonists and those who are colonized [4]. And in this paper, two female characters: Lina and Sorrow are to be explored. Lina and Sorrow are the two somehow marginalized characters in family, race, culture as well as in researchers' view, but they are typical not only because of their race—Lina is an Indian woman and Sorrow a hybrid girl—but because of their traumatic experiences that they become orphans due to natural or factitious calamities. Consequently, the procedure of their identical loss and their striving for regaining their identities is valuable to examine.

## 1.2. Literature Review

Currently, critical passages near the time of the publication of the work dominate the foreign studies of *A Mercy*. What these researches focus can be concluded as migration, motherhood motif, isolation and exceptionalism. For example, Maxine L. Montgomery's “Got on My Traveling Shoes: Migration, Exile, and Home in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*”, which examines *A Mercy* regarding its engagement with tropes of migration, exile, and home as the title suggests; Marjorie Downie's “Of Orphans and Mercy: A review of *A Mercy* by Toni Morrison” and Teresa G Jimenez's “They Hatch Alone: The Alienation of the Colonial American Subject in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*” explore the themes of the novel, and Steve H. Monk's groundbreaking study explores the motherhood motif in

“What is the Literary Function of the Motherhood Motif in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*?”.

There also have been over 40 papers published in periodicals and more than 10 MA papers studying *A Mercy* through the retrieval in CNKI, and the research for the theme, technique and culture constitutes the studying accomplishment.

In terms of the theme, slavery, feminism, self-abasement, maternal love and betrayal are frequently mentioned. The earliest research is probably Professor Wang Shouren and Wu Xinyun's discussion of the essence of slavery by analysing the main characters in their “Transcending Race: An Analysis of ‘Enslavement’ in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*”, and point out the binary impairment to both slaves and free individuals; Hu Xiaoxi examines the traumatic memory and its effect on the female identities in her MA paper “On the Trauma and Identity Construction of Female Characters in *A Mercy* by Toni Morrison”.

The study of the techniques in *A Mercy* concentrates on the use of image and narratology, involving the narrator, point of view, narrative discourse, intertextuality and defamiliarization etc. For instance, Hu Jun's “*A Mercy*: About the Construction of ‘Family’” explores the “family” image in *A Mercy*. Liu Xiao discusses the narration and the third person narration in her “Character's Narration in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*”; and Liang Yan and Qu Rongying's “An Analysis of Intertextuality between *A Mercy* and *Beloved*” is a paper examining the intertextuality between *A Mercy* and *Beloved*”.

Therefore, there are few researches about the construction of identities in *A Mercy* based on Homi Bhabha's post-colonial theory. Even though Xing Wenhong explores the pursuit of identity of two characters Florens and Rebekka with Bhabha's post-colonial theory as the theoretical foundation in her MA dissertation “Female Identity Pursuit: An Analysis of *A Mercy* from the Perspective of Homi Bhabha's Postcolonial Theory”, there remains a blank in this kind of study due to the incompetence of the analysis of characters in the novel, and this paper is designed to fill this blank.

## 1.3. Theoretical Basis

Along with Edward Waefie Said (1935-2003) and Gayatri C. Spivak (1942- ), Homi H. Bhabha (1949- ) is one of the three greatest post-colonial theorists. His creative way of post-colonial critique triggers his fame in literary criticism in the contemporary world. His contribution to post-colonialism has renewed the criticism on literary works in the post-colonial era.

There are two phases of the development of Homi Bhabha's theory: From 1980 to 1988: Bhabha took his

interest on the analysis of colonial discourse, but he distinguishes himself from other post-colonial critics and theorists by probing into the examination transcending binary opposition in the examination of colonial relationship. From 1988 to the present: Bhabha applies himself to the studies of historical legacies in colonies, particularly the colonial aftermaths of culture, the complex relation between post-colonialism and post-modernism, and the purport of present cultural relationship about cultural collision, races, nations and the conventional discourse of national origins.

Bhabha's work develops a set of challenging concepts that are central to post-colonial theories: hybridity, mimicry, difference, ambivalence, uncanny, and stereotype [5]. These concepts describe how colonized and colonizer are defined and how colonized people have resisted the power of colonizer and show an authority that is not as secure as it seems to be.

