# GETTING OUT OF THE "VALLEY OF THIS WOEFUL LIFE": BLACK FEMINIST DISCOURSE IN *A MERCY*

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper explores, through A Mercy, Toni Morrison's preoccupation with the black female condition in the dawn of the American race-based slavery system, and the construction of a liberating feminist discourse. It revisits the negotiation of the power dynamics in the seventeenth-century America by positing that re-membering and re-interpreting the past constitutes a royal way to shed light on the present. The memory of slavery from the female's perspective also helps construct the discourse of black women's liberation today. Using a black feminist interpretive frame, this research work analyzes, in the novel, the social struggles from the stance of the enslaved female thrown against the other social subjectivities in early America, for an advocacy of black females' condition. It thus purports to contribute to the liberation of black females in contemporary America.*

***Key-words**: Black feminism – slavery – liberation – domination – discourse*

## RÉSUMÉ

*Cet article explore, à travers A Mercy, l'intérêt que porte Toni Morrison à la condition féminine noire à l'aube du système esclavagiste américain basé sur la race, et la construction d'un discours féministe libérateur. Il revisite la négociation de la dynamique du pouvoir dans l'Amérique du XVIIe siècle en partant du postulat que la remémoration (en tant que ré-engencement) et la réinterprétation du passé constituent une voie royale pour éclairer le présent et aider à construire le discours de libération des femmes afro-américaines au XXIe siècle. À travers le cadre d'interprétation du féminisme noir, ce travail de recherche analyse, dans le roman, les luttes sociales vues de la perspective de la femme asservie en butte aux autres subjectivités sociales de l'Amérique naissante, pour un plaidoyer en faveur de la condition des femmes noires. Il entend ainsi contribuer à la libération des femmes noires dans l'Amérique contemporaine.*

**Mots-clés** : Féminisme noir – esclavage – libération – domination – discours

# INTRODUCTION

In the concluding lines of *A Mercy*, Morrison inserts a strip that stages Florens's mother, minha mãe. The latter muses on what, she thinks, is the most precious piece of wisdom on human condition she wishes she had transmitted to her daughter: "to be given dominion over another is a hard thing; to wrest dominion over another is a wrong thing; to give dominion of yourself to another is a wicked thing" (Morrison, 2008, p.167). This maxim, obviously, articulates Morrison's lifelong political commitment for the defense of black women excluded from the American society.

So much as the novel focuses on the slow crystallization of the various forces in the social dynamics that shaped the identity of the New World, it equally scrutinizes the unique characteristics of the black female's condition, as an enslaved individual. In those early years of the American social experiment which serve as setting for the novel, the author throws the black female's subjectivity against all the other subjectivities. This paper identifies, as an important argument in *A Mercy*'s neo-slave narrative, the probing of the black enslaved female's interior life and, to a larger scale, the latter's subjectivity, against concepts of property and freedom, motherhood, and love bond—ing/age, which all serve as discursive spaces through which racial and sexual dominions are articulated against the black female. This paper posits that the full understanding and re-interpretation of the past is a powerful lever that will serve in improving the social status of black females today in America. Probing these issues is vital for the liberation of the black female in the American society today. In this vein, in a black feminist perspective, this paper analyzes the female protagonist's journey of maturation and her path to self-fulfillment. It generalizes her case to make inferences on the black female subjectivity positioned, in the incipient America, at cross-purpose in relation to the other social identities: the white male, the white female, and, most peculiarly, the black male.

# 1. BLACK FEMINISM AND MORRISON'S LITERARY COMMITMENT

Black feminism is a doctrine whose goal is to liberate black females from the multifaceted oppression they are confronted with in the USA. Black feminists criticize the sexual oppression African American females are confronted with within their own male-dominated communities, and the race-related exclusion that they face within the wider American society and feminist movements, that is their social position as disadvantaged both by their racial and sexual identities. The social and material conditions of the African American female's past, although it is said to have evolved since emancipation, still finds its echo, through the fluid dialog between the past, the present, and the future, in the black female's social condition today. Her present is haunted by her former condition as a chattel property. Jesse A. Goldberg establishes the relation between the past and the present of the black female in America in these words:

> The material conditions of the two subjects are too different to allow for an equal sign. But the point is that despite the difference in political ontology between the enslaved subject and the "post-civil rights" subject, the two exist with a "hauntological" continuity […]. The structuring forces of violence that delimit choice within the context of slavery set in motion, and thereby continue to haunt, the conditions within which twenty-first century US subjects make choices about an economic system predicated on the violence of enslavement as its condition of possibility. (Goldberg 2018, p.116)

The "hauntology" Golberg evokes is the pernicious lingering streaks of pre-civil war social condition of the black female in what social experience she has in the twenty-first century. Morrison's goal of black feminism therefore consists in emancipating black women by giving them a voice and by filling in the gaps found in the African American female's her-story. The politics of giving the black woman a voice would eventually enable her to free herself from these subjectivities encapsulated in, and molded by, the gaze of the white male and female, and that of the black male. Most critics (Trace 1991; R.A. Griffin 2012; P. Ghasemi, 2015) find the corpus of Toni Morrison's literary production targeting that objective. This essay borrows from Yuang Wang's reflection on Morrison's literary commitment. Wang gives a clarification on his vision of Morrison's black feminism, identifying her black feminism as a three-tiered dynamics.

For Wang, the first tier of Morrison's commitment consists in the reconstruction of the history of African Americans in a postmodern posture. Post modernism is known to question the discursive totalities or *absolute* validity of grand narratives that serve only the interests of the ruling class. Morrison laments the absence of black females, and of black people at large, from the American official history: "There's a great deal of obfuscation and distortion and erasure, so that the presence and the heartbeat of black people has been systematically annihilated in many, many ways and the job of recovery is ours" (Davis 225). This questioning enables Morrison to create a space of self-reinvention which is vital for the African American female. She emphasizes this genesic potential through imagination when she writes: "I dream a dream that dreams back at me" (Morrison, 2008, p.137). This re-creation of the self, she does it through black folklore, myths, religious symbols, musical traditions, African American, etc. In this vein, the black enslaved females' her-story aptly compares with Suzan-Lori Parks's image of the dis-membered body. Parks argues that the unremembered patches of the history of black females that have been "dis-membered," through the re-creation of the self, are "re-membered," or literally put back into place (Parks,1995, ).

The second aspect of Morrison's literary project consists in taking the agency for the narrativization of the concept of blackness in American literature. As a matter of fact, although the black literary tradition can be traced back to such figures as Phillis Wheatley and Jupiter Hammon, Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass, the African American literature was ushered into a new cycle of its development with Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, and other writers of their generation. They spun on the thread of Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison, to bring a specific African American literary politics and poetics to world-wide recognition and appreciation. As a matter of fact, Morrison's work has significantly contributed in giving a content to black identity, and to the re-presentation of black female identity, in American literature. In her book *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison expounds the political tenets of black female marginalization in white American literature.

The third facet of Morrison's literary enterprise that Wang identifies is her empowering the silenced and marginalized people with a voice. She uncovers the horrors committed on black people in general, and on black females in particular, who are silenced by social repression. Morrison's black feminism challenges and subverts the conventional negativity constructed by white hegemony in the grand narrative by giving black females a voice. Morrison proceeds to put at the center of her narratives black females who look up and analyze the American social experience through their own subjectivity. Black feminism then serves as the critical lens used for the analysis of A Mercy in this research paper. How is this project reflected in *A Mercy*?

## 2. THE ESTHETICS OF THE UNSPOKEN BLACK FEMALE LIBERATION

*A Mercy* tells the story of Florens, a sixteen year-old girl who recounts the tale of how she is given away by Senhor D'Ortega. She is given away as an exchange currency for the settlement for D'Ortega's debt with Jacob Vaark. Florens's mother and her suckling baby boy are the first choice that Vaark makes for the payment. But Florens's mother kneels down and begs for Vaark to take her daughter instead. Florens's life on Vaark's property occupies the central part of the plot of *A Mercy* until she madly falls in love with the blacksmith hired to make the reproduction of the magnificent gate Vaark has seen in D'Ortega's mansion and which has aroused his envy. After Vaark dies, Rebekka, his widow, is struck in her turn by small pox and sends Florens on a mission to find the blacksmith and bring him to Vaark's home. The blacksmith has the medicinal skills to heal Rebekka. Florens finds the opportunity to flee and join her lover. But she is disappointed and thrown away by the blacksmith who notices that Florens has dislocated the shoulder of Malaik, the boy that he has adopted.

