

## Chapter IV

### **The Reinterpretation of Spaces: Milkman's Identity Crisis and Formation of New Identity**

Milkman, the protagonist, is explored in different spaces in this chapter. Unlike his ancestors who are attached or bound in one certain space, Milkman experiences various kinds of spaces, since he can freely and dynamically move to both the north and the south spaces. Each space has an effect on his identity-formation, which finally enable him to successfully create identity.

The name "Milkman" clearly suggests the heterogeneity of his identity as it embodies multiple connotations. It embodies the conflicts of race, gender, and psychological condition he encounters in life. The name can refer to whiteness and the image of the White man, in spite of his black skin. It also relates him with matriarchal power in terms of femininity or community, as distinct from "Macon Dead" who is named after his father. Or it can convey his immature characteristics. Milkman has to deal with all of them in his journey to self-discovery. It is presented in the form of journey of learning, or in literary terms, Bildungsroman, since, in his journey from the North to the South, he learns to know not only others, but also himself. Milkman's self-discovery distinguishes *Song of Solomon* from Morrison's other early novels. Pecola's madness (*The Bluest Eyes*) and Sula's alienation (*Sula*) are portrayed as marks of the "communal scapegoat" (Smith, 2003, p. 28), unaccepted by and irreconcilable to the community they live in. Therefore, Milkman seems to present the triumph of Black individuals in searching for their identities and integrating with community, but at the same time having to pay a heavy price. Furthermore, compared to the other two novels, the new issue added in *Song of Solomon* that plays an important role in the protagonist's self-formation is space. While Pecola and Sula never or rarely move from their community, Milkman takes journeys in broader areas as he experiences both the North and the South of America. The two spaces have tremendous influences on his self-formation as the new broader experiences enable him to have introspection towards many aspects of life. Although he encounters many conflicts against others and himself causing the senses of isolation and alienation like the two female protagonists, he can finally gain maturity,

which is ironically achieved from the sacrifices of women. Thus, spaces are essential for the individual's identity formation.

In this chapter, I will discuss Milkman's encounter of multiple spaces in his journey from the North to the South. Each space is dominated by dominant ideologies, which makes Milkman feel alienated as he is unable to completely assimilate to any of them and eventually leads him to create a fragmented identity. However, on the second trip to the South, Milkman has a chance to experience the contested spaces that enable him to form a new identity which I am calling heterogeneous identity.

### **The multiple ideologies of the North and Milkman's identity as an incomplete freeman**

In the second chapter of this research, I argue that the north space is defined by Milkman's male ancestors as the "Whites' utopia" and "Blacks' utopia". The two definitions showing the Blacks' different perceptions towards the space prove it to be the space containing multiple ideologies. The diversity of the north space enables Milkman to experience various groups of people, who introduce him to various kinds of values towards life.

#### **Milkman and the "Whites' utopia"**

For the north space as Whites' utopia, he identifies himself in the space mainly under the influence of his father, Macon Dead. In his relationship with Milkman, it is apparent that Macon attempts to "imprison" Milkman in his "Whites' utopia" in order to impose the idea of "wealth-is-freedom" on his son. For instance, he orders Milkman to go to "the North" represented by his office, instead of visiting "the South" represented by Pilate's house or hanging around with Guitar.

Boy, you got better things to do with your time. Besides, it's time you started learning how to work. You start Monday. After school come to my office; work a couple of hours there and learn what's real.

Pilate can't teach you a thing you can use in this world. Maybe the next, but not this one. Let me tell you right now the one important thing you'll ever need to know: Own things. And let the things you own own other things. Then you'll own yourself and other people too. Starting Monday, I'm going to teach you how. (p. 55)

Macon's "office" symbolizes "Whites' utopia" in terms of its microcosmic space of Whites' business world, which takes money, profit, or wealth as the core values. Therefore, Macon's mention of "this world" suggests the North, urban, business or capitalistic world, which is "practical" and "realistic" for Milkman's survival in the present. On the contrary, the "next world", as Macon intends to refer to the idealistic world, foreshadows Milkman's "future", since he embraces Pilate's teaching while taking journey to the rural South. Furthermore, Macon's introduction of his "world" crystallizes the linear sense of time. He advises Milkman to spend his time as productively as he can because time moves from past to present and to future and cannot be taken back. He should "own things" as much as he can or else his time will be spent for nothing. It is clearly presented that, for Macon, wealth and improvement are the sources of freedom and power, since when one "own[s] things", one can "own [one]self and other people too". Through imposing this idea, Macon intends to pass on his "colony" and capitalistic value to Milkman.

