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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Reading Deuteronomic Vision in Literature

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| ABSTRACT

The novelistic genre acquires its full nobility through its dynamic capacity to overcome any canonical forms, incorporating intertexts that belong to other discursive fields. It is a genre with no real borders –its heterogeneous and rhizomic identity corroborates its rebellious and conquering feature. Decrying conformism and traditional mimetic sectarianism, that genre renews its borders by appropriating innovative narrative techniques, consisting of interweaving literary, mythical, cultural, and biblical values. By imbricating those intergeneric or interdiscursive figures, Paule Marshall's fiction illustrates itself as a crucible of extratextual and complex resources. Through their combination, a poetics of heterogeneity emerges, thus generating a semantic shift, which ranges from spiritual trend to cultural one. The "Annual Excursion," which is thematized in *Praisesong for the Widow*, offers a substantial and spiritual way out for a cultural reconnection and wholeness –black characters who are involved in that journey to the homeland, construct their cultural identity, connect themselves with their ancestors' past, and restore their tarnished image. They also promise faithfulness to the "Old Parents."<sup>1</sup> In return, the latter undertakes to provide the "Out-Islanders"<sup>2</sup> with spiritual and cultural protection to them. That metaphorical, spiritual covenant, which is anchored in the book of Deuteronomy, is far from being pointless or accidental, for it embodies both spiritual and cultural stakes, which the current study aims to scrutinize through the lens of the semiotics of culture. For that purpose, two points will be considered, namely "metaphorizing black ancestors' requirements" and "the cultural scope of the spiritual covenant."

| KEYWORDS

Cultural connection, spiritual wholeness, Deuteronomy, cultural protection, spiritual wholeness, spiritual covenant.

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### 1. Introduction

From modernism to hypermodernism, going through postmodernism, considerable changes are achieved –the novelistic genre has been constructing values pertaining to each of those eras. In terms of features, each of the above eras claims a number of given social ideals, which are subtly expressed through varied narrative techniques.

If modernism focuses on individuals' experiences and emotions, putting them at the core of its major concerns, postmodernism distances itself from modernism by its anticonformist feature, advocating paradox, fragmentary, and heterogeneity.

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<sup>1</sup> In *Praisesong*, those to whom Paule Marshall refers as "Old Parents" or "The Long-time People" are her African ancestors –during the colonial period, the latter were deported from Africa and served as slaves on colonists' plantations in America and elsewhere. In essence, they are profoundly rooted in African tradition and culture. In Marshall's creative art, they occupy an essential place and are regarded as the repositories of the ancestral knowledge; they are "pure Africans." This means their cultural identity is authentically African one. Marshall establishes a distinction between them and the African descents whose cultural identity is influenced by colonization. Shortly, the "Old Parents" are African ancestral figures whose divine powers are praised in the novel under consideration.

<sup>2</sup> In *Praisesong*, the name "Out-Islanders" refers to Black Caribbean Diaspora. They evolve outside Carriacouan borders and are bound to take part in the "Annual Excursion" and pay tribute to the "Long-time People."

Hypermodernism advises material cumulation and instantaneity (immediate response to any forms of social difficulties). In accordance with those ideological eras, the XXI<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by Humans' desire to fully acquire their materialistic independence –here; individuals give more credit to material values; immaterial ones are overlooked. The justification for such a preference lies in the new social deal proposed by the consumer society that the ongoing century offers to individuals. *A priori*, without financial means, the world population can fall into misery. To avoid any eventual poor conditions or economic catastrophe, the quest for material, therefore, turns out to be needful and economical. However, the prevailing social order depicted in Marshall's context requires the subjects' profound involvement and advocates individualism.

In front of the drifts caused by the hypermodern era, literary work serves as a medium of prevention. It criticizes and raises deviant minds' awareness of the danger they incur by blindly embracing the ideals of hypermodernity. Like African-American intellectuals, such as the sociologist William Edward Burghardt DuBois and the poet Langston Hughes, whose critical works on Blacks' religiosity are quoted as references, Paule Marshall –an African-American woman writer, is entirely involved in constructing black cultural identity through metaphorical use of Western Christianity. Her fiction delineates some African-American characters embarked on some timeless struggles hoping to acquire sociocultural balance. One of her favorite themes is Christianity –through that intertext, she fictionalizes biblical values, instilling her African cultural heritage in young generations. For a thorough insight into her literary project, it is of paramount interest to appraise the critical studies which have already been achieved or done on her *Praisesong*. Such a comprehensive analysis will contribute to pointing out the evanescent and elusive issues. From a chronological perspective, it is, therefore, quite apropos to consider the following critical reflections:

In *Toward Wholeness in Paule Marshall's Fiction* (1995), Joyce Pettis scrutinizes the theme of spirituality. Her book shows how symbolic the journey is in Marshall's novel –that geographical movement oriented toward the ancestral roots enables black subjects to achieve spiritual and cultural wholeness thanks to their commitment to cultural practices in the Caribbean universe. Defining "spiritual wholeness," Pettis avers: "The significance of the term 'spiritual wholeness' within this context justifies its appropriation as the desired goal in the journey undertaken in Marshall's fiction" (Pettis, 1995).

Tangibly, "spiritual wholeness" is a state of being, an inner peaceful state, a sense of internal satisfaction, which brings stillness to the subjects whose cultural past is profoundly crisis. In African descents' social context, "spiritual wholeness" is not the one experienced in American Churches –rather, that is experienced as self-recognition, i.e., the ability of the "self" to transcend the alienating social barriers, which are deliberately erected by Whites to keep Blacks at a low standard of living. Comprehensibly, any "spiritual wholeness" is acquired or turns apparent when African descents succeed in reconnecting themselves with their ancestral past. However, the acquisition of such a cultural state is out of the question in capitalist America. Indeed, in African descent's collective memory, American society remains a location of humiliation, ill-treatment, and cultural dispossession. This means to acquire the "spiritual wholeness" explained by Joyce Pettis, African-Americans should return to their ancestral roots and initiate an actual or effective process of cultural reconstruction. In terms of Blacks' cultural survival, this involvement is economical or advantageous.

To go ahead with our analysis, let us indicate that in *Spirituality as Ideology in Black Women's Film and Literature* (2005), Judylyn S. Ryan is interested in black ancestral figures (Igbos). Ryan's critical study shows that the African ancestors have a transcendental vision. This means their perception of social realities differs from that of ordinary people. To Ryan, the *Igbos* (pure Africans) can see a spiritual universe that no one else can perceive. The ensuing utterances corroborate Ryan's viewpoint, "in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), the Igbos' ability to choose life and reject the most intensely nightmarish aspects of the American experience is motivated by their ability to 'see in more ways than one'" (Ryan, 2005). Through those utterances, we discover that African descent's spirituality is narrowly linked to Africa. Prior to being deported to unknown horizons, the first Africans already possessed beliefs and spiritual and visionary powers.

