



# VIOLENCE, TRAUMA AND PERSPECTIVES OF HEALING IN TA-NEHISI COATES' *BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME*

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## RÉSUMÉ

La violence raciale et le traumatisme constituent un problème sociétal d'un intérêt majeur. Le sujet informe la littérature afro-américaine depuis l'histoire de l'esclavage des Noirs en Amérique. Dans son œuvre *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates traite de la question à travers une lettre d'un père adressée à son fils pour l'instruire de l'enracinement de la violence dans la culture américaine. L'objectif de cette étude est de démontrer qu'au-delà du récit autobiographique et épistolaire de l'auteur qui fait le diagnostic de la violence raciste et ses conséquences traumatisantes dans la communauté noire, se dégage un enseignement destiné à la nouvelle génération américaine afin qu'elle se prépare à faire face à la violence raciste et à la vaincre. L'étude s'appuie sur les canaux scientifiques de la psychanalyse de Sigmund Freud et de la déconstruction de Jacques Derrida.

**Mots clés:** Violence raciale, traumatisme, guérison, Afro-américain, autobiographie.

## ABSTRACT

Racial violence and trauma constitute a societal issue of major interest. The subject has informed African-American literature since the history of black slavery in America. In *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates addresses the issue through a father's letter to his son, educating him about the roots of violence in American culture. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that beyond the author's autobiographical and epistolary account of racist violence and its traumatic consequences in the black community, there is a lesson for the new American generation to prepare to cope with racist violence. The study resorts to the scientific channels of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction.

**Keywords:** Racial violence – trauma – healing– African-American – autobiography.

## INTRODUCTION

The issues of racial violence and trauma have shaped African-American history and literature. It has been a core question throughout the history of African American literature with authors like Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), Richard Wright's autobiographical book, *Black Boy* (1945), James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* (1963), and Toni Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970). Writers and scholars expose the sufferings endured by Blacks in America. In a recent article "Violence as a Public Health Crisis", Freire-Vargas (2018) presents violence as a disease, and seeks to provoke thought about the ethical, legal, and policy dimensions of violence reduction and prevention efforts. Similarly, M. Armstrong and Carlson (2019) study violence in "Speaking of trauma: the race talk, the gun violence talk, and the racialization of gun trauma." They build on their literature to show how people are impacted by violence so as to make readers understand how people in the United States face gun violence in divergent ways, and how parents manage the anticipation of gun violence. In their article, "The invisible scars of emotional abuse: a common and highly harmful form of childhood maltreatment", Gama et al, (2021) rather analyze violence in connection with different types of child abuse. From the foregoing observations, it follows that violence and its traumatic causes or consequences continue to be a hot topic for American literary artists and researchers. Exploring the issue in *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates sheds a new light with his epistolary writing and healing perspectives.

Published in 2015 by Ta-Nehisi Coates, an African-American writer, *Between the World and Me* is a nonfiction book in which the author resorts to an epistle to explain to his fifteen-year-old son, Samori, the history and culture of racist violence against the black people in America from slavery to contemporary police brutality. Behind this explanation of the father is hardly hidden the writer's unsuspected target to warn the African-American younger generation about coping with the apparently endemic violence and trauma.

This paper aims at analyzing Coates's *Between the World and Me* in an attempt to show how the author's innovative approach to racist violence and its traumatic effects offers hope for healing. Proceeding from the assumptions that the epistolary genre is both intimate and informative, the study demonstrates how the sound advice from the letter sender to the receiver is very enlightening. The scope of the work is to establish the benefit of a writer's personal experience and literary exploration of America's racial history in the process of the society's positive transformation. The study is theoretically based on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction.

Explicably, Freud (1893/1953, p.105) posits the exploration of human psyche to understand his behavior, as "human behavior is affected by unconscious thoughts, wishes and memories, and.... the essence of repression lies simply in the function of rejecting and keeping something out of consciousness." By the same token, Derrida's theory is based on the premise that a literary text can have a plurality of significances and the true meaning is sometimes veiled, and that a deconstructive reading allows "to make the not-seen accessible to sight" (Derrida, translated by Spivak, 1976 / 1997, p.163). The use of these theories gives means to proceed by an in-depth literary exploration of the characters' psychology. The first section of this article scrutinizes Coates's literary project of the epistolary genre. It examines the different literary forms used by the author and their impact on the narration of the story. The second section analyzes racial violence by questioning the symbols of White hegemony and African American dissent. It also interrogates the binary opposition of the concepts of black and white. The third and last section of this study explores Coates's exposition of traumatic experiences lived individually and collectively by African Americans. It deconstructs the writer's epistolary text on intergenerational violence and trauma as a warning that can prevent and heal contemporary America from its seemingly incurable malady.

