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Revue scientifique  
de littérature,  
des langues et  
des sciences sociales

ISSN: 2411-6750



Université Félix Houphouët Boigny



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**REVUE SCIENTIFIQUE DE LITTÉRATURE  
DES LANGUES ET DES SCIENCES SOCIALES**



17/2022

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**Indexation:**

**Fatcat (<https://fatcat.wiki/container/qq5brdiztnatfkcb3ce5kxaypi>)**  
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## TABLE DES MATIÈRES

<b>Editorial</b> .....	<b>5</b>
------------------------	----------

### Allemand

<b>RABE Sylvain Lokpo</b> Das Karnevalslied im "Popo-carnaval" von Bonoua und im Kölner Karneval: Zeit, Raum und Bedeutung .....	6–21
--	------

<b>Aimé KAHA</b> Amour juvénile chez Goethe et Amadou Koné : quelles leçons de vie ?..	22–39
--	-------

<b>ALLABA Djama Ignace</b> Super Merkel : Du retrait de la vie politique d'une visionnaire .....	40–49
--	-------

### Anglais

<b>Ebony Kpalambo AGBOH</b> Racial Politics And The African American Search For Family Welfare In <i>Sula</i> .....	50–64
---	-------

<b>Mamadou DIAMOUTENE</b> Deconstructing Black Female Misrepresentation In Maya Angelou's <i>I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings</i> .....	65–76
--	-------

<b>Mariame WANE LY / Abdoulaye NDIAYE</b> Killing the Black Body, Knitting Paternal Filiation, and Entwining Identity Construction in <i>Between the World and Me</i> (2015) by Ta Nehisi Coates .....	77–91
--	-------

<b>Nouhr-Dine D. Akondo</b> Construing and deconstructing peace as a result of race-ridden conflicts and stereotypes in William Shakespeare's <i>Othello</i> .....	92–111
--	--------

<b>BEGEDOU Komi</b> Sacrificial Motherhood and Family Survival in Toni Morrison's <i>Sula</i> .....	112–127
---	---------

### Espagnol

<b>Mamadou COULIBALY</b> Un intento de delimitación de la frontera entre semántica y pragmática .....	128–145
---	---------

<b>Djidiack Faye</b> La representación de la mujer viciosa en tres novelas de María de Zayas: <i>El desengaño amando y premio de la virtud, El prevenido engañado y Tarde llega el desengaño</i> .....	146–159
--	---------

### Géographie

<b>N'zué Pauline YAO épse SOMA / KOFFI Amenan Ba Inès / Eric Paul KOUAME</b> L'autonomisation de la femme à partir de la production vivrière dans la sous-préfecture de Taabo (sud – Côte d'Ivoire) .....	160–176
---	---------

## Lettres (Littérature / Langue)

**PIDABI Gnabana** De l'action des personnages à la sensibilité du lecteur dans *Ténèbres à midi* de Théo Ananissoh ..... 177–191

## Philosophie

**Adjoavi ATOHOUN** L'universalité du sentiment du beau et le tort du malheureux .. 192–210

**KOFFI KOFFI Alexis** Heidegger et Levinas : de la différence à l'indifférence ontologique ..... 211–222

**AKPA Gnagne Alphonse / YAO Kouamé** Chefferie et pouvoir coutumier : la dynamique d'un modèle de pacification de société ..... 223–236

## Sociologie

**MAZOU Gnazégbo Hilaire / LEH Bi Zanhon Guy-Marcel / KOUA Aka N'Zi Jean Vincent** Le rôle économique des hommes dans le processus d'autonomisation des jeunes filles en Côte d'Ivoire : Une analyse de la situation des jeunes filles du Centre Providence de Bouaké ..... 237–251

**TRAORÉ Amadou Zan / TRAORÉ Amadou** Les équipes nationales de football et leurs désignations dans quelques pays d'Afrique de l'ouest : Sens et imaginaire ..... 252–266

