

Review Article

## Sentence Versus Redemption and the ‘Spiritual World’ in *Osiris Rising, Fragments, Why Are We So Blest? KMT: In the House of Life* by Ayi Kwei Armah and *Mama Day* by Gloria Naylor

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**Abstract:** This paper attempts to evaluate the different characteristics in the spiritual world that act on human destiny in blacks ‘cosmology in Ayi Kwei Armah and Gloria Naylor’s fiction while justifying the awareness of black intellectuals in their different approaches to sentence and redemption for African cultural revival. It also exposes black people facing acculturation phenomena and the deconstruction of the ancestral home. However, it argues that the achievement of the struggle for African cultural revival will be possible if they take the initiative in finding out specific strategies that would culturally, socially and politically reconnect black with their indigenous cultural reality. Some of these stratagems include good cultural references, rootedness, unity, teaming work, and rationality. To examine blacks’ spirituality in its double vocation of sentence and redemption, this study uses theories of anti-colonialists and Afro-centrists that advocate total liberation and empowerment of black people while assessing the issues of the disgrace of both African and African-American people. Similarly, the insights and commitment of thinkers like Afro-centrists are well considered as additional elements in this work. Ultimately, the novels contend that in African spirituality there is a divine will owed to the ancestors that have the mission of watching over their people and judging them in several ways when they are satisfied through rituals or recognition. As the authors of the three books suggest, the appreciation of ancestral legacy and cultural advancement is an effective means of ensuring blacks ‘social welfare in their communities and elsewhere.

**Keywords:** Spiritual World- Sentence- Redemption- African Cultural Revival- Cultural reality - Cultural Empowerment.

## INTRODUCTION

The fate of individuals in difficult moments in Black history has been one of the main concerns of African intellectuals and postcolonial writers. Indeed, the blacks’ conditions in the aftermath of slavery in America and colonisation in African countries have led the Ghanaian writer Ayi Kwei Armah in *Osiris Rising* (1995), *Fragments* (1974), *Why Are We So Blest?* (1974), *KMT: in the House of Life* (2002) and the African-American author Gloria Naylor in *Mama Day* (1988) highlight the problems encountered within their black communities. In addition, the need to restore the image of the *black man* through his living environment and of his perpetual relationship with the spiritual world of his ancestors has become a requisite in his daily life. Still, black people are on an everlasting quest for redemption in hostile societies where values are perverted. Both writers Ayi Kwei Armah, and Gloria Naylor, underline blacks’ situation with a great interest in a perpetual relationship of deliverance through spirituality. This same power has been watching over their ancestors, protecting them, and their communities against obscurantists and ego-centrist forces that plagued their social lives in crucial moments of history. Although pioneers in this theme like Koffi Ayidoho (1992)

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already mentioned that “*the self*” has lost its spiritual essence in what can be considered the ancestral home in Armah’s first three novels, the *Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?* to demonstrate his sense of creativity in guiding and protecting his society from destruction.

This paper attempts to evaluate the different objectives of the spiritual power on human destiny in blacks’ cosmology in Armah and Naylor’s fiction while justifying the awareness of black intellectuals in their different strategies to contribute to the revival of the African culture. It also assesses the spiritual aspect of African culture that acts as redemptive and destructive in fiction. The socio-cultural identity and the link between past, present and future that protagonists carry on to defy the forces of evil in the novels is a prerogative of ancestral heritage. Yet, it is crucial to know: To what extent sentence can be considered a redemptive act in the novels? It also answers questions such as: How does the spiritual world influence the notion of the three times? How do these authors appreciate the sacredness of spirituality in a historical context? These are the fundamental questions that will be addressed in this paper since dignity is an important element in the existence of individuals in a given society. What makes it even more interesting is that revalorizing this cultural concept would be of great interest in the process of regenerating the ancestral home for the revival of African identity and its prospects.