In his seminal work, *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha undermines the simple polarization of the world into Self and Other, in order to justify the material inequalities central to colonial rule [6]. What Bhabha is seeking is a long-term solution for everyone. His idea reverses the value of Self and Other and in his opinion the colonizer becomes morally inferior is not a productive approach. He notes that Other is usually created by the cultural differences and be "more relevant for colonialism" [7]. Often inferior to Self, Other loses its power to "signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse" [8], but in post-colonial discourse, there is no definite boundary between Self and Other. He argues that colonialism is not simply the domination of one group by the other one [9], and he emphasizes the unexpected forms of resistance that can be found in the history of the colonized, and clearly the unexpected anxieties that plagued the colonizer in spite of his apparent mastery.

Third Space is one of Bhabha's significant theoretical terms. As stated by Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, Third Space is usually created by the negotiation among people, especially the colonizer and the colonized, from various historical and cultural backgrounds in the colonial or post-colonial discourse. It is a space filled with instability and ambivalence because of the volatile and ambiguous relationship between the colonizer and the colonized who are deemed by Bhabha as the principal part in the post-colonial discourse. Sometimes there is a role change between the colonizer and the colonized in Third Space, so a hybrid identity is accordingly created.

Bhabha's work has poetic qualities, his work is replete with silences, ambiguities, hesitations and in his criticism he uses different principles and it incorporates a range of styles, juxtaposing historical descriptions, psychoanalytic analogy and literary criticism; therefore,

his texts are really elusive. They seem to be constantly undermining or frustrating in meaning.

## 2. LOSS OF FEMALE IDENTITY

Other is a concept opposite to Self. It means all the humans and things existing outside Self. Though there remain complex relationships between Self and Other, it is a universal belief that Other is inferior and subordinate to Self. "The Other loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse" [10]. Thus it can be concluded that both Lina and Sorrow are Other at the beginning of the novel from the aspects of family, society and geography, and the Other image always results in the loss of identity.

### 2.1. *Other in Family*

According to Bhabha, many of the women began to question their roles within the family and the community—the two central institutions which articulated the meanings and mores of the tradition of the labouring classes around which ideological battle was enjoined [11]. Professor Tang Hongmei also emphasizes the vital function of home and family in the course of female identification in her *Race, Gender and Identity: A Study of Novels by Alice Walker and Toni Morrison*. She claims that home and family are the beginning of female identical recognition [12]. Therefore, in *A Mercy*, there exists the loss of identity of female characters, because they are all Other in their family: alienated, lost or forsaken. And Lina and Sorrow are the representations of Other who experience their familial loss.

Throughout her life, Lina strives for soothing her tragedy of the expiration of her family and homogeneous people. When Lina is a tall, fourteen-year old girl, news of the deaths, brought about by epidemic and Europeans' massacre that has swept her village reaches out. Before bought by Sir Jacob, Lina stays with Presbyterians and forsakes her living habit as an Indian girl because she is afraid of losing shelter once more, which is also the reason why she loses her original identity. She behaves like a Protestant believer, for example, she works hard for "the God hates idleness most of all" [13], and she is included in the daily prayers.

Sorrow is a hybrid girl. She is born on board as the daughter of the captain, but one morning, "what she remembered is waking up after falling to the floor under the hammock all alone" [14] because all people on board have been gone or drowned. Her recollection of the ship has been drowned with it, and when someone asks about her originality, she will answer that the whale impels her to go on the land. Sorrow becomes an orphan and from then on Twin appears as her sole

companion. Twin joins her under the hammock after searching for survivors and food, accompanies her when she is saved by the sawyer and Jacob. Twin witnesses all of Sorrow's experiences involving her rape by two brothers, her journey to Sir's farm, her seclusion due to Lina's prejudice, her giving birth to her first baby, and her grave sickness and recovery under the blacksmith's curing and Florens' care. Sorrow spends most of her miserable time with Twin. She "concentrates on mealtimes and the art of escape for short walks with Twin, playtimes between or instead of her tasks" [15]. Unlike Sorrow's lack of sensation, Twin is acute. She sees through myriad things on the farm and she functions as Sorrow's guide. It is obvious that Twin is actually Sorrow herself but with different characteristics, and in Chapter 8, a chapter expatiating on Sorrow as the protagonist, Morrison states that Twin is Sorrow's "identical self" [16], implying that the present "Sorrow" is her "non-identical self". Sorrow has become Other, losing her identity at the instance when the ship, her birth place and her only home, is drowned, and the Captain, the symbol of her family, is persecuted by the sea.

