

Collective Trauma, Conditioned Identities, and the Struggle to Healing and Reconciliation in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*



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ABSTRACT: As an outstanding African-American author who has got fame for her tragic novel, Toni Morrison is well-known for her depiction of black experiences as slaves. She is an expert in portraying characters who are dealing with the after-effect of their ancestral African-American traumas. Morrison's community is weighed down by the heavy burden of rejection, oppression, racism, and white dominance, so they are burdened with a wounded psyche and body, therefore experiencing painful memories of their past. This paper focuses on Morrison's one of the major novels, *Song of Solomon* which highlights traumatic events that the African American community is faced with. This paper aims to study the collective trauma of these black characters who struggle with major repressive pressures within trauma theory; it further intends to analyze how this trauma condition's the characters' life and focus on their difficulty dealing with the problems. Also, it intends to deal with the issue of recovery and reconciliation among these black communities, whether they could pass the stages of recovery or rather are conditioned by the heavyweight of their trauma.

KEYWORDS: collective or communal trauma, memory, healing or recovery, identity formation, subjectivity.

INTRODUCTION

Collective trauma, in its basic meaning, refers to psychological reactions to traumatic events which stream on through generations as well as history. It represents the collective memory of bitter and uncompensated incidents that hover over the psyche of a specific group of people which is then transferred to the next generation. Victims of trauma are constantly haunted by the after-effect of their traumatic event, being conditioned consequently. Traumatic events witnessed by society result in collective sentiments, shifting that society's identity and cultural actions. Representative collective traumas include The Holocaust, the Armenian genocide, Slavery in the United States, the Nanjing Massacre, the Atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Trail of Tears, the Great Irish Famine, the Attack on Pearl Harbor, the MS Estonia in Sweden, the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States, the Halabja chemical attack, and the current COVID-19 pandemic.

The collective trauma inflicted by systems affects a group of people of any size and stirs up collective sentiment, often resulting in a shift in that society's culture and mass actions for generations to come. Trans-generational trauma of large scales such as the trail of tears, and slavery can be potent fuel for the eruption of violence and frustration in present communities. Collective or communal trauma constantly engages a struggle for meaning and identity. The victims of trauma are grappling with an event that involves identifying the "nature of the pain, the nature of the victim and the attribution of responsibility" (Alexander *et al.* 2001). Alexander calls this the "trauma process," when the collective experience of massive disruption and social crises becomes a crisis of meaning and identity.

As Ron Eyerman in his *Cultural Trauma, Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* points out, "from the perspective of cultural trauma, it could be the case that black men are more affected, traumatized, by the end of reconstruction and the re-establishment of segregation in the South and reaction in the North" (74). For Eyerman, a trauma in question is slavery, not as an institution or as a personal experience, but a collective memory; a pervasive remembrance that grounded a people's sense of itself (1). Eyerman goes further to state that cultural trauma reflects the problems of black Americans being defined as other by the white culture and their exclusion from that culture (cited in Schreiber 3-4). Such exclusion and separation lead to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, something that causes a need to re-evaluate the past and its meaning when it comes to identity formation (Schreiber 4). Julian Wolfreys in his critical work *Introducing Criticism at the Twenty-first Century*, has a challenging view towards trauma. He states:

Trauma might be said to be a ghost. Given that 'the essential character of traumatism is best described as a 'non-symbolizable wound' (Ronell, 1994, 327), to read trauma is to register the sign of a secondary experience and recognition of the return of something spectral in the form of a trace or sign signifying, but not representing directly, that something, having occurred, has left

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its mark, an inscription of sorts on the subject's unconscious, and one which, moreover, can and does return repeatedly, though never like the experience as such. (133)

Seemingly, Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* deals with collective trauma. Focusing on historical collective trauma Toni Morrison attempts to reconceptualize the traumatic events through reliance on narrative elements such as characters, actions, places, and time to redefine the history and the collective memory in a reconstructive process. Toni Morrison's works constitute texts in which through the characters' interaction with the color, and memory the trauma is brought out to a societal level which is crucial for personal and communal healing for preventing traumatic identities to transfer into future generations. Collective trauma can be alleviated through cohesive and collective efforts such as recognition, remembrance, solidarity, communal therapy, and massive cooperation and this is what Morrison does in *Song of Solomon*. As Judith Herman discusses in her major work, *Trauma and Recovery*, the core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation. In her renewed connections with other people, the survivor re-creates the psychological faculties that were damaged or deformed by the traumatic experience. These faculties include the basic capacities for trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy. (95)

Thomas Hubl in his contemporary work, *Healing Collective Trauma*, which in detail describes a process for integrating intergenerational & cultural wounds argues that when we do healing, we safely unpack the unconscious luggage we carry. We "defrag" to bring about greater integration. Healing permits us to travel lighter and brighter, to be more fully and deeply present to the moment, as less of the past splits our energy and attention and weighs us down. We begin to feel a sense of deeper presence, of "here-ness," and to see and sense our world with greater clarity and precision. (4)

The present study gains significance as the findings can shed more light on the studies on African American literature in general and the work of Toni Morrison in particular opening new windows to the analysis of her *Song of Solomon* within contemporary literary theories. The study also elaborates the notion of communal trauma in American society and its connection to race and ethnicity and Morrison's attempts to create narrations of healing. Handling collective trauma through narratives such as *Song of Solomon* brings out the capacity in communities of color facing violence and social injustice to develop trauma-informed, restorative practices in overcoming communal pain which is very important for communal accountability, responsibility, transformative healing, and social peace. This story is an attempt to restore the bruised identities that have shied away from the righteous positions for generations. "Communal identity is an integral part necessary not only for the transcendence of society or for a single private self, but also to reverse the shame and stigma which the system of slavery has inflicted on the African Americans" (Shilaja).