Although the authors’ novels differ in narrative structures and characterizations, there is a link which can be found if we pay attention to their common themes. Therefore, the most interesting aspect of the narrative, consistently in these novels is the spiritual dimension that holds the power of sentence and redemption as two major assets to establish the social order in black communities. For that, the analysis of the spiritual facts and their quintessence in the novels helps to understand the ideology around African cosmology developed in the fiction which Rahming M. B (2013, pp. 35-61), portrays as an assorted relation between the material condition of being and spiritual activities while Manigault-Bryant in (2013, pp. 63-79), points redemption as being a parcel in Black Spirituality. An analytical textual research method and an Afro-centrist and Marxist approach that support blacks’ empowerment, to assess the relevance of the theme as well as the insights of intellectuals. We also contrasted different situations in the lives of the characters in the novels to see how they are linked to the theme. The literary technique of “magic realism” is used in this work to combine fairy tales, Mythology, and dreams with everyday realities. After defining the spiritual world in its relationship with the three times: past, present and future, we will analyze the notions of sentence and redemption as both characteristics of African spirituality these two writers have used in their quest for an idealized world that corresponds to ancestral Africa.

### **The Spiritual World and the Notion of the three times: Past, Present and Future**

The term *spiritual word* in a literary context has often been associated with obscurantism because of its abstract characteristic and difficulty to understand. Spirituality in the African context has a direct significance in African culture and history. The spiritual world is the realm of the deceased ancestors or gods whom they used to worship in times of trouble, but who still spiritually watch over their sons as protectors when they are satisfied with the offerings of the living. The most devoted are often given supernatural powers of redemption or retribution against certain fanatics guilty of crimes against the innocent in African or Afro-American societies. In the history of humankind and culture, spirituality has always played important roles in the life of the communities and has been attributed a dual role, because of hiring two main forces, the good and the evil as opposed to their state of nature. It has been a means of salvation of the lost souls, at the same time a means to punish criminal acts if necessary. More importantly, it establishes equality between human beings and creates a balanced society of mutual acceptance and respect between the individuals and the ones who own supernatural powers in the blacks’ culture and cosmology. However, with the colonization in African countries especially in Ghana, where the socio-political and economic foundations have known some dreadful conditions and intellectuals resorted to cultural aspects of the ancient times in their writings, for instance, the spiritual dimension for redemption. In addition, the advent of the slave trade where black people have been deported by force to America for enslavement. Black people resorted to superpowers to gain a certain respect toward their masters or punishment for a crime over the indigenous oppressed people.

Crafted and carried on by cultural workers and writers in Ghana after independence, the notion of the *spiritual world* in *Osiris Rising*, *Fragments*, *Why Are We So Blest?* and *KMT: in the House Of Life*, has some redemptive functions. In their reconstructive vision of ancestral culture, Armah spreads his project of unity and hope in his novels while Naylor shows the duality of two different worlds fashioned to re-create Africa’s past in the darkness of a so-called “civilised world” of the United States of America in her novel *Mama Day*. Naylor devotes his work to the freed sons of former slaves of landowners, to protect them against the identity crisis of the black middle class in difficulties. Both authors point differently to the spiritual world in the context of cultural revitalisation. Therefore, the destiny of some individuals in these societies is in the hands of some erudite who are culturally rooted but also have a good understanding of the spiritual connection between the world of the living and the dead and the upcoming events. To get information from the anti-colonialist struggle or make them admit their pledges, the cultural activists of the anticolonial movement resort to an important parcel of African culture, the wisdom of the ancestors, by begging for their assistance or embodying their roles models in their struggle against the powerful enemies of their communities. Armah and Naylor’s

focus move to the future of Africans and their Diaspora seeking a spiritual reference for true identity in their home countries or abroad. In most of their novels, the essence of the *spiritual world* appears as having both destructive and redemptive powers. Their protagonists in a permanent quest for their identity have been in touch with spirituality; however, it helped them to accomplish great missions, for instance, Armah's *Osiris Rising* the awareness campaign executed by Ast and Asar who embody the connection with the spiritual world and play safeguarding roles in their communities.

