CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHOD

The important part of a research in analyzing the data is a method of research. By using method of research it will be easier for the writer easier in understanding the concerns expressed in a work that is going to be analyzed, to solve the problem and find a solution for the problems. In this study, the writer also uses method to analyze the object of the study, to understand all the data and finally transform it into a complete study.

3.1 Research Method

The research method used in this analysis is library research and the primary source of the analysis is the novel itself. This research is completed by enough valuable sources such as relevant books and literary books. The library research will be supported by the internet exploration in order to make data of the analysis more available.

Descriptive method will be used in analyzing the data. The purpose of descriptive method is as a comprehensive summarization in everyday terms of specific events experienced by individuals or groups. This method is more descriptive because the data is shaped of words and it emphasizes more on process not the product.

In doing the analysis, the writer will use qualitative research. Qualitative research is a research which is done with a limitation of target research where the data is not in the form of numbers. Qualitative research is aimed at gaining a deep understanding of a specific organization or event, rather than surface description of a large sample of a population. It aims to provide an explicit rendering of the structure, order, and broad patterns found among a group of participants.

Qualitative research does not introduce treatments or manipulate variables, or impose the researcher's operational definitions of variables on the participants. Rather, it lets the
meaning emerge from the participants. It is more flexible in that it can adjust to the setting. Concepts, data collection tools, and data collection methods can be adjusted as the research progresses.

3.2 Source of Data

The primary data is the novel itself. *Song of Solomon* was published by Alfred Knopf in 1977. It contains 337 pages in 15 chapters. To support the primary data, the writer also takes secondary data from textbooks, encyclopedias, and internet about trauma and its effects.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collecting method is steps applied by the researcher to get the data that are needed in particular research. In writing this thesis, the writer applies the library research by collecting data from some books and many other supporting materials that can be related to the subject matter. In this thesis, the writer uses Toni Morrison’s novel entitled *Song of Solomon* as the main source. This novel is the most important source of information for the subject matter that will be analyzed. It is also needed a search from internet to complete the data that had been collected.

3.4 Data Analysis

The analysis is conducted by using descriptive qualitative method. According to Miles and Huberman (1992: 16), "Qualitative descriptive method consists of a flow of activities that occur simultaneously and coherence, which include: data reduction activities (grouping), presentation of data, drawing conclusions, and verification."

Below are the steps of analysis conducted by the writer:

1. Data Reduction
Data reduction refers to the grouping of data. Grouping the data starts from sorting out the data related to trauma and its effects.

2. Presentation of Data

Presentation of data is presenting the data that have been gathered. The presentation of data is related with quotations or statements about trauma and its effects.

3. Drawing Conclusion

Conclusion is drawn by showing quotations or statements about trauma and its effects.

4. Verification

After drawing conclusion, the last step is verification. It refers to check the precision of the primary data which is gathered based on the results of reading the novel.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4. Analysis

4.1. Trauma in Song of Solomon

4.1.1. Milkman Dead’s Lack of Sense of Self

Macon Dead III or Milkman, the unfortunately nicknamed protagonist of *Song of Solomon*, is a young black man living in his own fog, disconnected from his family members whom he openly despises. The only son of a wealthy property owner and the daughter of the first black doctor in the city, Milkman lives a privileged existence, thinking he does not need love or affection. Milkman’s only dream is to fly, to be free of everything and everyone that weighs him down. The Dead’s house is symbolically a dead house, devoid of love, and it is this house and the people residing within it—Milkman’s father, Macon, his mother, Ruth, and his two older sisters Lena and Corinthians—that Milkman dreams to flee.

Milkman, a young man who seeks “to know as little as possible, to feel only enough to get through the day,” becomes the unwilling keeper of the memories of his family's history (*Song of Solomon*, 1977:180). Milkman’s father, Macon, accuses his wife Ruth, Milkman’s mother, of having a strange, possibly incestuous relationship with her own father, a revelation that causes Milkman to remember the incident that created his nickname: his mother’s extended nursing of him when he “was old enough to walk, talk, and wear knickers” (*Song of Solomon*, 1977:78). Ruth in turn accuses Macon of trying to kill Milkman in utero, forcing Ruth to drink castor oil and puncture her womb with a knitting needle. Milkman’s paternal grandfather, Macon Dead, Sr., was murdered while trying to protect his property, a tragic event that shapes the entire family and their future in ways Milkman only begins to understand much later. There is also his father and his aunt Pilate’s estrangement following
the death of their father over a matter both of them refuse to reveal. Underneath all these traumas is the untapped trauma of the misnaming that created The Dead Family.

One of the major effects of trauma is that it destroys the trauma victim’s sense of self. The self is undone following trauma due to a radical disruption of memory, a severing of past from present and, typically, an inability to envision a future. Milkman needs to create a new sense of self, an identity that incorporates his respective pasts with his current realities so that he can then face the future. The past is filled with violence and tragedy but also the possibility of triumph, if they can only learn the full pattern, reconnecting with the past that has been detached from the full story.

Milkman’s sense of self is not so much undone as it is underdeveloped. He is born in the aftermath of trauma. The legacy of slavery has essentially erased his history prior to his parents. Milkman, at thirty-one, lacks maturity. Much of his immaturity stems from his lack of knowledge about his history, and even more so the conspiracy to keep that knowledge from him. At the start of the novel Milkman is triply exiled, alienated from his family name, his cultural heritage, and his true home; further he is so lacking in mature selfawareness that he walks through the first thirty years of life ignorant of his exile, unaware that he is not a whole man but it is important to recognize how his family and culture silently conspire to keep him uninformed about his history. This conspiracy begins with the creation of the Dead name. Milkman’s grandfather, newly emancipated from slavery, registers with the Freedman’s Bureau.

The drunken white clerk incorrectly fills out the man’s paperwork, effectively renaming him Macon Dead. In this sense, the clerk could have consciously or unconsciously played into this conspiracy in wiping out Macon Dead’s pre-slavery existence. Macon Sr., an illiterate, does not discover the new name until when he is on a wagon carrying ex-slaves and his future wife north. Milkman’s grandmother convinces Macon Sr. to keep the new name because “it
was new and would wipe out the past. Wipe it all out” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 54). Losing
the name of the ancestor causes The Dead family to lose history, community, and tradition as
well; the past becomes dead and the loss of name damages the present understanding of the
past.

Macon and Ruth participate in this conspiracy by giving Milkman disjointed pieces of
the family history with the intent to make him choose sides. Milkman, at twenty-two, takes a
stand against his father’s physical abuse of his mother, knocking Macon down after Macon
punches Ruth in the face. After this episode, Macon confronts Milkman with a story of him
witnessing Ruth lying naked in bed with her dead father, sucking his fingers.

“In the bed,” he said, and stopped for so long. Milkman was not
sure he was going to continue. “In the bed. That’s where she was
when I opened the door. Laying next to him. Naked as a yard dog,
kissing him. Him dead and white and puffy and skinny, and she
had his fingers in her mouth.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 73)

Macon claims he is telling Milkman this because Milkman needs to know the whole truth:
“You have to be a whole man. And if you want to be a whole man, you have to deal with the
whole truth” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 70). But he is not telling the whole truth; he gives
Milkman a fragmented piece of a story that casts Ruth in an unfavorable light. Later in the
novel, when Milkman confronts Ruth with this story, she offers her own counter-story: that
Macon killed her father by hiding his medicine, that he tried to kill her and worse, he tried
everal times to force her to have an abortion when she was pregnant with Milkman. She
claims that she clung to her father, even in death, because he was the only person who really
cared whether she lived or died, that she has lived a lonely life by the greatness of the men in
her life, first her father and then Macon.

“. . . because the fact is that I am a small woman. I don’t mean
little; I mean small, and I am small because i was pressed small. I
lived in a great big house that pressed me into a small package”
(Song of Solomon, 1977 : 124)
These fragmented stories leave Milkman confused and frustrated. Walking into the cool night air after hearing his father’s outrageous story, Milkman doesn’t know how to feel.

“He wouldn’t know what to feel until he knew what to think. And it was difficult to think ....................................................... Milkman tried to figure what was true and what part of what was true had anything to do with him. What was he supposed to do with this new information his father had dumped on him?” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 75)

After hearing Ruth’s equally disturbing story, Milkman concludes that he does not want to know any of it. He even wishes for death to be rid of these traumas haunting him.

