

## REIFICATION IN HARRIET BEECHER STOWE'S *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*

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**Abstract:** This research studied reification in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The researchers used reification theory as proposed by Georg Lukacs and within Marxist tradition. By using Lukacs points of reification of the three points, the researchers find that Uncle Tom experiences the three points of reification, those are depersonalization, alienation of labor, and thing-like relation.

### A. Introduction

The trading on human beings is a common business in this daily life. It may vary from times to times, but within one spirit that is the spirit of exploitation of a man to others. This exploitative relation happens because a man regards others in the relation as a thing, a commodity. The process of exploitation that is done by human beings to others is called reification. Reification is a phenomenon that becomes a part of human beings' activities because of the interest of materialism. The materialistic activities can be seen in existence of prostitutions, slavery, a relation between boss and his workers, and many other things.

. Reification is found in works of literature because literature is a part of human beings' achievement in this life. Literature is an element from the core of the umbrella civilization in which all of us live today (Jaye and Watts,1981:165). Understanding a better world through a literary work is done by human beings in order to make them able to explore and exploit their life in line with the progress of mankind in civilization. Literary works have important role to influence societies. Among those influential literary works are Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The problems of reification are related to the ideas of Marxism. Reification is widely discussed as a

part of Marxism. Therefore, the idea of Marxism is discussed in this thesis. Marxism is a teaching that is based on the idea of a German thinker, Karl Marx (1818-1883). The idea is basically materialism, that means everything that exists merely a material world. Because what exists in this world is only material things, so that further he says everything is from material things, and everything ends as material things. Marxism teaches that the history of human beings is merely the economical struggle of human beings in which the ruling classes exploit the proletariats. Reification is depersonalisation of the subject as a result of capitalist modes of production and the alienation of labour (Wolfreys et.al.,2006:86). From the definition, it can be discussed that there are two important things covering reification. First is depersonalization of the subject as a result of capitalist modes of production, and second is the alienation of labour. One other point that is stated by Held (1980:22) is that reification takes place in the form of a thing like relation among human beings.

This paper tries to find the reification aspects in the novel of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

## **B.Theory of Reification**

Reification is a term that is used in Marxism. It refers to depersonalisation of the subject as a result of capitalist modes of production and the alienation of labour (Wolfreys, et.al.,2006:86). David Held also states that reification involves a process whereby social phenomena take on the appearance of things. It arises from the productive process which reduces social relations themselves to thing- like relation ( the worker and his/her product to commodities (1980:22). From the definitions given above, it can be said that reification has three important things those are firstly, depersonalisation of the subject as a result of capitalist modes of production, secondly, alienation of the labor, thirdly, thing-like relation. When the process of reification occurs, someone is subjugated from his quality as a person into non-person or depersonalisation. This happens because the subject (the person) is radically integrated into the capitalist system in production

processes. As Lukacs (1967:89) quotes from Marx that:

"Through the subordination of man to the machine the situation arises in which men are effaced by their labour; in which the pendulum of the clock has become as accurate a measure of the relative activity of two workers as it is of the speed of two locomotives.... Time is everything, man is nothing; he is at the most the incarnation of time. Quality no longer matters. Quantity alone decides everything: hour for hour, day for day"

Alienation is also a part of Marxism idea. The term is expressed in Marxism that individuals are separated from their own selves and not in harmony with their selves, families, friends, and jobs (Sargent, 1986:112). The concept appears from the rise of property. The property is owned by a capitalist. Because of that he can sell his property anytime he wishes. His properties include things and human beings. Human beings are labors in the process of

production. As stated by Sargent (*ibid*) labors sell their strength, power, skills, and times, so that the capitalist can have them totally and because of that he can use them. This process leads a labor to an alienation which alienates him from himself, other people and job environment. As it is stated by Held (1980:22) that reification involves a process whereby social phenomena take on the appearance of things. It arises from the productive process which reduces social relations to thing-like relation. From the explanation given by Held, it can be said that reification has made the social interactions among human beings have been reduced into the functions of making other people seen as commodities. Someone is related to others when they need the functions of a thing-like relation. How he accelerates as a thing to fulfill his function as a means of production to satisfy the master he works for. Because of the thing-like relation, social life has destroyed man as man (Lukacs, 1967:139). It can be said that the first thing that someone must consider when he creates a social interaction is that how the partner he makes contact with has to function as

a thing not a man that can help him to achieve a capital benefit as a part of productive process.

### C. Research Method

A research is either qualitative, quantitative, or mixed (Creswell, 2003:18). This study is a qualitative research. The reason of applying qualitative research in this thesis is that qualitative research is descriptive. It is very useful because the data used in this study in written texts. In qualitative research, the data collected is in the form of words or pictures than numbers. This study uses the elements of reification, a part of Marxism as the object of the study. The elements of reification are applied in the novel entitled *Uncle Tom's Cabin* written by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

The data that emerge from a qualitative study are descriptive. That is, data are reported in words rather than in numbers (Creswell, 2003: 199). In this qualitative research, the data will be in the forms of phrases and sentences quoted from dialogues carried out by the characters in the intended literary work used as the object of this research.

### D. ANALYSIS

A Kentucky farmer, Arthur Shelby who is an actually good master falls into bankrupt. He has to sell his some of his slaves. These slaves, even though they are human beings, they can be sold and treated as commodities. As a slave who lives under a possession of other people, Uncle Tom is placed on a low level society. Uncle Tom experiences there aspects of reification as it is found in the novel.