**Abdoulaye Guindo / Issa Diallo / Birama Apho Ly** Évaluation des messages sur la planification familiale à Bamako, au Mali : Cas des affiches ..... 267–288

## Éditorial

Bien chers toutes et tous,

Nous revoilà ! Á nos retrouvailles semestrielles !! Avec Germivoire, notre Revue vôtre ! OÙ, de vous à nous et de nous à vous, des échanges sont faits. Dans le cadre scientifique !! OÙ sciences humaines ou d'autres sciences entrent en communion et exposent des résultats de certaines de leurs quêtes générales ou particulières. Résultats qui seront vus et appréciés, espérons-le, par d'autres personnes intéressées par les sujets traités. Puisque Germivoire est une Revue en ligne/online.

Dans le labour de ce cadre ou périmètre cultivable á diverses couches, les récoltes semestrielles présentes se sont révélées variables de saveurs. Et la variété des saveurs donnent un bon goût particulier á ce numéro de Germivoire.

Et ce bon goût particulier vient des récoltes mises ensemble des champs aux parcelles différentes que sont l'allemand, l'anglais, l'espagnol, la géographie, les lettres françaises modernes, la philosophie, les sciences du langage et de la communication et la sociologie. Pour s'en faire une idée selon son intérêt á l'instruction, tout esprit curieux pourrait se référer aux différentes étiquettes de ces récoltes dans notre table des matières.

Á vos plaisirs solaires !!

**Brahima Diaby**

Killing the Black Body, Knitting Paternal Filiation, and Entwining Identity Construction in  
*Between the World and Me* (2015) by Ta Nehisi Coates

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**Abstract:**

The callous condition of African Americans, from slavery to colorblind racism, in passing by segregation, prompted multifarious consequences. Beyond psychological trauma, slaves and their progenies had to contend with disembodiment, epitomized by the recurrence of police brutality. In his memoir, *Between the World and Me*, elaborated in the form of a letter to his son Samori, and published in 2015, Ta Nehisi Coates reflects on the legacy of the American tradition of subjugation and relegation. Subsequently, the present paper analyzes how Coates debunks those sociological notions and presents us with the unfiltered status of black Americans in the U.S. He mostly lays the emphasis on the plundering of the black body and the burden of black fatherhood. In a literary and intimate form, he urges his son not to annihilate the alienating predicament of his race amidst Dreamers who envision themselves as Whites and laud the so-called American exceptionalism.

Key words: Black Body, disembodiment, fatherhood, race, violence.

**Résumé:**

La condition déshumanisante des Africains Américains, de l'esclavage à une époque contemporaine marquée par un racisme inavoué, en passant par la ségrégation, a généré des conséquences multidimensionnelles. Au-delà du traumatisme psychologique, les esclaves et les afro-descendants doivent affronter la désincarnation, caractérisée par la récurrence de la brutalité policière. Dans son Mémoire intitulé *Between the World and Me*, rédigé sous la forme d'une lettre à son fils Samori, et publiée en 2015, Ta Nehisi Coates évalue le legs de

cette tradition d'asservissement et d'exclusion. Par conséquent, la présente étude analyse comment Coates réfute ces notions sociologiques et nous présente sans filtre le statut du Noir Américain aux États-Unis. Il met particulièrement l'accent sur le pillage du corps noir et le fardeau de la paternité chez les Noirs ; tout en incitant son fils à ne pas oblitérer les conditions aliénantes de sa race, dans une société de Rêveurs qui se projettent comme des Blancs, ignorant le racisme structurel et faisant l'éloge du prétendu exceptionnalisme Américain.

Key words: Corps noir, désincarnation, paternité, race, violence.