“Above all he wanted to escape what he knew, escape the implications of what he had been told. And all he knew in the world was what other people had told him. ....................................................... Except for the one time he had hit his father, he had never acted independently, and that act, his only one, had brought unwanted knowledge too, as well as some responsibility for that knowledge. ................................................... but he felt put upon; felt as though some burden had been given to him and that he didn’t deserve it.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 120)

Milkman cannot understand these stories because they were not told to him to help understand; they were told to him to assign blame. Macon and Ruth speak only to embellish their own images and tarnish each other’s; neither really considers the impact their stories will have on Milkman. They do nothing to create an independent sense of self in their son, for neither of them really sees Milkman as having a self independent of them. Both Ruth and Macon are motivated by the desire to extend and expand their fathers’ legacies: Ruth wants Milkman to become a doctor like her father; Macon wants Milkman to continue on his path of accumulating property.

Milkman has been denied full access to the past that has shaped him because of his own families’ biases. Macon and Ruth focus more on their anger and resentment towards each other than on the legacy of their own fathers. These biases contribute to the traumas the protagonist face. In addition to his personal traumas, Milkman carries the burden of collective cultural traumas. Milkman, the grandson of a slave, is only one generation removed from
slavery. He was, in fact, the first black baby born at the white Mercy Hospital which his own
grandfather, the first black doctor in their city, was not allowed to enter. Milkman’s
generation, though technically free within their segregated community, are still limited in
what they can do and where they can go outside their collective. Slavery has ended, but
something of it continues to live on, in the social geography of where peoples reside, in the
authority of collective wisdom and shared benightedness, in the veins of the contradictory
formation of New World modernity.

Cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, tear in the social
fabric, affecting a group of people who have achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense,
the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a group or have been directly
experienced by any or all. What it shown in *Song of Solomon* is torn communities whose
inhabitants create competing solutions to move forward. As the self needs to be reconstructed
following trauma, so too does the community, and in this novel there are two dominant
reconstructions: one that seeks to forget the past and move on to the future, and one which
attempts to bring the past into the present to move on to the future known as the progressive
and the redemptive models. The progressive model views the trauma of the past as a starting-
point for progressive development and eventual inclusion in modern society while the
redemptive model is a restoration of pride and glory through redemption in the home country
whether that home country be the original birthplace of the community or the adopted home
country. This idea of finding redemption in the home country can extend beyond a physical
home towards a spiritual concept of home as a place where one can create a more holistic
sense of self. In the redemptive model the past holds tragedy but in being actively
remembered it serves as a source of pride, a symbol of survival. There are risks in either
model: the progressive model, in seeking assimilation, risks the loss of culture, the redemptive
risks the creation of divisions along racial and cultural lines.
In this novel, the protagonist finds healing by turning their traumatic memory into narrative memory which means transforming traumatic memory into a coherent narrative that can then be integrated into the survivor’s sense of self and view of the world and also by reintegrating the survivor into a community, reestablishing connections essential to selfhood. For Milkman, this transformation cannot be accomplished without the help of others. Alone he has tangled fragments of stories and memories. Frustrated by these memories that haunt and terrorize him, he seeks to escape. Milkman wants to fly away—away from his family, his history, his own “pointless, aimless life” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 107). He has no direction but the solution is not to run from the traumas but to find where he fits into the narrative circle so that it can be whole again. The burden of the past weighs heavily on the present but memory in the form of history and tradition is central to society and to all social interaction. The spiritual guides and helpers in this novel work together to help the protagonist see and understand the pattern of the past, present, and future and also find himself in this pattern.

Milkman, raised in his father’s image, is poised to inherit the business and likely become as feared and respected as his father. If this inheritance is a weight that keeps him from flying though, he will have to make an important decision. Despite what many in Milkman’s community think of his father, they grudgingly respect him for his wealth and status. They will likely regard Milkman as a fool if he rejects his inheritance. Milkman will likely lose what little sense of communal belonging he has; but what he gains makes the healing journeys he embarks on worth it.

Milkman needs a lure, a real, tangible, profitable lure, to go back to the past. That lure comes in the prospect of gold, the gold that caused Pilate and Macon’s irreparable split. In a world where a person can be born without a navel, where flowers can devour people, and a woman can live well over a hundred years, it is entirely possible that the gold only exists as a lure to bring the Dead’s back home. This same lure brings Milkman to Pilate’s house to meet
the woman who had as much to do with his future as she had his past and into the arms of Circe, the woman who gives him the names of his grandparents, the name to the bones, and the songs that hold his family’s story. This lure stirs Macon’s memory and causes him to persuade Milkman onto the journey; and the same lure turns Guitar from trusted friend to sworn enemy, shadowing Milkman throughout his travels. Macon, Milkman, and Guitar all want the gold for different purposes. Macon tells Milkman that “Money is freedom, Macon. The only real freedom there is,” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 163) and Milkman, believing that, sets out to find the gold. Macon Sr. needs to bring Milkman back to complete the circle, returning his bones to the earth and his family to the ancestral home. In the land of his ancestors, Milkman finds something that is completely weightless and has no financial value, yet has the power to set him free; he finds himself in the songs and the stories of his people.

Naming is an important theme in this novel. Names define values in the novel because of the crucial ways that they both reveal and conceal true knowledge and true identity. Earlier in the novel Macon walks down the street thinking about names, and how his family must have an ancestor “who had a name that was real. A name given to him at birth with love and seriousness. A name that was not a joke, nor a disguise, nor a brand name” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 17 – 18). Macon accepts his name and even continues the tradition by passing it on to his only son, but he does so with resignation, not pride. He does not own it and he does not see any freedom or pride in it. Milkman finally understands the importance of owning his name, all of it, including his nickname, when he learns his ancestors’ names.

“When you know your name, you should hang on to it, for unless it is noted down and remembered, it will die when you do” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 329).

In this sense it is not about the official, publicly documented name, but about the names that have meaning. Milkman’s nickname suggests dependence and immaturity that will eventually lead to strength. It suggests nurturing by the women in his life, and it anticipates the time he
will move beyond the need for that nurturing. After Milkman completes the journey he can take ownership of his name because he is now a single, separate Afro-American person while also connected to a family, a community, and a culture.

Pilate functions as the life-ensuring mother figure for Milkman. Ruth is not able to truly mother Milkman because he has “never been a person to her, a separate real person. He had always been a passion” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 131). She only realizes him as a man “who had flesh on the outside and feelings on the inside” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 133) when she discovers that for the second time in his life, someone is trying to kill him and then only because she sees his “imminent death as the annihilation of the last occasion she had been made love to” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 134). She is not really to be blamed for her selfishness though because she herself has never been fully nurtured by anyone. Pilate, who has been nurtured by a loving, instructive ancestor, has to stand in for Ruth and be the guiding figure for Milkman. Ruth is too bound by her father’s memory and Macon’s oppression to develop the imagination or acquire the freedom that Pilate has. It is this newmother, who spiritually attended at Milkman’s birth, who must guide him beyond the peacock plumage of materialism that binds him to earth and teach him how to fly. Ruth fights for his life, she prays for his survival, but always with a sense of his life as a symbol of her “single triumph,” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 133) whereas Pilate fights for him for the survival of the Dead’s legacy. Unfortunately Milkman learns the importance of Pilate’s role in his life too late to really share this with her. But it is the fact that he learns it along with the names of the bones and the message Macon Sr. is trying to send that signifies his triumph in the closing of the novel. “Just as the sequences of Milkman’s own stupidity would remain, and regret would always outweigh the things he was proud of having done,” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 335) but the circle has been restored: Macon Sr. is returned to the earth, Pilate surrenders her name to the air to live on, and Milkman flies.
Milkman has rituals he must complete to fully restore his wholeness. He has been guided along the way by the ancestors, but to achieve wholeness there are steps he must take alone, with only the stories and lessons he has learned to help him along the way. The rituals are not just for his individual healing, they are vitally important for the communities at large. The ritual of remembrance is the song of Milkman’s great-grandfather, Solomon, and his wife Ryna, who cries out in anger when her husband, refusing to be a slave anymore, flies away, leaving her with twenty-one children to care for alone.

\[ O \text{ Solomon don’t leave me here} \\
\text{Cotton balls to choke me} \\
O \text{ Solomon don’t leave me here} \\
\text{Buckra’s arms to yoke me.} \\
\text{Solomon done fly, Solomon done gone} \\
\text{Solomon cut across the sky, Solomon gone home} \text{ (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 303).} \]

The song tells the story of Solomon’s flight and includes the names of him and his wife and all their children. Milkman realizes that the song is a slightly revised version of the song Pilate has been singing all her life. This is the story of his people; this is his legacy and inheritance. It reminds him of the connections to his family: Ruth, Macon, Lena and Corinthians, Pilate and Hagar. He realizes that they are all different, complex people but they have this shared past that must not be forgotten. With no pen or paper to write it down, Milkman has to rely on his memory to record the words. By taking the story into his body to be stored in his memory, he completes the ritual and he can now bring that knowledge home to his family. What Milkman ultimately achieves on his healing journeys is balance. *Song of Solomon* promotes a cyclical concept of time. This is evident in the fact that this novel opens and closes with the same image. *Song of Solomon* opens with Robert Smith’s flight from Mercy and closes with Milkman’s leap towards Guitar. That they end where they began, but with significant improvement, suggests that the protagonist has healed and balance has been restored.
Milkman also finds healing and a restoration of balance in the land of his ancestors. His transformation begins in the woods in Shalimar during the bobcat hunt with some of the local men. Milkman’s journey up to that point has been fruitless. He arrived in Danville in a clean suit and expensive leather shoes with an empty suitcase waiting to be filled with the gold. By the time he gets to Shalimar, his clothes and shoes are ragged and worn down and he has no gold or any prospects of finding it. Feeling as if he has nothing left to lose, Milkman agrees to join the bobcat hunt.

