



Is Afro-Pessimism a New Trend In American Literature?

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ABSTRACT

The history of the racial struggle of the Afro-American people is long and painful. In different turns of history, it seemed that the struggle was successful in establishing the rights of Afro-American men and women on the soil of the USA. However, hopes vanished into utter uncertainty and frustration very soon. The Emancipation Proclamation gave hope to the millions, but this optimism did not last long. Even the Civil Rights Movement seemed to usher in a new era, but things did not change as expected. Even the twenty-first century has recorded some heart-rending incidents of racial injustices, like the murder of George Perry Floyd Jr. in 2020. Hence began the new era of pessimism regarding the future of racial justice in the USA. The novels published in recent times exude utter pessimism, showing the long patient struggle has fallen flat. This essay will particularly explore with special references to Jason Mott's *Hell of a Book* (2021) and Nawali Serpell's *The Furrows* (2022) if the long struggle for racial justice in the USA has failed, resulting in Afro-pessimism.

Keywords: Afro-pessimism, Jason Mott, Namwali Serpell, Racism, Black Literature,

Introduction

Once, Martin Luther King Jr. tried to infuse a “dream” into the heart of the Afro-American people in the USA. Encouraged by the famous “I Have a Dream” speech, they waged a struggle against all inequalities, hoping that “one day this nation will rise up and live the true meaning of its creed.” (King 101-196) Still, it seems that this “one day” has not come. Instead, contrary to King’s “dream”, the new generation of thinkers envision a bleak future for the Afro-American people in the USA. Jason Mott's *Hell of a Book* (2021) and Namwali Serpell's *The Furrows* (2022) have attracted the attention of readers for their unique ways of spreading pessimism.

Jason Mott's *Hell of a Book* (2021) deals with racism that involves police brutality, extrajudicial killing, and marginalizing Afro-American people. Namwali Serpell's *The Furrows* (2022), when read as an allegory of the continuous loss of lives in centuries-long racial conflicts in the Afro-American community, depicts the haunting memories of grief that perplex and unnerve Afro-American people in general. Both novels create an aura of utter disappointment and strongly bear the characteristics of “Afro-pessimism.”

In a word, “Afro-pessimism” refers to the belief that matters will never improve for black people in the USA. In the words of Frank B. Wilderson III, “Afro-pessimism is premised on a comprehensive and iconoclastic claim that Blackness is coterminous with Slaveness. Blackness is social death, which is to say that there was never a prior meta moment of plenitude, never equilibrium, never a moment of social life” (Wilderson III 102).

Weier makes it simple and straightforward, “The Afro-Pessimist axiom asserts not only that ‘civil’ has always meant ‘not- black,’ but insists that this continues to be so...” (Weier 420). Wilderson III believes that people of other communities like the Asian and Hispanic do not suffer as the black do. Wilderson III writes, “... White supremacy and anti-Blackness are not the same—in fact, ... the people who suffer White supremacy are also the people who, along with Whites, perpetrate anti-Blackness...” (Wilderson III 170). So, he does not classify the society as white and non-white, but black and non-black. To him, “Blackness and Slaveness are inextricably bound in such a way that whereas Slaveness can be disimbricated from Blackness, Blackness cannot exist as other than Slaveness” (Wilderson III 229).

This essay will try to prove that the concept of “Afro-pessimism” is reflected in the theme and literary devices used in Jason Mott's *Hell of a Book* and Nawali Serpell's *The Furrows* since the general perception about racism is utterly bleak.

Background

The struggle for racial justice is a centuries-old movement that has experienced many ups and downs. When a movement succeeded, the Afro-American people found hope, thinking that the age of “manacles of segregation” would end (King 101-106). However, even in the first quarter of the twenty-first century, Afro-American thinkers, like Martin Luther King, feel that “the Negro still is not free” (King 101-106).