Perusing the issue of spirituality in Paule Marshall's fiction, Donald W. Musser and David L. Paulsen establish a connection between self-worth and spirituality. To them, the appropriation of ancestral values by African descent helps to vivify black cultural heritage that colonization tried to deny and annihilate. To those critics, the above resources magnify black cultural identity and define Blacks as spiritual beings. In their critical book entitled *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies* (2007), they assert:

Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* reveals a spirituality linked to self-worth, images of blackness, and self-esteem issue. In sum, womanist spirituality is 'embodied, personal, communal', and it is 'the working out of what it means for each of us to seek companion, justice work, and decision in our witness. (Musser et al., 2007)

Understandably, in Marshall's novel, spirituality is not exclusively an instrument that exhorts the subjects to pay tribute to divine Beings, reconnect with themselves, and discover who they are. It also praises the subjects' sociability and cultural identity. To that

end, spirituality contributes to their training and social insertion or integration. Besides, themes such as integrity, reminiscence, and spirituality are predominant in African-American literature produced by Black women writers. Through the prism of fiction, they rigorously and effectively contribute to black females' emergence. Marshall's novel is part of that category of black women writers whose literary commitment or involvement makes possible the advancement of women's cause and praises the feminist worldview. Addressing the features of that literature in "From Fragmentation to Wholeness", Silvia Pilar Castro-Borrego maintains that

the search for wholeness stands as a key theoretical concept for African American literature and culture, together with double-consciousness, rememory, and ancestral spiritualism. Re-memory and ancestral spiritualism are two intimately related concepts. Ancestral spiritualism consists of the connection among past, present, and future, and the life force that makes it possible for the physical and the spiritual worlds to be one. (Castro-Borrego, 2011)

In other words, through those African-American women writers' fictional works, spirituality acquires a metaphorical significance, which not only elucidates a relationship with an absolute Being but rather a (Spatio-temporal) connection with the past to better ensure the sociocultural balance of the present and future. Being the holders of that glorious knowledge, the ancestors acquire a leading position in Marshall's novel. Visiting their memory is, therefore, a relevant means for African descents' psychological and cultural stability.

Further, like Silviar Castro-Borrego, Eugenia C. Delotte, another critic of Paule Marshall, highlights the prevailing relationship between "material and spiritual." To her, Marshall's fictional work decries the harmful influence of American imperialism on African descents. Through the passage below, Delotte provides dazzling insight into Marshall's literary vision:

In *Praisesong for the Widow*, Marshall returns to her concern for *Brown Girl* materialism, the past, and one's self. Here those themes are informed by the concern with spirituality to which the title calls attention, and which can lead readers to see this as Marshall's least political work. But such readings neglect the complicated role the material plays in this story of spiritual rebirth. The major religious metaphors of the novel are all specifically concerned with the relationship between the material and the spiritual. Incarnation is transmuted into the spiritual, and resurrection is the body's awaking in a spiritual realm. Marshall uses these metaphors to present a web of complex relations between the body and the soul, the material and the spiritual, and most particularly between Euro-American material hegemony and an African-American spirituality that is itself expressed through a fusion of body and voice. (Delotte, 2016)

To Delotte, *Praisesong* criticizes the foundation of the American political system, which claims to be capitalist, and which fosters alienating materialism. To that critic, the narrative technique, which consists in textualizing the drawbacks of that system, is an innovative narrative technique that requires reconciliation between "material resources and spiritual ones."

Moreover, from an explanatory perspective, Simon Gikandi discloses that the Caribbean space is rich in traditions and culture. In terms of geographical location, it is close to Africa and is still attached to African ancestral practices. The African descents, who visit it, heal their tears caused by colonization by paying tribute to the "Old Parents," and ancestral blessings are bestowed on them. Simon Gikandi's analysis shows that Marshall's text revitalizes Blacks' dark history, suggesting a transcending ideal or way out, which can enable them to transform their cultural values into an effective living force, which can enable them to overcome the colonial yoke. To Gikandi,

Marshall's subjects often make narrative turns toward the Caribbean landscape in an attempt to capture what she aptly calls thoughts and feelings about the Middle passage and to elaborate on the psychological damage brought on by history. Although Marshall perceives history in terms of its effects rather than as what Fredric Jameson (...) calls 'a reified force,' her novels-like those of her contemporary George Lamming –also strive to unmask the necessity of alienating history and even to provide a theoretical justification for an alternative episteme. Indeed, underlying Marshall's well-known concern with the nightmare of history and its alienating necessities is the desire for an ideal (and hence modern) version of the black experience, which both transforms African culture and transcends the colonial tradition. (Gikandi, 2018)

In connection with the above utterances, it should be underscored that Gikandi's critical study or reflection discloses a significant aspect of Marshall's novel. To that critic, *Praisesong* urges African descents to appropriate the practice of inculturation – that is, an inclusive sociocultural process that takes into account the cultural realities (values) received from the host society (America) and those inherited from their African ancestors. As mentioned above, Marshall's text constructs a fictional universe in which Blacks are no longer regarded as subalterns but rather as emancipated beings of integrity and dignity. In terms of the interweaving of

values, Marshall's novel is essentially exemplary. Indeed, her narrative technique is imaginative and innovative. Scrutinizing it, María Del Mar Gallego avows:

Marshall fuses myth, legend, and storytelling to formulate a new conception of self-born out of the collective consciousness of the African diaspora, integrating African, African American, and Caribbean influences and belief systems. The novel underscores the need felt by people of African descent to reconnect back to their origins, their African roots, acknowledging their past, which comprises significant ways of coping with the aftermath of the horrors of slavery and racism, in order to construct and assert a satisfactory sense of identity, both personal and collective, firmly grounded on these African cultural and spiritual retentions. Conversely, the desire for self-affirmation and emphasis on cultural continuity implies the rupture with imposed definitions of themselves and the world order that stem from a Western discourse that excludes them from its rightful membership. (Gallego, 2021)

In addition to the preceding papers, Daniel Tia and Gboni Stéphanie-Carelle Guibalé produced a critical paper entitled "Female Leadership through the Prism of Hypermodernity" (2022), in which they examine Avey Johnson's trajectory (one of Marshall's committed female characters). From a comparative perspective, they underscore Avey Johnson's materialistic attitude. To both critics, that black female character is a hypermodern being. Though interested in American capitalism, the latter does not waver. Her journey to the Caribbean, and above all, her participation in various traditional dances (Big Drum, Beg Pardon...) in Carriacou, consolidates her cultural assets.