“Even if he could have come up with a way to get out of the hunt, he wouldn’t have taken it, in spite of the fact that he had never handled a firearm in his life. He had stopped evading things, sliding through, over, and around difficulties. Before he had taken risks only with Guitar. Now he took them alone” (270-71).

In making this decision Milkman is taking steps towards wholeness. He is allowing himself to be totally vulnerable. Making the trip to Danville, going into Circe’s decrepit house, crawling into the cave; these are all actions he takes because he thinks they will lead him towards the gold. He joins the hunt with no expectations, not knowing where it will lead.

Sitting in the middle of the dark, unknown woods, Milkman begins to retrace his steps, wondering how he got to this strange place so far off from his original plan.

“He had come here to find traces of Pilate’s journey, to find relatives that she might have visited, to find anything he could that would either lead him to the gold or convince him that it no longer existed. How had he got himself involved in a hunt, involved in a knife-and-broken-bottle fight in the first place? Ignorance, he thought, and vanity.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 275 – 276)

Milkman realizes he has been fleeing from responsibility and accountability his whole life. He has been blaming others for their attitudes towards him, feeling as though he never did anything to deserve anyone’s hostility or anger. In the woods he hears his complaints for what they are:

a. “Old and tired and beaten to death. Deserve. Now it seemed to him that he was always saying or thinking that he didn’t deserve some bad luck, or some bad treatment from others.
That he didn’t even ‘deserve’ to hear all the misery and mutual accusations his parents unloaded on him. Nor did he ‘deserve’ Hagar’s vengeance. But why shouldn’t his parents tell him their personal problems? If not him, then who? (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 276)

b. “Apparently he thought he deserved only to be loved—from a distance, though—and given what he wanted. And in return he would be . . . what? Pleasant? Generous? Maybe all he was really saying was: I am not responsible for your pain; share your happiness with me but not your unhappiness.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 277)

Milkman recognizes this as the lie he has been telling all his life to justify his selfishness. Completely alone in the natural world, he feels “his self—the cocoon that was ‘personality’—give way” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 277). Relieved of this false sense of self, Milkman is able to connect with the land around him and hear what it has to say to him. This realization comes just in time to save his life.

“Feeling both tense and relaxed, he sank his fingers into the grass. He tried to listen with his fingertips, to hear what, if anything, the earth had to say, and it told him quickly that someone was standing behind him and he had just enough time to raise one hand to his neck and catch the wire that fastened around his throat.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 279)

Guitar almost succeeds in killing Milkman. Milkman survives, and walks, without limping, out of the woods “exhilarated by simply walking the earth” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 281).

Milkman’s final test comes in his confrontation with Guitar at Solomon’s Leap. Returning to Shalimar with Pilate to bury Macon Sr.’s bones, Guitar, who has been shadowing Milkman through the whole journey, kills Pilate, most likely because he assumes she is Milkman. Holding Pilate’s lifeless body in his arms, Milkman realizes that Pilate is the
example of what it truly means to fly. “Now he knew why he loved her so. Without ever leaving the ground, she could fly” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 336).

Milkman’s flight at the close of the novel is different from Solomon’s though. Guitar is in need of an ancestor too, he has no nurturing figure to guide him. If he had an ancestor like Pilate to instruct him, he might not have turned to the Seven Days as a solution to right the wrongs of the past. Sitting on the ground holding the woman fighting for his life and is always there to guide him, Milkman knows Guitar is ready to take his life as soon as he stands up. He could try to crawl away and hide, but he chooses to stand up and surrenders his life and his legacy to the friend who needs it more than him.

Milkman has passed the final test of his initiation; he is whole. Earlier Milkman had a dream he was flying, and in his dream “He was alone in the sky, but somebody was applauding him, watching him and applauding. He couldn’t see who it was (Song of Solomon, 1977: 298). When Milkman takes flight at the end, there is really a chorus of people applauding him: Pilate, Macon Sr., Solomon, and also Guitar. They are proud of him because he has completed the circle. The novel opened with Robert Smith’s flight away, and closes with Milkman’s flight forward.

4.1.2. Ruth Foster Dead’s Wound Inflicted upon the Female Body

Ruth Foster Dead is unarguably one of the most physically and mentally wounded women in the novel. By the age of sixteen she is married to Macon Dead the Second and by the time she is twenty he has stopped touching her. His refusal of her is brought on by the events surrounding her father’s death. However, Ruth and Macon both have dissimilar accounts of what actually took place on that day. Macon does admit to his son that he never really loved Ruth, saying, “I can’t tell you I was in love with her. People didn’t require that as much as they do now.” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 70). And given the lack of affection for her,
there was no emotional connection to stop him from truly despising Ruth because of her relationship with Dr. Foster.

The relationship between Ruth and her father is quite disturbing. Her mother dies while Ruth is still a child and she steps into the role of the woman of the house. But as she gets older her behavior towards her father becomes rather irksome.

“At sixteen, she still insisted on having him come to her at night, sit on her bed, exchange a few pleasantries, and plant a kiss on her lips. Perhaps it was the loud silence of his dead wife, perhaps it was Ruth’s disturbing resemblance to her mother. More probably it was the ecstasy that always seemed to be shining in Ruth’s face when he bent to kiss her—an ecstasy he felt inappropriate to the occasion.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 23)

This inappropriate behavior would certainly fall in line with the characteristics of Freud’s theory of the Oedipus Complex. Young girls have an original attachment to their mothers however, she makes the shift from mother-love to fatherlove only because she has to, and then with pain and protest. She has to, because she is without the phallus. And it is only by the transference of her love from mother to father that the girl becomes a woman. The transition is probably easier for Ruth because of her mother’s death. The absence of the mother figure makes the transfer possible. Ruth’s complex is represented in her undying love and devotion for her father and Dr. Foster is more than happy to marry her off to Macon.

What is also evident in the passage is that not only is Ruth emotionally involved with her father, the relationship is somewhat reciprocal. Dr. Foster does not stop coming to her; he does not stop kissing her. When Ruth is pregnant, Dr. Foster delivers both of her female children against Macon’s wishes.

“He delivered both your sisters himself and each time all he was interested in was the color of their skin. He would have disowned you. I didn’t like the notion of .......................................................... I tried to get a midwife for her, but the doctor said midwives were dirty. I told him a midwife delivered me, .......................................................... Your sisters are just a little over a year apart, you know. And both times he was there. She had her
legs wide open and he was there. I know he was a doctor and doctors not supposed to be bothered by things like that, but he was a man before he was a doctor. I knew then they’d ganged up on me forever – the both of them – and no matter what I did, they managed to have things their way.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 71).

Macon’s words elicit two interesting points to be considered. First, the reader gets what appears to be disgust based on the possible incestuousness of Ruth’s relationship with her father, but jealousy can also be inferred from his thoughts. It is not so much that it is her father, but simply that it is another man between his wife’s legs that bothers him. He goes on to explain to his son that he felt like it was Ruth and her father against him.

When Dr. Foster is on his deathbed Macon makes a startling discovery. When he enters the room he recounts,

“In the bed,” he said, and stopped for so long. Milkman was not sure he was going to continue. “In the bed. That’s where she was when I opened the door. Laying next to him. Naked as a yard dog, kissing him. Him dead and white and puffy and skinny, and she had his fingers in her mouth.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 73).

The cold fingers penetrating Ruth’s mouth are symbolic of the possible sexual relationship Macon believes them to have had. Uncertain as to whether Dr. Foster had an incestuous relationship with his wife, he tells Milkman,

“I’m not saying that they had contact. But there’s lots of things a man can do to please a woman, even if he can’t fuck. Whether or not, the fact is she was in that bed sucking his fingers, and if she do that when he was dead, what’d she do when he was alive? Nothing to do but kill a woman like that. I swear, many’s the day I regret she talked me out of killing her.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 74).