Another "Whites' utopia" Milkman experiences is the Deads' house. The house represents the materialistic urban bourgeois space where they lead decent and luxurious lives. Its luxury is described as "the doctor's big dark house of twelve rooms and the green sedan" (p. 9). And the inhabitants consider themselves superior to those in the underclass neighborhood. For instance, Macon and Milkman do not allow Corinthians to see Potter because "he is Southside and not good enough for her" (p. 214). Furthermore, the house is the "Whites' utopia" as it is used to reproduce the master-slave relationship. This is shown through the violence and inequality among the family members. The house had been controlled by Macon through creating "respect and fear" (p. 67) among family members. Yet Milkman successfully dethrones Macon's authority as the "master" of the Deads when he decks his father because his father smashes his mother.

Now when he met his sisters' eyes over the table, they returned him a look of hatred so fresh, so new, it startled him. [...] Milkman had to blink twice before their faces returned to the vaguely alarmed blandness he was accustomed to. Quickly he left the room, realizing there was no one to thank him – or abuse him. His action was his alone. It would change nothing between his parents. It would change nothing inside them. He had knocked his father down and perhaps there were some new positions on the chessboard, but the game would go on. (p. 68)

As shown by his sisters' unexpected reaction, Milkman's act is not seen as his revenge for his mother against his father, but the patriarchal power exercise of the new master. The violence "change[s] nothing" among family members, but declares that Milkman is the one they should "respect and fear", instead of Macon. Lena criticizes Milkman's act as being "exactly like him[Macon]" and it shows that he is "taking over, letting [them] know [he] had the right to tell her[Ruth] and all of [them] what to do." (p. 216) Thus, it can be said that Milkman assumes a position of a "master" and continues "the game" of suppressing others in the family.

Associating himself with the office and house, Milkman identifies himself with the "Whites' utopia" in way that he considers himself superior to and isolates himself from others. It is shown through his ignorance towards the sufferings of the members in family and community, especially his mother and sisters. For example, in his "dreams" he sees that his mother is smothered by the flowers she plants but he doesn't help her.

...Guitar looked him in the eyes and said, "Why didn't you go help her?"

"What?"

"Help her. Pull her out from underneath."

"But she liked it. She was having fun. She liked it."

"Are you sure?" Guitar was smiling.

"Sure I'm sure. It was my dream."

"It was *your* mother too." (p. 105)

Despite the fact that Milkman "called it a dream because he didn't want to tell him[Guitar] it had really happened, that he had really seen it" (p. 104), Milkman's

ignorance towards his mother's suffering emphasizes their master-slave relationship. There is no trace of mother-son bonding, but the image of Milkman as an "accomplice" of the "murder" of his mother. Moreover, his ignorance also represents extreme individualism. While Guitar tries to remind him of his ignorance, Milkman insists on his own conclusion because it is "his dream". The estrangement of mother-son relationship portrays Milkman's extremely individualistic mind. In addition, we can see Milkman's individualistic characteristic in his ignorance towards other family members. He destroys his sister's life by telling his father to prohibit her from seeing her boyfriend because he is one of the Seven Days members, and make her quit her job. What's more, he steals Pilate's sack of "gold" with the plan to hurt her if she comes in his way. And he cruelly breaks Hagar's heart until she finally goes out of her mind. He leaves all of his family members' sufferings behind and goes to the South for wealth and freedom. Lena compares his irresponsibility to the "ways to pee on people" (p. 214), which male urination refers to "a desire to dominate others or to a lack of self-control." (Wegs, 2003, p. 176) Milkman's indifference towards his family members' sufferings displays the distance between him and them. By being dissociated with them and their problems, he thinks he is free as he mentions that he wants to "beat a path away from his parents' past, which was also their present and which was threatening to become his present as well", "avoid commitment and strong feelings, and shy away from decisions" and "know as little as possible, to feel only enough to get through the day amiably and to be interesting enough to warrant the curiosity of other people – but not their all-consuming devotion." (p. 180) However, Milkman cannot assimilate to the White utopia as much as Macon because he lacks drive. For Macon, his traumatic history in the South and his strong bond to his father motivates him to "move north/upward", while Milkman has no inspiration to do so since being born in the North and disconnecting from his family roots. Moreover, Milkman's individuality is less intensive than Macon's, since he is more open-minded to learn other kinds of values. We can see it in his experiences in the "Black utopia".

