

Naming, Narrative and the Issue of Identity in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*

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Abstract:

*The hypothesis that the ambiguity of naming blurs characters' identity underlies this research. To investigate this, the study applies a literary onomastics methodology, specifically the "theory of two acts" approach, to Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. The analysis reveals that the derogatory naming practices rooted in the history of American slavery, and perpetuated as its legacy, contribute to psychological crises within the African American community. Besides, the author's naming acts demonstrate that while some names align with their bearers' traits or identities, others do not. Similarly, certain names allow characters to reconnect with their ancestral past, whereas ambiguous names often obscure it. These findings confirm the initial hypothesis.*

Key words: *Naming act, slavery, arbitrariness, compliance, fluidity*

Résumé :

*L'hypothèse selon laquelle l'ambiguïté de l'attribution d'un nom déforme l'identité des personnages sous-tend cette recherche. Pour examiner celle-ci, l'étude applique à *Song of Solomon* de Toni Morrison, une méthodologie de l'onomastique littéraire, particulièrement l'approche de la 'théorie des deux actes'. L'analyse révèle que les pratiques d'attribution de noms dépréciatifs ancrées dans l'histoire de l'esclavage américain, et perpétuées comme héritage, contribuent aux crises psychologiques dans la communauté africaine américaine. En plus, l'acte d'attribution de noms de*

l'auteur démontre que des noms s'accordent avec les traits ou identités des porteurs pendant que d'autres divergent. De même, certains noms aident des personnages à se reconnecter avec leur passé ancestral alors que d'autres contrarient ce projet. Ces résultats sont en phase avec l'hypothèse initiale

Mots clés : Acte d'attribution d'un nom, esclavage, arbitraire, conformité, fluidité

Introduction

Names and naming practices in fiction, broadly known as *literary onomastics* seems vital in critics' minds. Indeed, fiction turns around characters whose names are essential to literary interpretation (Alvarez-Altman, 1981:2). Therefore, the current research emphasizes some key terms, notably *naming*. "Character naming is a process whereby a writer names or labels his or her characters" (Allagbé, 2016: 20). The concept of 'narrative' is rooted in Gerard Genette's narratology. It encompasses both the story and the way it is told. The notion of identity, for its part, refers to the history, culture and civilization of an individual. In this research, it also embodies the adequacy between a name and its bearer. Overall, the study addresses the relationship between names and their bearers' identity. It argues that the ambiguity of naming in fictional narratives complexifies characters' identities. How does the naming act complexify characters' identity in the narrative? The current reflection intends to examine Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* in order to show how naming practice hinders characters' identity disclosure. Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* represents a useful corpus for the purposes of the study. Indeed, it portrays White characters and the Deads' habit of adopting names indifferently: "Both Lena and Corinthians. They let me do the naming by picking a name blind, but that was all" (Morrison, 1977: 71). In addition, we resort to "the theory of two acts" and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction to carry out the ongoing research. Indeed, The former

presupposes that proper nouns denoting fictional figures are parts of two entities: the naming act in a novel and the act of using a name in a novel” (Gipka, 2018: 62). Conversely, the latter emphasizes the instability of meaning and the arbitrariness of linguistic signs. The paper is organized into three main parts: first, naming and psychological crisis; second, naming, aesthetics, and narrative; and finally, the ambivalence of naming and identity.

I- From Naming Act to Psychological Crisis

The naming practices inherited from slavery, and their legacy in American society, often result in namelessness, invisibility, or the attribution of derogatory names to African Americans. Consequently, some African American characters experience deep psychological crises, which stem from their objectification through names.

I-1 Naming, American History and the Distortion of Identity

It is believed that names reflect the mindset of the person (namer) who gives them. They embody the way the giver sees the bearer of the name or what the namer expects from the bearer. From American historical disproportionate racial perspective, the namer stands for the subject whereas the bearer represents the object. In the same token, the subject performs the action while the object experiences it in a sentence or a linguistic system. The disproportionate racial relationship in terms of naming is vivid in African American fiction, namely in Ernest J. Gaines and Toni Morrison’s works. In their narratives, slaves’ names got from their masters are disconnected from cultural, historical and geographical roots of the slaves. Such names are degrading and injurious: “Sing? Sing Dead. ‘Where’d she get a name like that?’ ‘Where’d you

get a name like yours?’ White people name Negroes like race horses” (Morrison, 1977: 243). The names of slaves reflect the downhill status from the slave masters’ perspectives. Those names therefore intend to objectify the slaves: “Ticey is a slave name, and I don’t like slavery”(Gaines, 1971: 8), said Brown. Here, the slave name “Ticey” hides Gaines’s main character’s true identity. Later on, Miss Jane admits that she doesn’t know her father, nor her mother. Ticey’s situation is similar to Jake’s in *Song of Solomon*: “Did you ever know his real name?’ ‘Jake, I believe.’ ‘Jake what?’ she shrugged”(Morrison, 1977: 248). Milkman’s concern largely comes down to the following statement:

He [Milkman] read the road signs with interest now, wondering what lay beneath names. The Algonquins had named the territory he lived in Great Water *michi gani*. How many dead lives and fading memories were buried in and beneath the names of the places in this country. Under the recorded names were other names, just as “Macon Dead,” recorded for all time in some dusty file, hid from view the real names of people, places, and things. Names that had meaning[...] Names they got from yearnings, gestures, flaws events, mistakes, weaknesses. Names that bore witness. Macon Dead, Sing Byrd, Crowell Byrd, Pilate, Reba, Hagar, Magdalene, First Corinthians, Milkman, Guitar, Railroad Tommy, Hospital Tommy, Empire State...”(Morrison, 1977: 329-330).

The lack of surnames or the presence of derogatory names in the full names of slave descendants testifies to their loss of ancestry. For instance, although the main character of *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* is of African American origin, her name “Ticey” carries no African resonance; it

sounds fully American, thereby erasing her African roots. The same applies to other African-American characters such as Big Laura, Ned, and Uncle Isom, just to name a few.

The lack of last names is also common to African-American characters in *Song of Solomon*: “Hagar’s. Yeah. Sweet Hagar. Wonder what her name is.’ You just said it.’ ‘I mean her last name. Her daddy’s name.’ ‘Ask Reba’ [Hagar’s mother] ‘Ask anybody but Reba,’ said Milkman. ‘Reba don’t know her own last name.’ ‘Ask Pilate.’ ‘Yeah.’ I’ll ask Pilate. Pilate knows... her own name and everybody else’s” (Morrison, 1977: 89). The lack of last names is a symbol of African-Americans’ loss of identity. In the same way, Felzenszwalbe notes that Jews from Eastern or Central Europe are compelled to choose French or French-sounding names once they settle in France. This is only to comply with the national or French-sounding names (Felzenszwalbe, 2012: 170). However, this fact eventually undermines their Jewish identity. It is perhaps in the name of conformity to American-sounding names that Sing advises Milkman’s grandfather, “Jake,” not to change his slave name.

Beyond personal names, place-naming also becomes a site of racial conflict. The opposition between the phrases “*Doctor Street*” and “*Not Doctor Street*” reflects more than a struggle over terminology; it embodies the resistance of African Americans to preserve their history against the dominant group’s attempt to erase it. In addition, *Southside* as the name of Blacks’ neighborhood seems to be a way of downgrading and objectifying Black people:

Some of the city legislators whose concern for appropriate names and the maintenance of the city’s landmarks was the principal of their political life, saw to it that “*Doctor Street*” was never used in any official capacity. And since they knew only

Southside residents kept it up, they had notices posted in the stores, barbershops, and restaurants in that part of the city saying that the avenue running northerly and southerly from shore road fronting the lake to the junction of routes 6 and 2 leading to Pennsylvania, and also running parallel to and between Rutherford Avenue and Broadway, had always been and would always be Mains Avenue, and not Doctor Street. (Morrison, 1977: 4).

There is an overt antagonism between Blacks and Whites as for the names of places, especially streets. This can be seen as part of the broader American racial conflict, in which Whites generally strive to maintain the upper hand. This situation raises the debate concerning the essence of names. Indeed, Onomasticians believe that names are timeless and relevant to all epochs whereas logicians contend the transparency or semantic emptiness of names. Dr. Foster, the only Black doctor whose memory Southside residents strive to preserve through the label “Doctor Street,” was already dead. From logicians’ perspective, the city legislators are right. Indeed, Dr. Foster is dead. So, his name is buried with him. It can no longer designate any living object. Apart from “Doctor Street”, the village of Shalimar suffers namelessness at the hand of White public authorities. They intend to hide Blacks’ bravery, citizenship and identity:

He’d had to pay close attention to signs and landmarks, because Shalimar was not on the Texaco map he had, and the AAA office couldn’t give a nonmember a charted course- just the map and some general information. Even at that, watching as carefully, as he could, he wouldn’t have known he had arrived if the fan halt hadn’t broken again right in front of Solomon’s General

store, which turned out to be the heart and soul of Shalimar, Virginia. (Morrison, 1977:260)

The absence of Shalimar on the map reflects an American historical social reality. It embodies the invisibility of African Americans in the United States of America. Characters bearing degrading names eventually experience psychological crises.

