



CONFRONTING VIOLENCE IN THE NOVEL BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME BY TA-NEHISI COATES (2015)

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Abstract

This thesis is the analysis of the novel *Between the World and Me* (2015) by Ta-Nehisi Coates. The topic explain how the character tries to deal with violence perpetrated by White. The problem of this analysis is to what extent the novel reveals the character's attempts to deal with the subtle violence against black people, and how much fictional devices such as setting, character and conflict have an effect of showing the character's efforts to deal with violence. The purpose of this analysis is to reveal the character's efforts against violence done by white, and determine the role of character, setting and conflict in helping to know the character's efforts to deal with violence. The theory in this analysis is the concept of self-awareness by Duval and Wicklund. The method is text-based interpretation and context-based interpretation. The results of this analysis shows that the character's efforts in dealing violence can save him from death. In other words, black can survive from violence by trying to face and fight the violence itself.

Key words: *Violence, Black, Self-awareness*

A. INTRODUCTION

Although the equality has been launched before the law, but it is still found that people using skin color to judge others. It is used to see whether someone is in respect position or not. Commonly, people who are respected are the one who has power, and they are white. While the people who do not have power is seen as uncivilized, uneducated, and even as criminal. It influences the reaction against other people. In addition, it causes white commit a crime to black because they think that they are superior toward black.

There are some treatments of crimes established black as torture, violence, and murder. Unfortunately, nobody cares of them. Even the law which is expected to protect the society does not provide it to them. Hence, they must solve all the crimes with their own. They have to protect themselves, family and relatives. They have to be brave to confront the violence and find the way to secure.

There is evidence of violence toward black, which comes from the article entitled *Discrimination Against Black Students* (2016) by Aloud and Alsulayyim:

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“African American were subjected to major abuses and denial of basic rights that other citizens were enjoying, for example voting rights and economic rights (Badat, 1999)”.(p.3)

This shows that Black is the main object of America to receive the injustice, violence and discrimination. They are the object for torture. They do not have the same rights such other people (white). On the other hand, the perception of those who say that the black is not part of them, it causes they are also not given the right to be involved in providing the voting rights for the good of country, and this is one example of the injustice they get. This treatment is only intended for black, not for people who break the law or commit evil acts.

This issue is also exposed in literary works. The study of confronting the violence only focus on novel *Between The World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015). This novel was written as a letter from the main character to his son. The main character tells his son the black's life in America. Black who get violence such as shooting and beating, which have an impact die for some people. He tells it based on his experience from childhood till adulthood and having a son. He presents the story as to give motivation for black to confront the violence and getting secure. The result is, black people find the way to obtain the security in a state of black get violence and injustice. This novel is interesting to be analyzed because it reveals the life of black who has been a victim of violence and try to confront it for a long time. Here we can see black's struggles to get secure amid the violence that threaten their lives. This analysis is focused on character as a father and has a child. How to deal with crime in order to get secure can be seen from the main character's life taught by his parents when he was young to adulthood.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The analysis of novel *Between the World and Me* (2015) is done through text and context-based interpretation. The fictional devices such as character, plot (conflict) and setting needed during the process of analyzing. Character is used to reveal confronting the violence by the guidance of their parents, that is education and protection. Plot (conflict) is used to acknowledge the conflicts the character faced. Furthermore, setting is also crucial device as it is situation, atmosphere, and conditions exist in the novel in order to help in revealing the meaning. These elements are analyzed based on the concept of self-awareness by Duval and Wicklund.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Research Finding

a. Confronting the Violence through Education

The first way to confront the violence from the character is through education by his parents. Providing education can be seen from the way

character's parents help him to solve all the trouble in his mind. The trouble is such the question why Black often gets violence, they do not get the same right as other (White). Character's parents recommend him to read more books in order he can learn about condition of himself as Black people. It can be seen from the following quotation:

An unceasing interrogation of the stories told to us by the schools now felt essential. It felt wrong not to ask why, and then to ask it again. I took these questions to my father, who very often refused to offer an answer, and instead referred me to more books. My mother and father were always pushing me away from secondhand answers – even the answers they themselves believed. I don't know that I have ever found any satisfactory answers of my own. But every time I ask it, the question is refined.