## **1. Coates's literary project of the epistolary genre**

A literary text is, first and foremost, a work of art. The project of creative writing mobilizes artistic and aesthetic resources. This art is expressed through techniques and methods used by authors to convey their ideas and messages. The African-American literature is a literary canon in which black people write to combat the various trauma plaguing the American society. The uniqueness of an author's writing can be shown by identifying and analyzing literary devices, which are tools through which the author expresses his or her worldview. To this end, in *Between the World and Me*, Coates demonstrates his style by blending various literary genres to show how black Americans experience racial violence and the resulting physical, emotional, psychological, and traumatic consequences.

### ***1.1 The literary genres at stake in Between the World and Me***

A distinguishing feature of *Between the World and Me* is that Coates's epistolary writing embraces various types of texts and forms of discourse. The author creates his text from a mixture of literary genres. The genera include autobiography, history, essay and letter genres.

An autobiography is understood as a story about a person's life written by himself, as Stuart (1937, p.2) defines the genre: "a narrative of the past of a person by the person concerned." For Lejeune (2007, p.298) "in order to create an autobiography, the author enters into a pact or contract with readers promising to give a detailed account of his or her life, and of nothing but that life". Beyond the autobiographer's truthfulness to the narration of his life, one can note different types of autobiography, depending on writers' purpose and target. For instance, some authors write about their lives to confess to an offence they have done or to bear witness to the divine power and assistance. Another type of autobiography is related to the writer's project of exposing his or her psychological illness. Some people with mental illness problems write to externalize their thoughts in order to feel better. Understandably, some authors write for therapeutic reasons, as the act of telling one's story constitutes a psychic evacuation of social and psychological disturbances.

Some literary artists, like Ta-Nehisi Coates write to relate their own stories and that of their communities so as to share their hurting experiences made up of horrific events including assaults and murders. This can be perceived in reading *Between the World and Me* where Coates tells his personal story as a black man living in the United States of America. Using autobiography allows Coates to disclose the trauma he has undergone fearing for his life because of racial prejudices and the American police racist brutality. His witnessing the police unjust killing of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, two young black men, remains haunting traumatic scenes. The personal experience of the author highlights racial inequalities and violence and illustrates the structural racism implemented in the United States.

Following the example of autobiography, the essay is a literary genre used by Coates to expose his perceptions and arguments about racial violence and social injustice that black people have to face. The use of the essay enables Coates to explore the topic from a broader view beyond his personal life, as described in his autobiography. Through his argument, Coates analyzes the systems that favor racist violence, and he castigates its effects on black people.

Letters are another literary genre used in *Between the World and Me*. Letter writing is an important means of communication that originated in England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This form of writing has allowed American writers to simultaneously discuss the atmosphere before the American Civil War. The book's use of the epistolary genre enables Coates to talk directly to his son, from whom he is distant due to the racial context. In this letter, Coates reveals his feelings and fears to his son. As Nelson (2016, p1) argues, "The letter becomes a blank space for the expression of one's thoughts and emotions to the absent

other in a communicative effort to minimize the separation". Letter writing then becomes a medium that enables writers to express what is inside them and to create intimacy between them and the recipients. It is about bringing separated people together. Moreover, as Asci (2020, p.5) puts it "This literary form is viewed as a means for the writers to display their political and social thoughts". The letter allows writers to address social and political issues, as well as all the topics that matter to them that they sometimes do not dare to discuss openly. The epistolary novel gives oppressed and silenced people whose expression is limited an opportunity to express themselves. The intimacy that letter writing provides allows writers to express their deepest emotions, frustrations, fears, and expectations. In this way, letter writing seems like a safe way for Coates to discuss issues of racial violence and share his personal stories with his distant son, Samori. This is recognized through Coates' tolerance for addressing racial issues by sending to his son a letter recalling the imperfections of the American society, including racial discrimination, stereotypes, and police brutality against black people. The letter gives an emotional dimension to the story, making it realistic and touching the reader's emotions.