Unlike other female characters who have been deserted by their family members like Florenz, Lina and Sorrow become Other and lose their identities because of the miserable destruction of their family. They need a place where they can be identified and accepted as family [17] so that their identities are capable of being rebuilt.

## **2.2. Other in Society**

Toni Morrison used to say that descriptions of cultural, racial, and physical differences note "Otherness" in her theoretical work *The Origin of Other* [18]. Bhabha also notes that "cultural difference must be made to foreclose on the Other" [19]. From the explanation of Oxford Dictionary of English, 3/e, the word "culture" is "the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society", and the race is "A group of people sharing the same culture, history, language, etc.". Before the nautical age one race usually formed a social group, sharing the same or similar culture, so Other noted by cultural and racial difference triggers Other in society.

Lina and Sorrow are naturally Other in society due to cultural and racial inferiority in the primitive American continent. As an Indian, Lina's behaviour is tightly controlled by her superiors, especially in religion. She is forbidden to enter the church even she has been taught Presbyterian dogmas, so at the end of Florens' inscription, Lina has to sit by the road to church waiting for Mistress Rebekka. Europeans also rigidly changes her Indian feature, symbolized by burning her deerskin dress. Sorrow's religious belief is

not mentioned in the novel, but hybrid people, at that epoch, are inhibited from church of Christianity as well.

Beside this, social discrimination permeates Lina and Sorrow's life. As *Geographies of Postcolonial: Spaces of Power and Representation* states, "how the 'other' has become an important commodity in post-colonial global culture...just as it was important to understand how colonialism was popularised and how ordinary people came to learn about the world, it is also important to understand popular understandings of the world of post-colonialism. It is impossible to do this without considering the role of the media which—as the name suggests—mediate all of our understandings of and interactions with the rest of the world" [20]. Who is Other is a decision by the comprehension of those who are dominant. Lina's name given by those Presbyterian she live with, Messalina, is the demonstration of herself as an Other. Valeria Messalina was the third wife of the Roman emperor Claudius with a notorious reputation for promiscuity. European's naming of Lina reveals their bias towards American aboriginal women, leaving Lina at the position of Other.

This discrimination comes not simply from European intruders, but also from each other. Lina deems Sorrow as a curse to the farmland, as the corruption to others involving Rebekka's children and Florens. She impedes Sorrow from doing anything near them and she drowned Sorrow's first infant who is repeatedly dreamed by Sorrow. The drowning devastates Sorrow's primitive self-recognition as a mother, further places her at the state of numb, separates her combination with Twin.

Though Lina and Sorrow are not the central characters in *A Mercy*, Morrison expounds on their life in throughout the novel which inform the readers their craving for the identity and the background and proceeding of their identity loss: traumatizing experiences and inferiority in society. Their state of being Other is brought about by their families, particularly the collapse of their families, and society including racial and cultural factors leads to their identical misplacement. There also exists Other in geography because Bhabha concentrates on immigrant problems, and Sorrow is an immigrant and the Other in North American continent. As the daughter of the captain, she is accustomed to live on board and the land is absolutely strange for her. The loss of identity always leads to the pursuit of reconstructing it, so throughout their lives, Lina and Sorrow apply themselves to recreate their identities with the purpose of realizing their female values.

### **3. RECONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE IDENTITY**

In Bhabha's post-colonial discourse, there is a space named "Third Space" surpassing the binary opposition and the fixed Self and Other in the course of the communication and negotiation between or among different cultures. In Third Space, all the things including identity are variable and hybrid. It is this variability paves the way for those with Other image to rebuild their identities. There also have been over 40 papers published in periodicals and more than 10 MA papers studying *A Mercy* through the retrieval in CNKI, and the research for the theme, technique and culture constitutes the studying accomplishment.

#### ***3.1. Acclaiming Ownership to Strive for Belongingness***

Belonging is the happiness felt in a secure relationship. People's identity is always built in an assortment of relations with others in social and cultural context. For the possessiveness is one of the principal features of human beings, people usually pursue belongingness by seeking, finding, claiming and consolidating their ownership to other people or things so that they can have their identities rebuilt. Dwelling on the primitive American continent invaded by Europeans, Lina and Sorrow are among those who have been enslaved who strive for belongingness by acclaiming their ownership, and both of them choose to become a mother with the children as their possession. It's a process of the revision of Other in family.