By combining those resources with the material, she already possesses, Avey Johnson reveals herself as a model of female leadership. Her commitment to promoting the traditional values received from the elders during her stay in Carriacou helps her raise above all the negative forces inherited from colonization. Thus, in her now hypermodern environment, she is able to solve her difficulties; she is able to ensure her own social balance as well as that of her family and community. Outlining the stakes of Marshall's and Miano's literary projects, Tia and Guibalé assert the following, "tangibly, the era of hypermodernity should not be one of disengagement from the cultural heritage, but rather of a reasoned union between past and present. This is the feature or ideology that the literary projects under study popularize" (Translation mine).<sup>3</sup>

The meritoriousness of our critical review of literature is perceivable through its own chronological evolution. From one critical study to another, a specific strand of the novel under consideration is interrogated. Although the themes examined shares common values, there are inevitably new directions, which are brought out into the open and carried out, thus confirming the aesthetic density of Marshall's fiction. However, our review is not exhaustive –it does not cover all the critical studies done on *Praisesong* since its publication in 1983. There are several other significant dissertations, scientific papers, and critical books on that corpus, which are not quoted here. Given the brief volume of the current study, our review seems selective or fastidious. Despite those shortcomings, it provides a substantial and worthwhile interpretation of Marshall's artistic vision. Going through them, we intellectually experience the profound and varied significance given to the issue of spirituality. Through those works, we realize that *Praisesong* incorporates ideological visions, which remain relevant and have not yet received a great deal of attention –their complexity persists. The prevailing issues of hypermodernity and the inclusive appropriation of Western values in the ex-colonies are illustrative of that complexity and adaptability.

As neatly displayed above, the current critical review of literature is profuse in quality but not in quantity. Through its contributory and explanatory feature, we comprehend the literary scope of mobility romanticized by the "Out-Islanders'" journey to the Caribbean. Through their movements, the latter reconstructed their ancestral heritage, which was destroyed by the colonial period. Undoubtedly, those details strengthen and confirm the validity and relevance of our review; however, it fails to account for the Deuteronomic anchors that Marshall's text metaphorizes through the use of a spiritual covenant between the "Out-Islanders" and "Old Parents."

Better still, our critical review fails to illuminate the cultural significance of Christianity, which emerges in *Praisesong*. To some extent, the theme of spirituality is examined by some of the critical studies mentioned in the review; however, the predominant trans textual clues are superficially explained. In other words, there is a need to examine transtextuality in *Praisesong*. To Gérard Genette, "transtextuality, or textual transcendence, includes elements of imitation, transformation, and the classification of types of discourse. In his own words, transtextuality is 'all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed with other

<sup>3</sup> « Tangiblement, l'ère de l'hypermodernité ne doit pas être celle du désengagement vis-à-vis de l'héritage culturel, mais plutôt d'une union raisonnée entre passé et présent. Tel est le caractère ou l'idéologie que les projets littéraires à l'étude vulgarisent » (Tia & Guibalé, 2022).

texts” (Simandan, 2010). As to Yves Reuter, he maintains that “every text implicitly refers to other texts. This phenomenon, generally called intertextuality, is called transtextuality<sup>4</sup>” (Translation mine).

Our study, therefore, aims to scrutinize the figure of transtextual, which unfolds through the novel under consideration. Our main concern is to bring out the cultural implication of the use of biblical clues. To Keit Cartwright, “*Praisesong for the Widow* demands to be read intertextually or congregationally, within the ‘single calling-response unit’ that emerges from postplantation literature” (Cartwright, 2013).

For that purpose, the use of semiotics of culture will be advantageous or supportive. To Ahmad Kharbouch, “culture is first and foremost a semiotic or symbolic fact (...) and in that case to approach it judiciously, one must first and foremost interrogate its status as a signifying human fact” (Kharbouch, 2010). With regard to that characteristic, the use of semiotics of culture as a methodological tool will help to analyze two levels of significance, inter alia “metaphorizing black ancestors’ requirements” and “the cultural scope of the spiritual covenant.”

## **2. Metaphorizing Black Ancestors’ Requirements**

This section first provides a theoretical approach to metaphor and then interrogates the literary implications of some of the metaphorical intertexts incorporated in *Praisesong*.

A metaphor can be approached as a discursive figure involving two entities (A & B), between which there is necessarily a relationship of resemblance (A↔B). A pre-exists and conditions B’s existence, for the latter is narrowly linked to the former. This means A is fixed, and B is always abstract; therefore, the latter needs to be first mentally shaped or constructed before being materialized. Anyway, as Umberto Eco avers, “we are always faced with the manifestation of a text, which is already there” (Translation mine).<sup>5</sup>

Seemingly, the beauty of a literary text does not necessarily reside in the narrated fact; it is rather anchored in the narrative techniques set up by the text itself, which make the narration possible –they are the exact location where metaphor emerges. Indeed, the use of metaphor prevents the literary discourse from being flat. This means metaphor instills substance in it. The interpretation of that metaphorical energy goes beyond what is supposed to be explicit/visual (graphic writing). In his book entitled *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, Kövecses Zoltan confirms our approach as follows, “without metaphor, it would be difficult to imagine what our concept of time would be” (Kövecses, 2010). Through Zoltan’s significant approach, we discover how paramount metaphor is in humans’ lives. Its use remains one of the proofs of humans’ sense of creativity or the creativeness of imagination. As far as the fictional universe is concerned, it includes some metaphorical figures. In literary discourse, metaphor plays the role of prettification. To Pierre Fontanier, “tropes give language more interest and pleasure, that is, they make it more suitable to touch, to move, and penetrate the heart, and to wake up, flatter, and rejoice the mind” (Translation mine).<sup>6</sup> In other words, the occurrence of metaphor in a literary text gives tone to it. More explicitly, metaphor is one of the discursive figures which helps to codify or encode values in literary works. Writers use it to indirectly convey a specific vision or ideology.

In light of our theoretical approach, we can infer that Marshall’s novel subsumes some sociocultural realities, which remain implicit. Clearly, there are various conceptual or generative metaphors in *Praisesong*. To Kövecses, “a conceptual metaphor consists of two conceptual domains, in which one domain is understood in terms of another” (Kövecses, 2010). From the beginning of that novel, Jay Johnson’s family epitomizes poverty. He and the other members evolve in Brooklyn in some extremely difficult conditions. Indeed, the complex social situation of Jay Johnson’s family symbolizes the sufferings of the whole black community in American society.

Accordingly, the members of that family are influenced by American capitalism. The latter powerlessly witness their own descent into the abyss by embracing American (Western) tradition (lifestyle). As the story unfolds, they give up their ancestral heritage, which used to connect them with their past, and embark on a materialistic quest, which initially seems advantageous for them. However, with time, their situation turns problematic. Instead of giving happiness to Jay Johnson and his wife, the quest for material worsens their sociocultural situation. They consider their new situation as being unhelpful. In one of his critical studies entitled “From Sin to Redemption: A Cultural Critique of Paule Marshall’s *Praisesong for the Widow*,” Daniel Tia qualifies their repudiatory acts as a “sin” (Tia, 2020). Plainly, cultural rejection is an actual threat to the evolution and stillness of Jay Johnson’s family. Indeed,

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<sup>4</sup> « Tout texte fait implicitement référence à d’autres textes. Ce phénomène, généralement appelé intertextualité, est appelé transtextualité » (Reuter, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> « Nous sommes toujours face à la manifestation d’un texte qui est déjà-là » (Eco, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> « Les tropes donnent au langage plus d’intérêt et de plaisir, c’est-à-dire le rendent plus propre à toucher, à émouvoir, à pénétrer le cœur, et à réveiller, à flatter, à réjouir l’esprit » (Fontanier, 2010).