There is no doubt that hearing this story has traumatized Milkman in some way. While he had never had any strong feelings of love towards his mother, Milkman wonders about the validity of the story. In trying to reconcile the story within himself, he remembers being nursed by his mother. The literal registration of an event—the capacity to continually, in the flashback, reproduce it in exact detail—appears to be connected, in traumatic experience, precisely with the way it escapes full consciousness as it occurs.
It falls to Ruth to explain the truth behind the memory of her nursing him as well as the story concerning her father. She tells him how Macon had, in fact, killed her father by throwing his medicine away. She even tells Milkman how Macon attempted to kill him while Ruth was still pregnant. After Dr. Foster’s death, Macon and Ruth no longer share a bed.

a. “Your father and I hadn’t had physical relations since my father died, when Lena and Corinthians were just toddlers. We had a terrible quarrel. He threatened to kill me. I threatened to go to police about what he had done to my father. We did neither. I guess my father’s money …………………………………… You know, I was twenty years old when your father stopped sleeping in the bed with me. That’s hard, Macon. Very hard.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 125)

b. “And two months later I was pregnant. When he found out about it, he immediately suspected Pilate and he told me to get rid of the baby. But I wouldn’t and Pilate helped me stand him off.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 125)

Interestingly, it is not the absence of their sexual relationship that Ruth begins with; it is with his refusal to touch her. By not even attempting to lay a hand on her, Macon treats Ruth as if she is untouchable, a diseased person, who could contaminate him if he came into contact with her. By the age of thirty, having touch and sexual pleasure removed from the marriage for a decade now, Ruth acknowledges her fear that she would “die that way.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 125). Here Morrison sets up lack of intimacy as a type of traumatizing rejection inflicted upon the female body.

Nursing Milkman became, for Ruth, a way to hold on to some measure of pleasure in her life.

“She felt him. His restraint, his courtesy, his indifference, all of which pushed her into fantasy. She had the distinct impression that his lips were pulling from her a thread of light. It was as though she was a cauldron spinning gold.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 13)

Ruth continues this daily in a small room that her father had used as a study until Freddie the janitor discovers her. It seems almost fitting that a man would be the one to remove that intimacy and enjoyment from her life once again. Once Pilate comes to town she intuitively
senses a problem between the married couple and questions Ruth, “Do you want him?” Ruth responds, “I want somebody” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 125). Dying from lack of physical contact and emotional closeness, Ruth follows all of Pilate’s magical instructions. Ruth believes she can get Macon to value her again if sex is reintroduced into the marriage. And within four days Macon comes to her as if in a trance.

The traumatic events that Ruth now endures at the hands of her husband are far worse than when he would not touch her at all. Initially Ruth believes that the baby would be something to bring the two of them together, but she soon realizes otherwise. Instead the pregnancy brings something entirely different into their relationship.

“Then the baby became the nausea caused by the half ounce of castor oil Macon made her drink, then a hot pot recently emptied of scalding water on with she sat, then a soapy enema, a knitting needle (she inserted only the tip, squatting in the bathroom, crying, afraid of the man who paced outside the door), and finally, when he punched her stomach (she had been about to pick up his breakfast plate, when he looked at her stomach and punched it), she ran to Southside looking for Pilate.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 131)

In keeping with the characteristics of traumatic recollection, these repressed memories come flooding back only when Ruth learns of Hagar’s murder attempts on Milkman. This can be considered normal behavior for a trauma victim. She goes on to assert that there are many triggers or associative conditions that cause returns to traumatic events. Hagar’s attempts at Milkman’s life instantly return her to another time when she had to fight for his survival. But the emphasis of her memories is not placed on the abuse, but rather on the sex act that precedes it. As the narrator reveals,

“Her passions were narrow but deep. Long deprived of sex, long dependent on self-manipulation, she saw her son’s imminent death as the annihilation of the last occasion she had been made love to” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 134).
Hearing of Milkman’s impending death, she does not focus on a time when her life was in jeopardy. Rather, she remembers the moment when she was in Macon’s arms. This clearly relates to Ruth’s perception about the trauma that she has experienced. She has repressed the trauma by disassociating her need for male attention from the physical abuse inflicted upon her body.

Ruth fights for Milkman’s survival, but not her own. The reason may be found in her testimony, which she spills out to Milkman earlier in the novel.

“. . . because the fact is that I am a small woman.” I don’t mean little; I mean small, and I am small because I was pressed small. I lived in a great big house that pressed me into a small package.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 124).

In the confines of her father’s house and in comparison to him she is made inconsequential. The people in their community refer to her as “Dr. Foster’s daughter.” She is not her own person. Her existence is directly related to her father. Ruth’s repetition of the word “small” as a self-descriptor points to her low self-esteem. And living in the same house under the reign of Macon, she has undeniably been pressed even smaller even before the trauma. While Ruth has physically survived the trauma, she is merely a disjointed individual. A diminished, even shattered sense of self is common in cases of severe trauma of any sort but seems particularly prevalent in accounts of domestic tragedies and sexual abuse.

4.1.3. Hagar’s Private Pain

In the novel Morrison portrays the incestuous relationship between cousins Hagar and Milkman. Upon their first meeting Pilate introduces Milkman to Hagar as her brother. “Hagar.” Pilate looked around the room. “This here’s your brother, Milkman.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 43). Reba, Pilate’s daughter, corrects her, saying, “That ain’t her brother, Mama. They cousins.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 44). Pilate responds, “Same thing.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 44). Hagar joins in the conversation asserting that there is a difference
between the two. Pilate then corrects her by asserting, “I mean what’s the difference in the way you act toward ‘em? Don’t you have to act the same way to both?” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 44). In this scene Morrison sets up early on that family is family no matter how they are connected. Realizing that Milkman’s relation to Hagar should be considered that of a brother emphasizes the incestuous nature of their sexual relationship that will occur years later.

Therefore, Milkman quickly takes to Hagar. “From the time he first saw her, when he was twelve and she was seventeen, he was deeply in love with her, alternately awkward and witty in her presence.” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 92). Being five years his senior, she initially pays him little attention. But after some time they consummate the relationship.

“When he first took her in his arms, Hagar was a vain and somewhat distant creature. He liked to remember it that way—that he took her in his arms—but in truth it was she who called him back into the bedroom and stood there smiling while she unbuttoned her blouse.” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 92).

As an older woman Hagar is in control of the situation. Milkman is no more than a “puppy” in love with a woman.

Ten years later Milkman has become disillusioned by her.

“Now, after more than a dozen years, he was getting tired of her. Her eccentricities were no longer provocative and the stupefying ease with which he had gotten and stayed between her legs had changed from the great good fortune he’d considered it, to annoyance at her refusal to make him hustle for it, work for it, do something difficult for it” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 91).

Milkman no longer has to chase Hagar. Even now he does not “take” Hagar, as he desires to do; she willingly gives herself to him. She has opened herself up to loving him. Why would she refuse him? Morrison does not write many scenes of the two lovers; in fact, except for their juvenile meetings the only time they are together is when she is attempting to kill him. By not allowing the reader to see them in a loving manner together Morrison deemphasizes the relationship, possibly in much the same way that Milkman does. Whenever their
relationship is discussed it is in terms of their sexual relationship. This directly relates to the fact that Milkman is only interested in her sexually; beyond that, he does not value her.

After Milkman realizes that he no longer wants Hagar, he describes her as the

“Third beer. Not the first one, which the throat receives with almost tearful gratitude; nor the second, that confirms and extends the pleasure of the first. But the third, the one you drink because it’s there, because it can’t hurt, and because what difference does it make?” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 91).

But it can hurt and all too late Milkman realizes how much his carelessness has hurt Hagar. Before coming to this understanding he is resolved to end the relationship during the Christmas holiday. Milkman writes Hagar a thank you note for their time together and signs it with gratitude. He takes away the one thing that he can control, himself. This removal hampers Hagar’s existence in many ways.

Hagar deals with many similar false assumptions concerning beauty and is psychologically damaged by them. After Milkman has dumped her, she sees him in a bar with another woman. Detailing Hagar’s murderous rage, the narrator acknowledges,

“The “thank you” cut her to the quick, but it was not the reason she ran scurrying into cupboards looking for weapons. That had been accomplished by the sight of Milkman’s arms around the shoulders of a girl whose silky copper-colored hair cascaded over the sleeve of his coat. They were sitting in Mary’s, and Hagar saw her gray eyes, the fist that had been just sitting in her chest since Christmas released its forefinger like the blade of a skinning knife.” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 126 – 127)

At first sight Hagar thinks the woman is one of his sisters because of her light complexion and hair. But, upon realizing that this woman is not one of his sisters, she loses control. The woman emphasizes the European standards of beauty; Hagar possesses African features like Pilate. Hagar’s jealousy is fueled by feelings of inadequacy and selfhate. She does not fit the type of woman that Milkman should be with. It is mentioned earlier in the novel that Milkman
does not take Hagar around town with him. Couched in the explanation of shame for dating his cousin, his reluctance to be seen with her might also have to do with color discrimination.