In his famous Gettysburg speech (1863), Abraham Lincoln asserted that the USA is a nation “conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” (Lincoln 1-2). Therefore, Abraham Lincoln attempted to put an end to the age of slavery through the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), which he thought was an “unfinished work” (Lincoln 1-2). Even after “Five score years”, the situation changed very little, urging for the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Then, the Civil Rights Act (1964) seemed to usher in a new era with all types of segregation banned. Jalta says, “The Black people were further disillusioned and frustrated in the 1940s and 1950s because these legal actions were opposed by White society. As a result, African Americans were convinced that court actions by themselves could not destroy racial segregation...” (Jalata 102).

Neither in the last quarter of the twentieth century nor in the first quarter of the twenty-first century did the frustration of African Americans change since they continued to experience police brutality and systematic injustice. Disappointed, the black Americans found themselves economically cornered even in the new century. Jalta writes, “The objective of fundamentally transforming Black America was not successful. Hence, the majority of African Americans still do not have meaningful access to the political, economic, and cultural resources of the country. Furthermore, although the African American movement introduced the agenda of multiculturalism, the struggle for cultural identity and multicultural democracy has not yet reached its desired goals” (Jalta 107). The white establishments and many white intellectuals did not allow the rights to be prioritized- “The complexity and contributions of the African American movement were intellectually and politically undermined by the White establishment, its institutions, and its collaboration” (Jalta 109).

After so many movements ranging from Abolitionist Movement to Civil Rights Movements – that include both violent and non-violent activities, and after seeming success in the various turns of history, disappointments, as observed by the Afro-American thinkers, stem from the fact that situations have not changed for the Afro American people- “The negro is still languishing in the corner of the American society” (King 101-106). Weier summarizes it very precisely, “The election of Barack Obama to the presidency has been widely perceived as proof of the post-racial nature of today's United States society and the transcendence of its history of slavery and continued racial discrimination” (Weier 418). But does the superlative success define the condition of racism in the USA? Afro-pessimists come to explain the situation, “...the same time, a group of authors has emerged that challenges these notions of post-racialism and insists on the radical potential of politicized notions of blackness. Referring to each other as ‘Afro-Pessimists,’ Saidiya Hartman, Frank Wilderson, Jared Sexton and others argue that the race line continues to be the foundational socio-political fault line in the United States” (Weier 418).

Hell of a Book by Jason Mott

Afro-pessimism reaches a new height in *Hell of a Book* by Jason Mott because of his comic presentation of a serious theme. People of colour are killed, tortured, cornered, and discriminated against in terms of social and economic rights in one part of the book, while parallelly, readers get a silly comedy where an unnamed writer travelling the world on his first book tour is running naked to escape from the man whose wife he has slept with. The juxtaposition of silly comic and serious tragic elements is an expression of utter disappointment for people of colour in the USA. This juxtaposition is also a self-ridicule and a sign of normalization of abnormally brutal state-sponsored racism. The characters like the Kid- “Soot”, William, Soot's mother, and Daddy Henry all undergo racism, yet the characters are sometimes comically portrayed, amusing the readers. This comic sketch of tragic reality is the 'Afro-pessimism' of Alexander, who writes, “The superlative nature of individual black achievement today in formerly white domains is a good indicator that Jim Crow is dead, but it does not necessarily mean the end of racial caste” (Alexander 21). To Alexander, racism in American society is “adaptable” as “These new rules have been justified by new rhetoric, new language, and a new social consensus, while producing many of the same results” (Alexander 21). That is why Jason Mott does not mourn over the misfortune of the racially marginalized black people but depicts their miseries in good humour. To Mott too, the Emancipation Proclamation or abolition of the Jim Crow Law are meaningless and ridiculous.

This “Afro-pessimism” in *Hell of a Book* has not stemmed from the history of slavery or the Jim Crow era; rather, its root is in the “Hell” of present American society. The shooting, police brutality and mental trauma mentioned in *Hell of a Book* have their basis in recent American society, a phenomenon that has experienced no change for centuries. Murphy writes, “As of May 2020, African Americans, who make up 47 per cent of the District's population, represent 80 per cent of DC COVID-19 deaths. Many Black and brown Washingtonians live in the District's poorer wards, where they have less access to hospitals, and their unemployment and underemployment affect the quality of their health care” (Murphy 44), Michelle Alexander cites examples of black people like Jarvous Cotton, who are still denied the right to vote, nor did his forefathers have the rights. At this moment, Cotton is a “felon” and on “parole”, ineligible to vote (Alexander 1). Michelle Alexander thinks that it is actually the “preservation” of racism “through transformation” only (Alexander 21). Here lies the justification for Mott's pessimism about Afro-Americans' lives.