Key to the esthetics of *A Mercy* is the fact that its narrative introduces the reader into the society of the early days of slavery, from the perspective of the silenced, the voiceless enslaved female laborers. It espouses the consciousness of the female laborer whose incomplete mastery of English is realistically reflected into the grammar of the narrative. Utterances such as a minha mãe's "They assure we that the whitened men do not

want to eat we" (Morrison, 2008, p.164) reflect this particular grammar that will, blended with residues of African languages features, evolve, with time, into the current elaborate varieties of the African American vernacular.

The enslaved person's limited knowledge of the standard English language, is what first bars him/her from speech. In addition to this, one may mention the handicap of illiteracy. The defense for the enslaved to learn to read and write is a ban necessary to silencing his/her voice as it is the written word that most fluidly lends itself to the conservation of memory and the circulation of ideas. Young Florens realizes that "When the letters are memory we make whole words" (Morrison, 2008, p.7). Mastering the written word has enabled her to make her written confession, that is the tale of her own life, narrated from her own perspective, which would not have been possible otherwise. Also, her fast learning that outdoes her mother suggests a gradual empowerment of these females across generations. Through those devices, the unspoken, inarticulate black female, in the novel, is given the right to speak. But her empowerment to her own say is further articulated in the narrative poetics, as I will try to show further.

The trope of the mother sacrificing her daughter, paradoxically out of love, is not new in Morrison's work. It is a device that bares the horrific reality of slavery. The question as to why a mother begs for her own daughter to be taken away for a debt settlement in her own place, is not that hard to answer. Morrison's readers have already encountered this trope in *Beloved*. In *Beloved*, the mother kills her daughter and the haunting memories of the dead one now threatens quietude, with the past requiring, exacting remembrance and atonement (Azon and Baba-Agba149-163). However, although it is difficult for Florens to understand and condone her mother's act, it nonetheless becomes easy to *A Mercy*'s reader to get the key into the textual economy of a minha mãe taking the initiative to let go of her own daughter: for the "open wound that cannot heal" (Morrison, 2008, p.163) that all black women are in America, "there is no protection but there is difference" (166). The mother is intent on sending Florens away to avoid her inevitable fall under Senhor D'Ortega's predatory lust for his female enslaved. There remains however a second disquieting question that Morrison leaves as a riddle to the reader: how can a sensible young lady in love and intent on creating a family so ruthlessly pull a young boy's arm and crack his shoulder?

The first apparently intolerable act of sacrifice occurs without an explanation to Florens. Her mother is trying desperately to send her a message whose meaning Florens fails to grasp. She bears the unhealed wound of abandon as she still feels forsaken and unloved. The mother could have offered an explanation of her choice but she is silenced by the very presence of the white man and her social condition. She is silenced by the presence of D'Ortega, the white male that "owns," uses and abuses her. She cannot explain this to her daughter. Florens' trauma is related to the fact that her younger brother is chosen to her detriment: "A minha mãe begs no. Her baby is still at her breast. Take the girl, she says, my daughter, she says. Me. Me. Sir agrees and changes the balance due" (Morrison, 2008, p.07). The most probable explanation one may derive from the text is the resurgence of this unresolved trauma with the new challenge posed by a boy who has the full attention and care of the other person that Florens loves, the only person that now matters in her life: the blacksmith. Her violence on the boy who, through similarity of circumstances, reminds her of her own brother, epitomizes black females silencing that generates enduring trauma and neurosis. The final scene of fight with her attempt to kill the blacksmith can thus be read as her attempt to free herself from her social gag.

Florens's fixation on this unresolved trauma is each time revived by the sight of shows of parental affection with little boys. She retrospectively confides in this vein: "I have a worry.… mothers nursing greedy babies scare me. I know how their eyes go when they choose. How they raise them to look at me hard, saying something I cannot hear. Saying something important to me, but holding the little boy's hand" (Morrison, 2008, p.8). That is what happens once again with the blacksmith. But the latter would not let her offer an explanation on the traumatizing psychological complexities, the wounds of her status as an enslaved when she pleads: "I am a slave [only] because Sir trades for me" (Morrison, 2008, p.141). The trauma that resurfaces now is related to the circumstances of her exchange as a mere replacement currency.