While Hagar cannot remove herself from agony she feels because of Milkman’s preference for lighter complexioned women with long, silky hair, she remains nonetheless addicted to him and what she thinks her provides her. Her addiction is only tested. Hagar clings to the hope that she can have Milkman again even though he has caused her pain. She refuses to acknowledge that he has used her for sex. And she becomes intent on killing him only after reasoning with herself that if she cannot have him, no one else can.

To address Hagar’s addiction to Milkman we must return to a time before the relationship was formed. On a visit to Pilate’s house, Milkman and Guitar sit watching the women make wine. When discussing Reba’s winning of groceries in a contest, Hagar alleges that they would have starved to death had she not. Pilate declares that no one would let her starve, but Hagar contends, “Some of my days were hungry ones” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 48). Reba is hurt by this new information and affirms that they have always gotten her anything she has ever wanted. “Reba, she don’t mean food,” Pilate responds (Song of Solomon, 1977: 49). The narrator does not say what it is that Hagar has hungered for, only that realization creeps over Reba’s face. The silence by these women in response to Hagar’s alleged emptiness apparently stems from something that they cannot give her. After a few minutes they begin to sing, “O Sugarman don’t you leave me here ........................... Sugarman done fly away.” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 49)

Later in the novel we learn that the song is about Milkman’s great great grandfather Solomon who flew back to Africa and left his family behind. It is possible that Hagar mourns for her missing and unknown father. When Milkman ends the relationship, she experiences severe trauma possibly due to the loss of a constant male figure in her life. Hagar does not have what Pilate had, which was a dozen years of a nurturing, good relationship with men.
Pilate had a father, and she had a brother, who loved her very much, and she could use the knowledge of that love for her life. Her daughter Reba had less of that, but she certainly has at least a love of men which she does not put to good use. Hagar has even less because of the absence of any relationships with men in her life. She is weaker.

The sorrow she feels at this loss is identical to the mourning of Solomon’s wife, Ryna. When Milkman travels to Virginia in search of gold, he learns of his family history. Milkman learns of Ryna and Solomon from his distant relative Susan Byrd. It is a part of local folklore that once Solomon flew off and left Ryna, she yelled and screamed for days. The ravine near where it happened is named Ryna’s Gulch because when the wind blows across it, her cries can still be heard. Susan tells Milkman,

“They say she screamed and screamed, lost her mind completely. You don’t hear about women like that anymore, but there used to be more—the kind of woman who couldn’t live without a particular man. And when the man left, they lost their minds, or died or something.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 323)

Hagar is a descendant of Ryna; she too has become that “kind of woman.” Almost as if Susan has prophesied it Hagar’s addiction to Milkman has begun to hamper her own personal survival.

Hagar suffers from an addiction to Milkman. Without his love she feels worthless. As the novel progresses so does her addiction. She is so far removed from the truth of her life. She does not understand that she can be a whole person without Milkman to value her that she does not know how to behave without him. Trauma relates to addiction in that the sufferer looks towards something or someone to help forget the pain inflicted upon them. Hagar, however, is addicted to the one person who has caused her pain. There are three different types of addiction: sexual, romantic, and relationship addiction. Hagar’s violent behavior places her in the category of someone suffering from a relationship addiction. While the first type of relationship addiction deals with a person being addicted to any relationship, real or
imagined, within the requirements of the second type that is a person is addicted to a particular relationship with a particular person. Hagar exhibits many of the symptoms such as fear of being alone, controlling behavior and selective amnesia, a symptom that allows the sufferer to selectively forget the bad parts of the relationship. Hagar is overtaken by what is described by the townspeople as a “graveyard love,” explaining,

“On those days, her hair standing out from her head like a thundercloud, she haunted Southside and Not Doctor Street until she found him. Sometimes it took two days, or three, ................................................................. They had seen women pull their dresses over their heads and howl like dogs for lost love” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 128).

While Hagar has not resorted to this behavior, she has committed many acts of terror. Relationship addicts are constantly anxious and depressed. Since they have made the relationship the source of their validity, meaning, and security, they must hold on to it. As relationship addicts become increasingly aware that they cannot control the relationship, they become more and more desperate, often making accusations and precipitating battles, with concomitant feelings of desperation. Hagar has completely lost herself in her pursuit of Milkman. She knows nothing but the love she feels for him.

“She loved nothing in the world except this woman’s son, wanted him alive more than anybody, but hadn’t the least bit of control over the predator that lived inside her. Totally taken over by her anaconda love, she had no self left, no fears, no wants, no intelligence that was her own.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 136 – 137)

Hagar remains in a catatonic state for many days. It is not until Pilate puts a mirror in front of her that Hagar snaps out of it. “Look at how I look. I look awful. No wonder he didn’t want me. I look terrible” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 308). She bathes, gets her hair washed, her clothes ironed and goes off on a shopping spree. She also makes a hair appointment. On her way home it begins to rain and she is left soaked. She returns home with nothing to show for her effort. Hagar gives her stilted testimony in the arms of her grandmother. “Why don’t
he like my hair?” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 315). Her speech is fragmented, consumed with minute pieces of memory that have traumatized her. She cries about “the woman’s silky, penny-colored hair, her lemon-colored skin, gray-blue eyes and thin nose.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 315 – 316).

If racism is trauma then intraracial prejudice is overly traumatic to the psyche. The wound that Hagar possesses is inflicted upon many African American women. By naming the pain or testifying to the trauma, women may be able to recover. However, Hagar cannot. She is on the verge of death and cannot be pulled back. Without Milkman, Hagar would have undoubtedly answered in the negative. People die from relationship addiction. Addictive relationships can be fatal, physically, mentally, and spiritually. They just seem to grind a person down. Hagar’s addiction has taken its toll on her and the healing arms of Pilate are not enough to save her. And although Pilate has fought to love Hagar back by running her fingers through Hagar’s hair, she remains in a traumatized state with her testimony flowing out in pieces. Pilate can only respond with the words, “Hush. Hush. Hush, girl, hush” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 316). Hagar’s testimony is silenced only in death. Pilate, while sympathetic, does not truly listen to Hagar’s testimony. She quiets her. In doing so, Pilate denies the truth behind Hagar’s words. While Pilate only means to comfort Hagar, the refusal to let her speak only negates her experience of trauma. Hagar is smothered by Pilate’s maternal drive to hurry away the pain.

While she does experience love and is valued in the female-centered home of Pilate, she has not been taught about the outside world; she cannot function outside of the home. Pilate and Reba have always given Hagar everything she has desired, which only works to strengthen a particular symptom of addiction, the belief that she can make the relationship happen simply by desiring it. But Milkman does not want Hagar and she is unable to cope without him in her life.
It is evident that it is not only care or nurturing that Hagar desires because she receives that from the two maternal figures in her life, Reba and Pilate. Both women share the responsibilities of raising Hagar. Under Pilate’s roof Hagar has flourished. She has not had to want for anything. But this all-consuming mother love has in many ways hampered Hagar’s life. *Song of Solomon* is a portrait of enmeshment—the suffocating bond parents occasionally create with their children. While parental enmeshment is seen in the rearing of Hagar, Milkman also falls victim to enmeshment in Macon’s home. But this commonality is not enough to keep them together; it is not a source of bonding. If anything, this enmeshment works to destroy the relationship. The separate home life of Milkman and Hagar has made them self-centered, controlling, and unable to discover an authentic self. Fortunately, Milkman has the ability to find himself through the quest. Hagar does not have this ability because, historically speaking, it is the men who go off on the quest while the women remain at home. Pilate proves to be the only exception to this. Pilate has quested throughout the novel, roaming around after she is separated from Macon after their father’s murder. But she finally decides to settle in Macon’s town because Hagar needed a family. Pilate is wise enough to realize that a life on the road is no life for a child. Settled in a new home, Pilate creates a home better suited to raise a child. While Hagar’s home is matrifocal and nurturing, Ruth’s is not.

The home is traditionally thought of as a female domestic space. Macon’s family lives in the home of Ruth’s late father. While Ruth should have inherited the house after her father’s death, it is more Macon’s home than hers. The people in the community describe it as big and dark, “more prison than palace” (*Song of Solomon*, 1977: 10). And Macon enters the novel in much the same way as a violent husband returns home to his abused wife.

“Solid, rumbling, likely to erupt without prior notice, Macon kept each member of his family awkward with fear. His hatred of his wife glittered and sparked in every word he spoke to her. The disappointment he felt in his daughters sifted down on them like
ash, dulling their buttery complexions and choking the lilt out of what should have been girlish voices.” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 10)

The negative feelings that Macon has for the women in his life are evident in his daily interactions with them. And much like women in an abusive relationship, they have come to not only expect it, but as Morrison writes, “The way he mangled their grace, wit, and self-esteem was the single excitement of their days” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 11). Not only is this an abusive relationship, it is also marked by codependency; the women need Macon to define them and Macon needs them to dominate. Ruth and her daughters, Lena and First Corinthians, do not thrive in Macon’s home. They personify the patronym of their name; they are all “Dead” women in mind, body, and spirit.