### ***1.2 The impact of the mixture of genres on the narration of the story***

Through the mixture of literary genres, Coates unveils his own life story and his vision of art. The author deliberately inserts autobiography, history, essay, and letter to deconstruct the literary norms established by the mainstream western literature. He then relates the story of his personal life and the history of black people, referencing the era of slavery. The combination of the genres bespeaks the author's creativity.

The mixture of genres discloses the author's desire not to be confined by any literary norms that might prevent him from freely expressing his ideas and perspectives. Thus, Coates establishes a personal connection with readers through his autobiography. Through his personal story and America's history, he unveils the roots of racial violence and the aching lives of black people by exploring historical facts. This mixture of history and his autobiography demonstrates the author's project to connect the past and the present. By connecting the lives of his ancestors with that of his contemporary people, he shows American society has not changed. The hurtful past endured persists and negatively affects black people's lives. Thus, Coates tells his son the traumatizing experiences of his grandparents during slavery and his own distressing life in a contemporary American society divided by racial tensions between Whites and Blacks.

As a matter of fact, mixing different literary genres enables the author to analyze the themes of racial violence and trauma from different perspectives. Thus, he can easily

convey his personal experiences, analyze more broadly the imperialist system that maintains black people under domination, and address directly his son and reader in order to engender some intimacy.

This writing style gives a sense of the author's sincerity, which makes the message poignant and realistic, giving the story a certain dynamism. This dynamics makes the story interesting and keeps the reader focused on the theme of racial violence and trauma that represents the sad history of black people in America.

Through what appears at first sight as a juxtaposition of literary genres, one could perceive the author's attempt to deconstruct established norms both at the societal and literary level. This mixture of literary genres to address the problem of racial violence could reflect the complexity of the problem raised by the author, and the general malaise that overwhelms the American society. Coates' writing style is therefore perceived as an innovation that shows his will to explore new ways with the aim of finding solutions to the thorny issue of racial violence, which persists and gives rise to the hierarchization of the American society.

## **2. Writing Racial Violence and Trauma**

In *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates highlights African Americans' experiences of violence and trauma from the early settlement of Blacks in America to the present days. He depicts the effects of these scourges by addressing a number of situations that he considers as symbols of racial violence.

### **2.1. Symbolism in *Between the World and Me***

In *Between the World and Me*, Coates resorts to specific ideas, things, objects, persons and institutions that are so loaded with significance that they stand for something else. Concepts like slavery, racial segregation, and police brutality are considered as embodiments of white supremacy over Black people.

#### **2.2.1. Slavery, Racial Segregation and Police Brutality: Symbols of Racial Supremacy**

Ta-Nehisi Coates depicts slavery, racial segregation, and police brutality as symbols of white supremacy in the United States of America. Through these forms of violence, which are both historical and contemporary, Coates shows to what extent the American society is undermined by the ideology of white supremacy.

To Coates, the racial hierarchization of the American society stems from the establishment and institutionalization of slavery, which has contributed to the

dehumanization of black people. This system of slavery promotes violence and unfair social, economic, and political structures that harms black people. In reality, slavery left black people at the bottom of the social hierarchy and experienced racial injustice. Coates pictures slavery as a symbol of white supremacy because it strengthens the idea that white people are superior to black people.

The White supremacist ideology has outlived the abolition of slavery by promoting racial segregation. Ta-Nehisi Coates's book takes readers back into the racial violence of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as represented by racial segregation. Coates refers to the history of segregationist laws, especially Jim Crow Laws that institutionalized the discrimination against colored people in public accommodations, housing, and the education system. As Coates demonstrates, the purpose of these laws nurtured by white supremacists is to subjugate black people and perpetuate racial power. The author uses the expression "killing fields" to refer to black neighborhoods. Black lives do not matter to the government in this part of the world. Black people seem to have been abandoned by the political system because of their poor quality of life. This racial segregation affects black people individually and collectively. Ta-Nehisi Coates accounts for the difference in the quality of life between the two peoples. Black parents in their poor areas raise their children in fear and with many restrictions. Meanwhile, white children grow up and prosper without worry in wealthy neighborhoods. This discrimination seriously affects black children as they grow up in an environment of permanent fear and stress transmitted by their parents and the political system. In this sense, racial segregation can be perceived as an expression of white domination.