by repudiating their past, they lose the notion of time and space. In the chapter entitled “Lavé Tête,” the socioeconomic pressure exerted by American capitalism upon the black community is metaphorically textualized through a number of biblical intertexts:

Giant stones have buried your spirit, your heart, and your minds, shutting you off from the precious light of salvation. Lemme tell you about ‘em. There’s the stone of selfishness, for one. The stone of hypocrisy for another: Folks that come to church on Sunday and then go out and do some of every kind of wickedness beginning Monday right on down to next Sunday. (Marshall, 1983)

More importantly, the source domain here is biblical. For instance, concepts such as “giant stones,” “stone of selfishness,” and “stone of hypocrisy” create a metaphorical network whose common denominator is “sin” and “difficult.” Implicitly, *Praisesong* refers to the harmful effects of American capitalism upon African descent. That capitalist system is based on mass exploitation –it is devastating, for it offers a semblance of opportunity to black subjects, which inscribes them to a constrained lifestyle in which they feel compelled to deny themselves. Being under that pressure, they dissociate themselves from all forms of immaterial (cultural) values. As a result, they suffer from cultural disconnection and ignorance. The ensuing utterance is representative of the detrimental or nefarious consequences of American capitalism upon African descents, “giant stones have done buried your spirit, your heart, your minds” (Marshall, 1983).

By those utterances, the American capitalist system is criticized as the cause of African descents’ acculturation and suffering. The latter is now unrecognizable, for they acquire miscreants’ attitudes –they define themselves not as Blacks but as Americans. One of the telling instances which confirms our approach is mapped into the word of Marshall’s female character, named Avey Johnson. Indeed, when taking part in the “Annual Excursion” in Carriacou (Caribbean), she is asked to introduce herself: “What nation you are?” (Marshall, 1983). In a sense, His message embodies a constraining scope. To Lebert Joseph, paying tribute to the “Long-time People” is a traditional duty. Her response is surprisingly irresponsible: “I’m a visitor, a tourist, just someone here for the day” (Marshall, 1983). No one can deny the cultural change that occurred in Avey Johnson’s attitude; she has wholly cornered Western civilization. The narrator confirms her Western style as follows:

Her skirts, blouses, and Summer suits were done. The sweaters and stoles she drew around her when the weather on deck turned chilly had been packed after a fashion. Crowded into the wrong bag were the linen shirtdresses she wore on excursions ashore in place of the shorts and slacks favored by the other women her age on board, no matter what their size. Her shoes were in their special caddy. Her hats are in their cylindrical box. (Marshall, 1983)

Trustily, that female character is an African descent, but she now defines herself in relation to Western society. Despite her acts of self-denial, traditionalist figures, such as Lebert Joseph, stand firm. Indeed, that old traditionalist character describes African descents’ cynical behaviors as follows: “(...) some of you are sitting up here this morning dressed back in your souls’ walls up in a darkness deeper than midnight” (Marshall, 1983). To Lebert Joseph (one of Marshall’s traditional figures), various “Out-Islanders” have transgressed the ancestral rules. In *Praisesong*, he is not a priest, nor is his target audience a congregation of Christians. Rather, those “Out-Islanders” to whom he talks are regarded as “sinners,” and the latter need to achieve their cultural wholeness. To make it possible, Lebert Joseph uses biblical parables as discursive techniques to “biblicize” her fiction. As a circumstantial intermediary, he persuades his audience to repent. Through his words, he openly shows his sense of pragmatism:

Once Lebert Joseph offered up the opening statement of the song, his relatives behind him on the ground quickly joined in the singing. And the makeshift drums that had been silent all along began a solemn measure. Arms opened, faces lifted to the darkness, the small band of supplicants endlessly repeated the few lines that compromised the Beg Pardon, pleading and petitioning not only for themselves and for the friends and neighbors present in the yard but for all their far-flung kin as well –the sons and daughters, grand and great-grands in Trinidad, Toronto, New York, London. (Marshall, 1983)

Obviously, those biblical intertexts are earmarked for the black subjects who participated in the “Annual Excursion.” Here, the purpose is to prepare their minds so that they would be willing to receive the ancestors’ teachings. In terms of educational scope, Lebert Joseph’s ancestral teachings have a transcendental feature –it is also earmarked for the absent subjects (of African descent who do not take part in the ‘Annual Excursion’). Expressively, the target domain, which is suggested by Lebert Joseph’s Christianistic discourse, is cultural. Analyzing the characteristics of metaphor, Paul Ricoeur asserts:

The rhetoric of metaphor takes the word as its unit of reference. Metaphor, therefore, is classed among the single-word figures of speech and is defined as a trope of resemblance. As a figure, metaphor constitutes a displacement and an extension of the meaning of words; its explanation is grounded in the theory of substitution. (Ricoeur, 2003)

A closer look at Lebert Joseph's words gives the impression that he is a preacher, proclaiming the gospel to a crowd that is still in the gloom of ignorance. In essence, he sensitizes those broken-hearted subjects or beings so that each of them would connect with the ancestral heritage. Observably, the target domain suggested by the use of biblical values is the African-American cultural heritage. Examining Marshall's poetics of transtextuality, Navneet Kaur avows, "Marshall here implicitly posits the story of Ibo Landing as a spiritually empowering legend for African descent people, which in some ways can serve as a companion to the canonical stories of Christianity" (Marshall, 1983). To be more explicit, those biblical intertexts make sacred Lebert Joseph's discourse, thus providing it with a valuable density. Impressively, Lebert Joseph urges his fellows to appropriate their cultural heritage by coping his deeds:

The first thing I do the minute I reach home is to roast an ear of corn; just pick it out from the ground and put it on a plate for them. And next to the plate, I put a lighted candle. Next, I sprinkle a little rum outside the house. They like that, and every year God send, I hold a Big Drum for them. (Marshall, 1983)

It should be argued that Lebert Joseph distances himself from Whites' colonial deviationist or subversive use of the Bible. By metaphorically incorporating biblical parables in his discourse, he invites his fellows to follow their ancestors' paths. His original narrative techniques help to praise black cultural identity. Through his biblical discourse, Lebert Joseph promotes black cultural values. This is why Jörg Zinken, Ina Hellsten, and Brigitte Nerlich assert that "discourse metaphors reflect the cultural and social preoccupations of the time. New topics and events are often discussed in terms of cultural and mythical commonplaces; the target domain of the metaphor may be new while the source domain is much older" (Kövecses, 2010).