This spiritual reconnection helps them to take advantage of the wisdom of the ancestors to convey their mission in the reform of the Manda school agenda in *Osiris Rising*. Asar and Ast, like the ancient Egyptian deities Osiris and Isis, illustrate the redemptive force of resistance against the colonial hostile assault of Eurocentrism for the survival of African spirituality. Asar is an African and represents Osiris, one of the most outstanding deities of ancient Egyptian Mythology who embody the world of research and justice. At the end of his studies abroad, he returns to his home country to work as a trainer in Manda, a small town. The other, Ast, is an African-American who symbolizes Isis, this great magician known for her well-being in Egyptian mythology. Ast is well instructed in hieroglyphs writings by her grandmother Nwt who embodies wisdom, in Mythology. Ast's grandmother is the reincarnation of the original Nwt. Ast has a main objective which is to revitalize the past of the African continent to better redefine it but also; she gets involved with the Ankh as being the Spiritual driving force that guides the protagonists in their mission of renovation. At this point she equals Nwt, Ast grandmother rediscovered in *Osiris Rising*. However, she is in charge of training Ast who is an African American on crafts and hieroglyphs but also African true stories because she was getting ready to join the motherland for a special mission of innovation with his friend Asar she met at the university. These scriptures have a spiritual meaning through their nature. In the representation of the ancient deities of the Kemet the Ankh as a hieroglyphic symbol, is evocative of life and eternity. Ast mastery of this science makes her culturally whole and tied with the spiritual world in her first contact with the sanctuary *Bara*. She has been well assisted by her grandmother Nwt. But her journey to *Bara's* land has a spiritual meaning; it is, therefore, a place where Ast has to go to find her African identity but also to complete her initiations to the Ankh group with Ama Tete the master. This sanctuary of the modern Ankh is a place of redemption for individuals seeking their African identity.

The term *Spiritual World* has definitely, questioned the minds of readers who are involved in the African and Harlem Renaissance. It captures coded messages that only the initiated can decipher. In Armah's *Osiris Rising*, the spiritual is embodied in many aspects and by different characters, for instance, Jomo has a spiritual reason for his return to Africa "*The same power that sent us wandering into the furnace of slavery in America, that same god has pointed the way back, to the cool, fresh waters of our royal home, Africa*" (p. 141). As he says, this is god's will. He refers to the power of the divine to give a valid explanation for his homecoming. On the same note, in *Fragments* the Spiritual world is evoked here first during the meeting of the little family for Baako's protection before his departure to university in the United States of America takes place with a ritual well done by the matriarch Naana because Uncle Foli who was supposed to correctly perform the ritual for his nephew accordingly to the tradition of matrilineal society where the uncle has this responsibility, did not honour the spirits of the ancestors because of his week offering. Naana poured down too much wine to offer a drink to those gone before. In doing so she implores the dead with these words: "*Nananom, drink to your thirst, and go with the young one. Protect him well, and brink him back, to us, to you.*" (A.K, 1974, p. 11). It shows that she is devoted in her way of serving the spiritual world so that ancestors will be pleased to assist Baako from the beginning to the end of his journey. Contrarily, Uncle Foli has less respect for neither the gone nor Baako's redemption.

This specific spiritual reconciliation in Baako's account needs an effective ritual for a general redemption through the satisfaction of those who are supposed to protect Baako in his journey; differently from the dissatisfaction with Uncle Foli in the ritual. For that, Naana takes a wise decision to fully perform the ritual for the fulfilment of the ancestors. This woman knows about the three times: past present and future and could understand what the gone before need, because of her permanent relation with the spiritual world. For instance, she is the living memory of the wisdom of the ancestors in *Fragments*. As a bridge between the two different worlds, she is the one who ensures Baako's protection. Both writers understand the blacks' predicaments in hostile environments and are involved in bringing their people back to the path of redemption. *Why Are We So Blest?* (1974), keeps an eye on the example of the spiritual existence as having a crucial place in the lives of African people in general and Akan's in particular, for its redemptive function. In this novel, the concept of the spiritual world is embodied by the symbolism of a spider known as the *Ananse spirit*<sup>1</sup>, a symbol

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<sup>1</sup>Ananse spirit: the wisdom of this spirit in Akan culture, is evoked in the Ghanaian writer's work in *Fragments and Why Are We So Blest?* Ananse (Anansi), a divine trickster, mediates between heaven and earth. A master of disguise, deception, and illusion, he tricks gods and humans alike. Anansi went to Sky God, Onyankopon, and offered to buy his stories from him. Onyankopon told him the price was a python, a hornet, a leopard, and a nature spirit. Anansi agreed on the price, saying that he would add his mother to the price. By tricking the python, the hornet, the leopard, and the nature spirit, Anansi took them, along with his mother, to Onyankopon, who gave him all his stories, stories that thenceforth became known as Spider Stories.