... (p.34)

The quotation above shows that there is the fact that is hidden. "The stories" in the context refers to the history that may relate to the condition of Black in the past. This condition must be violence which comes to Black. The words "it felt wrong not ask why, and then to ask it again" means no one can ask about the history. The history is only to told, no clear explanation. This fact is deliberately hidden. The text also explain that the character tries to find the answers from the history which is hidden. The way the character tries to find the history means that the character has self-awareness. It can be seen from the way the character tries to find answers through his parents. Yet, here we can see the education given by character's parents. They teach the character to think, learn and find out of his answer. They recommend the character to read some books about Black, because the books can help the character reveal about what happened to Black. The book tells what other does not know. The setting here refers to the conditions that do not provide answers about the reasons for the history that have occurred (*stories*). The stories could be violence that happened to Black. Everyone is told to hide it, and no one can tell it to anyone. It is supported by the next sentence in the same paragraph:

In addition, the character's parents also educate him to be able to solve his own problems, find his own solutions. When the character gets disturbances at school and in the street, they choose to teach him to find his own solutions for the problems he faces. They teach him to think how to solve the problem. At least, he can reduce the fear cause of the violence he experiences. It can be seen from the quotation below:

But how? Religion could not tell me. The schools could not tell me. The streets could not

help me see beyond the scramble of each day. And I was such a curious boy. I was raised that way. Your grandmother taught me to read when I was only four. She also taught me to write, by which I mean not simply organizing a set of sentences into a series of paragraphs, but organizing them as a means of investigation. When I was in trouble at school (which was quite often) she would make me write about it. The writing had to answer a series of questions: Why did I feel the need to talk at the same time as my teacher? Why did I not believe that my teacher was entitled to respect? How would I want someone to behave while I was talking? What would I do the next time I felt the urge to talk to my friends during a lesson? I have given you these same assignments. I gave them to you not because I thought they would curb your behavior – they certainly did not curb mine – but because these were the earliest acts of interrogation, of drawing myself into consciousness. Your grandmother was not teaching me how to behave in class. She was teaching me how to ruthlessly interrogate the subject that elicited the most sympathy and rationalizing – myself.... (p.29)

The quotation above begins with the questions which means that there is something hidden and not clear. The way the character asks the condition of Black and try to reveal what exactly happen shows that he has self-awareness. He knows there is something wrong. He does not accept what he hears. He wants to know it in details why Black get violence. Hence, his mother teaches him to read and writing to get all the things he wants. His mother does it since he is 4 years old, which means that she teaches her child to have self-awareness from childhood. This writing is not just to write the problem, but as another way to investigate the problem itself, to reveal the violence that is organized. Writing can make people think critical. It helps character to find the answers of any questions that appear in his mind and supported by reading the books. It can be seen from the four questions in the beginning of the quotation above.

In the sentence “*how to behave in class*” means to behave well in class, accept all the teacher says and obey the teacher. Here, it can be seen that the character’s mother teaches him not to accept all the things he gets in school. However, she told him to always interrogate something that was

considered illogical and the thing which is not explain clearly, in order he always have an awareness of whatever is happening and how to deal with it.

The setting here refers to locations in the school where the characters also get troubles at school. School, it should be a place of learning, respect each other, learn to socialize, but the character receives trouble which means violence from his friend. Conflict here is internal conflict which refers to the character who does not know the condition around him as a Black people.

Confronting violence through education also can be seen from the character who improves his education and gets a good position in society in order he can be respected. Improving education here is formal education, such as study at university. Getting a good position and being respected in this novel is become a journalist. Each journalist is given the right to express opinions, finding something important that he wants to know or reveal.