## **Introduction**

In the 1990s, in the process of achieving both a racial agenda and a citizen project "to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American", the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>th</sup> centuries witnessed an outpouring of literary productions prompted by generations of African American writers. Those generations engraved one of the most intimate and infuriated voice in African American literature. Among the most prominent voices, those of James Baldwin (*Go Tell It on the Mountain* 1953, *Notes of a Native Son* 1955) and Cornel Ronald West (*Race Matters* - 1993; and *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism* – 2005; *Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud, A Memoir*- 2010), probed the psychological repercussions of racism. Baldwin describes Harlem as a testing place infested by dangers that are lethal for a young Black man. His discourse explores intricacies of racial, sexual, and class discrepancies in Western societies, most notably in mid-20th-century America. As for West, he analyzes moral authority and racial debates concerning race in the United States. He questions matters of economic and political concerns, as well as ethical issues and spirituality, and the crisis in black American leadership.

Following the footsteps of his literary forefathers, Ta Nehisi Coates, American author and journalist, recurrently explores contemporary race relations. He engages in fiction and nonfiction as well. Coates gained a wide readership during his time as a national correspondent at *The Atlantic* where he investigated cultural, social, and political issues, particularly regarding African Americans opposing white hegemony. He published three non-fiction books: *The Beautiful Struggle* (2008), *Between the World and Me* (2015), *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (2017), and his first novel, *The Water Dancer* (2019). In 2015 he received a Genius Grant from the MacArthur Foundation.



In *The Beautiful Struggle*, a memoir about the coming of age in West Baltimore and its effect on him, Coates discourses the influence of his father W. Paul Coates, a former Black Panther, amidst the prevalent street crime of the date. In *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* Coates reflects on race and Barack Obama's administration.

*Between the World and Me* takes the form of a book-length letter from the author to his son, adopting the structure of Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*; the latter is directed, in part, towards Baldwin's nephew, while the former addresses Coates's 15-year-old son. Coates powerfully examines the events of the Obama era from his intimate and overt perspectives. It is also the howling of Reconstruction-era as the American test in multiracial democracy ended with the return of white supremacist rule in the South. Coates' first novel and work of fiction, *The Water Dancer*, is a surrealist story set in the time of slavery, concerning a superhuman protagonist named Hiram Walker who is endowed with a photographic memory and "conduction" powers transporting people far distances across large areas via waterways.

However, Coates 'most distinguished book is *Between the World and Me* (2015) which won the 2015 National Book Award for Nonfiction. The title is inspired by Richard Wright's poem of the same name about a black man discovering the site of a lynching and becoming disabled with terror, engendering a barricade between him and the world.

*Between the World and Me* takes structural and thematic inspiration from James Baldwin's 1963 epistolary book *The Fire Next Time*. While Baldwin addresses his letter to his nephew, Coates book-length letter is directed toward his 15-year-old son, Samori. It is divided into three parts, recounting Coates's experiences as a young man, after the birth of his son, and during a visit with Mabel Jones. Coates contemplates the feelings, symbolism, and realities associated with being Black in the United States. (Coates *The Atlantic*: January-February 2017). He recapitulates the American history of violence against Black people and the incommensurate controlling of Black youth. (Remnick *The New-Yorker*: June 2015)

The book's tone is poetic and bleak, guided by his experiences growing up poor and always at risk of bodily harm. He prioritizes the physical security of African-American bodies over the tradition in Black Christianity of optimism and faith in eventual justice. *Between the World and Me* follows the scheme of African American autobiographical tradition that comprises remarkable cultural and political inferences. The format of *Between the World and Me*, an extended letter addressed to Coates's son, Samori, echoes the first essay in James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* (1963) addressed to Baldwin's nephew on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation.

More recently, African American writers continue to expand the genres of criticism and memoir innovating new perspectives. For instance, Claudia Rankine's most recent book, *Citizen* (2014), combines the genres of poetry and criticism so as to examine the concepts of race, violence, and citizenship in the contemporary United States. Similarly, Margo Jefferson's *Negroland* (2015) also explores issues related to race, class, and privilege through Jefferson's memories of growing up in an upper-class black family in the 1950s and 1960s.