of the wisdom of the ancestors which has also the power of sentence and redemption. Its meaning is rediscovered with Modin Dofu asks Dr Earl Lynch, who brought the image in his library but misinterpreted its real essence. He supports that “*It does not have a meaning ...*” (p. 32). The Ananse is one of the most important symbols in African oral tradition that can be found into many tales. Its recalling is important. It is recurrent in many African fairy tales with the same meaning, for instance, this spirit is mentioned in *Fragments*, “[...] *gain the wisdom to turn your back of the wisdom of the Ananse*” (p. 5) Naana would like Baako to get the wisdom of the “Ananse” because, he would probably take her over but this one lacks attention about the spiritual call, hence the meaning of this spiritual representation. The Ananse spirit also inspired the *Akan* people for their self-salvation with a common objective, that of the combat against the colonial cultural hegemony over their people.

The Westernization of educational structure brought a wide range of acculturation of Africans disturbing them at their roots and identity. However, Pan-Africanist writers crafted beautiful thoughts to bring their characters into self-consciousness. This spiritual journey to the source involved the characters in a redemptive pilgrimage. For this reason, Armah advocates a collective African academic renaissance and a return to the ancestral home, such as the place of redemption. In the novel *KMT: in the House of Life*, Jengo and Linda’s visit to Yarw, a place in Armah’s fiction is illustrative. It is the same as the reintegration that Ast experienced in Africa at Bara’s land in *Osiris Rising*. Lindela Imana expresses her mental connection to Yarw before the physical connection to the new place:

*I could understand [...] that this was familiar territory. I'd been here before. What I could not understand was the persistence of this feeling after Jengo turned the car onto the track to Yarw. We were on our way to a place I'd never seen, yet the further we drove into this landscape, the stronger my impression that I'd been here, too, before; (Armah A. K., 1995, p. 126)*

The trip to Yarw evokes a sense of familiarity with the environment, but also a spiritual connection with the ancestral home. One can easily recognize the area to which we come from or the house of redemption in African beliefs. It, therefore, calls for not only the union of scholars and traditionalists represented by Pr Jengo and Lindela Imana on one hand and Djely Hor and Astw Konate on the other hand but also a collaboration of both men and women witnessed in the exchanges between Jengo and Astw and Hor. (pp. 131-132) In addition, *KMT: in The House of Life*, the importance of return, reunion and identification. There is a need for individual bound energy, such as “*moving in the same direction*” or morale “*sharing the same vision, and knowing how to work*” (p. 132) By allowing Armah’s call for unity, African intellectuals and traditionalists must work hand in hand for their spiritual identity and salvation for their lost souls. This spiritual reconnection is clearly shown in the novel when Lindela appoints Professor Jengo in a dialogue:

*The spiritual connection that Lindela experiences with Yarw is similar to the spiritual contact between Ast and Africa long before she comes to Africa. Lindela’s spiritual connection with Yarw is equally significant in the sense that Yarw is “The House of Life and the symbol of the African culture and identity.” The spiritual bond marks her identification with African values. Jengo and Lindela’s visit to Yarw also marks their search for the African identity as Jengo articulates it, “Finding out who we are. Who’ve been (Armah A. K., 2002, p. 132).*

In this statement, Lindela’s spiritual contact with Yarw equals the contact between Ast and Africa before his homecoming. Both have the same connection with the spiritual world. Yarw is “*The House of Life and the symbol of the African culture and identity.*” This connection with the past leads to her reconnection with African principles. Their official visit to Yarw is an occasion to relink spiritually with the ancestors, as Jengo appreciates it: “*Finding out who’ve been*” (p. 32). It is the return for the traditional beliefs, the ancestral home, and the land of purity and light on Africa’s knowledge. Armah reinforces his vision of unity and obligations to advance his search for true African identity which Lindela refers to as “*clearing new paths to better directions of our own*” (p. 135) that is to say the way to their salvation. Armah’s conception of spirituality in his three novels is also evident in Naylor’s fiction *Mama Day*, which uses a literary technique called “magic realism” in combining fairy tales, Mythology, and dreams with the daily realities, recreates traditional Africa in the heart of the civilization in the United States of America. The notion of spirituality in the novel is carried out by female characters that are in touch with it and have accomplished great missions in serving their community in terms of cultural references and identity reconstruction. Naylor use of spirituality in *Mama Day* evidences a tale of supernatural powers inherited from African tradition to manage the “three times” past, present and future represented between two different worlds: that of the spirits meaning out of the ordinary and the living from which they struggle to survive. Indeed, the names of the three important female characters: Sapphira Wade, Miranda Day alias Mama Day, Cocoa and Ophelia illustrate the generational saga of a Spiritual legacy. Mama Day a woman of hundred years, has been performing the knowledge of past Africa as inherited from Sapphira Wade by healing people as when she helped Bernice in her inability to bear a baby with the use of medicinal plants and leaves. This is the good side of her