Another manifestation of white supremacy that Coates highlights is police brutality, especially against black people. In *Between the World and Me*, the police symbolize white power oppressing black people to maintain white dominance. American society is undermined by a phenomenon of racial violence that shows no signs of abating, despite police brutality increasingly killing unarmed black people senselessly. The recent murders of Trayvon Martin and Georges Floyd are one of numerous instances of police violence. As the author seeks to demonstrate, police violence endured by black people causes irreparable harm. Coates castigates a police system that, as he maintains, has been established at the expense of black people. In addition, the impunity enjoyed by the police illustrates deep-rooted stereotypes that portray blacks as criminals and inferior human beings. Coates says this while criticizing the lack of punishment for the police officer responsible for the murder of Prince Jones, a young black man. He states: "This officer, given maximum power, bore minimum responsibility. He was charged with nothing. He was punished by no one. He was returned to his work" (BWM, p.53). The author complains of the impunity for violence committed by police. This violence

varies depending on whether the person encounters a white or black person. Police abuse guns against black people.

The selective attitude of the police towards the black population contributes to creating a crisis of confidence between Blacks and the police system. This crisis of trust becomes the basis for more violence, as it prompts both sides to use violence out of fear of it. In this book, the author's explanation of the murder of Prince Jones by the police is not isolate. In fact, Prince Jones is a young black student. He is the son of a prominent doctor. He is a very kind boy who avoids troubles. Prince Jones is murdered as he is driving to see his fiancée. The unpunished murderer, a white police officer, pretends that the boy has tried to run him over with a jeep. This experience is common in the United States because "Each time a police officer engages [Blacks], death, injury, maiming is possible" (p.85). It is the daily fate of Blacks. They are victims of racial oppression and violence that prompt a permanent feeling of insecurity.

The police, who are supposed to protect black people, use extreme violence against them. The racist response of police to black communities causes black communities to perceive police more as terrorizing than reassuring. Every day, the black man steps out into the street with no assurance of returning home, because the streets are where the police become increasingly violent towards them. These examples are striking illustrations of the structural violence inflicted on black communities to perpetuate white supremacy.

### ***2.2.2. Samori, a symbol of resistance and resilience***

One of the symbols the author uses in *Between the World and Me* is the name Samori that he gives to his son. This name, Samori reminds us a West African figure who has fought against the white man, and particularly against French imperialism and colonization. By naming his son after the historical figure of Samori, Coates does not only make a parallel between the White American racist system and the White European colonial oppression in Africa, but he also aims to disclose the important role Samori can play in the context of black American struggle and resistance against oppression.

Therefore, in the fight against white supremacy, Samori appears as a symbol of black resistance and resilience, which must foster their determination to continue this long fight of self-determination started by old generations of Blacks. For Coates, Samori is a symbol of resistance, which shows that the current generation of Blacks do not have the right to give up the fight against white supremacy. Thus, by using a historical figure, Coates aspires to make younger people conscious of the fact that their historical and cultural background as Blacks can be determining in the struggle, as it can give them the



necessary strength and courage that guided their parents before them. The exploration of the history of black people, especially Samori's story, is, for Coates, a call to the younger generation never to forget their past in order to instill into their mind the spirit of resistance.

## **2.2. Deconstructing the Basis of White Supremacy**

In *Between the World and Me*, Coates puts into question the basis of white supremacy by exposing the historical and systemic structures that perpetuate racial inequality in America. He questions the ideology of the binary opposition of "white" and "black". This questioning of America's racist society gives meaning to the fight against the institutionalized racial division.

As a matter of fact, the American society is segregated between the world of whites and that of blacks. This division is the result of racial difference and discrimination that undermine the relationships between whites and blacks. To Coates, racism drives notions of racial superiority or inferiority, since people themselves are not so different regardless of skin. The narrator illustrates this thought well when he states: "But race is the child of racism, not the father." (BWM, p.8). This expression depicts racism as the real cause of racial differences, racial contempt, and individual and collective hostility towards black people. Therefore, physical and psychological subjugation and humiliation of blacks have only one objective, and that is to convince the black of the supremacy of the white race.