Clearly, the use of biblical values is known as the source domain; however, their use conveys another original domain called, by Vincent Jouve, "original or complex value" (Jouve, 2001). Here, in the current context, that original value embodies a cultural significance. Indeed, the question one might ask is, "why are they called so?" Values known as original are narrowly linked to the creativeness of imagination; they appear in literary texts as pertaining to the unknown, i. e., a true aesthetic disruption, which constitutes the writer's mark or signature. Their presence or manifestation is not necessarily the writer's conscious act. Only the critic, with the help of a theoretical approach, is able to make them more apparent. Lebert Joseph is convinced that whatever one might say or do, African descents cannot definitely repudiate white Christianity. So, to make his fellows' cultural wholeness possible, he suggests an inclusive spiritual pragmatism, which consists in mingling biblical and cultural facts in his discourse to convey a cultural reality. The utterances below substantiate the target domain:

I tell you, you best remember them. If not, they'll get vexed and cause you nothing but. They can turn your life around in a minute, you know. All of a sudden, everything starts gon' wrong, and you don't know the reason. You can't figure it out all you try. (Marshall, 1983)

As we can notice, the "Out-Islanders" are metaphorically considered "sinners." Therefore, acting as an intermediary, Lebert Joseph urges them to repent so that they would have salvation. Trustworthily, the type of salvation required by the old traditionalist is far from being the spiritual one, for the target domain is cultural. Indeed, the objective case "them" and personal pronoun "they" refer to black ancestors whose memory is still active and present in the Caribbean. It is, in fact, cultural salvation—a sociocultural uplift that praises African descents' dignity, integrity, and cultural identity. Lebert Joseph advises the "Out-Islanders" as follows:

Lemme tell you about it. It's simple. Simplest thing in the world. You just go to do like Jesus in His final hour on the Cross. Remember how He cried out at the end, 'Oh, God my God, why hast thou forsaken me? —called on the Lord to deliver Him from the pain. And God heeded. (Marshall, 1983)

Irrefutably, the very God whose clemency and forgiveness are urged here is not the Christians' One, for the target domain suggested by *Praisesong* is purely cultural. This means the text refers to black ancestors who can save African descents from cultural dependence. Thanks to their magnificent deeds toward African descents, the latter defines them as the living God. Marshall's text underscores that the ancestors can transform African descent's troublesome situations into positive or prosperous ones. There is a persistent exhortation aiming to help the "Out-Islanders" adopt a policy of inculturation, which is meant to consolidate their spiritual (Christian) and cultural wealth (resources). Tellingly, Marshall's novelistic universe is hyper-metaphorical; it includes a spiritual covenant, which is rooted in the book of Deuteronomy.

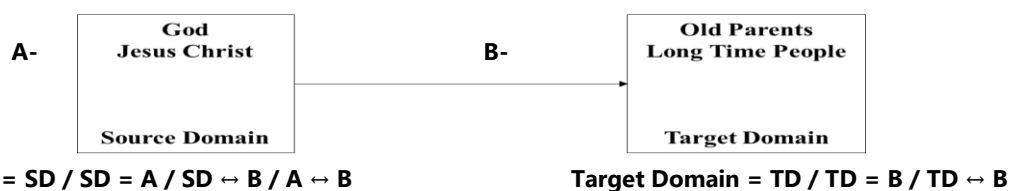
This transtextual value is, in fact, a tangible illustration of conceptual metaphor. To Alice Deignan, "conceptual metaphors function at the level of language, below language, and they are rarely, if ever, used in speaking or writing. They could be seen as a way of describing the connection that exists between two groups of ideas" (Deignan, 2005). Before deciphering the "two groups of ideas," let us now analyze the following textual clues: "I am commanding you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and

to keep His commandments, statutes, and ordinances” (Marshall, 1983). Through those utterances, the source domain is Christian. Here, the personal pronoun “I” acquires an extralinguistic value –it refers to Jesus Christ, and the target audience is the people of Israel. In terms of interpretation, the current recommendation is similar to the one substantiated in the book of Deuteronomy as follows, “honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you” (Deuteronomy 5, 17).

A closer observation of both utterances helps us comprehend that Marshall’s fictional work uses the Bible as a founding source. Her use of metaphorical figures corroborates Louis Hébert and Lucie Guillemette’s thesis according to which “(...) any text refers to an indefinite and large number of texts (‘any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations), even to any (previous) text”<sup>7</sup> (Translation mine). *Praisesong* is anchored in the Bible. Given its importance in humans’ training, Marshall uses some of its clues and infuses them into her literary facts. That metaphorical narrative technique breaks the barrier between the Bible and literature, thus helping to redefine the function assigned to literary works. Obviously, the use of biblical values consolidates the approach whereby literature is a channel enabling the reader to have access to the divine word. Explicitly, it should be noted that Marshall’s discursive strategies remain fundamentally metaphorical.

To go ahead, let us underscore that Lebert Joseph’s recommendation or spiritual call epitomizes implicit characteristics. This consists in promoting black cultural identity. If we consider the beginning of both utterances: “I am recommending you...” and “honor your father and mother...,” we realize that in terms of structure and tense, there is a difference –the former utterance uses present continuous, and the latter uses imperative; but, as far as the semantic scope (significance) is concerned, there is a similarity. Both of them express a command. As openly displayed in the first utterance, the African descents’ stability and stillness hinge on their behavior toward the divine Being.

Obviously, that spiritual covenant is the cornerstone of Marshall’s novel. To learn about it, let us consider the scheme below:



In the source domain, African descents are profoundly Americanized; they are under the pressure of the American capitalist system; as *Praisesong* indicates, “giant stones done buried your spirits, your heart, your minds, shutting you off...” (Marshall, 1983). Those “giant stones” symbolize obstacles and difficulties –they prevent African descents from fair emancipation. Consequently, they are compelled to give up their cultural values to the detriment of material. Here, they are qualified as “sinners” in *Praisesong*.

In the target domain, African descents free themselves from their initial social bondage by paying tribute to their ancestors. Later on, they reclaim their ancestral heritage and connect themselves with their ancestors. With reference to Marshall’s vision, Africans should live in American society in a balanced way. And the only way to be in a reliable balance is to accept communion with their ancestors. To Pierre Anzian, “African beliefs concern both the lives of the living and the ancestors who are both in the afterlife and in the visible world. In Africa, beliefs are generally transmitted from generation to generation by oral tradition” (Translation mine).<sup>8</sup> For instance, characters such as Avey Johnson achieve cultural wholeness after taking part in the “Big Drum” in Carriacou. However, beyond the target domain, *Praisesong* exhorts American decision-makers to initiate inclusive reforms capable of changing the American capitalist system. The desired goal is to favor the advent of an open system that can combine both Western and African values for the benefit of African descent as well as other cultural subjects evolving in American society.

The following step provides other further details about the cultural scope of the spiritual covenant metaphorized in *Praisesong*.

### 3. The Cultural Scope of the Spiritual Covenant

The current step of our study highlights the cultural significance of the spiritual covenant textualized in *Praisesong*. The purpose, in fact, is to show the prominence of black cultural heritage in the development of American society.