### **Milkman and the “Blacks’ utopia”**

Living in the North, Milkman does not only experience the “White utopia” or the world of prosperity, but also the “Blacks’ utopia” or the world of family and community. Apart from the life under his father’s influence, Milkman is introduced to the larger community mainly by Guitar. It enables him to absorb the sense of community being friendlier and less class-conscious than his father. Apparently, Milkman has a better relationship with Southside folks than his father, as “the tenants felt at ease enough with him to tease him, feed him, confide in him” (p. 56), although sometimes he is not welcomed by some folks as a result of his father’s selfishness and mercilessness. One of the “Blacks’ utopias” Milkman experiences is Tommy’s barbershop in Southside. Unlike Macon’s office, the barbershop can be considered as a kind of office, but it is not driven by profit; it concerns itself more with personal relationships. Here, he is introduced to the other world of underclass Blacks’ deprived life (p. 60), racial discrimination towards Blacks and Black history of slavery (pp. 80-2) that he never experienced while living on Not Doctor Street. The barbershop is the space the underclass Blacks share and express their opinions about what is going on in the world. Hence, the place can be seen as a path that more or less brings him to embrace the wider African-American community.

The other “Blacks’ utopia” Milkman comes into contact with through Guitar is Pilate’s home. It is another kind of home leading Milkman to see the real sense of family. In contrast to the violence and inequality of the slave-master relationship Milkman experiences in the Deads’ home, in Pilate’s home he realizes the sense of family bonding and the equality of family members. In the previous chapter, I argue that Pilate’s home is a reproduction of the southern world, more specifically Lincoln’s Heaven farm. In spite of living in the urban North, she maintains the traditional ways of life without modern facilities to make life more comfortable, and concerns about family bonding are shown through the singing ritual. With Pilate, Milkman is introduced to the real sense of family and “remember[s] being completely happy” (p. 47) for the first time in his life.

At fifty-two, Macon Dead was as imposing a man as he had been at forty-two, when Milkman thought he was the biggest thing in the world. Bigger even than the house they lived in. But today he had seen a woman who was just as tall and who had made him feel tall too. (p. 50)

Unlike Macon, the sense of family, for Pilate, is the equal treatment of everyone. Nobody possess the absolute control as “the biggest”, but everyone is “as tall as” one another. Furthermore, he is shown the significance of family bonding through the singing, in which all family members participate and play a role. In Pilate’s “utopia”, Milkman starts to learn to participate in family and community and acknowledge communal self. However, Milkman cannot completely assimilate to the space because his ignorance and extreme individuality prevent him from identifying himself with family and community.

Milkman’s encounter of “the Whites’ utopia” and “the Blacks’ utopia” in the North creates the sense of isolation and alienation to him, since he cannot completely assimilate to either or both of them.

Milkman closed his eyes and then opened them. The street was even more crowded with people, all going in the direction he was coming from. All walking hurriedly and bumping against him. After a while he realized that nobody was walking on the other side of the street. There were no cars and the street lights were on, now that darkness had come, but the sidewalk on the other side of the street was going empty. He turned around to see where everybody was going, but there was nothing to see except their backs and hats pressing forward into the night. He looked again at the other side of Not Doctor Street. Not a soul.

[...]

Milkman walked on, still headed toward Southside, never once wondering why he himself did not cross over to the other side of the street, where no one was walking at all. (p. 78)

The quotation shows Milkman’s isolation and alienation towards the north space. He is estranged from others since everyone goes “in the direction he was coming from.” This image signifies that although he lives in the society, he is not completely a part

of it. And it seems that he can find no way to escape from the situation since he “never once wonder[ed] why he himself did not cross over to the other side of the street”, which is absolutely empty. The crowded and empty streets can be seen as Morrison’s symbolic presentation of the protagonist’s psychological condition in terms of his identity crisis. His decision to remain with the crowd, despite the sense of alienation, illustrates his longing to identify himself with them. He does not dare to be alone and different from them, as we can see that he tries to define himself through his ancestors by either assimilating to or going against them. The empty side, thus, can be seen as the path of self-definition, apart from others, which he does not choose. Additionally, the scene emphasizes the image of the north space as the landlocked space. Milkman is locked in the North with the sense of alienation and estrangement. It is clearly presented that, after knowing the unpleasant backgrounds of his family members, “now he questioned them. Questioned everybody” (p. 79), including his mother possessive love, his father’s greed, or his sisters’ anger, as he comments that all of them are “crazy” (p. 205). He also criticizes Pilate and her children that “they’re crazy [...]. Nobody knows what they’ll do; *they* don’t even know.” (p. 182) Although he loves them, he has made use of them, until they are nothing for him now, as he mentions “[o]nce, long ago, he had cared what Pilate and Hagar thought of him, but having conquered Hagar and having disregarded Pilate enough to steal from her, all that was gone.” (p. 293) His comments suggest his egocentricity, which is highlighted by Guitar saying that it “[l]ooks like everybody’s going to the wrong direction but you, don’t it?” (p. 106) Besides, he also feels estranged towards Guitar claiming that “what right had Guitar to talk?” since he has a different way of life from Milkman (p. 107). When Milkman knows what Guitar does with the Seven Days, he says that kind of violence is “crazy” (p. 155). Moreover, it is noted that while he is head[ing] towards Southside, everyone is going to the direction he comes from, which can be said to be the northern part of the city. The action foreshadows Milkman’s journey to the South to search for freedom and prosperity, which is opposite to other Blacks who escape from the South to the North for the same purpose. The senses of isolation and alienation show Milkman’s failure in creating his identity as a free man in the north space.