The literary devices such as motifs, similes, metaphors and symbols used in *Hell of a Book* reflect the concept of “Afro-pessimism”. For example, blackness, a recurring motif, is shown as the point of vulnerability for black people. It, at first, appears with Soot, who is “impossibly dark-skinned” (Mott 22). The disappointment seems to reach its zenith as the writer says, “dark skin is a sin”. Black characters undergo all sorts of deprivation and injustice. Fear, another motif, comes across the minds of Soot's parents, who are often apprehensive of Soot being the victim of racism. It is deeply rooted in the psyche of Soot's mother that black people are not entitled to enjoy the rights of citizens and continue to live like slaves. The lives of the black people in *Hell of a Book* mirror Saidiya V. Hartman's definition of slaves, “The most universal definition of the slave is a stranger. Torn from kin and community, ... dishonoured and violated...” (Hartman 5). This is precisely what Soot and his family members are. Thus comes Harman's Afro-pessimistic reflection, “Slavery had established a measure of man and a ranking of life and worth that has yet to be undone” (Hartman 4).

Is the existence of the black people itself a shame? Is the blackness itself a vulnerability? William, Soot's father, experiences uneasiness when seen. The description of his feelings goes in this way, “Every moment of his life, he felt that he stood out. Too tall. Too skinny. Too Black. All of it swallowed him up some days. There were eyes everywhere, watching him, staring at him” (Mott 110). Bond and Cash write, “... traditionally, social scientists, psychologists and others assumed that the orientation of U.S. culture toward a Caucasian ideal of ... beauty led to lower body image and self-esteem among Black women and to self-hatred among Blacks in general” (Bond and Cash write 874-88). The standard of beauty is determined not by marginalized people like William; rather, it is in the hands of the people who are strong enough to marginalize a community. Moreover, the colour of their complexion is prone to danger and invites life threats. Helpless, hopeless and cornered, Soot's parents teach him to be invisible, “Unseen”. For generations, they know that being seen is dangerous and life-threatening. Jack, the media trainer, says, “[b]eing Black's a curse” (Mott 107). This is the echo of words of Christina Elizabeth Sharpe, a leading thinker of the school of “Afro-pessimism”, “I want *In the Wake* to declare that we are Black peoples in the wake with no state or nation to protect us, with no citizenship bound to be respected, and to position us in the modalities of Black life lived in, as, under, despite Black death: to think and be and act from there” (Sharp 13). Soot's father is murdered, and so is Soot. Soot's mother is traumatized after the murder of her husband. She is a kind woman, but “She showed her love through spanking and punishments”, showing the effects of trauma on parenting (Mott 252). Thus, the existence of blackness is agonizing. The writer uses the pair, “unseen and safe”, eight times, referring to the danger of being visible to black people (Mott 5).

The perception of Daddy Henry and William about the colour of their skin is analogous to that of Pecola Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. Glenn opines that the evaluation of attractiveness is heavily influenced by skin tone, with lighter skin acting as a type of symbolic capital that is translated into advantage and financial capital in the “market for heterosexuals”. The standard of beauty is set by the people who control the helm of power and economy (Glenn 281-302). They set the standard that is convenient to them and excludes others, distancing other communities further. In *The Bluest Eye*, Breedlove longs for blond hair and blue eyes so that she may look like the American children. This is not because her eyes and hair are ugly, but because the beauty standard of America has excluded black people as a part of their segregation policy. Breedlove is a victim of a new wave of segregation – a form of twentieth-century tool of slavery. Hopes rose in the twentieth century with the Civil Rights Movement, but that hope faded into pessimism. Both Soot and Daddy Henry want to conceal the “blackness”- Soot learns to be invisible, and Daddy Henry does not like drawings and writing about black people. The pessimism lies in the fact that black people can never meet the standard of beauty and put themselves in the mainstream. Their appearance and skin tone have kept them out of society segregated forever.