Pilate’s home is quite the opposite of Ruth’s. Ruth’s home is characterized as a male dominated space, while Pilate’s is very female-centered. Ruth’s home is one of violence, where abuse is inflicted upon her body; Pilate’s is a home of safety and refuge. Ruth feels the security of Pilate’s home; so does her son. Only Macon fears going to the house and the women who lived inside it. He was very strict with Milkman about never going there. But Milkman is initially fascinated with this matriarchal household because of its difference from his patriarchal one. Food is tasty and plentiful, and none of the rigidity of his own home is present. When Macon goes against his own warnings and sneaks up to Pilate’s house, he is entranced by what he hears and sees.

a. “They were singing some melody that Pilate was leading. A phrase that the other two were taking up and building on. Her powerful contralto, Reba’s piercing soprano in counterpoint, and the soft voice of the girl, Hagar, who must be about ten or eleven now, pulled him like a carpet tack under the influence of a magnet.” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 29)

b. “Near the window, hidden by the dark, he felt the irritability of the day drain from him and relished the effortless beauty of the women singing in the candlelight. Reba’s soft profile, Hagar’s hands moving, moving in her heavy hair, and Pilate” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 29)
Macon cannot take his eyes off the women. Pilate’s home is full of life and music and he realizes that his is cold and barren. There is no question as to why Ruth’s home becomes a site of violence. There is no spirituality, no sensuality, or connectedness to their ancestry. Trauma is enacted daily upon the women who live there and they must all venture outside of the house to receive healing.

4.1.4. Pilate’s Cultural Trauma

The African-American experience of slavery and its impact on many generations forward is a recurrent theme in the fiction of Toni Morrison. Pilate in *Song of Solomon* is an example of such a character. Being African-American with former slaves as ancestors, she suffers from the trauma experienced by black people in America in the aftermath of slavery. She has suffered a traumatic past as an orphan since her father was killed by white men. Together with her brother, she was the witness of this tragic event when her father was shot sitting on a fence refusing to leave his property. Additionally, Pilate has never known her own mother, as she died giving birth to her.

The most severe and dangerous trauma is when dependent children are separated from their parents. As children are more vulnerable than adults, they are in greater need of the safety of home as well as the care of parents and community. Pilate is the victim of trauma as she is separated from both her parents since childhood. Despite being motherless, as her mother died giving birth to Pilate, she lives a happy life together with her loving father and brother until the age of twelve when her father also dies. A former slave, now free and owning his own property, her father is fooled by white people to sign a paper transferring his property to the white men. Being illiterate, he does not understand what he has signed and refuses to leave his land. Sitting on his fence, he is shot and killed by the white men who lay claim to his property, with his children witnessing this tragic event. At first, Pilate and her
brother, Macon, stay together, hiding in the woods. After a while, however, when Macon kills a white man in self-defence and they find his sack of gold, they disagree on what to do with the gold and have a severe fight. The fight results in their splitting up and Pilate is left all alone in the world.

The trauma of Pilate is further emphasized by being marked as “other” both by her brother and each community that she settles into. Due to the rejection and isolation experienced by Pilate, she can rely on no one but herself, a knowledge that helps her to build her own identity. In the quest to escape the white culture, the colonized often feels alienated and finds it difficult to choose between the two contradicting cultures. In order to find hope for the future, it therefore becomes important to reclaim the past and to reunite with the ancestors in the recent history instead of the past as they no longer exist there. When Pilate’s father is murdered, she loses not only him but also her brother and thus also her natural connection to her ancestral past and her cultural identity. However, a renewed contact with this past is established, represented by the spiritual contacts Pilate has with her dead father.

After his death, Pilate is in constant spiritual contact with her father, who gives her advice and helps her to claim her ancestral past and cultural identity. Shortly after his death, when she and her brother hide in the woods, their father appears for the first time. Pilate then realizes that he is looking out for them when he helps them to find shelter in a cave: “showing them what to do and where to go” (Song of Solomon, 1977:169). Later in life, Pilate tells her sister-in-law that she relies on her dead father who provides her with advice:

a. “I see him still. He’s helpful to me, real helpful. Tells me things I need to know.” (Song of Solomon, 1977:141)

b. “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 somethin else. He’s the only one” (Song of Solomon, 1977:141)
With this statement, Pilate affirms that she relies on her ancestral past, represented by her
dead father. Actually, when saying that her father is the only one she relies on, it is implied
that the cultural identity he represents is the only one that is important for her own cultural
identity. This conclusion can be drawn from Pilate’s rootedness in African art such as old folk
songs and her supernatural powers as well as her rejection of the modern, material lifestyle in
America.

For a long time, music was the healing art form for black people. In the case of Pilate,
this is true as she often sings an old folk song about her earliest ancestor, Sugarman or Jake, a
song that has been passed down through generations. Her nephew understands the source of
the song when he searches for his roots and hears children singing it in the village that his
family originates from: “… that was when they fell to their knees and sang Pilate’s song”
(Song of Solomon, 1977 : 303). Pilate first starts to sing it when she is depressed after her
daughter is born and her dead father tells her to sing. “Pilate understood all of what he told
her. To sing, which she did beautifully, relieved her gloom immediately” (Song of Solomon,
1977 : 147). Her singing has a healing power and it is her father who has helped her to come
to this knowledge. That she sings an old traditional song about her earliest ancestor is a
further representation of her rootedness in that culture.

Superstition and magic are other forms of expression closely linked to the culture of
black people. Pilate acknowledges this heritage through her spiritual contacts with her dead
father. However, this is not the only way in which she holds supernatural powers. Another
example is when she unconsciously knows about the marital problems of her sister-in-law,
Ruth, who wants another baby. “Pilate came to see Macon right away and soon as she saw me
she knew what my trouble was” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 125). By providing Ruth with
natural cures, Pilate is implicated in Macon’s renewed attraction to his wife.
“She gave me funny things to do. And some greenish-gray grassy-looking stuff to put in his food.” Ruth laughed. “I felt like a doctor, like a chemist doing some big important scientific experiment. It worked too. Macon came to me for four days. He even came home from his office in the middle of the day to be with me. He looked puzzled, but he came.” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 125)

Thus, Ruth becomes pregnant with the help of the supernatural powers of Pilate. These powers originate from the culture of her ancestors, a heritage that Pilate affirms and one that she is in close connection with.

Pilate not only affirms her ancestral cultural heritage but also rejects the new culture in the modern American society and the materialism it represents. A description of her home affirms it.

“At night she and her daughter lit the house with candles and kerosene lamps; they warmed themselves and cooked with wood and coal, pumped kitchen water into a dry sink through a pipeline from a well and lived pretty much as though progress was a word that meant walking a little farther on down the road.” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 27)

The lifestyle of Pilate is here characterized as backward and old-fashioned. She has, thus, not adopted the modern lifestyle and material standard of her time. This is further emphasized by the facts that her home hardly has any furniture and that she is indifferent to money for life.

a. “A moss-green sack hung from the ceiling. Candles were stuck in bottles everywhere; newspaper articles and magazine pictures were nailed to the walls. But other than a rocking chair, two straight-backed chairs, alrge table, a sink and stove, there was no furniture.” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 39).

b. “They were so different, these two women. One black, the other lemony. One corseted, the other buck naked under her dress. One well read but ill traveled. The other had read only a geography book, but had been from one end of the country to another. One wholly dependent on money for life, the other indifferent to it.” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 139)

By showing that material things and money are not important to her, Pilate also shows that she rejects the society it represents, i.e. the modern American society.
The name is an important expression of a person’s identity. The taking of a new name therefore became important for former slaves after emancipation. Their previous names symbolized enslavement as they had been given to them by their masters. As a consequence, their new names became the symbol of a new beginning as free men and women as well as a washing away of an imposed identity and a relation to an imposed past. Thus, the renaming was an act of self-determination as it was a rejection of slavery and the cultural heritage imposed by the white enemy. Additionally, it was a pathway leading to redemption and liberation from the past.

As Pilate’s father, Jake, is a free man when Pilate is born, he is able to choose her name according to ancestral tradition and his own preferences. He finds her name in the Bible and by the visual appearance of the name he believes that it is an appropriate name for his daughter. Being illiterate he chooses “a group of letters that seemed to him strong and handsome” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 18). He writes it down on a piece of paper, copying the letters from the Bible and proclaims: “That’s the baby’s name” (Song of Solomon, 1977 ; 18). Although other people find the name inappropriate, Jake is determined in his choice and keeps the note in the Bible where it stays until he is killed twelve years later. It is important for him to follow black customs when giving his daughter her name. This is an expression of his liberation from the slave past and his possibility to choose a name himself, not being forced to follow any white man’s decision. It is an act of self-determination and a way to claim the cultural identity of his daughter.