When it comes to Lina, her acclaim of ownership is uncovered by her maternal love towards Rebekka's children especially Patrician and then the black girl Florens. A bereaved Indian woman, Lina is longing for familial love, so she appears as a "mother" in the novel though she has not married. She deems them to be her own kids and carefully looks after them. What is unfortunate is that her masters' children perish one after another, but blessedly Florens arrives then. Lina has the sense of intimacy on this little black girl at the first sight, and they do everything together. From Florens' narration in those odd chapters, readers can find that Lina poses a great effect on Florens' life and sense because phrases like "Lina says that" appear repeatedly. Lina considers herself as Florens' mother but this kind of love and probably her craving for a family triggers her excessive possessiveness. She fears anyone seeming to be a threat of her relationship with Florens. For instance, she suggests expelling Sorrow because she regards Sorrow as a curse of the family, and she is apprehensive of the arrival of the blacksmith who has obviously been fallen in love with by Florens. Quoted from a traditional saying, excessiveness is as harmful as deficiency. Lina's excessive love and possessiveness is

undoubtedly detrimental to the construction of her identity.

Sorrow craves for a child as well. Even though she has an imagined companion Twin who is in actuality the demonstration of her early pursuit of ownership, having children for her is a salvation and an accomplishment that she completes herself. Therefore, she has a maternal excitement after being informed that she is pregnant even if her baby is a consequence of a rape. On the contrary, Sorrow considers that she has been rescued by rapers, the sawyer's two sons. However, her newborn baby is drowned by Lina. A servant that seems superfluous in the farm, Sorrow suddenly suffer from a serious disease, but she gets through her misfortune because of the treatment given by the blacksmith and more importantly, her second pregnancy and her daughter's successful birth. Sorrow has realized her need for ownership since she gives birth.

Both Lina and Sorrow yearn for the ownership to create a sense of belongingness by inventing motherhood so that they can rebuild their identities, but their methods differ. Lina acclaiming her ownership by showing her maternal love towards others and Sorrow, seemingly unconscious, seeks it by having her own baby. Their different approaches would accordingly wind up with varied consequences.

#### ***3.2. Invalidating Exotic Culture to Avoid Exclusion***

In an article examining Fanon's post-colonial theory, Homi Bhabha states that "cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in the relation of Self to Other" [21]. Therefore, culture in the post-colonial discourse is hybrid. But as a critic, Morrison claims that "the fear of merging, or loss of identity through synergistic union with the other, leads to the wish to use racial purification as a separating strategy against difference" [22], hence some people in a multicultural society negate exotic culture to purify their own culture and avoid exclusion.

In *A Mercy*, Lina and Sorrow want to invalidate the European culture in order to break away from their status as Other in society, and this invalidation is particularly shown in characters' attitude towards religion. Considering Sorrow, though her religious belief has not been mentioned, it is crystal clear that she is definitely pagan because unlike Lina's amazement when hearing Rebekka's pray to God, she is unimpressed by Rebekka's final belief in Christianity and has no intention of being baptized. She plans for escaping from Rebekka's brutal treatment with her daughter to a place with new life. It is a behaviour opposite a Puritan's creed because Cotton Mather, a socially and politically influential New England Puritan minister who can be considered as one of Sorrow's

contemporaries, used to declare that A Christian should do his job with satisfaction and loyalty owning to the fact that all the jobs are holy and conferred by God, servants and slaves included [23]. Therefore Sorrow's escape is a rebellion against the Puritan work ethic, the alien culture from Europe.

It is not obviously presented by Lina because she has accepted Christianity by European intruders, but she insists on bathing in the river which those Christians will never do. This is her negation against the alien culture. Additionally, in Chapter 4, the narrator claims that Lina is "unimpressed by the festive mood and not involved in the jittery satisfaction" [24] that a new mansion is being built. Constructing a house is an announcement of priority that is customarily employed by white masters in American continent, of which Lina shows little approbation. Thus consciously or not, Lina and Sorrow invalidate the exotic culture originally from European invaders to some extent, and their negation of Christianity is the most demonstrative.