The book's narrator, “the writer”, who is taking a cross-country tour, has tried to hide his black identity. This is neither the beginning nor the end of the obscurity. “The Kid”, who has the supernatural capacity to be unseen, follows him everywhere. “The Kid” represents the later generation, who feels his Blackness is a barrier on the way to a healthy life in the existing society. “The Kid” feels that his identity in American society is obscure. His father, William, feels in the same way and tries not to expose his body as the beauty standard of American society does not count him. The mother of the “kid” is obscure in her treatment of her child -the treatment is between sanity and insanity. She loves her child undoubtedly, but the treatment of her child does not reflect much motherly patience. The character of Sharon is also full of obscurity, as the character of the media is. Though she becomes emotional in Chapter 8, reading the news of Soot's murder, she does not hesitate to use the tragic death as a marketing tool for the narrator's career. The obscurity of racial identity and rights of the Afro-American people is again reflected in the narrative style, where the fine line between reality and imagination is blurred. Real and unreal merge, symbolizing utter instability in the life of the Afro-American individuals – ranging from the people of the oldest generation represented by Daddy Henry to the people of the youngest ones like Soot. Daddy Henry's contempt for drawings and writing about Black people alludes to the novel's idea of Blackness as a subject. Because of his internalized racism, Daddy Henry tells William that black people should not be the subject of his drawings; instead, he can draw only the white people. Is it self-hatred? The systematic torture imposed upon the black people ultimately results in this abhorrence for blackness or self-hatred. Laws changed, governments changed and new policies have come in place, but they seem to innovate new methods of discrimination only. Alexander writes, “Public housing officials are free to reject applicants simply on the basis of arrests, regardless of whether they result in convictions or fines.

Because African Americans and Latinos are targeted by police in the War on Drugs, it is far more likely that they will be arrested for minor, nonviolent crimes. Accordingly, HUD policies excluding people from housing assistance based on arrests as well as convictions guarantee highly discriminatory results" (Alexander 143).

Daddy Henry also uses the n-word to describe Black people on multiple occasions. When he says, "No [n-word] stories, okay? You gotta do it right!", he doubles down on this self-hatred discourse while encouraging Soot to compose stories- "You must do it 'right!" (Mott 55). The novel's concerns about intergenerational trauma are reinforced by the notion that doing something 'right' entails doing it white. The obscurity of identity is handed down from Daddy Henry to Soot, creating an atmosphere of utter pessimism.

The theme of coming with grief in the novel *Hell of a Book* is a frustrated expression of a bleak future for the Afro-American people in the USA. The characters are faced with two types of grief -personal and collective. Grief at both personal and collective levels is so rife that dealing with grief is often unhealthy. The first-person narrator finds it difficult to deal with his parent's death. His psychiatrist insists that the narrator has trauma that should be explored. But instead of dealing with that trauma, the narrator creates a coping strategy of his own. He has a medical issue that causes memory loss and makes him prone to hallucinations. Thus, he can escape his own trauma, resorting to an unusual practice. Soot handles his personal trauma of his father's death in a manner akin to this. He begins to imagine things as well, even picturing a future in which his father is still alive. The loss of his father also causes him to frequently vanish into "The Unseen", where he is invisible. The death of his father also causes him to frequently vanish into The Unseen, a place where he is invisible. Soot likewise disassociates himself from reality into The Unseen; his suffering "receded, and he could believe it had never come at all" (Mott 147). Soot and the storyteller are two instances of people who shun sorrow. As regards collective grief, the first-person narrator takes the same course of action as he does with regard to his own grief: he chooses to disregard the news and come to the conclusion that the victims are not real. The method the narrator adopts emerges from passive acceptance of the tragedy. These personal and collective griefs are the reminders of victims of police brutality in the USA. The death of George Floyd is neither the ending nor the beginning. Even after the countrywide protest after the murder of George Floyd, the murder of the Afro-Americans has not been stopped. It is recognized that "Lethal and unaccountable police violence against Black civilians is one of the defining political issues of the twenty-first century in the United States" (Reny and Newman1499). Despite the issue being much discussed, no improvement has taken place. Reny and Newman raise the question, "Does social protest following the police killing of unarmed Black civilians have a widespread 'opinion-mobilizing' effect against the police?" (Reny and Newman1499) This is a valid question to investigate, and after exploring, they have come to a conclusion that evokes frustration, "...attitudes among high-prejudice and politically conservative Americans either remained unchanged or evinced only small and ephemeral shifts. Our evidence suggests that the Floyd protests served to further racialize and politicize attitudes within the domain of race and law enforcement in the U.S" (Reny and Newman1499).