DISCUSSION

Song of Solomon is a 1977 novel by American author Toni Morrison. This novel has been awarded the National Books Critics Award; it is one of the outstanding novels of Toni Morrison among others. Generally, this novel focuses on the African-American experience in the United States over four generations, and in particular, it narrates the life of Macon Milkman Dead III, an African-American living in Michigan. The novel represents the legends and folklore that tell the story of slaves who fled to Africa. It also has portrayed the Great Migration, the movement of Southern blacks into other parts of the country, which took place following the Civil War. This novel represents America in the 1960s and highlights the black community undergoing racism, hate, and intolerance.

This novel revolves around the black community in America and the themes like love, loss, friendship, racism, past and memory, and the search for identity. Toni Morrison intentionally has left some parts of this novel untold so that she could involve her readers with its creation. As she says herself, "I want the reader to respond on the same plane as an illiterate or preliterate reader would. I want to subvert his traditional comfort so that he may experience an unorthodox one: that of being in the company of his solitary imagination". Toni Morrison first and foremost, is an author of black women suffering under racism and oppression. In this novel, she sticks to a male voice and relies on a black male who undergoes difficult life in a racist society. This novel has raised her to a place of honor and has awarded her with the Nobel Prize in literature in 1993; this was a turning point in her life because she has been the first black author presented by such an honor and award.

Song of Solomon focuses on cultural identity; it examines African-Americans that have escaped slavery by returning to Africa, their homeland. This novel highlights the life of Macon Milkman Dead, who mirrors all his black community. He is a young man who has been alienated in society; he goes in search of an identity for himself because he is estranged and distanced from his family and in particular from his community, therefore, lacks a historical past. Milkman is mentally enslaved and spiritually dead, but with the help of his eccentric aunt, Pilate, and his best friend, Guitar Bains, he goes on a physical and spiritual journey, therefore he can find a way to return to his past and realize his self-worth.

Macon Milkman has got a nickname, Momma's boy because he was breastfed with her mother during her childhood, while he contrasts his close friend, Guitar, who is raised motherless and fatherless. Macon Milkman Dead III is named after his father and

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grandfather. His grandfather has been wrongly named by an administrative error when he had to register subsequently to the end of slavery. Milkman's mother who is the daughter of the only black doctor in the town has been reputed for idolizing her father. After his death, she has been witnessed by her husband while she was lying in bed beside her father's dead body, sucking his fingers. Later Ruth tells her son that she was kissing the only part of him that remained unaffected by the illness from which he died. Milkman gets involved in two conflicting stories from her mother and father which makes it hard for him and causes consequent problems for Milkman in getting to the truths in his life. Macon as a result grows aggressive toward her mother; he accuses her mother of having incest with her father and then punches his father in the face, which represents his lack of trust in his family.

It could be argued that all the characters in this novel are obsessed with their memories; in other words, they are haunted by their past. It is best described in the course of the novel where Morrison begins from the middle of the novel and then goes back in history so that she can represent how the characters have reached the point that they are settled in. In the initial chapter, Macon is walking in town while he is preoccupied with his painful past experiences about his father and his sister. This memory keeps streaming inside which refers to his trauma. These traumatic past experiences are so much intense that Macon cannot escape them; instead, he is entrapped in a spectral presence that constantly haunts him. As Wolfreys states:

Something of the past always remains, if only as a haunting presence or symptomatic revenant. The traumatic is that, therefore, which is phantomatic or phantasmatic... The subject of trauma is rendered immobile, unable to move beyond the haunting effects left by trauma, and can only experience in a damaging, repetitive fashion, the disjunctive specters remain of what is non-symbolizable. (134)

Macon's memory is filled with his spectral past which blurs the distinction with his present. Morrison skillfully represents these memories from most of her characters' perspectives and represents their recurrent memory is present. The course of the novel consists of fragmented memories of different characters which disturbs the order and sequence of the novel, though at times she narrates some chapters in chronological order. Morrison repetitively gives flashbacks that highlight the past of the black community. These characters' minds are affected and fragmented by their past experiences. "The traumatized person may have multiple and fragmented encapsulations of the trauma, a situation which tends to push his or her dreams and fantasies toward a more disorganized state" (Appelbaum et al. 205). It is then noted that "The traumatic recollection can appear waking as intrusive thoughts, illusions or hallucinations, or in the dream state, as horrifying nightmares" (Appelbaum et al. 226).