The content analysis of the book shows the author's deconstructive conception of the binary pair black/white. Being black or white should definitely not be a problem, since according to the American Declaration of Independence "All men are created equal."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the issue of race, which seriously affects black people as well as the Whites, to a lesser extent, should not exist insofar as the connotations given to the concepts "black" and "white" whether negative or positive are artificial, and are designed to serve selfish and racist interests.

The idea of inferiority and superiority of race emerges with the desire of whites to dominate and submit Blacks to slavery. White supremacists' vision is so ingrained in the minds of white people that they end up convincing themselves that their conception of "race" is a natural law that must govern human societies. This is illustrated by the

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<sup>1</sup> « Declaration of Independence : A Transcription ». *America's Founding Documents*  
<https://news.stanford.edu/press-releases/2020/07/01/meaning-declaration--changed-time/> Accessed on May 6<sup>th</sup> 2023.

author asserting: "Americans believe in the reality of "race" as a defined, indubitable feature of the natural world" (BWM, p. 8). When the author says "Americans", he refers to whites as "the superior race" who believe America belongs to them more than the Blacks, who are "the inferior race". Consequently, all physical, verbal, emotional, and psychological violence endured by black people is rooted in this discriminatory vision. This leads to individual and collective psychological affliction that is manifest through the following lines: "My death would not be the fault of any human but the fault of some unfortunate but immutable fact of "race," imposed upon an innocent country by the inscrutable judgment of invisible gods"(BWM, p.55). If this extract embeds the quintessence of the problem of race, it enlightens about how the author seeks to dismantle the prejudices about the concepts of "black" and "white". In his opinion, binary pairs should be viewed as complementing each other, not opposite. The opposition is created and fueled by some white persons who continue to dominate and traumatize black people. Beyond all these testimonial denunciations of the white racist system, one can perceive the author's healing prospects.

### **3. Exploring trauma and healing perspectives in *Between the World and Me***

Coates is a traumatized black literary artist who writes to deplore the fate of African Americans who are victims of racism, violence and trauma in America. He writes to denounce an illness that he is living with or has been diagnosed with. His writing is not only a psychological evacuation of his pain, but it is also prevention. He warns his son of what is in store for him as a black in America. It is in this context that one must apprehend the prospects for healing violence and trauma.

In *Between the World and Me*, Coates describes various forms of violence and trauma. He relates how systemic issues critically contribute to persistence of violence and trauma, especially among black people. He highlights some strategies likely to prevent violence and help victims to cope with trauma.

Actually, Coates spotlights structural racism as one key factor leading to violence and trauma in the sense that institutional structures with racist overtones disadvantage Black people in some aspects of life such as education, employment, housing, and the criminal justice system. Structural racism has historical origins, for it can be seen as a heritage of slavery, which perpetuates inequalities. Coates sheds light on disparities in education as far as educational opportunities are concerned. The author reflects on his own experiences when he was attending school in Baltimore, and questions the quality of education of Blacks, disclosing the lack of resources in the education system and lack of appropriate facilities. Also, Blacks are victim of stereotypes about intelligence. These

stereotypes deriving from structural racism contribute to disparities as they limit educational opportunities for black students. These disadvantages perceived as illustrating social injustice promote systemic violence.

Equally, Coates examines how American institutions like the criminal justice system carry within them genes of inequalities. He shows how racial bias in this institution embeds systemic injustices that lead to discriminatory attitudes against Black people systematically targeted and incarcerated, because of the color of their skin. This situation perpetuates the cycle of violence and trauma, as it contributes to the marginalization of Blacks. Moreover, housing inequality is also tied to structural racism against Black people and communities, because denying various services to black people disadvantages them and perpetuates poverty and violence.

Structural violence also creates economic inequality, which manifests itself in the lack of economic opportunity for black people who are forced to live in poverty. These forms of psychological abuse are a source of trauma that affects the happiness and dreams of individuals and communities, as experienced by Coates who writes to raise awareness and proposes prevention and healing perspectives.