After the tragic murder of Pilate’s father, the note with Pilate’s name written on it becomes an important symbol of her connection to her ancestral past and the cultural identity it represents. When she becomes an orphan, Pilate folds up the piece of paper with her name on it and puts it in a little brass box that has belonged to her mother. Out of these two objects originating from her parents, she creates an earring that she carries hanging from her ear for
the rest of her life. Although her parents are no longer physically present, the earring symbolizes their presence in Pilate’s life as well as her close connection to her ancestral past and cultural identity.

The way in which Pilate attaches the earring to her body is a representation of her struggle to deal with her cultural trauma and to affirm her cultural identity. Trauma victim must identify the nature of the pain when dealing with the identity crisis due to a traumatic event. The pain and infection Pilate causes herself by attaching the earring to her ear can be interpreted as a symbol of the pain she feels in losing her father. It is her way of identifying the nature of the pain and dealing with the identity crisis caused by the trauma of becoming an orphan.

“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.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 167)

Her infected ear is the representation of the trauma she experiences. Further, as she nurses herself to stop the bleeding she is dealing not only with her bleeding ear but also with her separation and trauma. Thus, as her father is no longer physically present, she creates an artificial connection to him; represented by the earring with the note he wrote and attaches it to her ear. In that way, she has a physical connection to him although he is no longer in this world with her. This is her expression of claiming her own identity, keeping in touch with her ancestral past and being proud of it.

Pilate’s last name, Dead, originates from the white society and is thus not important to her as it does not have any connection to her older cultural identity. The name was given to her father Jake by a drunken, white officer in the Freedmen’s Bureau when registering after emancipation.
“He asked Papa where he was born. Papa said Macon. Then he asked him who his father was. Papa said, ‘He’s dead.’ Asked him who woned him, Papa said, ‘I’m free.’ Well, the Yankee wrote it all down, but in the wrong spaces. Had him born in Dunfrie, wherever the hell that is, and in the space for his name the fool wrote, ‘Dead’ comma ‘Macon’. (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 53)

Being illiterate, Jake does not find out what he is registered as until his wife later tells him. However, he decides to keep his new name as his wife thinks “it was new and would wipe out the past. Wipe it all out” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 54). Although the new name is given to Jake by the white society, he receives it as a free man and his wife considers it as a symbol of the new beginning as well as the washing away of an imposed identity and past. Although her father keeps this name as a free man, Pilate does not identify with it and only uses her first name when she meets people. “Pilate had learned, whenever she was asked her name, to give only her first name. The last name had a bad effect on people” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 146). The association to death is probably what makes people react negatively to it. However, this is not the reason for Pilate not using it. Death is a natural part of her life and nothing that worries her. “. . . since death held no terrors for her (she spoke often to the dead), she knew there was nothing to fear” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 149). However, this name is not chosen by her father or given to him according to ancestral tradition and is therefore not that important to Pilate and her cultural identity.

By rejecting her last name, Pilate also rejects the white society that imposed it on her. She rejects it as it originates from the Western culture and not her older, ancestral culture. By using only her first name, she claims her own identity and affirms her cultural heritage from her father as that name was given to her according to ancestral tradition and not by the white society. Further, in her active choice of the old culture over the new culture, she is not suffering from double-consciousness, i.e. her soul is unified and not consisting of two souls (the African and the American). She has avoided the feeling of being caught between cultures and the sense of not belonging to any of them. To affirm both names would symbolize that
double-consciousness as one name represents the old culture and the other represents the new. Pilate uses only her first name, an expression of her close connection to her ancestral past and the oldest, inner essence of her people.

A significant fact, which makes Pilate unique and different from everybody else, is that she has no navel. She was born naturally but after her navel-string was cut “the cord stump shriveled, fell off, and left no trace of having ever existed” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 28). As a child and young woman, she does not realize that her lack of navel marks her as different to everyone else. She knows that her brother has a navel but she has only thought of it as “a way in which males and females were different” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 143). However, from the horror expressed by an older woman first questioning Pilate on her abnormality, she realizes that there is something wrong with not having a navel.

Pilate’s brother, Macon, regards Pilate as the “other” as he believes that she is inferior to him. Being a successful businessman who owns a lot of property, he belongs to the black upper class. Pilate, on the other hand, is part of the underclass society, running an unaccepted business in making and selling wine. Although sharing the natural bonds of blood relations, Macon does not allow Pilate to be a part of his life. He is ashamed of her and does not want other people to know that he is related to her.

“He trembled with the thought of the white men in the bank – the men who helped him buy and mortgage houses – discovering that this raggedy bootlegger was his sister. That the propertied Negro who handled his business so well and who lived in the big house on Not Doctor Street had a sister who had a daughter but no husband. A collection of lunatics who made wine and sang in the streets “like common street women! Just like common street women!” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 20)

Thus, in Macon’s quest for social status and respect in the white as well as the black society, money and property are more valuable to him than his relationship with Pilate. He rejects her and isolates her from his life, despising her inferiority and worthlessness. This is illustrated by
his behaviour when Pilate moves to the city where he lives after their long separation. She decides to find him as she wants to make peace with him and as she believes that her grandchild needs the stability of family that Macon represents. However, when she finds him and reunites with him, he is “truculent, inhospitable, embarrassed, and unforgiving” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 151). Although he remembers the time when she has been the dearest thing in the world to him he now despises her as he believes that she is inferior to him. He states:

“How far down she had slid since then. She had cut the last thread of propriety. At one time she had been the dearest thing in the world to him. Now she was odd, murky, and worst of all, unkempt. A regular source of embarrassment, if he would allow it. But he would not allow it” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 20).

With this statement he affirms the otherness of Pilate as somebody who is inferior, ugly and dirty, not worthy of his companionship.

Macon also rejects Pilate because of her skin colour when referring to her as murky. In his determination to climb the social ladder, he has married Ruth, the daughter of “the most important Negro in the city”, a former doctor (Song of Solomon, 1977: 22). Ruth’s skin is fair, something that marks her higher status within the black community. She is also the total opposite of Pilate, whose skin is very dark. However, it is not only the white society that rejects people of colour but also the black people themselves as they wish to escape this shame. Pilate holds the feelings of being “other”, i.e. being rejected as inferior not only by the white society but also by relatives and other people who have a higher social status within the black community.

As previously discussed, Pilate’s lack of a navel marks her as “other” and this is the reason for other people than her brother rejecting her. Without parents and without any contact with her brother, her trauma is thus further emphasized by the fact that people reject her in each community that she settles into. At the age of fifteen, after a sexual experience with a boy and people finding out that she does not have a navel, she realizes that she is
abnormal. The group of people she is staying with asks her to leave them although they like her and in spite of the fact that she is “a good worker and a big help to everybody” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 144). The same thing happens in other societies that she settles into. Once people become aware of her lacking a navel, they reject her or leave her behind as they are terrified of being “in the company of something God never made” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 144). For example, people show their fear of Pilate being unnatural and frightening when they hide their children in the presence of Pilate. “Men frowned, women whispered and shoved their children behind them” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 148). Thus, people are afraid of Pilate and want to protect their children from her. They consider her to be unnatural and therefore do not want her to be a part of their society.

The fact that Pilate lacks a navel further excludes her from intimate relationships. It occurs to her that

“although men fucked armless women, one-legged women, hunchbacks and blind women, drunken women .............................................., and even certain species of plants, they were terrified of fucking her—a woman with no navel” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 148).

The fear she is met with isolates her from love and marriage. From this experience she learns to hide her stomach from her lovers in future relationships. When she later 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.

Although wanting to be part of a community and loved by someone, Pilate feels that she is too different for other people to accept her as part of their community. She realizes that “every other resource is denied her: partnership in marriage, confessional friendship, and communal religion” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 148). She continues to search for a stable
relationship, though: “Having had one long relationship with a man, she sought another, but no man was like that island man ever again either” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 148). This statement confirms that she feels isolated as she wants to be loved and part of a community. However, the knowledge of being “other” than the rest of society and her fear of being rejected is a catalyst of Pilate deciding to rely on only herself and to form her own life according to her own choices.

Pilate’s otherness in terms of the lack of a navel is an expression of Pilate being self-born. This is furthermore an indication of her ability to form her own identity. Morrison characterizes Pilate as self-born.