redemptive mission. Naylor, like Armah, uses these features to recreate the authenticity and image of Africa with a little difference from the space of Armah who recalled the civilization of glorious Egyptian and Akan Culture in post-colonial Ghana.

Here it happens inside the civilization of the West: New York City. In these perspectives, both authors have aimed at a symbolic reconciliation between the past and present of Africa. Thus, both plan a place where Africa's children could find, references, refuge and spiritual redemption. Miranda Day as Naana and Nwt, in Armah's works not only knows the true story of their lineages but plans to transfer this wisdom to her great-niece Cocoa as Nwt did with Ast before her departure to Africa the place of redemption. The cultural affiliation emphasized here with these African traditional women, is the role they played to honour the past Africa with its rich culture and contribute to its revival. This grandmother appears as a protagonist in the opening scene of the novel untitled *Naana*. Armah first introduced this character in most of his novels to pay tribute to the matriarchy that plays a safeguarding role in African spirituality. In the novel *Fragments*, Naana embodies the wisdom of the African ancestors; she is the unique one who owes great respect and recognition and devotion to Africa's spirituality through her benevolent role. The fact that these characters are given such roles, recalls the image of women as bearers of life and hope. That is to say, they will ensure the continuity of performing good actions and ensure the continuity of traditional practices through their nieces and grandnieces of modern times.

Another factor is relevant, as far as the age of these matriarchs is concerned. Though both authors Armah and Naylor have chosen very old female characters in their fiction characterized as having knowledge and wisdom, but also for their extended lifetime to emphasize the time agreement between past present and future that are interconnected. In these perspectives, Manigault-Bryant in "*From 'Pythian Madness' to an 'Inner-Ethic of Self-Sacrifice': The Spirits of Africa and Modernity in W.E.B. Du Bois's Late Writing*" (pp. 63-79), guess that America's redemption is encoded in Black Spirituality in corporative complementary of all things, and spiritual interaction ritualized in two historical and metaphysical representation of "*Xhosa*" in South Africa. As painted by the African American writer, one can say that these women are the bridge that links the two worlds the past representing the realm of the spiritual, wisdom, tradition and knowledge, and superpowers and the present represented by the opportunists, the liars, the alienated, and all that represent the colonial enterprise of dehumanization and non-respect of the black race. These pan-Africanist writers have found the necessity to create these characters for the redemption of the whole black race because they are the links between the realm of the Spirit and the dead. The cultural affiliation emphasis here with these African traditional women is the role they played to honour past Africa with its rich culture and contribute to its revival.

This protagonist appears in the opening scene untitled *Naana*. Armah first introduces this character as in most of his novels to celebrate the matriarch that plays a safeguarding role in African Culture. Whereas, in *Fragments* Naana embodies the spirituality and wisdom of the ancestors, she is the unique one who has a great respect and recognition for African spirituality. Both authors Naylor and Armah, use these features to recreate the authenticity and image of Africa with a little difference in space and time. Armah re-invented the ancient myth of glorious Egypt that has known as a great civilization to recreate the ancestral home and its spirituality for the redemption of the *Akan* people of postcolonial Ghana and the African Diaspora. Whereas, in Naylor, this recreation of Africa occurs in the heart of the civilization of the West: New York City. In these perspectives, these authors have aimed at a symbolic reconciliation between the past and present of Africa for a better future where spirituality will have a crucial role in social life. Thus, both authors resort to the spiritual world to find their true identity as rooted Africans and African-American to free themselves from foreign influences, and the growing alienation of their communities. However, spirituality as a main part of African beliefs stands as a refuge where black people could find true traditional references, divine wisdom, protection and salvation.