Main character gets that opportunity. He continued his education at university and has the opportunity to become a journalist. He is given the right to interview others who provides the information he is looking for. It can be seen from the quotation below:

...And they gave the art of journalism, a powerful technology for seekers. I reported on local D.C., and I found that people would tell me things, that the same softness that once made me a target now compelled people to trust me with their stories. This was incredible. I was barely out of the fog of childhood, where questions simply died in my head. Now I could call and ask people why a popular store closed, why a show had been canceled, why there were so many churches and so few supermarkets. Journalism gave me another tool of exploration, another way unveiling the laws that bound my body. It was beginning to come together – even if I could not yet see what the “it” was. (p.62)

Journalist give power to the character to find something he wants. Find answers to all the questions that comes to his mind about Black bodies. The sentence */I found that people would tell me things, that the same softness that once made me a target now compelled people to trust me with their stories/* prove that the character has been respected. That is the way the character confronts the violence. The character confronts the violence by increasing his study. It shows that he is educated people. He also has the right such other to be respected, and he is not the object of violence. The character already has power to tell public about what is accepted by Black, Black who is treated as an object, accept violence and does not get justice or even does not

get protection from the law in his country. He can convey that condition through his writings, articles, and journals, as written in the last sentence above */Journalism gave me another tool of exploration, another way of revealing the laws that bound my body/*. The setting is the condition of the main character who has become a journalist. This is a great opportunity to convey to the world about the life of Black who often receives violence.

In short, one way to deal with violence committed by White to Black is by providing education to the character and his son. Teach them about the violence experienced by Black people in the past. This education aims to give awareness for Black generation that they must dare to face the difficulties, the violence given to Black. Educating Black's child to read in order to know about the condition of the world and understand the conditions they experience. Beside, the character's parents teach him to write down all the problems he faces in order he can find solutions to solve the problems he faces. Writing can make the character thinks about how they should act for the existing problems. In addition, awareness is also needed to deal with violence. Awareness can make people think about things that have happened and how to act based on the experiences that have been passed.

b. Confronting the Violence through Protection

Another way to confront the violence is giving protection to the character. Character's parents try to protect him from being violated by White. The impact of violence that occurs to Character can cause lose the body (death), because others commit violence without mercy. Character's parents realize that they must protect his child in order he does not become a victim of violence and even die, such as has happened to other Black people.

The protection that is given by character's parents to him can be seen in the quotation below:

Have they told you this story? When your grandmother was sixteen years old a young man knocked on her door. The young man was your Nana Jo's boyfriend. No one else was home. Ma allowed this young man to sit and wait until your Nana Jo returned. But your great-grandmother got there first. She asked the young man to leave. Then, she beat your grandmother terrifically, one last time, so that she might remember how easily she could lose her body. Ma never forgets. I remember her clutching my small hand tightly as we crossed the street. She would tell me that if I ever let go and were killed by an onrushing car, she would beat me back to life. When I was six, Ma and Dad took me to a local park. I slipped from their gaze and found a playground. Your grandparents spent anxious minutes looking for me. When they found me, Dad did what every

parent I knew would have done - he reached for his belt. I remember watching him in a kind of daze, awed at the distance between punishment and offense. Later, I would hear in Dad's voice – "Either I can beat him, or the police." Maybe that saved me. Maybe it didn't.

The quotation above shows that violence can occur anywhere, at home, in the street, in the park, and other places. This shows that violence usually occurs to Black. The action taken by Character's parents (beat) above is one way to protect him from violence perpetrated by others. The beating shows that his parent is worried about him. They are powerless. They do not get protection if something happens to him. The beating was intended to make the character aware that his live were never safe, there is always a threat to him. That is what happened to his parents in the past, and they did not want that happen to the character either. They must protect him from crimes committed by others. The beating was done by character's parents because they were worried about his safety (*your grandparents spent anxious minutes looking for me*). The sentence */I remember her clutching my small hand tightly as we crossed the street. She would tell me that if I ever let go and were killed by an onrushing car, she would beat me back to life/* explain about the threat to character's safety. Character's mother tries to protect the character from these threats. Holding his hand tightly indicates that his mother wants to make sure that his condition is safe and there are no distractions that will endanger him.