The multiple ideologies of the North presented through the “Whites’ utopia” and “Blacks’ utopia” cause the sense of isolation and alienation to the protagonist. Although both of them seem to introduce the broader worlds to Milkman, the different values prevent Milkman from completely assimilating to them. Therefore, they cause him to have an identity crisis.

### **The multiple ideologies of the South and Milkman’s incomplete communal identity**

After failing to achieve freedom from the North, Milkman takes his journey to the South to find the “gold”, believing that it will help him escape from the unpleasant life. However, he experiences other values of the south space, those which are involved in personal relationships in family and community. This experience influences him to change his goal and create new identities. The significance of people in family and community manifests in two different aspects: housebound and housebond spaces. Similar to his journey in the North, Milkman attempts to assimilate to both spaces while taking a journey to the South. Nonetheless, the various values of the south space finally cause Milkman’s identity crisis.

### **Milkman and the housebound space**

The housebound space which Milkman encounters is the closed southern community such as Shalimar and some parts in Danville. Here, Milkman learns to identify himself with the community because, in doing so, it will be easier for him to trace the “gold”. The more he knows and becomes acquainted with local people, the easier he can find the “gold”. Formerly, we can see that the protagonist has strong drives to associate himself with others by either assimilating to or going against others, as shown in his life in the North. Yet, he is unable to completely do both because the differences of values impede him from taking sides. The sense of alienation displays his status as an “inside outsider”. In the close community of the South, Milkman is seen as an outside stranger, despite the fact that he considers the

space as “home” and expects to be welcomed by the local folks. The fact that they totally consider him as a stranger is not only because he comes from the North, but also he brings with him the northern ideology shown through his display of conspicuous consumption and extremely individualistic mind. For example, in Shalimar, his act unintentionally insults them and triggers a negative reaction from them.

Fuck’em. My name is Macon; I’m already dead. He had thought this place, this Shalimar, was going to be home. His original home. His people came from here, his grandfather and his grandmother. All the way down South people had been nice to him, generous, helpful. In Danville they had made him the object of hero worship. In his own home town his name spelled dread and grudging respect. But here, in his “home,” he was unknown, unloved, and damn near killed. These were some of the meanest unhung niggers in the world. (p. 270)

Milkman regards Shalimar as his “home” where he expects everyone to treat him like their kin or even to be pleased with his coming. On the other hand, the passage shows that he becomes their “unknown” stranger, or worse, enemy “damn near killed”. Here, we can see Milkman’s “whiteness” as he addresses the folks as “unhung niggers”. It reflects the role as a slave master or White racist like the Klan. It displays Milkman’s estrangement and disconnection towards the close Black community or his “original home”.

Milkman’s status as an outsider is repeatedly highlighted every time he visits the housebound space. For instance, at Circe’s place in Danville, Milkman shows his disapproval towards Circe’s insistence on staying in the mansion, since he thinks she does so to show her loyalty towards the White masters, and offers her some money to “buy her freedom” (p. 246). Here, Milkman’s act is ironic because he employs Whites’ capitalistic logic to strike a blow against “the Whites’ power over Circe”. Circe’s comments on Milkman’s “ears-not-connected-to-brain” (p. 247) display Milkman’s inability to understand other kinds of perception, especially Black perception towards the suffering of slaves. The incident proves him as a “White man” who only feels “a flood of pity” (p. 246) towards a Black ex-slave, or in other word,

an outsider to the African-American community. However, in the Byrds' house, the status as an outsider enables him to connect to his family. According to Susan, Milkman is an outsider not because he is seen as a "White man", but a Black man who comes from other place. Although he is not completely accepted as a kin to the Byrds, he is allowed to know about Sing. Therefore, the status as an outsider here both connects and disconnects Milkman from his family and community.