<sup>7</sup> « (...) tout texte renvoie à un nombre indéfini et élevé de textes (‘tout texte se construit comme mosaïque de citations’), voire à tout texte (antérieur) » (Hébert & Guillemette, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> « Les croyances africaines concernent tant la vie des vivants que celle des ancêtres qui sont à la fois dans l’au-delà et dans le monde visible. En Afrique, les croyances sont généralement transmises de génération en génération par la tradition orale » (Anzian, 2020)



Questioning culture in Marshall's *Praisesong* requires a definitional approach, which can display its usefulness. We refer to culture as an abstract entity linked to immaterial values, i.e., all the values which can contribute to the construction of an individual's identity. No one can prove, in a tangible way, the number of cultures that an individual possesses. However, this does not mean it is impossible to analyze the notion of "culture". What could be incongruous is any analytical attempt aiming to dissociate culture from humans. This would be like dealing with humans without life, for both forms a single entity. In Marshall's novel, there are various cultural markers through which black culture is imposed as a channel for sociocultural development. For example, traditional dances, such as "Big Drum," Caribbean languages, scenes of libation, and proverbs are some significant cultural markers that shape African descents by consolidating their cultural connectedness.

Culture, as such, is not an isolated matter, for individuals can only assert the difference of their cultural identity in relation to other ones. The source domain examined in the first section of our study describes a cultural fact; therefore, culture necessarily implies the idea of community. To put it more clearly, culture is a set of moral norms or social representation through which a group of individuals identifies themselves as a single entity. Marshall's novel depicts a set of ethnic groups, which have their particular features; however, they develop other common cultural markers around which they construct and advocate their collective identity. Let us consider the utterances below:

In Carriacou, mainly the women dance the Juba (...). They do it in pairs, facing each other and holding the long skirt to dress up off the ground (...). It is a dance that puts you in mind of a cock fight (...). The Bongo? Have you heard of that one, maybe? Is the one I like best, oui. The song to it tells what happened to Carriacou man and his wife during the slave time. (...) Is the Banda people turn now (...) Then : 'Arada, oui, (...) Then : Moko. Is the song of the Moko nation you're hearing now. (...) Cromanti, are Cromanti people you see in the ring now? Later: Congo, oui. They had some of the prettiest dances... (Marshall, 1983)

Through those names, we discover that there are various ethnic groups in *Praisesong*. From an intercultural perspective, they (groups) do not influence each other. On the contrary, there is mutual and internal respect and recognition between them. This contributes to the constitution and manifestation of their sense of brotherhood or togetherness, thus helping them consolidate their common ties. Those cultural patterns are metaphorically the cement of the black community. In other words, black culture is constructed and maintained around common practices, which help Carriacouan ethnic groups and other African descents construct their collective identity and protect it. In *Praisesong*, the "Out-Islanders" or African descents share the same ideal. To them, paying tribute to their ancestors is a cultural duty. This strengthens their cultural connectedness. Indeed, the ensuing textual clues below show how tightly knit the ethnic groups depicted in Marshall's novel are:

When you see me down on my knees at the Big Drum singing the Beg Pardon, I won't be singing just for me one. Oh, no! Is for tout moun'. I have all like you in mind. 'Cause you all so that doesn't know your nation can't take part when the Beg Pardon or the nation dances is going on. Oh, no! Pas possible. The Old Parents would be vexed. You all have to wait till the Creole dances start up later in the fete. Then you can join in. Every and anybody can dance then... (Marshall, 1983)

A closer look at those utterances reveals that each ethnic group has its own particularity that Lebert Joseph (one of the most involved characters of Marshall) explains to Avey Johnson. This old man is the one who passes on the ancestral sacred knowledge to the "Out-Islanders." Those cultural markers are part of the African descent's collective memory. Defending those values is a dignified deed. This constitutes a duty of memory that Marshall fulfills by textualizing the ancestral heritage. Through the prism of literature, she makes her vision known. For instance, through some gestures, Avey Johnson's ethnic group is recognized. The following textual clues exemplify our opinion: "You know. (...) I watched you good last night at the fete, and I can't say for sure, but I feels you're an Arada, Oui. Something about the way you was doing the Carriacou Tramp there toward the end put me in mind of people from that nation" (Marshall, 1983).

In accordance with the traditional vision, the "Old Parents" are some deities who differ from ordinary beings; they watch over the living beings. Through the "Big Drum", African descents display their cultural asset and their ability to impound any policy of acculturation or cultural dispossession. African descents are aware that believing in ancestors is advantageous for the survival of their cultural identity. To Pierre Anzian, "belief in God and the cult of ancestors are some constitutive traits of African religious mentality. They are part of the African cultural universe"<sup>9</sup> (Translation mine).

During the "Annual Excursion," the ancestors are present among the living Beings. Characters, such as Lebert Joseph, can speak to them. Through the following textual clues, we can infer that the "Old Parents" are always present and are around the living beings:

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<sup>9</sup> « La croyance en Dieu et le culte des ancêtres sont des traits constitutifs de la mentalité religieuse africaine. Ils font partie de l'univers culturel africain » (Anzian, 2020).

“Sometimes it was nothing more than a moth, a fly, a mosquito. In whimsical disguise, they made their presence known” (Marshall, 1983). More significantly, the more numerous the “Out-Islanders” are, the more numerous blessings are offered to them. Illustratively, the massive participation of the “Out-Islanders” facilitates the attendees’ deliverance. Avey Johnson’s case is significant; she realizes that “the darkness contained its own light” (Marshall, 1989). Here, *Praisesong* underscores Avey Johnson’s successful sociocultural insertion, which helps her discover herself and her extended family.

Knowing one’s cultural affiliation is strengthening and alleviating, for the subject feels worthwhile. Besides, the “Big Drum” provides the “Out-Islanders” with opportunities to renew their cultural ties. This helps them prove that their existence in American society is not accidental. In other words, the “Annual Excursion” remains for Lebert Joseph, a cultural duty whose fulfillment or achievement restores African descent history. Indeed, during that spiritual journey, the “Out-Islanders” are purified. For instance, the traditional bath that Avey Johnson receives from Rosalie Parvey is fortifying. The textual clues below corroborate our analysis:

Come, oui, Rosalie Parvey was saying, is time now to have your skin bathe. And this time I gon’ give you a proper wash – down/ with a sharp, quickly muffled cry, her hands had come up to cover her face again, and the convulsions of humiliation and shame that swept her –the same ones that had racked her sleep for most of the night –made it appear that the painful retching had begun all over again. But she had recovered somewhat by now and was gazing around her with a look almost of humility. (Marshall, 1983)

As a result of Rosalie Parvey’s spiritual bath, Avey Johnson is recognized as a full member of the Carriacouan community. She is allowed to attend the “Big Drum”. She now feels proud of her membership and vows to spread her cultural roots to all parts of American society. Clearly, culture has a huge educational significance in *Praisesong*. Examining the aesthetic significance of culture in Marshall’s novel, Daryl Cumber Dance avers,

*Praisesong for the widow* reinforces Kamau Brathwaite’s earlier description of her as a novelist of the literature of African reconnection, one who, in his words, recognizes the African presence in our society not as a static quality but as root living, creative, and still part of the main. (Dance, 2011)

Through culture, some individuals (communities) can distinguish themselves from others. In *Praisesong*, African descents develop some cultural values through which they affirm their common cultural roots. The moving tribute to the ancestors is a perfect illustration. During the “Big Drum,” African descents orally receive ancestral knowledge from their ancestors. Indeed, To Anzian, “orality as a force of African tradition played a major role in the transmission of cultural values and the formation of the identity of the black man”.<sup>10</sup> (Translation mine). Tangibly, an individual whose culture is influenced loses his/her dignity and integrity. It is, therefore, necessary to indicate that true dignity is not the one which is acquired by possessing material, for one is born without any fortune. However, at birth, one is already inscribed in a given culture.