In this novel, memory is a prison for Macon, since he is entrapped in his memory which distances him from his present life experiences. This memory has full authority over Macon. When for example Macon feels terrible, he remembers an experience that makes her fill with joy, and in another part, his present aggression is affected by his past terrible memory. In another part of the story, when Milkman has a voyage, he recurses to his father and ancestor's memory. These memories give him a loose history of his family which is somehow alien for him. When he refers to his family memory, he creates a history of his past generation and looks upon it; this memory represents his great-grandfather's flawing back to Africa and his grandfather remaining back and marrying an Indian woman. This fragmented story brings Milkman joy and makes him proud of his great-grandfather; this ignites in him an interest to travel across the country telling everyone about it.

Milkman subjectively interprets others' memories; he believes them the way he likes to believe them, so he ignores the memories that don't sound good for him. He believes that Solomon flew back to Africa, while he ignores his grandfather being a slave. Milkman's memory is somehow challenging; it is a collective memory of his ancestor's past while it is transformed a bit by Milkman. Moreover, Milkman changes his collective memory to something satisfying and empowering, though in some parts it insists to be present and forces itself to Milkman's memory the way that it has been passed to his grandfathers.

Song of Solomon stores in itself evidence and memories which linger from the past. There is a woman who is 200 years old; this woman has stayed alive and goes back to Milkman's grandfather's time. There is a father who has been raised from the dead, who plays the role of a spectral presence in this novel. These metaphorical depictions represent and highlight the past which hovers over this black community that has a past of slavery.

The history of the black community remains open; the woman still lingers on and has remained from the past, besides, the old man who has risen from the dead refers to the spectral presence of this story that haunts the black community. Milkman and his counterparts are haunted by the history of their fathers and grandfathers which makes their life conditioned and difficult. These characters are haunted by a memory that repeats itself and which causes pain and suffering, which therefore changes the course of their life and action. The narration of *Song of Solomon* is divided into two major parts; part one includes chapters one to nine which is set in an unnamed town of Michigan which is focused on Milkman's birth to the age of thirty-two years old, and the second part comprises chapters ten to fifteen which begins with Milkman's arrival in Pennsylvania, where his ancestors had lived. This novel initially refers to Milkman's early age and focuses on his aimless life; he is caught up between his father's materialistic lifestyle and Pilate's traditional values.

The novel is written in flashback which intends to bring the past to the surface and highlight its importance in the character's ongoing action and life. Milkman's father, Macon, and his aunt, Pilate ran away after their father was murdered while he wanted to protect his land. They reach the unnamed town in Michigan and keep up their life. Macon refuses to contact her sister because he

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thinks she is a social embarrassment. When Milkman leaves his town in search of a family gold and inheritance that he thinks his aunt has hidden, he goes to Danville which makes him more involved with his ancestral past. Meanwhile, Milkman cannot find Pilate's gold but instead is haunted by mysterious stories surrounding his ancestors. Therefore, he goes in search of his family history in the fictional town of Shalimar, Virginia, where he meets his father's people and discovers his true meaning of life and the hidden inheritance. Hwangbo in his essay argues that:

Recent studies of the socio-political dimension of trauma have proved that trauma can result not only from a single devastating event but also from the accumulated effects of a series of events or chronic life conditions. Thus, especially in connection with issues of social oppression and power dynamics, trauma studies recently have begun to pay increasing attention to the factors of duration and accumulation of traumatic experiences to properly understand the history of violence and abuse committed by a dominant society against groups of disenfranchised and disempowered people and to examine the full psychological impact of trauma on these people's lives.

The black community in this novel has a dark past that is accumulated in the time of slavery. As Milkman goes deeper into history he becomes aware of the suffering and the heavy burden that his ancestors underwent in their time; they are the victims of oppression and suppression and white dominance. These blacks are affected by their past which remains in their present situation and also passes to the next generation. Throughout the story, the past generation's life is focused so that it can best represent the abuse and violence that is inflicted towards these African-American. Though Milkman's father and aunt have escaped their traumatic situation, they are uncontrollably haunted by it unwillingly. As many critics have noted, "a central theme running through Morrison's novel is speaking the unspeakable and giving a voice to those whom Morrison calls discredited people whose narratives have been silenced by both the weight of their unbearable traumatic experiences of loss and the systematic denial of those experiences by a white hegemonic society" (qtd. in Hwangbo 25).

According to Cathy Caruth: "The traumatized carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess" (5). This is the case with Milkman and other young black generations who bear a heavy burden that doesn't belong to themselves but their past. These characters are unconsciously traumatized which is impossible to escape. Tyson states that "the colonial subjects often are described as having a double consciousness, a term first established by W. E. B. Du Bois in 1903, meaning that they perceive the world as being divided between two cultures: "that of the colonizer and that of the indigenous community" (421). This "double consciousness" produces an unstable sense of self, a feeling of being caught between cultures, and a sense of not belonging to any of them (Tyson 421). Milkman has a double consciousness which makes him feel unstable and which causes his sense of un-homeliness and not belonging to his history. Throughout the novel he struggles to seek an identity and self; first he cannot belong to his father's belonging and self, then he goes further to find out more about his history and people; his lack of stability makes him escape his home.