In a profound work that pivots from queries about American history and ideals to the most intimate apprehensions of a father for his son, *Between the World and Me* provides a powerful innovative locus for the understanding of American history and contemporary crisis. As such, Coates shares with his son and readers his experience referring to race and his role and place in the American Nation. In a few pages, Coates captures and exposes what people of color, unfulfilled and terrified parents, and excluded black youth were unqualified to voice. Even *New York Magazine* reported that after reading *Between the World and Me*, Toni Morrison wrote "I have been wondering who might fill the intellectual void that plagued me after James Baldwin died. Clearly it is Ta-Nehisi Coates." Subsequently, Coates's book is a thoughtful and angry address to a nation that refuses to prosecute police officers who kill innocent black men and women; that pursues a policy of mass incarceration hugely weighted towards its black population; and that routinely seems to think nothing of it.

What is it like to inhabit a black body? Does the American authority lack empathy for black human beings in the United States of America? And can we despair of Americans ever living together in truly racially peaceful and tranquil society, rather than being riven by racial division, strife, and conflict? Therefore, the present study comprises three sections. The first section deals with sociological violence and the slaying of the Black body, both physical and metaphysical, in contemporary America. The second section examines the burden of black fatherhood in the parental mission of upbringing a black child in America. It also probes transmitting the burdensome legacy of black struggle to the New Generation. The third section scrutinizes Black response to race presumptions and prejudice. It also analyzes African Americans condition through the prism of American Dream which requires summoning the necessary awakening of "Dreamers".

### **1. Scheming Sociological Violence and Slaying the Black Body**

The prominence of the Black body in literature prompted intense academic interest. According to Erica Reischer, an independent scholar in Oakland, California and Kathryn S.

Koo, from Saint Mary's College of California, the body is a «text» upon which social meanings are inscribed. (Reischer and Koo 2004: 297). Thus, overturning the naturalistic and biological perspective, the present study aims to investigate and redefine the black body as a sociocultural and historical construct. Following the anthropological conception of the critic Elisabeth Grosz who contends that «*If the body is written, that means it can be rewritten and re-inscribed in society with a new meaning*», the present paper proposes a reading and significance of the Black Body in *Between the World and Me*. It deals with the feelings, symbolism, and realities associated with being Black in the United States.

Opposition to this violence and to the policy of mass incarceration, disproportionately targeting black Americans, took the form of the Movement for Black Lives, also known as Black Lives Matter. The movement's demands include ending the criminalization of black youth, demilitarizing law enforcement, and distributing reparations to black people in the United States. Besides, the movement forms a contrast to the view that, following the election of President Barack Obama in 2008, the United States has entered a "post-racial" era in which issues of racial disparity and violence are no longer a major problem. Similarly, *Between the World and Me* (along with the journalistic output of Coates and other African American writers) points to the ongoing effects of slavery and sustained racist injustice as evidence against this "post-racial" view. This racism is mostly conspicuous in the form of the destruction of the black body. Coates writes:

The destroyers will rarely be held accountable. Mostly they will perceive pensions. And destruction is merely the superlative form of a dominion whose prerogatives include friskings, detainings, beatings, and humiliations. All of this is common to black people. All of this is old for black people. No one is held responsible. (Coates, 2015: 9)

When reflecting upon the system that shatters the lives of African Americans, Coates deems the metaphor fits perfectly with their plight. He denounces " *It does not matter if the agent of those forces is white or black – what matters is our condition, what matters is the system that makes your body breakable*" (Coates, 2015:18).

### **1.1. Violence as Sociological Breaks**

Violence is present throughout *Between the World and Me*. One of Coates' main points in his letter is to impress upon Samori how white America has thoroughly wrecked black bodies in a violent way. In the past, slavery was the means of oppression, and today, violence is most present in police brutality and mass detention. He explains how violence against black people in the past led to violence in the streets (called "killing grounds") today.