### **3.3. *Reconstructing Hybrid Cultural Identity***

Hybridity is one of Homi Bhabha's most essential post-colonial theories. According to Bhabha, hybridity is the hybrid cultural identity in the post-colonial discourse in the Third Space. Because of the complex relationship between Self and Other, the cultural identity in a post-colonial discourse is complicated and hybrid. For example, Lina as an Indian accepts Christian dogma belonging to her white contemporaries, and she has the dual individuality of a slave and a mistress for she has the power of most things in the farm. And about Sorrow, she is a girl with mixed-blood as well as an American resident.

Apart from complex identity, Homi Bhabha points that "hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects." [25] In other words, hybridity reflects the need for the inferior to search for the deprived authority and racial or gender discrimination in their identification. In *A Mercy*, all of the characters seek the rebuilding of hybrid identities, Lina and Sorrow involved.

As the former sections mentioned, Lina and Sorrow seek the rebuilding of their hybrid cultural identity by acclaiming ownership to strive for belongingness and negating alien culture in order to be not excluded. Being deprived of their families by either natural or factitious forces, both of them choose to have a child to possess their ownership. In the aspect of invalidating exotic culture, Sorrow has no faith of Christianity representing the alien culture as a result of her experience. As for Lina, though she is churchgoing after being adopted by Presbyterians, she retains her habit of bathing as an Indian does, and she disapproves Europeans' habit of

proclamation of their ownership and priority by building a house to occupy the land. Their hybrid identities are recreating through the course of their continuous endeavours, but in colonial American it is strenuous for the inferior particularly female people to manage to reconstruct their identity.

## **4. FEMALE IDENTITY ASSESSMENT**

A psychological thinker, Bhabha suggests that all identities, whether individual or collective, are incomplete; and this incompleteness is not a problem to be solved but it needs to be acknowledged [26]. Just because hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities, the hybridity of the female characters in the novel are destined to striving for the authority and power in their identities. At the mean time, the primitive American continent was a Migrant community that are represents a much wider trend towards the minoritization of national societies. As the previous chapter mentioned, the two characters: Lina and Sorrow discussed in this paper all strive for the realization of their identity. Their approaches and results, however, are thoroughly different.

### **4.1. *Self Misrecognition***

Lina, as an aboriginal resident in American and the Other to white immigrants, blends in the society by her diligence on the farm and her maternal love towards Florens and Rebekka's children. She deems herself as a member of the family in action but she also admit her identity as a slave, which is revealed in Florens' soliloquy in Chapter 1: "Florens, she says, it's 1690. Who else these days has the hands of a slave and the feet of a Portuguese lady? So When I set boots that fit a man not a girl." [27] It might be the result of European's attitude towards Indians: "Once they terrified her, then they rescued her." [28]. This unstableness in attitude from Europeans and the complex relations between them, a normal phenomenon in post-colonial discourse in Bhabha's theories generate Lina's habitual obedience to her white masters. After Jacob's death, Rebekka begins to believe in Christianity out of despair and Lina is forced to accompany her on the way to church, and she is seated by the pavement in all weather because she is prohibit by authorities to set foot in. Also, Lina is prohibited from bathing in the river as what she usually does and must cultivate by herself without anyone's accompaniment, but Lina shows no sign of dissatisfaction or rebellion even when all the others find horror in the house, because she infuses compliance and inferiority deep in her consciousness, and her seek for identity is impeded by this.

Furthermore, Lina's craving for family hinders her breaking away from Other. As the title of the novel

suggests, Jacob's mercy constructs the seemingly steady but actually a makeshift and frail family. A child suffering the loss of her family and her homogeneous people, Lina desire for the completeness of this family. Thereafter she works hard on the land, midwives Rebekka's children, plays the role of Florens' mother, regarding her as the replacement of dead Patrician, and in any event, she wants to protect her, prevent her from any forces of wickedness like Sorrow [29] who is regarded as a curse of the family and the blacksmith who Florens has flipped at the first sight. When her attempts fails: the family collapses because the Jacob's death, Rebekka's variation, Sorrow's giving birth of a baby and Florens' self-recognition as an independent woman, Lina clearly remains in despair. She continues to do her work carefully and calmly as usual, but she is "simmering, like green apples trembling in boiling water too long, the skin near to breaking, needing quick removal, cooling before mashes into sauce". [30]. Her identity, supposedly been regained after participating in the chores of Jacob's family, has lost since the moment that the family starts to corrupt, and her identification fails to complete.