### **Sentence and Redemption as Characteristics of African Spirituality**

As a definition, the term *sentence* refers to a punishment given by a judge in court to a person or organization after they have been found guilty of doing something wrong whereas, the term *redemption* in the Cambridge online Dictionary is the state of being kept from evil or of improving morally. In this paper, both terms refer to the redemptive force and approach aimed at protecting black people from very difficult situations in their communities. Armah and Naylor as cultural actors lay bare the different objectives of human destiny among which sentence and redemption as attributes of spirituality play significant roles in the lives of black people. However, the analysis of the theme in different situations in the novels will help us to understand the extent to which the term sentence can be redemptive. Dealing with the term sentence, some practices evidence fatal scenes of human sacrifices to express their devotion to traditional spirituality. It is in a context of spiritual reconstruction that Armah lays bare a character's drama of existence, Asar's death in *Osiris Rising* in one sense, echoes the original Asar in the Kemetic Mythology sentenced to a horrible death and destruction of the body by Set the wicked character. For instance, the body of the original Osiris, Asar in Armah's version was cut and disjointed into fourteen fragments and is rendered by the Ghanaian writer while painting the death of his character Asar by Seth Spenser Soja and his gunmen in the novel. That is to show recurrent events in African spirituality that may have different meanings. Asar's sentence to death might mean a spiritual sacrifice that marks a new

beginning because according to the myth and in Armah's fiction, he will come back to the realm of the dead. Pan-Africanists have used this divine dimension to mean hope which echoes the driving force of freedom fighters who took the Ankh symbol as their emblem for regeneration. What so ever, even dead these activists spiritually govern the minds of their followers in the accomplishment of their missions, by facing the disintegration phenomenon through a spiritual unification for their redemption.

By reading the second chapter of the fifth part of Armah's novel *The Healers*, the title "*The Sacrifice of Victims*" is evocative of some atrocities in the history of the Akan people. Horrible scenes show a line of people sentenced to death to support the will of a minority of rooted elites of small African kingdoms in an endless quest for power and victory. They resorted to their spiritual beliefs as a rescue to their aim by giving holocausts to the spirit of the sacred River *Nana Bosom Pra*. This act consists of sentencing people to death followed by incantations to beg the water god, to give them protection and victory over their enemies of the Asante army before engaging the wars. According to the narrator it has not prevented the loss of soldiers during the wars, hence too much useless bloodshed and human slaughtering. These scenes of great cruelty are shown through the death of innocent victims pouring their blood to please the Ashanti gods. This horrible and disgraceful scene is rediscovered in the novel *The Healers* Densu's interpretation and description of the scene does not mean the redemption of the victims but a senseless sacrifice. This is shown in the following lines:

*A small crowd of men, led by three priests in white, their faces painted with death's white clay, accompanied the victims. There were two drummers beating drums carried on the heads of drumboys, drumming a slow death to the spirit of the sacred river Pra. Densu heard the message and knew its meaning. It was a message pleading shame and guilt. The drummers, on behalf of the king of Assen Nyankomase, accepted the guilt of people who had neglected their god in happier times. Now, surprised by danger, they have come to ask forgiveness. [...] They asked the river not to turn its long-nursed anger against the neglectful worshippers. Instead, they asked the river to raise its anger against the Asante army which, the drummers said, would be coming soon to cross the river, bringing death to the river, bringing death to the river's worshippers. The drums alternated, repeating their prayers. After each prayer the refrain was beaten:*

*Accept, O Bosom Pra, Accept this offering, sacred river, Accept, accept. A new victim was pushed to the edge of water with each such prayer. At the words 'Accept, accept', strong men cast him down forcibly and a sword slashed his throat. His blood poured out to redden the river. (Armah A. K., 1978, pp. 160-161)*