He also describes his childhood as being violent, both with other people in the streets and within his own family. He describes in *Between the World and Me* the first time he dealt with that lethal violence at the age of seven:

The boy with the small eyes reached into his ski jacket and pulled out a gun. I recall it in the slowest motion, as though in a dream. There the boy stood, with the gun brandished, which he slowly untucked, tucked, then untucked once more, and in his small eyes I saw a surging rage that could, in an instant, erase my body. (Coates, 2015:19)

As far Coates is concerned, nonviolence does not make as much sense to him as the views of Malcolm X or the Black Panthers. Ultimately, he asserts that no black person has ever or will ever be safe from the unswerving threat of violence in the United States. The reminiscence of the murder of Prince Jones is the illustration for Coates that he needs persistently to warn his son of the pervading violence as a transgenerational threat: *"And I could not save you from the police, from their flashlights, their hands, their nightsticks, their guns. Prince Jones, murdered by the men who should have been his security guards, is always with me, and I knew that soon he would be with you"* (Coates, 2015: 90). Coates strains to expound to Samori the encumbrance and stress of living as a black person in America. Even as a young boy watching white America on TV, Coates felt the breach between his world and theirs. The color line has been experienced during the Civil War; America has eulogized the War of Secession as a battle between states in which both parties were valiant and heroic, ignoring the reality that Confederates were engaged in war to maintain black bodies in bondage. Very significantly, Coates journeys Samori to momentous places in the expectation that he converts into a sentient citizen of the world as both a stunning and appalling place. He pinpoints:

But American reunion was built on a comfortable narrative that made enslavement into benevolence, white knights of body snatchers, and the mass slaughter of the war into a kind of sport in which one could conclude that both sides conducted their affairs with courage, honor, and élan. This lie of the Civil War is the lie of innocence, is the Dream, Historians conjured the Dream. Hollywood fortified the Dream. The Dream was gilded by novels and adventure stories (Coates, 2015:102-103).

Coates's college friend Prince Carmen Jones, Jr., was "mistakenly" chased and executed by a policeman. Coates uses his friend's story to argue that racism and related tragedy affect Black people. He writes to Samory *"you must always remember that the*

*sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body*" (Coates 2015: 10). Very meaningfully, the perpetual menace of disembodiment requires the impeccable deportments in public so as not to nurture suspicion for killing the Black body.

## **I.2. Killing the Black Body**

In *Between the World and Me*, the tone is poetic and bleak, guided by Coates' experiences growing up poor and constantly at jeopardy of bodily impairment. He prioritizes the physical security of African-American bodies over the tradition in Black Christianity of optimism and faith in Divine justice. Coates's position is that the religious rhetoric of "*hope and dreams and faith and progress*" does not guarantee the disappearance of the White supremacy system (Wallace-Wells New-York Times: July 14<sup>th</sup> 2015).

In that vein, he differs from Martin Luther King Jr's integration and Malcolm X's nationalism. Coates gives an abridged, autobiographical account of his youth "always on guard" in Baltimore and his fear of the physical harm threatened by both the police and the streets. He also feared the rules of code-switching to meet the opposing social norms of the streets, the authorities, and the professional world. He contrasts these experiences with neat suburban life, which he calls "the Dream" because it is an exclusionary fantasy for White people who are empowered by their history of privilege and annihilation.

Racism toward black people is centered on forcibly confiscating physical control of the black person's body. This began with slavery, as Coates describes in visceral details. He urges Samory not to view slavery as a mass of black people working on plantations but to consider each individual slave as a person who was physically contrived into labor. Corporeal abuse was sustained into the Civil Rights Movement, with the use of lynching, tear gas and water hoses as assaults on black bodies. As such, Coates enlightens how the destruction of the black body is still prevalent today; the continuing plundering of the black body entails a disembodiment that is real and extremely burdensome:

Disembodiment is a kind of terrorism, and the threat of it alters the orbit of all our lives and, like terrorism, this distortion is intentional.....Murder was all around us and we knew, deep in ourselves, in some silent space, that the author of these murders was beyond us, that it suited some other person's ends. (Coates, 2015: 113-114)

Through history, the black body is regulated as an object or an animal. Even today, black men are considered as disposable bodies within American society. For which reason Coates says: "*perhaps being named "black" was just someone's name for being at the bottom, a human turned to object, object turned to pariah*"(Coates, 2015:55). Coates portrays the black male body as essentially vulnerable: "*When I was your age the only people I knew were black, and all of them were powerfully, adamantly, dangerously afraid. I had seen this fear all my young life, though I had not always recognized it as such*" (Coates, 2015: 14). In other words, Coates shows how racism operates through the control, manipulation, and exploitation of black bodies and the subsequent insubstantiality of black bodies within a prejudiced society. Therefore, he traces this transgenerational fragility back to the commodification of black bodies.