1.2 Naming and Psychological Impacts

Not only do names reflect the namer's view vis-à-vis the bearer, but also they influence the bearers' mindset. So, some characters strive to imitate their namesakes. Toni Morrison's works exemplify this issue. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola despises her own mother. In so doing, she imitates Pecola, her namesake, who appears in the film *Imitation of Life*. Claudia, the narrator, admits: "I just moved here. My name is Maureen Peal. 'What's yours?' 'Pecola' 'Pecola? wasn't that name of the girl in *Imitation of Life*?' I don't know. What is that?' 'The picture show, you know. Where this mulatto girl hates her mother 'cause she is black and ugly but then cries at the funeral. It was real sad. Everybody cries in it. Claudette Colbert too. 'Oh.' Pecola's voice was no more than a sigh." (Morrison, 1970: 56-57). In copying her namesake of the film, Pecola Breedlove refers to her mother as Mrs. Breedlove. This reflects a lack of love. Moreover, Pauline, Pecola's mother, names her daughter after Pecola of the film: "Eyes all soft and wet. A cross between a puppy and a dying man. But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly" (Morrison, 1970: 100). Not only does Pecola unconsciously repeat the behavior of her namesake, but also her mother's act of naming results from the psychological impact she experiences from her habit of film watching, particularly the film entitled *Imitation of Life*.

Moreover, the impact of naming on characters' mindsets is also vivid in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*.

Macon Dead II family experiences deadness. The family premises display a dead atmosphere. No one feels at home. This is particularly true for the daughters of the family. Indeed, they establish a link between their surname 'Dead' and their social status: "Corinthians continued to make roses, but she hated that stupid hobby, and gave Lena any excuse to avoid it. They spoke to her of death. First the death of the man in blue wings. Now her own. For if Porter did not turn his head and then lean toward the door to open it for her, Corinthians believed she would surely die" (Morrison, 1977: 98). Corinthians and Lena see themselves as useless as dead corps. Later on, Milkman admits: "If you were sick, would you go see a man called Dr. Dead" (Morrison, 1977: 69). In Milkman's mind, his family's name badly influences him. This is the reason why when his close friend Guitar threatens him, he replies that he is afraid of nothing since he is already dead. Despite all, the naming act plays an aesthetic role in narrative.

II. Naming, Aesthetics and Narrative

The naming act and the act of using names serve the internal exigencies of the fictional work. They contribute to the beauty, unfolding and the understanding of the narrative. In this respect, some characters' names are consistent with their deeds whereas others are at odds with the actions of characters in the narrative under study.

II.1 Naming and Textual Compliance

In this subsection, the analysis originates from Marie Vauthier's approach of onomastics in traditional novel writing as recalled by Adama Coulibaly: "In traditional novel writing, onomastics aims at camouflaging the gap between names and the objects or individuals named: They want to make the reader ignore the purely verbal construction of characters"(Coulibaly,

2017: 223). To some extent, the aforementioned approach of onomastics is characteristic of Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. So, the Black terrorist group 'Seven Days' derives its name from the number of its members which simultaneously blends with their operation days. The narrator adds : "They call themselves Seven Days. They are made up of seven men. Always seven and only seven. If one of them dies or leaves or is no longer effective, another is chosen (Morrison, 1977: 155). In so doing, this proper name of the group complies with the aesthetic ambition of the text. The author does her best to establish a logical and coherent link between that proper name, the name bearer and the fictional text within which that name appears. The appellations 'Mercy Hospital' and Doctor Street' bear witness to the historical realities of African Americans in a racist environment. Indeed, the first designation remembers a favor that allows Milkman to be born in a White hospital while the latter commemorates to the only Black doctor who set on the street.