However, in Shalimar Milkman is introduced to the ways of becoming a member of the close community, which are hunting and singing rituals. These communal cultures are employed as a kind of boundary to allow or disallow outsiders to become a part of it. Hunting is presented as the coming-of-age ritual and the process of assimilation towards the closed community by proving masculinity which commonly includes bravery, strength, and surviving skills. By participating in the hunting with the folks, he learns that, in this primitive world, the most valuable thing and the only strength he can rely on to survive is his own instinct, not his expensive properties. Stuck in the middle of the deep forest while the local men move quickly without any special tools, Milkman realizes that his properties are meaningless and valueless.

The rest of him had disappeared. So the thoughts came, unobstructed by other people, by things, even by the sight of himself. There was nothing here to help him – not his money, his car, his father's reputation, his suit, or his shoes. In fact they hampered him. [...] His watch and his two hundred dollars would be of no help out here, where all a man had was what he was born with, or had learned to use. And endurance. Eyes, ears, nose, taste, touch – and some other sense that he knew he did not have: an ability to separate out, of all the things there were to sense, the one that life itself might depend on. (p. 277)

Here, Milkman's "rebirth" is depicted. He has to abandon the northern values and embrace southern values. We can see that all his properties and values he brings from the North "hampered him". More importantly, he has to abandon "himself" in order to be a part of nature using his physical senses "eyes, ears, nose, taste, touch" and "endurance". With them, Milkman can move on and even survive Guitar's attempt to

murder him. Ironically, the hunting ritual does not enable Milkman to prove his strength, but his weakness. He realizes the selfishness and foolishness of his extreme individualism and materialism and perceives the importance of communal relationships. His realization of weakness is clearly depicted as he later confesses to the folks that he is “scared to death” (p. 280). Milkman’s “transformation” makes the folks gradually accept him and treat him like one of their members, as he is provided some information about his family and allowed to spend days and nights with the local woman, Sweet. Hence, it shows that, by successfully participating in hunting ritual, Milkman starts to be “bounded” by this community.

In addition, Milkman participates in the singing ritual or the oral culture to assimilate to the community. He needs to decipher the riddles in the children game’s song because it will shed light on his family roots. To do so, it requires his full attention to listen and memorize the whole song.

Milkman took out his wallet and pulled from it his airplane ticket stub, but he had no pencil to write with, and his pen was in his suit. He would just have to **listen** and **memorize** it. He **closed his eyes** and concentrated while the children, inexhaustible in their willingness to repeat a rhythmic, rhyming action game, performed the round over and over again. And Milkman memorized all of what they sang. (p. 303, emphases added)

The quotation emphasizes the importance of oral-literate traditions. It shows that Milkman is learning to be a courier of Solomon’s legend by listening and memorizing the whole song. It also illustrates the different historical recording methods between Blacks and Whites. Unlike the Whites, the Blacks “inscribe” their history onto their memory. So to learn about it, their descendents need to listen and memorize, not read. Here, Milkman “closed his eyes and concentrated”, so he would not miss a single word including the rhythm and rhyme. In “Orality, Literacy, and Memory in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*”, Middleton points out the conflicts between oral and literate traditions prevailing in the novel. Milkman’s reliance on written culture disconnects him from the southern world. Middleton notes that both Milkman and readers “have been deceived by orthography and our literate images of words” (1993, p. 68), so at first we do not see the similarity between Charlemagne, Shaleemone,

Shalimar, and Solomon. Therefore, the oral-aural experiences provide the crucial links in Milkman's search for his family (Middleton, 1993, p. 69). Obviously, experiencing the singing ritual connects Milkman to this closed family and community. Having the same ancestors, Milkman can be undoubtedly considered as one of them.

Nevertheless, the housebound space is not Milkman's final destination. Although it leads him to embrace family and community, the sense of family and community is limited by geography. Milkman's embrace of family and community is associated with the fact that he has his family in the North and has to go back to serve them. Thus, because the sense of family bonding has no geographical boundary, he cannot completely accept housebound identity.