## **2. Upbringing a Black Child in America**

"*It would be wrong to comfort you,*" writes Ta-Nehisi Coates to his fifteen-year-old son who learns that the killers of Michael Brown will escape punishment (Coates, 2015: 11). What might seem an unusual declaration coming from a father who raises the issue of upbringing a black child in America. The need to protect black children against racism appears in several contemporary African-American memoirs, allowing a rare glimpse into a unique struggle faced by black fathers in America. Part of the challenge is inseparably connected to being a black male. A study of black masculinity reveals male challenges referring to the preservation of the black body. According to literary scholar Keith Clark, in many cases "*black males cannot be fathers because they do not believe that American society will let them be men*" (Clark 108). Evidently then, the threats faced by black fathers begin long before they even become fathers, as they extend back to slavery.

### **2.1. The Burden of Black Fatherhood**

Since slaves were not allowed to maintain the basic family unit, fathers were robbed of their paternal role and position. Dr. Wade Nobles explains that slavery instilled in black

men a profound sense of shame. When it came to their children, enslaved fathers made a dehumanizing realization: "*I cannot protect you from the horror*" (Black Fatherhood Project). The damaging impact of removing fathers from families cannot be understated as it became necessary to "*separate to survive*" (Black Fatherhood Project). Considering these facts, slavery is a foundational frame through which one can understand black fatherhood through a historical frame.

Very significantly, literature offers a closer look into the lives of silent fathers, and Coates's memoir provides an exclusively intimate picture. *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Ordinary Light* (2016) by Tracy Smith, and *Negro land* (2015) by Margo Jefferson, each demonstrates that black fatherhood is about apprehending that there is no specific approach to teaching children about race, is the truest expression of fatherly love. As such, Ta-Nehisi Coates bluntly describes the predicament he, and his own father, find themselves in as black fathers. He confesses:

Now I personally understood my father and the old mantra— "Either I can beat him or the police [can]." I understood it all—the cable wires, the extension cords, the ritual switch. Black people love their children with a kind of obsession. You are all we have, and you come to us endangered. I think we would like to kill you ourselves before seeing you killed by the streets that America made (Coates 2015: 82).

Subsequently, memoirs do reveal how the fatherly instinct to protect generates a unique dilemma for black fathers. What sets black fathers apart, then, is a compounded struggle to defend one's child while defending one's self. This transgenerational trial prompts fathers to bestow a legacy of resilience upon sons.

## **2.2. Passing the Torch of the Burdensome Legacy to the New Generation**

When his son cries over the killers of Michael Brown escaping punishment, Coates gives him the sole advice he can, recommendation inherited from his own parents: "*this is your country, . . . this is your world, . . . this is your body, and you must find some way to live within all of it*" (Coates 2015: 12). Thus, racial legacy passed from father to son over generations. The unfeasibility to escape racism combined with the father's preparedness to allow his son to choose his own path, is a license to navigate the immense world that threatens him. Coates tells his son "*the struggle is really all I have for you because it is the only portion of this world under your control*" (Coates 2015:107).