Likewise, proper names such as Southside, Shalimar, Lincoln Heaven in the narrative seem logical and coherent when we examine places they refer to. Southside is the neighborhood populated by underprivileged Black people. The appellation definitely derives from the underprivileged status of Blacks in opposition to privileged Whites who symbolize north. Shalimar village is named after Solomon, the ancestor of Shalimar inhabitants: "The one around here who did was this same Solomon or Shalimar- I never knew which was right. He had a slew of children, all over the place. You may have noticed that everybody around here claims kin to him" (Morrison, 1977: 322). As for 'Lincoln Heaven', it embodies the success of Macon Dead I's farm: "Seven years later he [Macon Dead] had one of the best farms in Montour County. A farm that colored their lives like a paintbrush and spoke to them like a sermon" (Morrison, 1977: 235). . The coherence between names and

places is also vivid in the narrative when we keep to the narrator's testimony: "Far away from Virginia, fall had already come. Ohio, Indiana Michigan were dressed up like the Indian warriors from whom their names came... The Algoquins had named the territory he lived in Great Water, *michi gani* (Morrison, 1977: 329). People name places according to adequate features.

In his article entitled 'Milkman Dead: An Anti-Classical Hero' (2009), Trudier Harris has revealed that Milkman Dead accomplishes a set of unworthy deeds without being severely punished or criticized. Harris adds that the protagonist's childish behavior is consistent with the name he bears. In early pages, a breastfeeding scene determines the hero's name. Freddie ensures that the name he proposes suits what he sees in Macon's house:

"Used to be a lot of womenfolk nurse they kids a long time down South. Lot of 'em. But you don't see it much no more. I knew a family –the mother wasn't too quick, though –nursed hers till the boy, I reckon, was near 'bout thirteen. But that's a bit much, ain't it?" All the time he chattered, he rubbed his chin and looked at the boy. Finally, he stopped, and gave a long low chuckle. He'd found the phrase he'd been searching for. "A milkman. That's what you got here, Miss Ruffie. A natural milkman if ever I seen one. Look out, womens. Here he come Huh!" (Morrison, 1977: 14-15).

On the ground of naming circumstances, Milkman's appellation seems logical. It illustrates Felzenszwalte's opinion on naming: "some surnames indicated or reverted to a physical characteristic, a character trait or a profession, like those born in France. So, Fusk could designate, according to circumstances, a red-haired individual, smart or cunning, or

working as a furrier” (Felzenswalte, 2012: 162-163, translation mine). The naming act analysis in the narrative highlights two major types of relationships between names and name bearers: they are compliance and depthlessness or divergence of names.

II.2 Naming, Depthlessness and Divergence

This section draws on two central concepts in onomastics: *Meaning and Significance*. Analyzing Louis Herbert’s opinion, Mounir Hammadou reveals that ‘Meaning’ deals with the contextual sense whereas ‘Significance’ refers to the initial or etymological sense (Hammadou, 2023: 665). Furthermore, some linguists view names as mere words to be analyzed. In so doing, they deny the historical dimension and the meaningfulness of names. Jean Louis Vaxelaire adds: “If proper nouns do not have any history, according to causalist logicians, they do not have any culture either. This is logical since they are universal, belonging to no culture, no language etc.” (Vaxelaire, 2009: 309, translation mine). In this respect, those linguists share the same viewpoint as analytics philosophers and logicians, especially Saul Kripke’s concept of ‘rigid designator’.

Since Ferdinand de Saussure, the link between words and the external world is submitted to criticism. Poststructuralists are more skeptical denying the stable link between the signifier and signified. To some extent, the poststructuralist approach of language goes hand in hand with African Americans’ identity in terms of naming. Indeed, because of slavery, the combination of their surnames (slave owners’ names) with given names hardly reveals their real identity, that is to say the names of their ancestry.

In African American fictional texts, Black characters generally lack surnames, but those who possess surnames take those names from the slave owners. Consequently, the combination of that surname with their given name is far from

revealing their African origins. In semiotic terms, the linguistic sign (signifier + signified) fails to correspond adequately to its referent, since the names imposed by slavery do not reflect the characters' ancestral identity. This state of fact seemingly influences some of Toni Morrison's characters. In this subsection, the reflection contends that the significance of characters' names differs from their deeds or identity.