### **Milkman and the housebound space**

In Milkman's journey to the South, he also encounters the housebound space. His sense of family and community bonding is, in fact, produced during his journey in the housebound space. It is clear that his journey is initially driven by financial fortune or the "gold" in the green sack. The fact that Milkman "followed in her[Pilate's] track" (p. 258) in order to "look for her people" (p. 146), which formerly served a personal purpose, ironically leads him to associate with many people, which creates the bond with his family and community. Due to the bond, the purpose of his journey is gradually altered to "spiritual fortune" until discovering that the "gold" is actually the bones of his ancestor. It can be said that the new motive of family bonding is a result of his experience in housebound space. While living in the South, Milkman often connects the two worlds, the southern and the northern worlds, to complete the jigsaw of his family, which enables him to perform an introspection of his relationship with his family and community. It is clearly depicted that "[e]ver since Danville, his interest in his own people, not just the ones he met, had been growing." (p. 293) He has "a good feeling to come into a strange town and find a stranger who knew [his] people", which makes him understand what "links" (p. 229)

mean to him. In housebound space such as Susan Byrd's house, the strong sense of family and community enables him to make a bond with people.

He was curious about these people. He didn't feel close to them, but he did feel connected, as though there was some cord or pulse or information they shared. Back home he had never felt that way, as though he belonged to anyplace or anybody. He'd always considered himself the outsider in his family, only vaguely involved with his friend, and except for Guitar, there was no one whose opinion of himself he cared about. [...] But there was something he felt now – here in Shalimar, and earlier in Danville – that reminded him of how he used to feel in Pilate's house. Sitting in Susan Byrd's living room, lying with Sweet, eating with those men at Vernell's table, he didn't have to get over, to turn on, or up, or even out. (pp. 292-3)

The protagonist learns to “belong” to new places and people by connecting himself with them through the story of their ancestors. The sense of bonding does not depend on distance (“feel close to them”), but memory they share together (“connected” and “shared” “some cord or pulse or information”). Here, it shows that Milkman begins to understand the sense of bonding, although he cannot still connect it with his northern family.

Later on, in the hunting and singing rituals, the transformation of his self enables him to perform introspection and finally conclude that his bond with the northern family was always in the form of “ignorance” and “vanity” (p. 276). The song creates the “nostalgic” sense to him, as he “smiled, remembering Pilate. Hundreds of miles away, he was homesick for her, for her house, for the very people he had been hell-bent to leave.” (p. 300) He is also homesick for his family, which he never once felt love towards when living in the North, feeling sorry for his mother's deprived life and understanding his father's greed to fulfill his grandfather's dream, Hagar's crazy love, and Pilate's unconditional love for him. The housebound space of Shalimar enables Milkman to create the deeper bond towards his family and community as he does not only think of them, but also realizes that he should be responsible for his actions towards them. Ironically, the housebond value or sense of

responsibility towards family drives him to leave the South. Like Sing and Pilate, Milkman's sense of family and community is not bounded in certain space; what he is concerned with is the wider bond of people. Therefore, due to the housebond values, he decides to leave and go back in order to serve his family and fulfill his ancestors' wishes --- to unveil the truth about the "gold" in the green sack.

Assimilating to the closed community through the internal rituals and creating bond towards family and community enable Milkman to create his communal identity. By gaining complete understanding towards his family and community and being a part of them, he expresses that the southern children's game "is [his] game now" (p. 327) and he belongs to "that flyin motherfuckin tribe" (p. 328). However, Milkman, in fact, does not gain complete communal identity, since he has not fully taken responsibility towards Hagar's death. He has no understanding of his fault when Sweet asks him "[w]ho'd he[Solomon] leave behind?" and he simply says "Everybody! He left everybody down on the ground and he sailed on off like a black eagle." (p. 328) Here, Milkman still focuses on and praises the flight of his male ancestors as the graceful act of freedom. Yet, he fails to see the suffering of "everybody down on the ground" and to connect it with his action towards Hagar. However, realizing his mistake does not help him to achieve communal identity because "the consequences of Milkman's own stupidity would remain, and regret would always outweigh the things he was proud of having done. Hagar was dead and he had not loved her one bit." (p. 335) Thus, her death always remains as evidence of his individuality and as the flaw that prevents Milkman from completely creating communal identity.

Apparently, the various ideologies of both the north and the south spaces result in Milkman's identity crisis. When living in the North, he is unable to completely assimilate to the "Whites' utopia" and the "Blacks' utopia". It is shown through his senses of isolation and alienation towards them. Due to his estrangement, he cannot complete his identity as a freeman. Similarly, Milkman is not a complete part of the housebound and housebond spaces. He cannot fully embrace housebound identity because of the bonding and the duty he has with his northern family. On the other hand, he is unable to completely create housebond identity due to his "killing"

of Hagar. In other words, Milkman cannot complete his communal identity. Obviously, the protagonist's identity crisis proves that the varieties of ideologies in both spaces have tremendous impact on an individual's formation of identity.