#### **4.2. Completeness**

Sorrow, like her name given by the sawyer's wife, experiences a sorrowful childhood and teenage years and she reacts all of her traumatizing experiences with little sensation. She lives in her own world where exist only herself and Twin. There are only three times that Sorrow speaks to others in Chapter 8, a chapter depicting her as the central character. The first time is when she is summoned to see Sir and tells him her age, signifying her desire for the better treatment; the second is when she is informed by Lina that she is pregnant and she is excited, revealing her desire for a child, a symbol of family which can complete her as a woman; and the third is when she is lying on the hammock, asking the blacksmith whether she will die or not, which is a emblem of her wish to live. But most of the time, Sorrow's observation and cognition towards her surroundings is expressed by Twin, her partner, her personified self with acuteness which originally belongs to herself, and her longings for existence, family and her complete self are covered under her numbness.

However, as time goes by and she witnesses more things, Sorrow's desire as a woman and envision are gradually inspired. First of all, she thinks that no one has kissed her after catching sight of the scene that Florens is kissed by the blacksmith. This thought shows that she yearns for love from others and her feminine recognition has been awaken initially. Second, after her second pregnancy, she observes Lina's conversation with the blacksmith about Florens, and "suffused with the deep insight mothers-to-be claim", she finds that "Lina is simply wary of anyone who came between

herself and Florens" [31]. Things has changed because in the past only Twin has this kind of deep insight. Twin has appeared less and less since that moment. She is even absent from Sorrow's second giving birth and vanishes after the birth of Sorrow's daughter, representing the recurrence of Sorrow's real self even if she is not treated mercifully by Rebekka and still refused by the superior race and classes. Unlike Lina, Sorrow declines to be subordinate to Rebekka and arranges an escapement with Florens. She has become an independent woman. What is also worth to notice is that she changes her name and never calls herself Sorrow again. Her words to her daughter that "'I am your mother,' she said. 'My name is Complete.'" [32] is the statement of the completeness of her identity.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

This paper, based on Homi Bhabha's post-colonial theory, analyses the identical loss and identification of Lina and Sorrow in Toni Morrison's novel *A Mercy*. The traumatic experiences, forcing them to become Other, eventually result in their loss of identities [33]. This is the destiny of all the inferior people in colonies, and they are destined to seek the recreation of their identities which is considered by Homi Bhabha to be hybrid, by regaining the authority to get rid of Other in either conscious or unconscious way. Lina and Sorrow can be regarded as the representation of them.

Lina represents those striving for identities with consciousness and her endeavour begins when she is sold to Sir Jacob's farm. Because of Sir Jacob's and Mistress Rebekka's mercy, it is a tendency for servants to forget their actual status and deem themselves as a member in the family, hence Lina apparently breaks away from the status of Other in family and she is craving for eternal completeness of the family, which can be acknowledged by her repugnance for Sorrow who is a "curse" of the family deemed by Lina, and her possessiveness of Florens and apprehension on the blacksmith's approach as well as Florens infatuation with him. It obvious that though consciously, Lina acclaims her ownership and pursue the belongingness by others. Undoubtedly, it is impossible to control others' will and destiny, so when the family borders on collapsing, Lina falls into the state of despair while doing her work with apparent calm. Lina's pursuit of identification ends with her failure.

In terms of Sorrow, before her second pregnancy, Sorrow seems unconscious and numb because she transforms her sense and envisage to her "identical self" Twin, but her creation of Twin is the acclaim of ownership of a faithful friend, thus there is no confusion that Twin appears decreasingly and finally vanishes after the birth of her daughter when the whole farm is in a mess and Lina has little intention of interfering her procreation. Since then Sorrow has become absolutely

conscious and independent. She changes her name to Complete and plans to escape from the destroyed farm in Florens' last narration, and she complete the process of rebuilding a hybrid identity because she manages to reevaluate her identity and not to be dominated by the superior, but herself.

Though both Lina and Sorrow search for the reconstruction of identities in the similar way. By comparing and contrasting Lina and Sorrow's experiences and their course of pursuing identities, their results differ. Therefore, it can be concluded that identification can never be achieved by pinning one's hope on others and thorough obedience. It is a necessity for females to keep an independent sense and never be degraded and enslaved by themselves.

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