The sentence */either I can beat him or the police/* also shows that violence is very often obtained by Black and even from apparatus (police) who are supposed to maintain the security of the community. The sentence */maybe it saved me. Maybe it didn't/*, main character realizes that what his father does is not necessarily saving him, but at least he had tried to prevent his child from the merciless of violence, which is riskier for the character's safety. That word also shows that, the character has self-awareness. He is aware that everything can happen to him, because he sees the violence around him. The conflict here is an internal conflict experienced by Black. Fear of the safety of his child's body because violence can occur at any time that he is not aware of. The setting refers to environmental conditions (home, street, park) which are always surrounded of fears of Black that is threatened with violence. This shows that Black never felt safe even though it was in the house.

To protect themselves in the street, black learns culture and language from the street in their environment. They learn to understand the atmosphere in the street. This can be seen in the quotation below:

To survive the neighborhoods and shield my body, I learned another language consisting of a basic complement of head nods and handshakes.

I memorized a list of prohibited blocks. I learned the smell and feel of fighting weather. And I learned that “Shorty, can I see your bike?” was never a sincere question, and “Yo, you were messing with my cousin” was neither an earnest accusation nor a misunderstanding of the facts. These were the summonses that you answered with your left foot forward, your right foot back, your hands guarding your face, one slightly lower than the other, cocked like a hammer. Or they were answered by breaking out, ducking through alleys, cutting through backyards, then bounding through the door past your kid brother into your bedroom, pulling the tool out of your lambskin or from under your mattress or out of your Adidas shoebox, then calling up your own cousins (who really aren’t) and returning to the same block, on that same day, and to that same crew, hollering out, “Yeah, nigger, what’s up now?” I recall learning these laws clearer than I recall learning my colors and shapes, because these laws were essential to the security of my body. (p.23)

The quotation above shows that the character is aware of his situation. Character pays attention to any circumstances and the possibility of bad atmosphere that will happen to him, especially in the street. He confronts the violence by paying attention to codes, ways of communicating (languages) in the street. He must understand the situation, conditions, culture, and codes (language) so that he can confront the violence and save himself. Knowing the codes in the street, it can help the character to avoid and escape from the violence they will face. Settings here can be seen from the street that is not safe for the character and threatens his safety. He will face violence that will result in the destruction of their bodies if they are not careful and understand the atmosphere in the street.

In summary, confronting the violence can be seen from the way Black protects their child from violence that might occur to their child. This is because Black parents have experienced such violence throughout their lives and they know that violence can threaten their safety. They do not want the same thing happen to their child. Black parents beat their child when they are anxiety about the condition of their child who are out of their control. This is because they want their child to understand that they are not in security, anything can happen to them, and Black parents do not want to lose their child. In addition, Black parents also always hold their child's hands tightly when they cross the street. They want to make sure their children do not get danger. It means that violence can happen anytime, and cannot be predicted

when it happens to them. Finally, Black learns culture and language in the street to protect their safety. That protection shows that there is self-awareness in Black to maintain their personal secure, have the right to live safely.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The novel *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) reveals the issue confronting the violence. The issue of confronting violence is exposed through text-based and context-based interpretation. In text-based interpretation focuses on fictional devices such as character, setting and conflict. In context-based interpretation relates to the concept self-awareness by Duval and Wicklund. Thus, confronting violence in this analysis refers to how Black deal with difficulties, crime such as physical attacks, or death threats so they can secure. The main character in this novel is a father who told to his son about black's life in America. He told his experience, how he saw the life of black who lived in fear, the violence he experienced and other blacks. Black lives in fear because of the violence often happens to them. Hence, he told his son how black faced the violence. He told of the treatment given by his parents to keep him safe by providing education and protection.

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