The soldiers of the army of the Ashanti will, in turn, make a few days later the same human sacrifices that will not prevent however the massive loss of their fighters in the *Naana Bosom Pra*<sup>2</sup> river, the object of their incantations. This dark side of African spirituality is adversely viewed by Armah because these sacrifices have never contributed to the survival of ancient African kingdoms or given more power to the kings. Apart from premeditated and recurrent crimes that only weaken their position because of human loss; there is not a logical explanation for these sentences. Presumably, Armah shows through these sacrifices that Africa was mistaken at a crucial moment in their history. He worried about some human sacrifices that happened in ancient times, the way they were practised in African tradition, for instance, in *The Healers*, was nothing but contrasting the spirit useless death sentence of innocent people. Some people are sentenced to death because of transgressing certain spiritual beliefs of a given social clan that only the initiated have the right to own. They enjoy a certain privilege inherited from the wisdom of their ancestors. However, they have some social codes in the form of spiritual dogmas that no one has the right to break. For instance, in *KMT: in the House of Life*, Armah paints his disregard against the spirituality of *griots*' so-called framed "*secret*". These socio-cultural beliefs lead to Djily Hor's sentence later in the novel after holding a conference at the university about the spiritual secret of his society. Though, this veiled threat: Hor's "*audience of academic should in no way benefit from the experience of insiders*" (p. 162). The issue here lays in the fact that *griots* are jealously hiding some ancestral spiritual knowledge that event brought them to capital punishment of an innocent individual in their community. All the more, the novel shows this section led by Mamadou Kouyate as having orchestrated a criminal act. Consequently, in Hor's society, some secrets must stay untold because of their spiritual dimension (p. 202). These ancient spiritual beliefs do not tally with the ideology developed by the author because in no case this tragic act can be a means of redemption. Neither does it ensure the durability of the secret nor the permanent spiritual connection of the masses.

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<sup>2</sup>Naana Bosom Pra: a river of southern Ghana. The Pra River rises in the Kwahu Plateau near Mpraeso and flows 150 miles (240 km) southward to enter the Gulf of Guinea (Atlantic Ocean) at Shama. Its main tributaries are the Ofin, Anum, and Birim. Constantly broken by cataracts—especially the Bosomasi Rapids at Anyinabrim—the river is unnavigable even by canoe for most of its length. Oda is the commercial centre of the river's northern basin. Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (1998, July 20). Pra. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Pra-River>

Naylor in *Mama Day* contrasts Armah, in certain points. She emphasises his vision regarding the ways and essence of sentence which leads to redemption but to some extent, they have in common a spiritual connotation of both terms. Some special individuals own some supernatural attributes because they inherit some privileges from the spirit of ancestors that have the mission to protect people from imminent dangers or avenge a crime coordinated by enemies or wicked people in their community represented in the novel by Miranda Day alias Mama Day. Equally other people are driven by jealousy to use the darkest methods in African spirituality to sentence some people to committing crimes with witchcraft as seen in Ruby's attitude on Cocoa Day. This is relevant in African spirituality. This certainly brought some European thinkers like Joseph Conrad that landed the continent to refer to it as the title of his book *Heart of Darkness* (1985). Indeed, African spirituality is an abstract and obscure science that has no logical explanation. It is often transmitted from one generation to another rediscovered in the novel *Mama Day* as in *Fragments*. Like Armah, Naylor shares the same vision of attributing the female gender to the role of spiritual representation. Both authors have a strong interest in this parcel of African culture that is both destructive and redemptive; whereas, Naylor's use of the term '*supernatural occurrences*' is subjective. When it happens to sentencing criminals in his community, the matriarch often uses her spiritual power with her magical walking stick to avenge a crime by punishing the guilty people of his communities who resort to the forces of obscurity to sentence innocent people. Mama Day's wisdom can be observed through her sense of taking care of the powerless all her life, she even did a great sacrifice by deliberately accepting to never get married or have children, this reliable and trustworthy person all her life dedicates her spiritual knowledge to the service of his people.

The analysis of the terms sentence and redemption in Naylor's fiction can be linked with the history of the day lineage. According to the tale, a Matriarch known as Sapphira Wade pushed his master Bascomb Wade to deed his land (the Island of Willow Springs) in 1823 to his slaves and their descendants, to protect them, she "*bore him seven sons in just a thousand days*" (p. 3). Research has even linked this act with the seven days of the creation of the universe, hence her name "Mama Day." This deed, written with blood is a legal document and is an official record of an agreement or official proof that someone owns land. However, this action sentences him to an imminent death. As a result, Bascomb Wade is sacrificed for the redemption of the Day's lineage; this was the condition for Sapphira Wade to inherit his superpowers from African spirituality. To support Naylor's vision, critics, like Melvin B. Rahming in "Reading Spirit:" Cosmological Consideration in Garfield Linton's *Voodomation: A Book of Foretelling* (pp. 35-61), has depicted a mixed relation between the material condition of being and spiritual activities. Besides, Linton's narrative multivocality in *Voodomation*, notes the contradictory harmonies of all things in the universe as in ancient Egyptian cosmology.