Even though Milkman's friend receives his given name 'Guitar' from hazardous circumstances, his name 'Bains' is depthless since it is the slave owner's name and does not allude to the deep self of the character. Therefore, Milkman's close friend's full name is Guitar Bains as he admits himself: "Guitar is *my* name. Bains is the slave owner's name" (Morrison, 1977: 160). However, neither Guitar, nor Bains is symptomatic of Guitar's deeds or utterances in Morrison's fictional text. On the ground of his surname meaning found in the online dictionary of proper names, the reader expects Guitar to be "white, fair" Instead, Milkman asserts: "Guitar could kill, would kill, and probably had killed. The Seven Days was the consequence of this ability, but not its origin (Morrison, 1977: 210). Indeed, Guitar enrolls at a Black terrorist group in charge of killing any White individual because of the murder of a black man. Milkman reproaches Guitar that this is not fair of him to kill any innocent White person. Later on, Guitar shows that he does not care about names. He replies: "X, Bains- What difference does it make? I don't give a damn about names"(Morrison, 1977: 160). Not only is Guitar not a musician as his given name makes think of, but also he is unfair, the opposite of his surname meaning. Therefore, the name 'Guitar Bains' is inconsistent with the character.

Moreover, the tradition of naming in Deads' family is one of the most striking example of arbitrariness of naming in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. From Milkman's grandfather

contestation to choose the name “Pilate” for her girl-born baby, to the drunk White man who frames the name “Macon Dead” for Milkman’s grandfather, naming is arbitrary in Deads’ family as Macon Dead II admits: “Both Lena and Corinthians. They let me do the naming by picking a name blind, but that was all” (Morrison, 1977: 71). Anyway, proper names are devoid of meaning. This is where the concept of ‘rigid designator’ is coined to express the voidness of names. Proper nouns are consequently similar since they do not distinguish themselves from one another on the semantic level. They are merely meaningless. In this respect, the naming act holds an ambivalent status towards people’s identity.

III. Ambivalence of Naming and Identity

Naming act often traces back to people’s identity through history and commonness. It all the same sometimes blurs individuals’ identity. The narrowness of a denomination to cover the wholeness of the entity it refers to as well as the ability of a name to designate many entities at the same time and the interchangeability of appellations among opposed categories and genders hinders identity.

III.1 Names and the Quest for Identity

Names are replete with people’s history and culture. So, ‘Song of Solomon’ as the appellation of the mythic song sung by Pilate and the children from Danville guides Milkman to his roots in *Song of Solomon*. In fact, the song encompasses historical clues for the identification of the main character’s ancestry. Throughout the melody, the main character as well as the reader realizes that ‘Sugarman’ or Solomon, Milkman’s great grandfather, flies to Africa: “O Sugarman don’t fly away, Sugarman done gone, Sugarman cut across the sky, sugarman gone home (Morrison, 1977: 6). People usually connect to their past throughout a significant clue. In Macon Dead

family, the ‘Song of Solomon’ turns out to be the significant signifier or name through which the family accesses their identity. In Jewish context, Felzenszwalbe argues:

“It comes out from all a piece of ‘lesson’ no, an idea; useful to many, be jew et non-jew. The fact of seeking and finding from the past, significant signifiers for them, words or names that mattered, and to use them for feeding “an ongoing total account’ Mallarmé talked about in his poem *A Throw of the Dice*. In short, feeding what I call the “structure of our lives”. That’s what good writers do when they write novels. Others do it unconsciously”(Felzenszwalbe, 2012: 185).

Names are major characteristics of individuals’ identity. In these circumstances, the loss of people’s own names embodies their loss of identity. “Yeah. I’ll ask Pilate. Pilate knows. It’s in that dumb-ass box hanging from her car. Her own name and everybody else’s. Bet mine’s in there too. I’m gonna ask her what my name is (Morrison, 1977: 89). Pilate sticks to her identity. It is the reason why she keeps her name in the earring hanging on her ear. Her ear load also remembers the social circumstances in which she was born. It establishes a connection between her and her parents. Furthermore, the quest for African American cultural identity in Toni Morrison’s third fictional text comes true. It culminates in the Dead family. The Dead family, especially. Instead of searching for gold, Milkman embarks on looking for his forefathers’ names and cultural identity in *Song of Solomon*: “There wasn’t any gold, but now he knew that all the fine reasons for wanting it didn’t mean a thing”(Morrison, 1977: 257). Milkman rather asks about his grandfather’s name: “You said his wife made him keep the name. Did you ever know his real name?”(Morrison, 1977: 244). Milkman’s trip for gold eventually turns into a search for names and cultural identity.

Besides, naming permits to confirm identity and belongingness. Through the appellation ‘Solomon’, Milkman feel associated with the people of Danville. Indeed, the village is populated with Solomon’s offspring: “He [Solomon] had a slew of children, all over the place. You may have noticed that everybody around here claims kin to him. Must be over forty families spread in these hills calling themselves Solomon something or other”(Morrison, 1977: 322). In his search for identity, names such as Sing and Ryna also allow Milkman to identify his grandmother and great grandmother and solidify his family’s history. In so doing, naming act is consistent with individuals’ roots and identity, but it also plays a camouflaging role because of the fluidity of names..