### **3.1. Violence and trauma prevention strategies**

In *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates does not explicitly highlight strategies for violence prevention. However, he implicitly makes suggestions that could help in the exploration of solutions to systemic violence. Thus, a critical reading allows us to come up with themes of education and community building, which can be perceived as strategies for addressing the root causes of structural violence.

Coates's book sheds light on the importance of individuals benefiting from a good education that could enable them to understand their history and cultural identity. In an American society where access to information about Blacks' history and culture is institutionally restricted and controlled, having a good historical and cultural background can be seen as a form of resistance against structural violence displayed in the book. As Coates asserts:

The pursuit of knowing was freedom to me, the right to declare your own curiosities and follow them through all manner of books. I was made for the library, not the classroom. The classroom was a jail of other people's interests. The library was open, unending, free. Slowly, I was discovering myself. (BWM, p. 34).

According to Coates, the education provided to black people in the classroom is restricted and black history is not taught. Rather than simply describing the situations of black people at school, the author delicately suggests that providing knowledge to black

people can help them learn the truth and understand their history. These intellectual gains can possibly help challenge the systems that perpetuate violence and cause trauma.

Coates also sees storytelling as a powerful means of resistance to organized violence. Through a well-planned strategy based on racial difference, Black people are victim of a misrepresentation ideology in narratives, speeches, and media, aiming at subordinating and dehumanizing them. Therefore, education is crucial. By telling and writing their own stories through narratives, Black individuals could revisit their history and understand the historical context of oppression, and resist systemic violence through the strength of their stories. This is strikingly described in the following extract: "You must struggle to truly remember this past in all its nuance, error, and humanity. You must resist the common urge toward the comforting narrative of divine law, toward fairy tales that imply some irrepressible justice." (BWM, p.48). This quote confirms that oppressors have distorted the black past to maintain racial prejudices and stereotypes. Therefore, re-appropriating their history and culture can help fight against institutionalized violence that is sometimes tolerated out of ignorance.

The book also highlights the challenges facing black people and community solidarity as a strength in the fight against structural violence. Black individuals experience the same predicament, because they have interconnected histories and identities. In this way, solidarity can create a sense of unity among black communities. By joining forces and supporting each other, we can increase our collective resilience. These communal connections can be a form of resistance to the isolation and structural violence that black people face. As Coates puts it, "Indeed, you must be responsible for the worst actions of other black bodies, which, somehow, will always be assigned to you." (BWM, p 48)

Moreover, Coates encourages reflections about societal norms and systemic violence. Questioning the systemic issues can trigger a collective conscious awareness of social, cultural, economic, and political systems that perpetuate violence against black individuals and communities. Actually, by refusing to accept their fate, Black people can promote a communal effort to change their status. This collective effort could result in the reform of systemic structures like education, law enforcement, and general societal policies that could be determining in the healing process.

### **3.2. Trauma Healing and Coping Mechanisms in *Between the World and Me***

In Coates's book, the trauma experienced by Black Americans is not only physiological, but it is also psychological and emotional. Healing is therefore not presented in clear steps in the traditional sense. Rather, the author invites readers to reflect on coping

mechanisms for trauma, particularly racial trauma experienced by black people. Trauma is both historical and contemporary. It is deeply ingrained in the black body, mind, and spirit. Therefore, it will not be so easy to recover. Consequently, healing must be viewed as a long-term process that takes into account various aspects of black people's lives. As Cori (2008) states, healing cannot be completed quickly or immediately. This is a lifelong journey that requires patience, effort, support, and self-compassion. The process of healing trauma proceeds by an understanding of American history of race relations. This understanding is an enlightenment that derives from teaching received directly and indirectly.

Understandably, Coates's essay appears as a lesson not only to his son, but also to all readers. Through his letters, he reeducates black individuals allowing them to understand the true history of their people and acknowledge discomfiting realities, since facing the truth about institutionalized injustice and confronting one's fears are paramount in the healing process. Levine (2008) explains:

The first truth, Buddha taught his disciples, is that suffering is part of the human condition. If we simply try to avoid confronting painful experiences, there is no way to begin the healing process. In fact, this denial creates the very conditions that promote and prolong unnecessary suffering. (Levine. 2008. p. 11)

Thus, reeducation can enable the individual to rebuild his sense of self that has been fragmented by structural racism. Also, knowing their common history can bring individuals, families, and communities together, create a sense of belonging and rebuild a collective and personal identity. The retrieved identity can be a source of harmony and balance that is fundamental to show resilience to systemic trauma.