Milkman suffers a cultural and communal trauma because of his lack of displacement among his community. He cannot feel at home which is experienced and felt by colonized African-Americans who are robbed of their home and belonging in their homeland. As Ron Eyerman states, "cultural trauma reflects the problems of black Americans being defined as other by the white culture and their exclusion from that culture" (cited in Schreiber 3-4). Milkman's grandfathers have been excluded from their homeland which led to their complete loss. They fought for their homeland but were just ended up being slaves and prisoners under the hand of the whites. This black community's past recalls their loss of self and meaning which needs to be reevaluated, so this history resurfaces to be completed.

According to Jeffrey Alexander et al., "cultural trauma always engages a meaning struggle for the victim, who must identify the nature of the pain when dealing with a traumatic event. This trauma process is expressed as "a crisis of meaning and identity" (cited in Eyerman and Seidman 3). Cultural trauma involves finding alternative strategies and voices and needs the past to be reinterpreted so that it could reconcile present and future. It involves "an openness to new forms of identification and the attempt to leave others behind" (Eyerman and Seidman 4). So, to recover from trauma, it is necessary to re-evaluate the past into the present. This is just possible in making the past present. In *Song of Solomon*, the history is present; the characters are involved in their history and are involved in flashbacks which make their memory haunted with the past; the distinction between past and present is blurred in this novel which makes the charge of past very highlighting. This is intended by Morrison, who tries to recover her past generations to survive their traumatic past. This could be somehow achievable in Milkman's life who somehow tries to change his collective memory and struggles to give a new meaning to his life.

In *Song of Solomon*, characters are witness to racism, inequality, and dominance which has affected the lives of all the black African-Americans and their later generation. In this novel the society is divided by racial discrimination, so the blacks are suffering a trauma that has haunted them for four generations; racism and slavery has taken root in their life and has wounded their psyche so much that they are forced to live with it constantly. These blacks are strangers in their society, so there are robbed of their identity and self which makes their suffering more. As Sidney S. Furst claims, self-esteem and the feeling of belonging to a family or community protect against trauma (cited in Schreiber 9). Therefore, trauma has a huge effect on the development of self and identity.

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As Neil J. Smelser says; "trauma is a threat to some part of their identity and can arouse negative effects to the victims" (40). It is understandable why the black young generation in this novel doesn't have a clear sense of their identity so they seek to acquire an identity that is impossible with their traumatic past; these characters neither can stick to the history of their past generation nor easily can get an identity. According to Wanru, "All the obvious symptoms of trauma can bring about a great impact on the self-esteem and self-perception of the individual, therefore, that disrupts the formation of a relatively complete identity and leads to the individual's identity crisis" (109). This past trauma has shattered the sense of connection of the young black community such as Milkman, Ruth, Macon, and the others with their ancestors and people; their self and subjectivity are violated which is very crucial in their relationship with others as well as with their parents. Consequently, such trauma has caused a distorted identity; the characters are facing an identity crisis, so they are victimized by their losses and distortion.

In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison focuses on a black young boy who undergoes the journey of identity; he goes through a difficult situation in his community and white society and he struggles to find an identity and self for himself. Milkman as a black boy strives to understand the meaning of community and blackness which urges him to forge his being in the context of collective identity. Furthermore, he deals with the concept of individual identity, forged out of the personal journey. In his journey, Milkman has difficulty coming to terms with the expectations of the black community since he is filled with a gap inside which keeps up haunting him. Milkman is in search of individual and collective identity through the course of the novel. Milkman feels loss and thinks that something is wrong with him:

Milkman stood before his mirror and glanced, in the low light of the wall lamp, at his reflection. He was, as usual, unimpressed with what he saw. He had a fine enough face. Eyes women complimented him on, a firm jawline, splendid teeth. Taken apart it looked all right. Even better than all right. But it lacked coherence, a coming together of the features into a total self. It was all very tentative, the way he looked, like a man peeping around a corner of someplace he, is not supposed to be, trying to make up his mind whether to go forward or to turn back. The decision he made would be extremely important, but how he made the decision would be careless, haphazard, and uninformed. (70)

Milkman is constantly looking behind which represents his obsession with the past. His obsession with the past is metaphorically portrayed by his looking back and behind. When he's riding in the family hearse as a four-year-old, he's looking at the view behind him. When he meets Hagar, he falls in love with her back; this highlights his preoccupation with something rest behind, which refers to the past. In the street Milkman prefers to go in the opposite direction of everyone; he intends to distance himself from everybody as well as size himself up. Milkman is at sea when he ponders on the things that he cares for and believes in; he doesn't know what he wants and where he wants to reach. "As the stars made themselves visible, Milkman tried to figure what was true and what part of what was true had anything to do with him" (75). Milkman is lost at sea in a boat. He strives to find out about everything especially about himself. In this lost sea which refers to the community that has isolated Milkman, he tries to reach the shore and feel safe. Milkman in his society is left alone, with no help and support, even his parents. Despite having friends, he is left alone, growing distant, while he tries to cultivate his own identity and make a place in the world.