III.2 Naming and Fluidity of Identity

An individual is made up of many selves in such a way that one name is incapable of designating a person. In other words, the self is wider than the width of the name. In his article “Milkman Dead: An Anti-Classical Hero”, Truddier Harris, according to Harold Bloom, argues that Milkman deserves his appellation because of his childish behavior towards female characters namely Pilate, his mother and his two sisters. However, later on, Milkman carries out a heroic deed when he discovers his family’s history. On this ground, ‘Milkman’ becomes an irrelevant denomination for the hero. Furthermore, the designation ‘Song of Solomon’ of the song refers to two major variations of the song: the children’s version and the one sung by Pilate. So, the paper advocates that under one name lies many selves or realities. This is undoubtedly the reason why the preacher in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* wonders: “What makes one name more a person than another? Is the name the real thing, then? And the person only what his name say?”(Morrison, 1970: 142).

Moreover, the instability and plurality of individuals' names hinders the knowledge of any subject's identity. This state of fact is characteristic of the novel understudy. Indeed, a bulk of appellations comes to designate Milkman's great grandfather. In the early pages of *Song of Solomon*, Pilate's song refers to him as 'Sugarman'. Later on, Milkman discovers that his real name is Solomon, which is often associated with Shalimar. No one is sure about the spelling of his denomination: "Solomon or Shalimar- I never know which was right" (Morrison, 1977: 322). Likewise, Milkman's grandfather's designation varies from Jake to Jay. Milkman asks: "Did you ever know his real name?" 'Jake, I believe" (Morrison, 1977: 248). But, the children from Danville sing: "Jay the only son of Solomon" (Morrison, 1977: 264). Because of the instability and plurality of Milkman's grandfather's names, the paper contends that a diversity of designations only ensures a loose identity. Many signifiers call a diversity of signifieds as Vaxelaire has alluded to theorists of the sign void such Stuart Mill and Saul Kripke. In these circumstances, names hardly refer to the referent they are supposed to designate.

The interchangeability of names among opposed categories or genders testifies to a social chaos. It is also reminiscent of the instability of names and meaning. The situation defers the knowledge of the name bearer. In other words, the derogatory names hardly reveal the origins of the bearer. They sometimes only describe few traits of the denoted entity. In *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, the title character refers to Coon's son as "Monky Boy Dog". Instead of being a high rank soldier, 'General Lee in *Song of Solomon* is an hog: "General Lee was all right by me", he told Milkman, smiling. "Finest general I ever knew. Even his balls was tasty" (Morrison, 1977: 52). Naming act is associated with humor and joke: "His father may have called their plow horse President

Lincoln as a joke”(Morrison, 1977: 52). Likewise, gender binary division no longer exists when it comes to naming. A female character can bear masculine name, and vice versa. In *Song of Solomon*, Milkman’s Aunt becomes the namesake of the historical biblical figure ‘Pilate’. In this vein, any name can designate any gender without distorting the identity of the bearer.

Conclusion

The study has dealt with naming, narrative and identity in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*. The ambiguity of naming in the novel under study complexifies characters’ identity. How does naming complexify characters’ identity in *Song of Solomon*? The study has examined Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* in order to show how ambiguous naming hinders characters’ identity. As an onomastics methodology approach, ‘the theory of two acts’ as well as Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction helps fulfill the goals of the study. ‘The theory of two acts’ consists of two entities: the naming act in a novel and the act of using a name in a novel. Conversely, Derridian deconstruction focuses on the instability of meaning and the construction of identity through language. The article adopts a tripartite structure. So, the first part is ‘From naming to Psychological Crisis’, the second is entitled ‘Naming, aesthetics and Narrative’ and the third part reads ‘Ambivalence of Naming and Identity’. The derogatory naming act from American slavery history objectifies African Americans. It eventually leads to psychological crisis. Furthermore, the author’s naming act and using act of names in *Song of Solomon* reveal two types of names in the narrative. Some names comply with characters’ identity. In so doing, they match the narrative. Other names are inconsistent with the name bearers. Even if some names such as *Song of Solomon* allows the Deads to reconnect with their roots, others blur characters’

cultural belongingness. They are sometimes narrower than the self. The findings are in line with the hypothesis that the ambiguity of naming complexifies characters' identity.

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