Coates also views literature, especially autobiographical works as a suitable tool in the process of healing trauma in the sense that words can be used as medicine to address patients' illness concerns. This idea is demonstrated by Bloom (1999. p.6) who asserts: "For healing to occur, we know that people often need to put the experience into a narrative, give it words, and share it with themselves and others. Words allow us to put things into a time sequence - past, present, future." The ability to put their traumatic experiences into words can be very important in the healing process because it can be beneficial to people's psychological liberation of painful experiences. This emphasizes the therapeutic function of literature. The author seeks to alleviate his psychological pain by writing his personal life. Koné also discusses this way of connecting literature and medicine when he writes:

The inspirational line of African-American autobiographical writing is at the crossroads of the diagnosis of a private or social evil and its potential cure. Its project arises from the writer's obsession with exposing a personal or collective plight so as to be psychologically

discharged of it. It usually starts as an individual reaction to a mental discomfort and his or her attempt at getting liberated from that inner torture through the art of telling his or her own story. (Koné. 2018. p. 262)

The therapeutic aspect of telling about an individual's personal or collective experiences through literature is very interesting. Just as medicine helps in times of illness, literature provides comfort and emotional relief in time of distress or sadness. By providing insight and understanding, literature appears to writers as a means of escape and emotional healing. Literature can also help readers successfully overcome their own difficulties or trauma due to the experiences of others featured in the work. Soro (2018. p. 166) supports this idea with the suggestion that writers should explore the roots of their characters' traumatic experiences in order to serve as a therapy for the reader to "understand both the trauma and its consequences for ensuing outcomes on the individual and society."

Coates also suggests love as essential in the process of healing psychological and emotional trauma. Love provides a powerful, positive emotional and mental state that fosters interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal love, that is love between people, involves affection, social relatedness and connections. Its lack in a person's life becomes the cause of isolation, emotional and mental troubles. According to Coates, people who are full of love are kinder, more compassionate, and more affective. These emotions are essential to maintain harmony and balance in a person's life, family, and relationships with society. This harmonious relationship can provide him inner peace and well-being.

Likewise, for black people to overcome trauma, they must maintain hope for the future. Having hope means believing that better things can happen. Therefore, waiting for something to happen that can change their plight is important in dealing with resistance because it builds people's resilience. Hope can be found through intellectual inquiry and the pursuit of knowledge that can challenge the institutionalized racism and inequality in American society that harms the black community.

In short, the combination of quality education, cultural and identity retrieval, community support, and critical reflection can serve as tools in the process of coping, healing, and moving forward after experiencing systemic violence and trauma.

## CONCLUSION

This analysis of Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* has demonstrated the literary artist's creativity in exploring the America's racial history and the prospects of coping with racist violence and trauma. Through a combination of literary genres such as autobiography, history, essay and epistle, Coates's book functions as a testimony of a

black father's intimate concerns for his son who has to face with the current and complex race issue. This study has permitted to show that the whites' perception of "race" and their attempts to impose white hegemony are at the basis of racial inequalities and the dehumanization of black people. This prompts the hierarchization of the American society in which Black Americans are looked on as the subordinate class, who must submit to the whites and their ambitions at the risk of violence and even death. This racial domination based on psychological complex of inferiority and violence is exactly what is deconstructed through Coates's personal literary exploration of the collective plight of America's crisis.

The study has shown through a deconstructive reading of the book that Coates implicitly proposes violence prevention strategies and coping mechanisms, including education and knowledge, togetherness, and rebuilding of cultural and personal identity. The author refreshes a tradition of knowledge and experience transmission by writing to his son, a letter in which he informs him of the historical and cultural background of Black people. From this angle, Coates's book appears as a message to both the younger generation and the American government. Younger generations are encouraged to unite and oppose racism and its effects, as the government must not only improve the country's social systems that currently harm Black Americans, but also create conditions of social equality that will promote the social integration of black people. Coates's epistolary writing lies within the framework of that literature of "forewarned is forearmed".

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