Here, Jason Mott has succeeded in presenting an ironic situation that generates pessimism. Though the unhealthy way of dealing with grief emerged from unnatural treatment imposed on the Afro-American community with no hope of justice, the Afro-American community is held responsible for taking drugs and violence. With this narrative, they are discriminated against in their workplaces. Alexander writes, Nearly every state allows private employers to discriminate on the basis of past criminal convictions. In fact, employers in most states can deny jobs to people who were arrested but never convicted of any crime. (Alexander 146)

Another spell of maltreatment and police brutality in the community goes on in the name of stopping drug dealings and violence. Mott tries to trace out the origin of the unusual elements in the life of the community by showing what happens when the narrator tries to avoid grief. In Chapter 26, the narrator experiences a public mental breakdown as a result of his avoidance of grief. After experiencing a total meltdown from reality, the narrator has a hallucinated chat with Soot's mother, and thus, the narrator encounters the death of his own mother. Similarly, Soot's escape into The Unseen does not save him from the grief of the loss of his father. He will still have to deal with it when he gets back to reality.

***The Furrows* by Namwali Serpell**

In *The Furrows* by Namwali Serpell, the never-ending grief emerging out of the loss of a child symbolizes the sufferings of the African-American people in the USA that torment each member of the community with no hope to overcome the agony of centuries-old injustice. This inability to find any light of hope to win over the pain of the loss of a brother, the discovery of the same loss in another person's life (Will/Wayne also lost his brother), and submission to this grief stands for "Afro-pessimism". Serpell in *The Furrows* is utterly pessimistic about the grief of the family, which, instead of fading up with the passage of time, deepens and tightens its grip on the thoughts and emotions of the characters involved. The grief in the novel results in mistaken identity, double consciousness, break of family ties, inferiority complex, trauma and psychological conflicts between mother and daughter, and physical and mental abandonment of a child by parents. The father of Cassandra, Mr Williams, marries another woman and forms a new family to keep himself away from the tormenting memories prevailing in his old family, thus abandoning his daughter, Cassandra. On the other hand, Mrs Williams, the mother, joins an organization working with lost children, showing signs of mental abandonment of Cassandra. The grief haunts the protagonist, Cassandra, perpetually in different forms and shapes her psyche. At the end of the novel, the grief takes a different form, with Cassandra coming in touch

with Wayne, but the gloom lasts. The book ends with the image of darkness, shadow, and death as the final passage goes on, "And now, from the midst of the catastrophe, a thicker darkness rises, a tall shadow that grows steadily...It is water or sand or smoke or death. It is the sealing black behind our eyes" (Serpell 266). Is not the 2022 novel, *The Furrows*, reflecting the "Afro-pessimism" that gets its roots deeper in the psyche of the black Americans after the murder of George Floyd in 2020, along with regular state-backed "killings", "excessive force, invasive stops, militarized terror, and more" inflicted especially on "the people of colour"? (O'Rourke 1337)