Moreover, Milkman is a typical black character that undergoes endless difficulties and hardship. He like his parents lives by white values because as a black he is rejected and suppressed, so he is forced to go for a change. Milkman prefers to follow his father's materialistic attitude towards life, favors a money-oriented life and a wealthy white-dominated lifestyle. Milkman's father's materialistic life is an unbearable and disgusting matter for the local people. Mrs. Bains, Guitar's grandmother's comments on Milkman's father and says "A nigger in business is a terrible thing to see. A terrible, terrible thing to see" (22). This highlights how Milkman's father by starting a business, has forgotten his blackness and attitude towards his people; after starting his business he rejects helping and sympathizing with an old woman who has too much burden on her shoulders.

Milkman is a colored man but treats like a white and acts like a white. Milkman is distanced from his root and black identity, so he suffers a distorted identity. "Milkman, as the local people in the South think, is as black as them but has the heart of the white men" (Morrison 266). For Milkman it is incomprehensible how Guitar behaves as a radical person towards racism. Milkman though has black friends and sticks to them, but he cannot sympathize with the story of blacks suffering tragic moments. Milkman has acquired a white attitude towards black people and their suffering which makes him senseless towards them. For Milkman "the racial problems that consumed Guitar were the most boring of all" (107). He is blind to racism and discrimination unlike Guitar; Milkman is unconsciously identified with white society and values. "He was bored. Everybody bored him. The city was boring... He wondered what they would do if they didn't have the black and white problems to talk about. Who would they be if they couldn't describe the insults, violence, and oppression that their lives made up of?" (108).

Milkman's favoritism of white values has been inherited from his father, so he has constructed a white identity, which is represented from his "white-capitalist pursuit of materials and his white-identified position" (Wanru 112). Milkman is a black man with a white identity. He has unconsciously robbed himself and his identity as a black and suffers cultural trauma which makes him rootless and unhomeliness. "Home, or place, is a fundamental aspect of identity" (Gaspar 103). Milkman is estranged and alienated from his home, so he is distanced from the site of his communal identity. According to Rico; "Home is not only a geographical location, but also a symbolical site working through memory and desire, a mystical site of communal identity" (63). Milkman has a past of slavery

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where his grandfathers have been sold to America, therefore they have lost their homes. As Wanru notes; "The traumatic memories of slavery and racial discrimination have caused them to feel an acute sense of oppression in their native land. Though they were born in this land and know it intimately, they always feel depressed and alienated. A sense of rootlessness has haunted them from generation to generation; they try to get rid of it but feel helpless" (113).

Moreover, Milkman despite his white favor and identity, cannot integrate into white society, he is excluded from white because of colored skin, and because for white people, he is one of the slaves and the generation of the inferior groups in society. Therefore, Milkman communicates exclusively with his black friends, as well he is marginalized by the blacks, whatsoever. In the school: "White and black thought he was a riot and went out of their way to laugh at him and see to it that he had no lunch to eat, nor any crayons, nor ever got through the line to the toilet or the water foundation... he was never asked to play those circle games, those singing games, to join in anything" (264).

In his adulthood, Milkman was also ignored and excluded, so he suffered complete isolation. When Guitar takes Milkman to Feather's pool hall, he refuses to let Milkman in; he is disgusted and rejected by black people most than he has been rejected by white society. Milkman and his father are abhorred for their white values. When he took a journey to the south, the local people looked "with hatred at the city Negro" and no one wanted to talk to "the Negro with the Virginia license and the northern accent" (266). Milkman has always been the target of exclusion and rejection. Wherever he goes, Milkman is an outsider, therefore, Milkman is inflicted the feeling of torment and suffering by his society and people. Milkman's "sense of rootlessness originates from his loss of black identity, the loss of past, his name, and black heritage" (Wanru 113).

Milkman in this novel is a northern outsider; he is alien to the rules of engagement in the black community. Milkman is not familiar with proper behavior towards his counterparts and the black community. He has entered a "completely new order of things" (10). There is a conflict between Milkman and his people which arises from a failure to assess the implications of his presence. He is not familiar with black life and values which makes him a stranger in his encounter with blacks. When he comments that there are "pretty women" (267) in Shalimar, it leads to the rhetorical game of playing-the-dozens between him and the men assembled in Solomon's store: "Milkman sensed that he'd struck a wrong note. About the women, he guessed. What kind of place was this where a man couldn't even ask for a woman?" (268). Milkman has got accustomed to the white manner, so he behaves like them, and forgets that he is black, that a black has no right to ask for a woman; slaves are the property of the white society and the whites the owners. Just a bourgeois can ask for something.