By naming his son after Samori Touré, "*who struggled against French colonizers for the right to his own black body*" (Coates 2015:68), he bestows on him a profound sense of racial cognizance. In doing so, he instills in Samory political resilience and memorial construction. At the end of the memoir, he recurrences the imperative statement: "*I urge you to struggle. Struggle for the memory of your ancestors. Struggle for wisdom . . . Struggle for your grandmother and grandfather, for your name*" (Coates 2015: 151). Coates purposefully uses the word "struggle" instead of "overcome" or "defeat" because racial resilience infers a continuous exertion. Coates does not promise a predictable end to the struggle, as such, he recommends Samori not to "*pin (his) struggle on [the Dreamer's] conversion. The Dreamers will have to learn to struggle themselves, to understand that the field for their Dream, the stage where they have painted themselves white, is the deathbed of us all*" (Coates 2015: 151). Coates is impeccably blunt in teaching his son what to expect from the world so that he becomes equipped and capable of resilience according his own terms.

The embedded psychological costs of being a black father in America rarely surface. Some African American fathers enthrall as much violence they are capable of for their child, inaudibly, suppressing any sign of frustration that could jeopardize their child's psychological balance. As Rich Benjamin states in a September 2016 article in *The Guardian*, "*fatherhood is a vexed topic, and continues with The Beautiful Struggle that makes an enduring genre cliché—the father-son relationship—unexpected and new because it offers a vital insight into Coates's coming of age as a man and thinker*" (*The Guardian* October 22<sup>th</sup>: 2010). For Coates, notwithstanding the symbolism of Barack Obama as the first Black president, forcefulness towards, and subjugation of, black men and women remain entrenched in American culture since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. That sociological context and racial prejudice requires a communal and judicious retort to equip and prepare generations of black boys to face post traumatic racial bias.

### **3. Retorting to Race Preconceptions and Bias**

The passage of culture and wisdom between generations was critical to Coates himself. He highlights how his parents were extremely influential in developing his own understanding of the world, far more significant than his experience of formal education, at least until he enrolled at Howard University. Even at Howard, Coates suggests that the experience of learning from his peers and relatives was also more formative and influential than the university curricula. Embedded in the African and communal notion of family, Coates views family as an extended social unit. Obviously, Coates is enthused by the existence of his son,



and views fatherhood and familial bonds as a spiritual and metaphysical connection. He writes with filial and emotional overtones: "*Black people love their children with a kind of obsession. You are all we have, and you come to us endangered*" (Coates 2015: 82). As the herald of African American fatherhood, he warns his son against the fallacious American Dream.

### **3.1 Unveiling the Deceitful Promise of the American Dream**

Coates classifies himself as a researcher and begins reading at the age of four. For instance, he reads his father's books about African history throughout his childhood; as an adult too, he reads profuse amounts of books to investigate history. Coates is intellectually curious, but he seems uncomfortable with the American system of formal education, he confesses "*I was made for the library, not the classroom*" (Coates 2015: 48). However, he draws a dialectic bound between literacy, freedom and equality. In a subtle manner, Coates discourses how white Americans idolize democracy and consider there is some predetermined glory about America, for its democratic and justice systems. However, Coates purports that the white concept of American democracy and shows Samori that slave labor in the cotton fields is what truly gave the America Nation its foundation. Subsequently, it is burdensome for white Americans today to acknowledge that America is not innocent and is in fact built on atrocities committed against other humans.

### **3.2. Summoning the Necessary Awakening of Dreamers**

Coates confesses that his entire life has been dedicated to wondering how he can freely live in America with his black body. He warns Samori that "*The entire narrative of this country argues against the truth of who you are*" (Coates 2015: 99). Therefore, in a society marked by colorblind racism, existential questions are lingering and Coates confesses his obsession: "*I tell you now that the question of how one should live within a black body, within a country lost in the Dream, is the question of my life, and the pursuit of this question, I have found, ultimately answers itself*" (Coates 2015:12). He further

adds that "*the question is unanswerable, which is not to say futile*" (Coates 205:12) and that his constant grappling with this question helped him to cope with the fear of having his body taken from him.