The literary devices used in the novel *The Furrows* exude the same gloom of "Afro-pessimism". The novel's motifs, symbols, images, metaphors, similes, and ironies create an ambience of disappointment that is unlikely to come to an end. Wayne's face, a motif that Cassandra sees everywhere and that prevents her from resuming a normal life, is the symbol of pessimism shaping the identity of people of colour. The metaphor of "No Man's Land" that cuts "through a gap between the fancier houses that reach the beach" symbolizes the categorical class division supposed to last forever. (Serpell 4) If the novel is read as an allegory of the condition of the black people in the USA, the simile of 'A junk of bones' refers to the desperate struggle of the African Americans to save each other, though in vain. Cassandra says, "The wind whipped. I clutched his knuckles like a junk of bones on the one hand and pushed the water away with the other. We rocked, his knees bumping my back, his head knocking my shoulder in that unreasonable way." (Serpell 6) The irony of Cassandra's mother's organization- an organization to rescue the lost children, may be read as a satire on Afro-American's desperate efforts to gain their rights and respect in the USA. Furthermore, of course, this satire originates from a deep belief in "Afro-pessimism", a theory asserting that there is no escape from "Slaveness" for African Americans. (Wilderson III 102)

The imagery used in the novel reflects utter disappointment about the identity. The narrator does not find her existence on Earth comfortable. She does not feel at ease and comfort in the company of her near and dear ones like parents, and with the other people she comes in touch with like Will. This uneasiness originates from the grief that haunts her everywhere. In Chapter 10, Cassandra sleeps on a flight, I slept uneasily on the flight. Plane sleep always feels to me like a form of restless thinking. The thoughts are like links in a chain; then the chain start pulling you by the wrists as you stagger along, picking up speed until you start to jog, race, careen.... (Serpell 99)

The long-tailed simile refers to the thought patterns of the protagonist- full of insecurity and instability. This insecurity lies in the nature of the grief, which is spread across the family, and the wave of the grief is spiral and repetitive in nature- a never-ending grief that appears in different forms as the protagonist advances in age. It is like the history of the Afro-American people – the social injustice has changed its forms and degree of intensity in ages, but there has not been any fundamental change in the "Slaveness." Alexander, while speaking of recent history, says, "For more than three decades, images of black men in handcuffs have been a regular staple of the evening news. We know that large numbers of black men have been locked in cages. In fact, it is precisely because we know that black and brown people are far more likely to be imprisoned that we, as a nation, have not cared too much about it" (Alexander 177).

The black people remain uncared for, pass the days behind bars without committing crimes and die. The grief of sufferings and loss eats into the vital of the community. Every time, the new shade of grief comes in a "form of restless thinking" (Serpell 99). The same concept of pessimism about the existence of the black people is evident in Toni Morrison's Novel, *Beloved*. Specifically referencing Morrison's novel, Valerie Smith writes that the characters of *Beloved* are "so profoundly affected by the experience of slavery that time cannot separate them from its horrors or undo its effects" (Smith 345). Here in the novel, *The Furrows*, the protagonist's experience of loss is so profound that nothing can make her forget the grief. Like *Beloved* in *Beloved*, Cassandras' memory haunts her perpetually in a range of ways. What needs to be added here is "Slaveness" of the Afro-American people is still identical to that of hundreds of years ago. George Floyds are killed in different ways and with different excuses. Their memories come back to live with the community as *Beloved* returns to Sethe and Paul D, indicating that the agony will perpetuate in the hearts of the Afro-American people.

Regarding the time and mode, the novel, *The Furrows* is gloomy, sad, mournful negative and depressing, exuding intense pessimism of existence. The novel raises the question if living means experiencing the different versions of the same grief. All the characters try to escape the gloomy world they seem to be encapsulated in, but definitely in vain. What they can, at best, do is to escape a specific version, but not the grief itself. The tone pervading throughout the novel implies that mourning is the inseparable part of black existence. The following is the description of a mournful psyche, "I lay in the dark, counting my beads, sliding them along the abacus of my mind, thinking of the gaps between people and between memories, how everything we do is a leap across them. Time began to sleep forward, fast, faster, then at a furious speed, propelling me through the night until my eyelids flipped open to a stopped down with no color at all" (Serpell 65).