From that point of view, culture is an essential entity that precedes material; it characterizes humans. From their earlier moments of life, African descents are already affiliated with a very specific community, which has its own rules, visions, and ideologies. This means when they grow up; those different values are taught or inculcated in them. Basically, culture participates in humans’ educational development process. In other words, the emergence of black culture in American society is economical for both African descent and America. By promoting black culture, African descents demonstrate their usefulness in American society. Indeed, African descents offer their own values to America and share them with others. As we can see, culture is educative. Through the utterances below, its educational function is more apparent: “Now I know you know somethin’ ‘bout the old-time creole dances. At you’ve heard their names some-place ...’ (...) The Belair ... ? The Carisa ... ? The Chiffone... ? The Old Kalenda ? (...) Granbelair ?” (Marshall, 1983).

Through those textual clues, Lebert Joseph revitalizes a distant era. This enables Avey Johnson to learn about her cultural roots. Knowing those cultural affiliations helps her be inserted into both American and Caribbean socio-cultural realities. More importantly, Avey Johnson’s case aesthetically remains relevant. In other words, the utterances which follow show how socialized Avey Johnson is. Her participation in the “Big Drum” is a fortifying and uplifting experience for her. Her successful cultural initiation also enables her to utter her ancestral name as prescribed by Aunt Cuney:

And who are you? (...) And as a mystified Avey Johnson gave her name, she suddenly remembered her great-aunt Cuney’s long-age admonition. The old woman used to insist, on pain of switching, that whenever anyone in Tatem, even another

<sup>10</sup> « L’oralité comme force de la tradition africaine a joué un rôle prépondérant dans la transmission des valeurs culturelles et la formation de l’identité de l’homme noir » (Anzian, 2020).

child, asked her name, she was not to say simply Avey or even Avey Williams. But always Avey, short for Avatara. (Marshall, 1983)

Clearly, Avey Johnson's participation in the "Big Drum" reinforces her ancestral ties. She regains her spatial and cultural bearings. *Praisesong* neither praises the American capitalist system nor Christianity. Through some subtle or metaphorical narrative techniques, that novel urges African descents to open their eyes, admit their own transgression and understand that their African great-grandparents did not embrace American capitalism to claim their dignity. Better still, dignity is not just a dismissal of other values; it is rather the capacity of an individual to adapt him-/herself to the sociocultural realities encountered while preserving his/her own. Without that continuous dynamism, some minds still haunted by colonization, which proclaims the superiority of white culture over black one may believe that their approach is valid. In *Praisesong*, there is sharp opposition to that neocolonial ideology. Through a critical study on *Praisesong*, Daryl Cumber Dance perfectly underscores it:

(...) in the fabric quest for material success and social climbing, symbolized by a house in White Plains with its expensive silver tea service, crystal, China, and Chandelier, both she and her husband, in effect, sold their souls to the evil. As her husband achieved economic success and acceptance in elitic black society, he began to blame poor blacks for their own poverty and victimization, ceased all the rituals that had tied him to the black community, gave up his financial name, and shaved off the mustache that had been patterned after his father's –the best trace of everything that was distinctive and special about him. (Dance, 2011)

*Praisesong* proclaims the anteriority of black culture over American capitalism. As structured and expressed in Marshall's vision, American capitalism is only an instrument of exploitation and subjugation. Considering Lebert Joseph's deeds, one can infer that black culture is transcendental –it positions African descent above American capitalism. This means it liberates them from any form of social bondage. Better still, African descent takes part in the "Big Drum" struggle to get rid of it. Marshall's metaphorical discourse biblicalizes black culture. This enables African descent to be culturally regenerated. The novel under consideration exhorts them to adopt a pure African attitude. To Pierre Anzian,

African human is the being, individual living on the continent described as the "cradle of humanity." He carries within him the heritage of this historical, cultural past that he tries to confront with the values proposed by the globalized civilization. That past and present living in him constitute the sediments of his being. African human is a being in the world, being in a relationship, being in interaction, and being of communion with God and the Cosmos. (Anzian, 2020)

Marshall's "idealized universe" is not physical; it is rather embedded in every regenerated being's imagination. Each of African descent interiorly experiences it. The adoption of such an inner universe is curative. To Eva Lennox Birch, "*Praisesong* is a harmonious blending of the narrative themes of her earlier writing encompassed in an increasingly metaphorical style, in which metaphorical structure and meaning are inseparable" (Birch, 2016). Importantly, Marshall's fictional universe offers an uninfluenced state of mind, which heals African descents from any forms of psychological pains linked to American capitalism. Indeed, that cultural ascent does not necessarily imply a physical movement; rather, it requires a sense of solid cultural affiliation or background.

The achievement of cultural ascent, as portrayed by Marshall's novel, should be African descents' credo, for it helps them avoid any forms of impoundment of their culture. In *Praisesong*, the Johnsons' attitude is regarded by the defenders of black cultural identity as evidence of unforgivable cowardice. In other words, the repudiation of black cultural values by the Johnsons helps Jay Johnson and Avey Johnson to be more Americanized. However, that opportunistic venture remains dangerous –it jeopardizes the inherited values, thus heaping opprobrium on the entire lineage. Worse still, Jay Johnson and Avey Johnson's attitudes cover negative consequences. In her critical book entitled *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*, Rita Felski corroborates our standpoint:

The violent sickness which overcomes [Avey Johnson] in a primitive boat on the rough seas acts as a symbolic purging of her own uncritical acceptance of the materialism of American society and her denial of black roots, community, and spirituality. (Felski, 1989)

To further, *Praisesong* is a poetic response to various prevailing socioeconomic changes in American society whose influence on African descents is devastating. In the face of that tragic fact, there is a need to maintain its integrity by adopting a number of efficient strategies for preservation. The instance of the Caribbean people is an example that should be followed. To Edward Kamau Brathwaite, "African culture not only crossed the Atlantic, but it also crossed, survived, and creatively adapted itself to its new environment. The caribbean culture was therefore not purely African, but an adaptation carried out mainly in terms of African tradition" (Brathwaite, 1986). Implicitly, Marshall's *Praisesong* advocates a policy of cultural adaptation. To her, in this new America,

i.e., one of the hypermodern eras, African descents must fully play their part, and the only possible way to be successful is to move forward without losing their ancestral bearings.