Florens feels her safety threatened the second time in her life by the presence of Malaik. The blacksmith, who, in the text, stands for all black males, once more refuses to let Florens speak and explain why she has dislocated Malaik's shoulder. He calls her a willful enslaved person and would not listen to Florens's explanation. What Florens tries to explain is that her schizophrenia is related to her condition as a tradable commodity: "I am a slave because Sir trades for me" (Morrison, 2008, p.141). She is silenced the first time but refuses to be silenced again. Her decision to write her confession is the liberatory acts that brings her out of the silence that her society has imposed on her. She engraves the recital of her life – in an ascending pattern, first on the floor, then on the walls – of the mansion that is built with the fruit of her servitude and silencing. This rising writing from the "crawl space" to erection is symbolically preceded by her attempt to kill the master figure who defines her as an enslaved, whom she leaves in blood.

In the last chapter, the mother's voice appears. She tells the reason why she asks a stranger to take her daughter away. In her eyes, the conduct is not a cruel behavior but an act of love and mercy. She does it because she recalls her own bitter experience. She is shipped from Africa, sold and raped. She confides to her daughter: "I don't know who is your father. It was too dark to see any of them" (Morrison, 2008, p.163). She is scared her daughter might fall prey to the same abuses if she stays in Senhor's hands. She pleads for Jacob, of whom she comments: "there was no animal in his heart" (Morrison, 2008, p.163), to take her daughter away because she instantly feels in the latter's eyes that he is not like D'Ortega. Though there is no protection for her daughter far away from home, she believes things will be different. She gives up on her daughter out of love and protection.

The same story is narrated by three different persons from different perspectives. Collaging them together, the reader finally finds the truth and gains insight. The collage fashion of the narrative hints to the way African Americans, especially females, had to assemble the pieces of memory together to restore their history facing erasure and nauseating emptiness.

## 3. THE ENSLAVED BLACK FEMALE'S BODY FACED WITH RAPE AND LOVE

Jacob Vaark, on his errands, encounters Peter Downes, the well-traveled trader of enslaved people who tells "mesmerizing tales ending with a hilarious description of the size of the [black] women's breasts in Barbados," women whom he describes, "besides bosoms, … *like whore[s]. Lush and deadly* [emphasis mine]" (Morrison, 2008, p.30). That the black female body is turned into favorite subject of dirty drinking gibes in taverns only indicates how profusely that body was fed on during slavery. The fetishization of the black female first works on her body as site of pleasure, both "unethical" and defenselessly offered for the predation of white males, with the full range of the right of possession: usus, fructus and abusus. The narrative focus falls on a surrealist scene of females on sale whose apparent indifference is too obvious not to speak for their terror and the horror of such transactions that embarked them on an unpredictable journey of more unknown atrocities yet to come: "The women's eyes looked shockproof, gazing beyond place and time as though they were not actually there" (Morrison, 2008, p.22).

In her essay entitled "Possession," Morrison eloquently points out that "whatever the level of eloquence of the [enslaved narrative] form, popular taste discouraged the writers from dwelling too long or too carefully on the more sordid details of their experience." This experience was linked to the stark violence exercised in "possessing" the female body through sexual and reproductive violence whose direct account was euphemized and disposed of in compliance with the constraint and condition for the publication of enslaved narratives, thus forbidding accurate memory (Morrison & Denard, 2008, pp.69–70).

Florens's mother, a minha mãe, bears the psychological scars of sexual abuse, first gang raping, then again with Senhor D'Ortega. The horrible details, the reader is just left to imagine. But her torment can be measured only by the agonizing desperation and the eagerness she shows in pushing her daughter into Jacob Vaark's hands, expecting it could make a difference for her. What has a minha mãe experienced, which

makes her so scared for her daughter? She falls prey to both Senhor D'Ortega and his wife, husband and wife's sexual assaults and calls Senhor's mansion the "valley of this woeful life" (Morrison, 2008, p.166). She furthermore believes that her soul is doomed for eternity because of those sins she is made to commit. Florens's "disposal" as a property is thus to be viewed as an act of mercy rather than a tragedy. As a matter of fact, not all female victims of assault and social rejection manage to have the semblance of psychological sanity or as much as the limited options that Florens's mother does with Vaark's act of "mercy". There is in *A Mercy* a character that is more profoundly wounded by her condition as a commodity: Sorrow. "Vixeneyed Sorrow," is shown in the narrative, "with black teeth and a head of never groomed woolly hair the color of a setting sun. Accepted, not bought, by Sir, she still had no memory of her past" (Morrison, 2008, p.51).