In the course of the novel, when Guitar and Milkman order a soft-boiled egg, their discussion changes towards the issue of race skin color, and colonization. They talk about racism in France and other countries which referred to their racist America and their behavior towards the black community. For Guitar, skin color determines he can or cannot be in life; that skin color can either limit or broaden his freedom. During their discussion, they quarrel over Negro problems and racism:

No, you can't be any egg, nigger. Now, you can be a crow if you wanna. Or a big baboon. But not an egg. Eggs are difficult, complicated. Fragile too. And white. They got brown eggs. Miscegenation. Besides, don't nobody want 'em. French people do. In France, yeah. But not in the Congo. Frenchman in the Congo won't touch a brown egg. Scared of 'em. Might do something to his skin. Like the sun. (116)

Guitar represents the real fact and life of the black community which doesn't seem approving for Milkman. He highlights the degree that whites have been suppressed. In comparing themselves to something, Guitar just gives tea in Milkman's hand and opts for an egg for himself so that he shows the difference in their color and says Milkman that he cannot be an egg because he is a colored white egg is white at the response of whom Milkman gets annoyed and asks him if he is one of those racists that cares for their color skin. Milkman and his alike are witnesses to racist discrimination throughout their life which makes them suffer and feel shame.

All black people have to bear the shame that is inflicted on them. When Milkman meets Susan Byrd and Grace Long and asks about his grandmother. While he asks for her, he is told: "Because...the woman he's looking for was his grandmother, and if she's his grandmother she'd be too dark to..." Susan Byrd hesitated. "Well, too dark to pass. Wouldn't she?" She flushed a little" (292). Milkman's Grandmother couldn't pass and escape the violence in America; she couldn't escape and return to her home in Africa. These representations refer to the fact that the past generation had to tolerate suffering under white dominance and they were denied their heritage and right to live freely.

As he goes deeper into history, Milkman learns more about his ancestors and the way they had lived and suffered, which gradually makes him change his white favoritism. When he learns about his grandfather, he becomes shot that his grandpa had been wrongly murdered but the person that was the murderer wasn't prosecuted because of his white color. This was the fact in his fathers' time in Pennsylvania, which is highlighted in Reverend Cooper telling this story of getting trampled by horses when attempting to march in an Armistice Day parade. Reverend Cooper's wound is evidence of both the irony of this experience and of the hypocrisy of American society:

The reverend turned around and showed Milkman the knot the size of a walnut that grew behind his ear. "Some of us went to Philly to try and march in an Armistice Day parade. This was after the First World War. We were invited and had a permit, but the people, the white people, didn't like us being there. They started a fracas. You know, throwing rocks and calling us names. They didn't care

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anything 'bout the uniform. Anyway, some police on horseback came – to quiet them down, we thought. They ran us down. Right under their horses. This here's what a hoof can do. Ain't that something?" (233)

The reverend's wound refers to the wound that is carved in his psyche as well, which lingers on and keeps up reminding him of his past which is as alive as if he is experiencing it at the time. This black community has been the target of abuse, violence, and discrimination for their skin color which makes them the other and different, so the white community has treated them and continues to treat them like animals and inferiors. So, they have to suffer endlessly which hovers over them and their next generation, as well. As Wanru emphasizes, "although slavery has been abolished many years ago, its impact is permanent on the black people. And racism, still existing in the white dominant culture, continues to influence the life of African Americans. As marginalized groups, African-Americans have to bear the traumatic memory of slavery and racism" (111).

Milkman is not traumatized and is not witness to suffering, but he is haunted by the trauma of his ancestors and therefore is affected by traumatic symptoms, which is passed on to him through his parents; he is suffering the trauma that belongs to his parents which are represented in his identity crisis. Milkman suffers a sense of rootlessness the way his father has suffered and his grandpas as well. Milkman has lost his sense of self and identity; he has to go on a journey so that he could find a self. While he looks at the mirror, he ponders on himself and thinks that his body lacks "coherence, a coming together of the features into a total self" (69). Milkman's traumatic suffering dates back to his history. This trauma plays a spectral role in his life, bringing to the surface what is frozen in time and confronting Milkman in his life and surrounding. Furthermore, Milkman's life is barren with a traditional and cultural element that belongs to his people. He has lost his connection with what is his. Milkman is alien to his traditional heritage and belonging which by his going for the gold that is hidden by Pilate is found out and approved later.

Moreover, Milkman doesn't sing folksongs like those in Pilate's, his aunts' family. He is indifferent towards the flying legends of Smith, though his birth was accompanied by it. He doesn't believe in supernatural occurrences which he encounters as well in his life and connection with his people and which is a historical heritage of his ancestors. Pilate lacks a navel which proves this fact in this story. These black communities believe in ghosts and supernatural elements which is highlighted by Pilate's talking with her father's spectral ghost. This ghost likewise represents the spectral presence of the past that remains to live. This ghost comforts Pilate when she is depressed which seems incomprehensible and unbelievable for Milkman. Once he laughs at Freddie when Freddie talks about the ghosts with him. Even he "couldn't stop the laughter, and the more he tried, the more it came" (110). This fact shows how Milkman is ignorant of his past and how he has lost the connection with his ancestors. "The symptoms of trans-generational transmission of racial trauma pass on to Milkman and lead to his psychological trauma, thus his identity crisis" (Wanru 114).