### **Contested space and Milkman's heterogeneous identity**

In Milkman's first trip from the North to the South, he experiences various kinds of values dominantly embodied in certain space. They affect Milkman's identity formation as the negotiations of these values lead him to have an identity crisis. However, Milkman does take the second trip to the South, which enables him to encounter contested space. The space embodies different ideologies, which cannot supersede or replace one another. Experiencing contested space is essential to Milkman's formation of new identity as a heterogeneous identity.

Here, the contested space is Solomon's Leap. It is the place Milkman takes Pilate to in Shalimar in order to bury her father's (Jake's) bone at the place he belongs --- Solomon's Leap --- where his father flew back to his home and accidentally dropped Jake down to the ground. Solomon's Leap is geographically described as "the higher of two outcroppings of rock, [b]oth flat-headed, both looking over a deep valley" and with a plateau on top (p. 335). The place is a contested space embracing both the characteristics of north and south spaces.

"...like a bird. Just stood up in the fields one day, ran up some hill, spun around a couple of times, and was lifted up in the air. Went right on back to wherever it was he came from. There's a big double-headed rock over the valley named for him. It like to killed the woman, the wife. I guess you could say 'wife.' Anyway she's supposed to have screamed out loud for days. And there's a ravine near here they call Ryna's Gulch, and sometimes you can hear this funny sound by it that the wind makes. People say it's the wife, Solomon's wife, crying. Her name was Ryna.

They say she screamed and screamed, lost her mind completely. (p. 323) First, it is the north space as "the land of freedom" for Black to liberate himself. It is said that Solomon sets off and flies. His liberation echoes the act of the northern men



such as Macon Dead and Milkman in terms of their craving for freedom and ignoring their family and community. Second, the place can also be perceived as a south space as it contains housebound and housebond characteristics. We can see that in the same area of Solomon's Leap, there is Ryna's Gulch embodying the story of Solomon's "wife" who is left behind and moans about his departure --- the origin of "Song of Solomon". The space can be seen as housebound space because, apart from Solomon's act of liberation, it bounds the people Solomon leaves behind with the suffering of slavery. Furthermore, despite Solomon's individual flight, Ryna's moaning creates and maintains family and community. It originates the collective memory bonding Black ancestors and descendents together. Although in the realm of myth, Ryna's tragic story seems to lie beneath Solomon's success story, in the realm of reality, she plays a significant role in maintaining his "presence". It can be said that the legend of Solomon's flight has been memorized and passed on among generations in the forms of story, song, or children's game because of those who were left behind. Therefore, the place is a contested space because it conveys both the sense of freedom/imprisonment and individual/collective characteristics.

Solomon's Leap and/or Ryna's Gulch, as a contested space, enables Milkman to create heterogeneous identity providing Milkman a chance to integrate the Black collective memory and his individual experiences. The integrated experiences are caused by the various physical conditions of Solomon's Leap. The geographical description as a "flat-headed rocks looking over the deep valley" shows that Solomon's Leap openly connects to both ground and air. The ground and the air spaces enable Milkman to witness and reinterpret his ancestors' flights, and create his own flight as well.

The ground space supports Milkman in combining the northern and southern identity while witnessing Pilate's "flight". At Solomon's Leap, not only Solomon takes flight, but also Pilate. However, Pilate's flight generates different meaning, unlike her ancestor.

Yet when she moved her head a little to gaze at something behind his shoulder, it took a while for him to realize that she was dead. And when he did, he could not stop the worn old words from coming, louder and

louder as though sheer volume would wake her. He woke only the birds, who shuddered off into the air. Milkman laid her head down on the rock. Two of the birds circled round them. One dived into the new grave and scooped something shiny in its beak before it flew away.

Now he knew why he loved her so. Without ever leaving the ground, she could fly. “There must be another one like you,” he whispered to her. “There’s got to be at least one more woman like you.” (p. 336)