This grave brooding tone has become the trending aspect of racial perception in the USA. Time is personified here in this passage, and 'propelling the night' symbolizing rampant bleak elements in society. The newer generation of Afro-American thinkers cannot depend on the "dream" dreamt by their predecessors because the USA has not been a country its children are not evaluated by the "content" of their character but by the "color of their skin" (King 101-106). The tone of the novel reflects the recent perception of the future of Afro-American people in the USA. The long struggle against racism, as it seems, has totally fallen flat, with no

hope of any development. The novel *The Furrows* does not make full sense until it is read as an allegory of the agony of the Afro-American community in the USA.

The repetition of the same story of grief across the novel reminds the readers of the tragedy of black life in the USA that began with slavery and goes on up to now. Like the story, Cassandra's grief does not experience linear progress; rather, it is cyclical. It comes in different forms and versions again and again. This cyclical grief is a metaphor for the repetition of tragic events in the lives of the black community that lead to the inception of "Afro-pessimism". Very understandably, for Wilderson III, the Emancipation Proclamation is a non-event (Wilderson III 218), and for Alexander, it is "illusory" (Alexander 20), and has not brought any change in the lives of black people. Weier says, "... historical events such as the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement have not changed the position of African Americans within civil society. Rather, these moments are read through the conservative dynamics they unleashed: the Black Codes and the propagation of black convict labour after the Civil War ...the instauration of the 'War on Drugs' and the crackdown on black political movements, the development in the 1960s of the Prison Industrial Complex..." (Weier 423-24).

Like Cassandra, black people experience the loss of lives in different ways under institutional slavery, Jim Crow Laws, and sometimes in the name of the "War on Drugs" (Alexander 5). Afro-Pessimism insists on understanding the present age as "The New Jim Crow" era (Alexander 173).

The narrative style and the unique use of the literary devices of Serpell in *The Furrows* make the readers realize the problems in the new ways – the repetitive and never-ending forms of grief that is normalized. This normalization is a process imposed by the prevalent narrative about black life and the helpless submission of the black people to the altar of unchangeable realities. The novel begins, saying, "I don't want to tell you what happened. I want to tell you how it felt" (Serpell 3). People of all colours can see what is happening, but few can feel the way black people are feeling at the loss they undergo routinely.

Conclusion

The Emancipation Proclamation could not bring about change because the national narrative did not change. Laws have been changed in the face of movements over the last two centuries, but secretion and discrimination have appeared in new forms with a greater degree of intensity. Black people have ascended to the highest positions of the state and society- Obama was elected president twice, and many black people have been playing leading roles in the arenas of sports, entertainment, and business. The superlative success of the handful of black Americans has been highlighted only to divert the discussion of continuous deprivation that the community has been undergoing for centuries. Alexander precisely summarizes the pessimism, "Ten years ago, I would have argued strenuously against the central claim made here— namely, that something akin to a racial caste system currently exists in the United States. Indeed, if Barack Obama had been elected president back then, I would have argued that his election marked the nation's triumph over racial caste—the final nail in the coffin of Jim Crow" (Alexander 2).

But Alexander cannot be elated anymore with the success of the individual black people. Jason Mott and Namwali Serpell have recorded the truth of the grass-root level in their recent novels, expressing a dark view – this 'slaveness' is never to come to an end (Wilderson III 229). This tone is nothing new in American literature, but from the perspective of recent history, pessimism has taken a deeper root, even in the literature of new-generation writers like Jason Mott and Namwali Serpell.

Jason Mott and Namwali Serpell present the world of Black people in the USA from a particular point of view: Afro-pessimism. Of course, a more objective study may be conducted to explore how much it is justified to be pessimistic about the future of the Afro-American people in America. Even this claim that 'Blackness cannot exist as other than Slaveness' demands critical examination (Wilderson III 229). Yet, the two novels, *Hell of a Book* by Jason Mott and *The Furrows* by Namwali Serpell, have drawn the attention of a huge audience because of their portrayal of the contemporary distress of black people in America.

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