Milkman is suffering a cultural trauma that keeps up haunting him. Milkman is clouded by his ancestor's collective memory that has been witness to and victim of the time of slavery, the target of violence and oppression, and the referees of the after-effect of suffering that lived on as a wound in their psyche. Though Milkman doesn't approve, and in some parts rejects his memory, he is unconsciously affected and conditioned by this collective memory, so he is suffering a loss of identity and meaning which makes life difficult and challenging for him.

The post-colonial critic Homi Bhabha suggests that "remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (63). First, Milkman remembers his past the way he desires; the memory that seems painful for him is replaced by another memory that feels him with desire, later his sweet memory is replaced by a bitter one. Milkman despite his attempts has no control over his memory that belongs to his past though against all his wishes he strives to change them. Milkman is somehow successful in resisting some facts, but he cannot believe them otherwise, though he attempted to believe at first sight. When Milkman starts his journey, he is prone to his past heritage, a history that seems not approving and not interesting to hear. He happens to encounter people that have information over his fathers and grandfathers and gets information over their suffering which unconsciously haunts Milkman as well. Day by day, Milkman's memory puzzle is put together by those that he encounters. As Tally in his *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison* discusses:

For Milkman history, identity, and spiritual healing are linked to the power of naming and the verbal facility to impress his experience on the language. This he ultimately achieves through initiation into the discursive formulas of the African American vernacular. Milkman must acquire the vernacular speech and culture of black urban males to be spiritually reborn and "discursively" reinserted into a history from which he and his family have been estranged. The narrative structure of Milkman Dead's quest depicts a series of initiatory phases of reappropriation of folk knowledge through encounters with black culture-bearers who actively engage in the production of their meaning. (26).

Morrison in the novel sticks to the black world and language and sticks to black culture by which she intends to affirm the role of African American language and culture to her literary art: "I wanted to write literature that was irrevocably, indisputably Black, not because its characters were, or because I was, but because it took as its creative task and sought as to its credentials those recognized and verifiable principles of Black art" (2). Milkman goes for the quest of the historical and cultural identity that completes his self and identity so he can experience spiritual healing and get out of his cultural trauma. He struggles to overcome his trauma, and it is

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possible just in his encountering with black culture, getting familiar with the black language, and finding out about his past which is a heritage left from his ancestors.

Milkman is not the only character that suffers trauma, but it haunts Pilate as well; she is a character that has been witness to trauma and who is suffering its effect. First, Pilate has been forced to escape slavery and return to where she calls home, then she is rejected as the other by her brother and the society as well. Pilate is left alone and bears trauma individually; she is haunted by the spectral presence of his father which refers to his past suffering. Pilate has to deal with her cultural trauma, cultural identity, and heritage; she has to end her feeling of double-consciousness and un-homeliness and go back into her roots. In her study *Race, Trauma, and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber says that Morrison's characters "struggle for self-definition free of racial encumbrances and they often rely on different aspects of 'home' to survive their racial trauma" (1). Pilate could be remarked as a character that struggles for her self-definition and strives to survive racial trauma.

Being African-American and an ex-slave, Pilate suffers trauma that not only belongs to her but also dates back to all black people in America in the aftermath of slavery. As a child, Pilate has suffered trauma, because she has been a witness to her father's murder by the white men. She was forced to run away with her brother because they were witnesses to how their father has ended in a tragic death, he was shot sitting on a fence refusing to leave his property. Additionally, Pilate lacks a mother; she has never known her mother which is a major loss in a child's life and self-development. She has lost her mother at her birth. Pilate's trauma is intensified by being regarded as an outsider by her brother and the community that she intended to interact with.

Furthermore, Pilate suffers traumatic loss not only because of her mother's loss and later by her father's murder, but also because she loses her brother's company as well as the community that she feels she belongs to and regards her people therefore she has lost her connection with her ancestral past and her cultural identity. However, she could regain her contact and establish a new relationship with them which is represented in her contact with her father's spectral ghost that has come from the past. Pilate interacts with her father's ghost who gives her advice and lets her claim her ancestral past and cultural identity. After her father dies, Pilate and her brother hide in the woods so that they could escape the white gaze. Meanwhile, their father appears who helps them to find shelter in a cave: "showing them what to do and where to go" (169). Afterward, once Pilate tells her sister-in-law that her father is relied on because he provides her with what she needs: "He's helpful to me, really helpful. Tells me things I need to know. ... It's a good feelin to know he's around. I tell you he's a person I can always rely on. I tell you something else. He's the only one" (141).

Pilate affirms that her father's ghost is the source of empowerment because he helps her connect with her ancestral past. When Pilate says that her father is the only person she relies on, she refers to her approving and sticking to her cultural identity. Pilate attaches herself to her African root through her old folk song and her supernatural powers as well she rejects the modern and materialistic style of American life, unlike her brother. She attaches the earring to her body which represents her coping with her cultural trauma and affirming her cultural identity. According to Alexander et al., a trauma victim must identify the nature of the pain when dealing with the identity crisis due to a traumatic event (cited in Eyerman and Seidman 3).