In “*Song of Solomon: Reality and Mythos Within the Community*”, Bjork suggests that Pilate’s “flight” is not a selfish flight since she “does not fly away from responsibility; here is a desired flight toward a communal consciousness [...], which itself transcends the world’s meanness and selfishness.” (1996, p. 97) We can see that death, for Pilate, is not depicted in the negative sense, but another way to freedom after she can complete her task in burying her father’s bone. Her graceful and peaceful acceptance of death enlightens Milkman to see another meaning of freedom. Here, we can see the encounter of the northern and southern values. Milkman reinterprets the meaning of “freeman” as opposed to the one based on wealth and individual gain. Pilate shows that one can be a freeman when “integrating” to family and community “[w]ithout ever leaving the ground”. Her freedom can be everywhere including in death. It highlights this character as having extraordinary psychological strength. The act enables Milkman to fully understand the southern housebond value of family care. Nevertheless, the scene is not depicted as the glorification of the southern values. The image of Pilate murdered by malicious Guitar echoes the repeated history of women harmed, hurt, and left “down on the ground” (p. 328) by men who are obsessed with freedom. It reminds Milkman of what he and his male ancestors had done to women and helps him see the difference between his male ancestors’ and Pilate’s flight. Here, it can be said that Pilate “re-enacts” both roles of her ancestors, since she is “hurt” like Ryna and “flies” like Solomon. The southern values are illustrated in both positive and negative ways. The housebond values are suggested as an alternative way to define freedom that one can maintain bonds with others to achieve freedom.

Apart from realizing the mistakes of his ancestors and himself, Milkman also takes the “female role” in Pilate’s “flight”. Milkman repeats the roles of Ryna and Pilate by singing the “Song of Pilate”. First, he moans for her departure, like Ryna does in Solomon’s flight, since he “could not stop the worn old words from coming, louder and louder as though sheer volume would wake her.” Second, he repeats Pilate’s role as a courier of myth, like her maintenance of Solomon’s song. More importantly, Milkman does not only repeat his ancestors’ roles, but also participates in them in creating a new myth. He compares the greatness of her sacrifice as much as Solomon’s flight by calling her “sugargirl” (p. 336), as both acts represent freedom in different meanings. He alters the position of Black women by making them the “subject” of the song to emphasize their important roles in Black history. Here on the ground, Milkman experiences his female ancestors’ roles and integrates them to his own experience, which shows that now he neither feels isolated nor alienated from family or community any longer. It can be said that Milkman starts to achieve self-discovery in this way, for although he cannot completely belong to certain space, he can negotiate and balance between “others” and himself.

Next, the air space helps Milkman to reinterpret Solomon’s flight and create his own flight.

“You want my life?” Milkman was not shouting now. “You need it? Here.” Without wiping away the tears, taking a deep breath, or even bending his knees – he leaped. As fleet and bright as a lodestar he wheeled toward Guitar and it did not matter which one of them would give up his ghost in the killing arms of his brother. For now he knew what Shalimar knew: If you surrendered to the air, you could *ride* it. (p. 337)

In “Civilization Underneath”, Wilentz points out that Milkman’s flight, “which mirrors his great-grandfather’s, appears predestined.” (2003, p. 152) His yearning to fly has been influenced by Black men such as Robert Smith and Solomon. Their flights are seen as the connection to Black history and the “collective myth of freedom throughout the African diaspora.” (Wilentz, 2003, p. 153) Flight, in spite of representing individual escape for freedom, can be seen as the collective heritage passed on among generations. The surrealistic ability signifies the inheritance that

Blacks receive from their past home, before being violently suppressed in the new home as slaves. Thus, it can be seen as the final link connecting them with their original home. Here, Milkman succeeds in connecting himself with ancestors. His ability to leap seems to present as a sudden enlightenment as he immediately realizes that he should “surrende[r] to the air” to “ride it”. Additionally, pronouncing Solomon’s name as “Shalimar”, which seems to be the original African way to say it, shows that Milkman does not only connect with Solomon, but also transcends to connect with African traditions.

While Milkman’s flight is illustrated as predestined duty, he also participates in the flight. It is apparent that Milkman “dedicates” his flight or his life to Guitar as he says “You need it? Here” in order to take responsibility towards his acts in triggering Guitar’s “greed” for gold. When he fails to get it, he has to be responsible for his word. His intention to face the unpleasant reality undermines what his ancestors done in their flights, since both Smith and Solomon fly to escape cruel reality (Seven Days’ murder and slavery). He does not “surrender” only to the air, but also to his fear of death, which enables him to overcome it. He seems to leap in order to serve his “brother’s” desire, which ironically makes Milkman feel free as well. Therefore, Milkman’s leap towards Guitar’s arms is the moment of experience, which is both merged with and separated from his ancestors’. Similar to his experience on the ground, Milkman integrates his own experiences to his male ancestors’ through his flight in the air. The ability to encounter and negotiate “others” and himself productively proves Milkman’s heterogeneous identity.

In conclusion, spaces play important roles in Milkman’s formation of identity. Their diverse ideologies can cause Milkman to have an identity crisis, or influence him to form heterogeneous identity. The infinite processes of identity formation through spaces suggest that identity is not fixed or pre-given. Milkman does not passively yield to the ideologies around him, but tries to negotiate and deal with them.