Because Coates has spent his life trying to understand the gap between himself as a black person and the Americans who prioritize race, the concept of the American Dream and the Dreamers often recurs in his writings. However, Coates senses a staggering feeling of injustice when considering the predicament African Americans are trapped into in their own country and society. The questioning turns out painful, even obsessional to a certain extent:

I knew that my portion of the American galaxy, where bodies were enslaved by a tenacious gravity, was black and that the other, liberated portion was not. I knew that some inscrutable energy preserved the breach. I felt, but did not yet understand, the relation between that other world and me. And I felt in this a cosmic injustice, a profound cruelty, which infused an abiding, irrepressible desire to unshackle my body and achieve the velocity of escape. (Coates 2015:21)

Besides, Coates argues that Blacks must not feel any sense of guilt or shame with regard to their condition. Those who are answerable of racial divisions, the Dreamers, are the ones who have to face their accountability. For

that purpose, they must wake up from their Dream and face the painful reality. He tells Samori it is not his responsibility to convert the Dreamers into realist citizens. While at first Coates yearned for the American Dream, he ultimately realizes that he wants to understand the United States as it accurately is, even if that makes him a realist who is politically and socially alert:

I do not believe that we can stop them, Samori, because they must ultimately stop themselves. And I still urge you to struggle. Struggle for the memory of your ancestors. Struggle for wisdom. Struggle for the warmth of the Mecca. Struggle for your grandmother and grandfather, for your name. But do not struggle for the Dreamers. Hope for them. Pray for them, if you are so moved. But do not pin your struggle on your conversion. (Coates, 2015: 151)

Eventually, Coates comes to the realization that Blacks' racial and sociological scope is restricted. The racial problem can be sorted out only if Dreamers are disposed to awaken from their Dreams.

## **Conclusion**

Coates was inspired to write *Between the World and Me* following a 2013 meeting while sitting United States President Barack Obama. Coates, a writer for *The Atlantic*, had been reading James Baldwin's 1963 *The Fire Next Time* and was determined to make his second meeting with the president less deferential than his first. As he left for Washington, D.C., his wife encouraged him to think like Baldwin, and Coates recalled an unofficial, fiery meeting between Baldwin, Black activists, and Robert F. Kennedy in 1963. When it was his turn, Coates debated with Obama whether his policy sufficiently addressed racial incongruences in the universal health care rollout. After the event, Obama and Coates spoke privately about a blog post Coates had written criticizing the president's call for more personal responsibility among African Americans. Obama disagreed with the criticism and told Coates not to despair.

*Between the World and Me* expresses a father's fear and frustration that the safety of his family is always under threat. In doing so, Coates explores particularly how black fathers approach parenting. Besides, Coates interchanges not only with his son but to a broader

audience, about his personal truth and his understanding of what it is to be black in America. To put it bluntly, Coates's book is full of anger, desperation and pain over the fact that African-Americans continue to be the victims of American white supremacy and their Dream. Although one commonly thinks of the American Dream as an innocent pursuit of success and happiness, in reality the American Dream cannot be emancipated from violence against African Americans. Coates explains: "*The Dream thrives on generalization, on limiting the number of possible questions, on privileging immediate answers*" (Coates 2015:50).

As a result, black people live in a constant condition of fear, knowing that their bodies are always at risk of annihilation or mutilation. Throughout the book, Coates refers to the American Dream as an addictive fantasy that spurs the enslavement and usurpation of black bodies. He writes: "*Plunder has matured into habit and addiction; the people who could author the mechanized death of our ghettos, the mass rape of private prisons, then engineer their own forgetting, must inevitably plunder much more*" (Coates 2015:150)

Most intimately, Coates thought about how Baldwin would not have shared Obama's optimism, the same optimism that supported many Civil Rights activists' conviction that justice was unavoidable and predictable. Instead, Coates saw Baldwin as being fundamentally "cold," without "sentiment and melodrama" in his acknowledgment that the movement could fail and that retribution was not guaranteed. Coates found this idea "freeing" and called his book editor, Christopher Jackson, to ask "*why no one wrote like Baldwin anymore.*" Jackson proposed that Coates tries. And he succeeded in resurrecting one of the most vibrant tones in African American literature.

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