Naylor's account with spiritual sentence aims at giving a divine mission to his characters in another life as with Asar in Armah's *Osiris Rising*, for instance, in Georges Andrew's sentence, a character in the novel ends with a mysterious death. The narrator recounts that he died after being attacked by a vicious chicken. This was the ultimate condition to save her beloved Cocoa who was bewitched by Ruby, a jealous witch. This death will not only erase Georges' dark past but will integrate him into the spiritual world where the ancestors are dwelling. At the same time, it is an occasion for him, to find his true identity. His death is physical but not spiritual. This quest for redemption for Africans and African-American individuals is relevantly dealt with in the fiction of both writers because this passage between different worlds is considered a new beginning. Some cultures in Africa's cosmology believe in reincarnation, that is to say, those who passed away, come back in the form of a spirit watching over the living according. As in ancient Egyptian mythology with the resurrection of the god Osiris who returns from the dead. The origin of this Island of Willow Springs as well as the unknown history is accessible to Miranda Day who understands the past, can well interpret the current events and predict the upcoming events in his community. She is the guardian who owns a temporary and spiritual power. Therefore, based on these above analyses one can conclude that both writers Armah and Naylor appreciate the sacredness of spirituality in a historical context.

Once again the matriarch uses her supernatural power to sentence someone, for instance, she summoned lightning with her working stick to hit and burn Ruby's house, to avenge the criminal actions of this wicked witch who bewitched her niece Cocoa Day victim of a hex<sup>3</sup> and dark forces of the island. Metaphorically, Cocoa is the bridge, that links past and present the only way on and off between Willow Springs (blacks) and New York (whites). Consequently, she was in trouble, when the bridge was hit by a storm. The novel recounts that Only Georges' sacrifice after accepting that Mama Day was not a crazy woman, relied on her knowledge and superpower, to save her beloved in serious situations. Perhaps most of all the understanding stipulates that "*everybody wants to be right in a world where there ain't no right or wrong to be found*" (p. 230). Likewise, one must take Armah's words into account when he says in *Fragments* the danger is everywhere "*The death of the Soul*" (p. 7) Finally, the novels contend that in African spirituality there is a divine will owed to the ancestors that has the mission of watching over their people and judging them under

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<sup>3</sup>Hex: to affect as if by an evil spell.

Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hex>. Accessed 25 Jul. 2023.

several ways when they are satisfied through rituals or recognition. As the authors of the three books suggest, the appreciation of ancestral legacy and cultural empowerment is an effective means of ensuring blacks 'social welfare in their communities. Definitely, for a successful African cultural revival and pan-African nation, some useful cultural assets like African spirituality must be safeguarded due to their significance in the blacks' culture.

## CONCLUSION

In short, the analysis of the theme of sentence and redemption and their relationship with the concept of 'spiritual world' in Armah and Naylor's fiction, afford the pleasures of both the classical novel and complicatedly structured plot replete with recurrences and prediction and the folktale, with its oral rhythms and supernatural events. Unlike many contemporary fictions, it also conveys lessons about how we should live and give an important place to African spirituality which must be safeguarded by this and the coming generations. Students who read these books will come away bearing some of the wisdom of these characters Naana, Ast, Asar, Modin Dofu and Mama Day even if most people stipulate that human beings are confronted with the dilemma about the ignorance of truth. Therefore, Africans must hang on to what they consider as a truth, their cultural legacy of spirituality which is a gift of the wisdom of their ancestors which not only helps them to resist manipulative forces, to avoid the death of the soul but lead them to their redemption. To such an extent, can we consider the spiritual world as being a mere representation of a utopian culture of the black Saga by both authors? Or is it not more relevant to consider the sentence as an indispensable factor in the redemption of black people in the spiritual and historical context of indigenous Africa, as the authors' contribution to the Pan-African renaissance?

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