Pilate by attaching the earring to her ear inflicts pain and infection which highlights and refers to her feeling pain in losing her father. This action could be remarked as a "way of identifying the nature of the pain and dealing with the identity crisis caused by the trauma of becoming an orphan" (Person 13). "Pilate rubbed her ear until it was numb, burned the end of the wire, and punched it through her earlobe. Macon fastened the wire ends into a knot, but the lobe was swollen and running pus. At Circe's instruction, she put cobwebs on it to draw the pus out and stop the bleeding" (167).

Pilate's infected ear portrays her trauma which makes her feel pain; furthermore, it remarks the wound in her mind as well as her ear which bothers her constantly. When she nurses herself to stop bleeding, she tries to deal with her trauma and let it heal. In her essay "Knowing Their Names: Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*", Marianne Hirsch argues that "when Pilate pierces her flesh, she creates an artificial, bodily connection to her father as she incorporates his word into her own body" (81). For Pilate, this action attaches her to her father as well as her ancestors. Pilate's identification with her fathers and grandfathers is so much deep which makes her use her first name and ignore her last name because she doesn't identify with it: "Pilate had learned, whenever she was asked her name, to give only her first name. The last name had a bad effect on people" (146). Her last name is death which is named by white people and which doesn't belong to her ancestors. Since her last name is not chosen by her ancestral tradition, she prefers to avoid using it.

Moreover, it is argued that Pilate likewise intends to reject white society by rejecting her last name, since it is a name that is imposed by whites. And by using her first name, she approves and sticks to what is just left for her as a heritage from her father. Additionally, Pilate lacks a navel which is another point that separates her from her brother and other communities and displaces her as the other among her people. At the age of fifteen, she had her first sex with a boy who found out that she lacked a navel, so they injected in her the feeling of being abnormal. She is left by everyone despite their love towards her and despite her being "a good worker and a big help to everybody" (144). She is rejected by all because they are afraid of being "in the company of something God never made" (144).

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Pilate's lack of a navel excludes her from all relationships. It occurs to her that "although men fucked armless women, one-legged women, hunchbacks and blind women, drunken women ... they were terrified of fucking her – a woman with no navel" (148). This fear isolates Pilate and alienates her from her people and society. So, she later hides her stomach from everyone. When she falls in love and becomes pregnant, she refuses to marry the father of her child as she fears that she will not be able to hide her stomach from her husband forever. She is afraid that the love of her life will reject her too when he finds out that she lacks a navel. Therefore, she decides to leave him as she does not want to get hurt.

Furthermore, Pilate's lack of the navel refers to her self-born; her self-born belief is also crucial in her coping with her trauma experience "The research of Daniel J. Siegel indicates that people who have experienced trauma are not destined to repeat their past traumas if they make sense of the impact they have on their lives. An important goal in this making-sense process is to become the author of one's own life story" (cited in Schreiber 16). According to Schreiber; "Pilate exemplifies the ability to reshape one's life in this way" (16). Pilate, therefore, could be argued to be the author of her own life story. Pilate relies on her father's ghost so that she could cope with her trauma and build a self-built identity, as well, she intends to preserve her cultural inheritance. This is represented in the way her father appears to her after the creation of her new identity: "he no longer came to Pilate dressed as he had been on the wood's edge and in the cave ... Then he had worn the coveralls and heavy shoes he was shot in. Now he came in a white shirt, a blue-collar, and a brown peaked cap. He wore no shoes ..." (150).

CONCLUSION

In this novel, other blacks are suffering cultural trauma, like Macon Dead the Second and Ruth. These characters like Milkman are living with white values; they are alienated from their black tradition and heritage and are haunted by an overwhelming sense of insecurity. These characters likewise feel rootless and unhomeliness, therefore they are rejected and separated from their culture and society; they are distanced from their ancestor's past, therefore are suffering a dramatic loss of identity and self. These characters have no collective memory that can stick them to their history; their loss of parents represents their loss of whole their African American past. Macon and Ruth favor white society and values and hate their community. Macon favors materialistic life and denies her sister's primitive style of life. Ruth likewise is interested in artificial Western values and this is represented in her table manners and the way she feels disgusted and uncomfortable with Pilate's house and lifestyle.

It is concluded that the *Song of Solomon* bears witness to collective trauma therefore he struggles to overcome the heavy burden on his shoulder, heal his psychically fragmented and spiritually detached self, and reconnect with the communal whole. Likewise, other black characters suffer a collective trauma, so they feel lost, self-less, and alienated. Milkman is a good example of a haunted character; he is suffering a cultural trauma that doesn't belong to himself but his fathers and grandfathers. Though he tries to ignore and escape his history, he is forced into it; Milkman is forced into a journey that closes him into his past heritage. Pilate as an ex-slave and the upbringing of slavery is left alone; she suffers trauma but she manages to establish and build a connection with her past and define a new self and identity for herself. Unlike Milkman, Pilate doesn't suffer unhomeliness and rootlessness because of her approving traditional black values. To sum up, only those characters could surpass the pressure of trauma and find a connection as well as meaning in their life that could pass the stages of recovery.

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