“After their mother died, she had come struggling out of the womb without help from throbbing muscles or the pressure of swift womb water. As a result, for all the years he knew her, her stomach was as smooth and sturdy as her back, ......................................................, and indifferent cave of flesh, dragging her own cord and her own afterbirth behind her.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 27 – 28)

The description of Pilate as self-born may either be interpreted as an expression of her as an independent, self-sufficient person or as somebody who is a product of herself. Independence and self-sufficiency is the correct interpretation as Pilate’s lack of a navel represents the black struggle for survival in describing Pilate as self-born. It is shown in the way that Pilate manages to support herself, her daughter and granddaughter without help from anybody else. Running her own business in winemaking she is successful and becomes a rich woman.

“They made the trip in style (one train and two buses), for Pilate had a lot of money; the crash of 1929 had produced so many buyers of cheap home brew she didn’t even need the collection the Salvation Army took up for her” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 151).

This statement confirms that Pilate is independent and self-sufficient. However the idea of Pilate being a product of herself is a more important representation of how she forms her cultural identity.
Morrison claims that Pilate has invented herself, meaning that the description of being self-born is a representation of how Pilate is a product of herself, a statement supported by the following quote: “…when she realized what her situation in the world was and would probably always be she threw away every assumption she had learned and began at zero” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 149). That she begins at zero is a representation of how she forms her cultural identity by starting from nothing, a symbol of a new beginning. She stops worrying about her stomach and stops trying to hide it. Further, she cuts her hair and forms her life following her own thoughts about what makes her happy or sad and what is valuable to her. She also asks herself existential questions such as what is true in the world and realizes that she has nothing to fear as she forms this new identity of hers. That the new identity is a product of herself and not like anyone else’s is further confirmed by the following quote:

“Her mind traveled crooked streets and aimless goat paths, arriving sometimes at profundity, other times at the revelations of a three-year old. … and – the consequence of the knowledge she had made up or acquired – kept her just barely within the boundaries of the elaborately socialized world of black people.” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 149)

The description of Pilate being on the boundaries of the elaborately socialized world of black people may be a representation of borderlines and in-between places. It is common to locate the question of culture in the realm of the beyond and that this beyond exists on the borderlines of the present. The beyond is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past. Instead, it can be seen as a transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. It can be applied to Pilate’s identity formation as she both uses acquired knowledge as well as knowledge she makes up herself when forming her new identity. The acquired knowledge would then represent the old, inherited wisdom. Further, the knowledge that she makes up on her own represents what she knows or has learned in her present life. Thus, when Pilate is described as being on the boundaries of the elaborately socialized world, it can
be argued that she is in the in-between places. These in-between places offer the possibility to elaborate strategies of selfhood that initiate new signs of identity. This is true as Pilate’s new identity is a product of herself and not like anyone else’s. The interpretation of Pilate being self-born as her being a product of herself is thus an expression of how she forms her new identity, the post-colonial identity. In this task, she does not leave the past behind. Rather, she has a strong foundation in her ancestral past. Pilate does not dismiss inherited knowledge as she takes advice from her dead father when forming her new identity: “But most important, she paid close attention to her mentor – the father who appeared before her sometimes and told her things” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 150). By paying close attention to her father, she affirms that his knowledge and the cultural identity he represents guide her in her own cultural identity formation.

To interpret the fact that Pilate is self-born as an expression of someone who has created herself is also important when describing her process of making sense of the trauma she experiences. 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. Pilate exemplifies the ability to reshape one’s life in this way. When creating herself, Pilate thus becomes the author of her own life story. In order to make sense of the trauma she experiences and to build her own identity, she relies on her dead father as well as the cultural inheritance from him, something that heals her from her traumatic experience. This is expressed 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, when she and Macon had left Circe’s house. 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 (they were tied together and slung over his shoulder), probably because his feet hurt, ..........................................................., or rested against the side of the still” (Song of Solomon, 1977 : 150)
The difference in her father’s clothing marks how differently Pilate relates to her trauma before and after creating her new cultural identity. Shortly after his death when she hides in the woods with her brother, she sees him as he was dressed when he was shot. This is an expression of her being in the midst of the trauma. After creating her new identity and making sense of the trauma, she sees a more positive image of him, one from before he was killed and that also reflects her own appearance and preferences. She herself wears a cap and she does not like wearing shoes.

For example, this is how she is described by her brother: “… Pilate continued to visit, her shoelaces undone, a knitted cap pulled down over her forehead, bringing her foolish earring …” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 19 – 20). This expresses how Pilate always wears a cap and although she wears shoes on the occasions described, they are not laced as she prefers to be barefoot as in childhood. An illustration of this is when she hides in the woods with Macon: “They ate raspberries and apples; they took off their shoes and let the dewy grass and sun-warmed dirt soothe their feet” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 167 – 168). In this situation, the bare feet represent something positive and soothing for Pilate. Further, people who knew Pilate in childhood describe her as follows: “Pilate they remembered as a pretty woods-wild girl that couldn’t nobody put shoes on” (Song of Solomon, 1977: 234). From this statement, it can be concluded that Pilate never wore shoes as a child when she lived a happy life with her father. As her father appears to her barefoot when she has made sense of the trauma, it can be argued that this represents her connection to the happy childhood, when she was close to her father and her roots. Thus, through a solid foundation in her ancestral past, Pilate has now made sense of her trauma as well as created her new cultural identity.
4.2 Findings

Though slavery was abolished more than a hundred years ago, it still haunts the generations of its victims and has become the origin of all kinds of problems confronting the African Americans nowadays. Indeed, slavery is a founding trauma for African Americans. For black slaves, their families are forcefully separated, their dignity is ruined, their bodies are mistreated, and their subjectivity is destroyed.

By the history of exploitation, oppression, and persecution, blacks still live in its aftermath. They feel they are isolated in the land where it claims that everyone is equal. Life in the country for them is so repressing that they try to get rid of the influence of their ancestors’ trauma. However, instead of finding a way out, they become depressed, and are numb to their life and to their great dreams they once held.

Slavery and racial discrimination also lead to a sense of inferiority among African Americans on a deeper level. Self-inferiority impels them to give up the black tradition and forget their painful past but to compromise with the white values. Finally, they put the white values above their own values. The more pride they get in such life, the more inferiority they feel in their deep mind.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

5.1 Conclusion

From the previous analysis, the writer concludes that The Blacks had lost connection with their native land and their contact with their ancestors’ tradition and culture since they were brought and sold to America. They felt lonely like a wanderer. For a long time, African Americans have lived in the white-dominant society. To make a living, they have to adapt themselves to the white society and are gradually separated from their own traditions and cultures. Generally, because the blacks are at the bottom of society, they tend to hold a sense of national inferiority. For the modern African Americans, the history of slavery and racism bring them to live in the shadow of its traumatic aftermath. They have to suffer from the negative influence of trans-generational transmission of racial trauma. As a result, some of them form a distorted identity.

Certainly, man in the novel experiences the trauma of paternal loss and identity crisis, but he has inherited a coping ability. As Milkman realizes at the conclusion of the novel, men have inherited the ability to fly. Men lose and in return they leave.

Ruth has survived the trauma inflicted upon her body by Macon, yet living with the impact of it continues to haunt her. Ruth still lives without touch, without care and affection from Macon. Hagar, however, has not survived her traumatic experience. The crisis of life proves to be too great for her to withstand. While both women endure two distinct damaging experiences, the initial trauma is the same for both of them. They both suffer the rupture of a love relationship, which sets the tone for the remained of their lives. They remain tied to the
land, tied to their children. They are left to pass on the stories, sing the songs, and mourn the men who have left them. In the end Hagar is left dead and Ruth is shattered.

Pilate is an African-American woman with former slaves as her ancestors. She suffers from the trauma experienced by black people in America in the aftermath of slavery. Her trauma consists of being an orphan after witnessing the murder of her father. This trauma is further emphasized with the separation from her brother as well as being rejected as “other” both by her brother as well as each society that she settles into. Although suffering from trauma and being all alone in the world, Pilate manages to establish a renewed contact with her ancestral past.

5.2 Suggestion

Reading literary works can enrich the horizon of thinking of the readers about human life as most of literary works have messages or moral lessons so that the readers can justify how to behave.

The writer expects that the readers will understand what she has analysed and get knowledge after reading this thesis. As the analysis focuses on trauma and its effects, the writer wishes that the readers can take the final message that is no matter what kind of trauma we have experienced before and no matter how big the effect affects us, we have to keep strong and we have to be able to cope the trauma and its effects how hard it is.

The writer would like to give suggestions especially for students of English Department to make further analysis of this novel because there are many topics that can be discussed from this novel. Moreover the writer also hopes that the readers will be interested in reading other Toni Morrison’s literary works and analyze them.
The writer realizes that this thesis is far from perfection and still has many weaknesses and mistakes therefore it would be pleased to invite the readers to give suggestion, correction, or any other input which later the writer could use in order to produce an impressive writing.