Sorrow is seen wandering after a shipwreck in which the whole crew has perished. She has no knowledge of her own origin and cannot recollect any shred trace of her past. She has never set foot on firm ground. Her total disorientation, clumsiness and inability to walk on firm earth, her mental state, all concur to remind us of those characters for whom Morrison confesses that she has to find appropriate ways to render the horrors they have gone through (Morrison & Denard, 2008, pp. 69–70). Sorrow, unkempt, inarticulate, and untidy, has been kept her whole life on the ship certainly for the sexual appetite of the crew since she cannot serve any other purpose. Then on, rejected by everybody, she has no social connection except the occasional male encounters that find in her a quick and easy sexual prey. This, obviously, is the first purpose her presence on the ship explains. The reading that the body of black females, like Sorrow, offered in slavery, as a commodity, "always included the possibilities of their wombs" (Morgan, 2018, p.3). These possibilities, clearly stated, are rape and childbearing necessary for the perpetuation of the system. She converses with an identical self only she sees and calls Twin until she gets pregnant and becomes a mother. Then the imaginary presence she calls Twin disappears.

The tremendous improvement of her mental condition with motherhood is an evidence that she has been traumatized by the horrors of her experiences and seclusion on the ship, and also in the various households she is then on taken in, unloved. In rising back to humanness after her childbearing experience, she takes agency for her own naming, and changes the name she has been given, *Sorrow*, into *Complete*. Morrison's introduction of this character into *A Mercy* toys with the possibility of a complete mental and physical destruction of the human attributes in a female reduced to her/his purest state of tradable asset. This commodity has "its" own human subjectivity so well annihilated in slavery that "it" becomes unpalatable and therefore rejected. *Sorrow* [read, absence, deprivation and grief] becomes *Complete* [full, happy, fulfilled] when she has somebody to love and talk to: her baby. But the baby is another leash that holds these black female enslaved: the sword of Damocles hanging over the child's head.

In the concluding lines of *A Mercy* cited in the introduction of this work, one reads: "to give dominion of yourself to another is a wicked thing" (Morrison, 2008, p.167). One of the privileged spaces of negotiation of social power between black males and females is love relations and wedlock. As it is often noticed, it is within the links of marriage, the circle of the normative family, that power relations between the black male and female ending in the black female's domination, is often visible. Since the relationships of Bill Cosey with Heed, Christina, and May, in *Love*, Toni Morrison has engaged in the examination of the complete annihilation of [black] females' self-love and worth in love and marriage relations. Likewise, Florens has her first love experience with the blacksmith whom she raises into the status of the divine "my shaper" (Morrison, 2008, p.71): "No communion or prayer. You are my protection. Only you. You can be it because you say you are a free man from New Amsterdam and always are that" (Morrison, 2008, p.69).

The blacksmith that Florens is infatuated with is a free black workman. Florens's attraction to the blacksmith seems to articulate her contemplation of the idea of freedom and the highest embodiment of fulfilled blackness on which she can project herself. The halo of freedom, she herself has never known, but only imagined. As a free man, she thinks, he can give her the protection and safety that she needs. The figure of Florens thus works as a started but unfinished articulation of freedom. Her connection to the concept of freedom is still mediated. Her flight to find refuge with the blacksmith can merely be analyzed as a swap of

masters, an immature flight from one "owner" to another. We can surmise that if she has not surrendered her being to that extent to the blacksmith through love, she would not have felt that schizophrenic urge to hurt Malaik who, in her distorted view of reality, is competing with her for the blacksmith's affection. She is afraid of being abandoned once more by the blacksmith, but it does happen after he returns and finds that she has hurt the little boy because he has destroyed her shoes. The narrative works at two levels of signifying, the first of which is Florens finding a rival in the blacksmith's affection. Besides, Florens has always viewed the use of shoes, anyone's cast-offs, as way of rising into society, which her mother has usually deplored as a dangerous and unnecessary sophistication for her condition. The destruction of her shoes thus metaphorically undermines this desire of social uplift in the critical circumstances when she decides to elope and stay with the blacksmith. But to the abundant gift of her loving, the latter only returns indifference. What is he afraid of?