Through the same argumentative logic, it should be noted that Marshall's literary project gives very particular interest to black culture. She attests that one of the strategies which can help African descents to preserve their cultural covenant, i.e., their relationship with their cultural past, is to keep vivid one's ancestral language. From this standpoint, the nation's language acquires a decisive place in *Praisesong*. In Carriacou (Caribbean), colonists' language is forbidden. Here, those participating in the "Annual Excursion" use their nation language (Patois), the one that their ancestors understand. Through the interest given to Patois, we realize that the ancestors are always present in African descent's collective memory. For instance, Lebert Joseph talks to them as if they were physically standing before him. Indeed, with Patois, there is a real communion between Lebert Joseph and his ancestors. Scrutinizing language as a symbol of resistance and self-affirmation, Federica Zullo avers:

Marshall intentionally manipulates voice and language as a means for affirmation and resistance within black communities, with specific attention to Caribbean and African American spaces. (...) The creation of Avey's 'transversality' is allowed by travel and by the possibilities of language since it is through listening to a familiar word in Patois that she is literally transported to the authentic discovery of the Caribbean. (Zullo, 2022)

Explicitly, the use of Patois by African descents enables them to show their Caribbean relatives that despite the time spent in other tropics, they still master their nation's language. Through that language, African descents magnify their culture as well as their ancestors' social vision. Certainly, in terms of communication, Patois served as a tool of exchange, but on the educational level, it is the prime tool through which knowledge is taught; around that language, unity and brotherhood are created, and these values are always profitable to the individuals who share the same language. Analyzing the sociocultural prong of Patois, Carissa Turner Smith writes:

In fact, the Halsey Street rituals between Jay and Avey do also link them to each other by linking them to their shared heritage of the African diaspora: Moreover (and she only sensed this in the dimmest way), something in those small rites, an ethos they held in common, had reached back beyond her life and beyond Jay's to join them to the vast unknown lineage that had made their being possible. And this link, these connections, heard in the music and in the praisesongs of a Sunday: '... I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were/young...,' had both protected them and put them in possession of a kind of power. (Smith, 2008)

Aesthetically, the use of Patois in *Praisesong* is anticonformist to the Western tradition. Indeed, by textualizing the Caribbean Patois, its status of orality alters and acquires that of writing. In essence, if that narrative technique is innovative, it appears in the text as real linguistic insecurity, for the colonists' language loses its hegemony. In other words, by liberalizing the literary channel of expression, Marshall contributes to the policy of decolonization. To Kameelah L. Martin,

Linguistic knowledge of national language is a key through which culture can be unlocked using Armah's approach to reclaiming one's intellectual history. In Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), nation language is used as the source from which protagonist Avey Johnson is able to recover her African and connect to her Diasporic brethren in Grenada. (Martin, 2018)

Clearly, Patois plays a symbolic role. In *Praisesong*, it has a spiritual function. It serves as a medium of communication. Without it, no verbal performance (libation, chats, blessings) is possible. Its acquisition is, therefore, an essential asset in the process of identity construction. This favors access to the ancestral matrix. Examining the place of this nation's language, Anzian asserts:

It is through African religious language made up of myths, symbols, rites, prayers, incantations, sacred hymns, theophoric names, etc. that we will have to bring the unspeakable closer; i.e., the divine, and see how it gives itself there insofar as it can give itself there. With regard to the African religious language as a support, a specific mode of expression, a human resource of knowledge of God and divine things enables the African man to say, God, to name, to sing, and speak about him.<sup>11</sup> (Anzian, 2020)

Through those utterances, we can deduce that African descent's national language is a key vehicle in the construction of their identity. That is the prime vector of their sociocultural integration and socialization. Without it, it is squarely impossible to penetrate

<sup>11</sup> « C'est à travers le langage religieux africain constitué des mythes, des symboles, des rites, des prières, des incantations, des hymnes sacrés, des noms théopores, etc. qu'il nous faudra rapprocher l'indicible, c'est-à-dire le divin et voir comment il s'y donne pour autant qu'il peut s'y donner. Dans cette logique, le langage religieux africain comme support, mode spécifique d'expression, ressource humaine de connaissance de Dieu et des choses divines permet à l'homme africain de dire Dieu, de nommer, de chanter et de parler de lui » (Anzian, 2020).

deeply into the cultural matrix of African descent. *Praisesong* shows how essential Patois is to the African descendants who take part in the Big Drum.

With reference to the preceding analysis, we can assert that *Praisesong* depicts a double universe having different beliefs. The Western one is characterized by Christianity, and the African one is known as a location where ancestor worshipping is essentially rampant. The black characters whose sociocultural conditions are described in this novel are of African descent. In keeping with the spirit of our analysis, the latter are acculturated in view of the predominance of the Western capitalist system. The African universe includes some worthy cultural values, which can ensure the African descents' sociocultural balance.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Conducting a Deuteronomic reading on Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* has been an interesting venture, for this has made the analysis of various metaphorical intertexts possible. The textual occurrences of those figures are fundamentally metaphorical –they constitute, in essence, some of the major instances where the text under consideration constructs complex values of a rare particularity. Thus, to carry out our work, we have divided it into two sections, namely, metaphorizing black ancestors' requirements and the cultural scope of the spiritual covenant.

To decipher them, we used semiotics of culture whose operability helped us determine the source domain of the metaphors contained in the text under study and reveal the target domain. That methodological tool has helped us question those metaphorical intertexts. The spiritual dimension, which emerges in *Praisesong*, is a textual value whose aim is to promote black culture. Through the picture of Christianity, black cultural heritage is implicitly evoked. The use of semiotics of culture in our study has also helped to elucidate Marshall's literary project. Through that methodological tool, we have come to the conclusion that Marshall's fiction advocates a Christian and ancestral mediation whose main purpose is to provide African descents with a sociocultural balance in America.

Fully and truthfully, the current study has given significant answers to the issues raised in the introduction. The results obtained exemplify how essential that scientific contribution is. Our work has shed light on Marshall's literary aesthetic. Thus, it should be noted that by mingling Christian and ancestral values, *Praisesong* participates in the creation of a poetics of heterogeneity, which symbolically defines the heterogeneous feature of African descents' cultural identity. The full appropriation of those values restores the African descents' sense of integrity and dignity. Certainly, our study advances academic research on Marshall's writing, but it does not put a definitive end to the debate around Marshall's text(s).

It should be underscored that themes such as nomaditude and "crossing borders" coined by Hodi Bouraoui are innovative fields but remain less interrogated. Critical studies aiming to analyze them could be ambitious; they could show how the experience of writing turns to be equated to crossing borders. Obviously, the current study has looked into the metaphorical significance of spirituality. In terms of results, it has been established that African descents need to adopt spiritual and cultural mediation to guarantee their integrity and dignity. In spite of that remarkable advancement, other substantial values thematized in *Praisesong* deserve to be re-examined. These include, for instance, the characteristics of Marshallian feminism and the aesthetic scope of oral tradition. Those aspects are to be considered for further insight into Marshall's fiction.

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