Samira Spatzek's reading of *A Mercy* in her essay "Post-Slavery Negotiations? On (Slave) Narrative and Impossible Stories in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*" helps the reader map the blacksmith's psychological geography of freedom. She situates the blacksmith in the liminal social position in 17th-century Virginia where, even though there were a few free black individuals, the freedom they were given was really limited. The blacksmith's complexion is thus inconsistent with freedom. Spatzek then argues that the blacksmith's notion of freedom is too flimsy to conceive of "owning" someone else. Of course, he is free in the sense that he has a valuing occupation and medicinal skills that empower him to "life-and-death decisions" (64). But his creation within a utopian space that marries blackness to freedom cannot do with the concept of ownership meant for enjoyment, in the Lockean sense. Thus his resort to the ready-made discourse of femininity as unrestrained wilderness ["You are nothing but wilderness. No constraint. No mind" (Morrison, 2008, p.139)] barely veils the limits of his own sense of freedom. She goes on:

> The dialogue [with Florens] illustrates that the blacksmith reduces Florens to what he thinks is her 'wilderness,' her alleged inability to control herself and her sexual desire. He approaches Florens as if she were a slavish body-thing, which due to its lack of reason remains outside of the early modern paradigm of individual liberty. His commandment to 'own herself' thus unmasks his own hovering existence in a microcosm of reason, self-control, and self-possession. Black human mastery remains an ambiguously narrow narrative window of possibility in that it tantalizingly mediates black male liberty; however, in being constructed vis-à-vis a discourse of belonging, as figured by Florens, the blacksmith's freedom, attractive as his refusal to be mastered may appear, is only thinkable as a (self)possession, a state of personhood for which love or desire for another person becomes a threat. In his quasi-Lockean mindset, the blacksmith cannot conjoin independence and belonging. (Spatzek 66)

Luckily, this defect in the black male's sense of freedom is the trigger for Florens's own the search of complete independence. In a last jump of pride, the jump of Oedipal liberation, she kills that divine/divinized father figure by raising the hammer against the blacksmith. This has enabled her to take her destiny in her own hands, consequently gaining the agency to write her own life story. She articulates her feminist discourse as follows:

> From all those who believe they have claim and rule over me. I am nothing to you. You say I am wilderness. I am. Is that a tremble on your mouth, in your eye? Are you afraid? You should be. The hammer strikes air many times before it gets to you where it dies in weakness. You wrestle it from me and toss it away. Our clashing is long. I bare my teeth to bite you, to tear you open. (Morrison, 2008, p.157)

Her killing the father figure is followed by the move to write her own story. To her, writing or engraving is a kind of relief first and foremost meant for herself. Of course, she addresses her story to the blacksmith. But she knows well that the blacksmith cannot read her confessions. "You won't read my telling. You read the world but not the letters of talk. You don't know how to" (Morrison, 2008, p.160). So, though no one listens and though the blacksmith will not read, she has to make her voice heard and constructs the new

worldview in which she registers herself. This is the path to self-assertion that African American females have to thread to find freedom and true selves.

## CONCLUSION

In *A Mercy*, Morrison gives African American females a voice for their own telling of their life experiences. Oppressed racially and sexually, African American females were and still are marginalized and silenced. They were taken from their homes and forced to work in the New World. They lost their identities and were redefined, in totally different social paradigms. They were cut from any chance to get emancipated or empowered. Morrison's focus on the past underscores the undeniable relation it nurtures with the present. Through her narratives, she endows these black women with the power of expressing their pains and sufferings, an appropriate idiosyncrasy of autonomy and self-assertion. By summoning and reinterpreting their yet untold painful past, they can finally rebuild and shape their dis-membered her-stories, curing the old wounds.

Women must have a better understanding of the new challenges and work for their participation in social dynamics. And in this perspective, Morrison has given an exceptionally new, postmodernist perspective to the reading of history. She revisits and reshapes the past with the whole specter of wounds like slavery, the destruction of cultural identity, male chauvinism and women subjugation, and racism.

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