The first if depersonalisation of the subjects as a result of capitalist modes of production. Uncle Tom is subjugated from his quality as a person into a non-person due to the exploitation of capitalist which is called as the process of depersonalisation. This happens because the subject (the person) is radically integrated into the capitalist system in production processes. Because he is subjugated, he cannot

have freedom anymore. The following quotation describes how Uncle Tom is subjugated into the capitalist system in production process:

Tom got in, and Haley, drawing out from under the wagon seat a heavy pair of shackles, made them fast around each ankle. (Stowe,1994:114).

The above quotation happens when Haley buys Uncle Tom. Haley sets a heavy pair of shackles on Uncle Tom's ankles so that Uncle Tom cannot run away from Haley. This action is a part of the exploitation of a human being. By wearing the chain on his ankles, Tom is not longer a human being actually. His existence as a human being is removed.

The process of neglecting the personalisation of a human being in a capitalist system is undeniable. Someone is placed in a position as a production means. The depersonalization process of Uncle Tom is closely related to the concept

of regarding Uncle Tom not as an individual but as a part of production means, which means a part of machines. By chaining Uncle Tom, Haley, a capitalist will sell Uncle Tom into a market so that somebody else can buy Uncle Tom and insert Uncle Tom to be a part of production machines in the cotton fields in Kentucky.

Even though the personality of Uncle Tom is well known for his good reputation, it does mean that a capitalist like Haley needs to loosen his cruel attitude to this pious Christian slave. Haley cannot believe Uncle Tom, he must be alert if sometime Uncle Tom escapes so that Haley needs to chain him since they go out from Mr. Shelby's house. He does not feel satisfied, he needs more things to control Uncle Tom's body. On the way to the slave market, Haley needs to stop for a while to buy handcuffs as an additional means

to control Uncle Tom. The following quotation describes the depersonalisation that is experienced again by Uncle Tom:

After they had ridden about a mile, Haley suddenly drew up at the door of a blacksmith's shop, when taking out with him a pair of handcuffs, he stepped into the shop, to have a little alteration in them (Stowe, 1994:115).

The above quotation describes the situation when Haley wants to control Uncle Tom entirely. Haley removes humanity of Uncle Tom by doing depersonalisation. A man must be treated well, but in the story it is described that Uncle Tom is chained on his ankles and then his hands as well. The action cannot be avoided for in the capitalism system a man is completely depersonalised. Haley has to chain Uncle Tom tightly without hesitation because he regards Uncle Tom not as a person

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The second is about the alienation of the labor. Uncle Tom also experiences this condition. The following quotation shows the condition:

Well," said the smith, feeling among his tools, "them plantations down thar, a

stranger, an't jest the place a  
Kentucky nigger wants to go  
to; they dies thar tol'able fast,  
don't they?"

(Stowe,1994:115).

The above quotation describes the harsh condition that is experienced by a labor, in this case a slave if he arrives in plantation in Kentucky. The labor's experience in a hard condition influences the spirit of working and makes him lose his consciousness as a human being. The hardship will make a labor feel frustrated because he cannot find a way to get away from such a condition. Moreover, if he knows what happens around him that many labors get killed fast, in this case is described through the Kentuckian plantations.

The hardship makes a labor in a condition that he has no way to get out from such a situation but only death. If a labor dies in a plantation, a place that Uncle Tom is going to join, it means that he has to live

alone. A labor lives alone because he is taken up by a master who can buy him from his previous master. The occurrence explains the process of separation of a slave from his family. A slave normally has a family as Uncle Tom himself does. Uncle Tom has a wife and children. Being taken by Haley and sold to other master, it means that Uncle Tom experiences alienation. He cannot resist and escape the condition of separation from his own family because the capitalists, in this case the masters and the slave trader trade him as a commodity.

Understanding this process of the separation of a slave from his family and the hardship in a plantation, it can be studied that a slave lives in a miserable condition that causes him to feel alienated. The condition that forces a labor to experience alienation is described in the following quotation:

So one should have thought, that witnessed the sunken and dejected expression on those dark faces; the wistful, patient weariness with which those sad eyes rested on object that passed them in their sad journey

Simon rode on, however, apparently well pleased, occasionally pulling away at a flask of spirit, which he kept in his pocket.

“I say, you!” he said, as he turned back and caught a glance at the dispirited faces behind him!”Strike up a song, boys,-come!”

The men looked at each other, and the ‘come’ was repeated, with a smart crack of the whip which the driver carried in his hands. Tom began a Methodist hymn,

“Jerusalem, my happy home!

Name ever dear to me!

When shall my sorrows have and end,

Thy joys when shall...”

“Shut up, you black cuss! roared Legree; “did ye think I wanted any o’ yer infernal old Methodism? I say, tune up, now, something songs, common among the slaves.

“Mas’r see’d me cotch a coon,

High boys, high!

He laughed to split,- d’ ye see the moon,

Ho! Ho! Ho! Boys, ho!

Ho! yo! Hi – e! oh!” (Stowe, 1994:381)

The above quotation describes the event when Simon Legree inspects his labors in the plantation. He finds the fact that his labors work without enthusiasm. The

labors work with the deep expression of sadness because they do not want to do the works under the exploitation of a capitalist like Haley. Moreover, they are worked as slaves which they do not have freedom, so that happiness cannot happen among them. Among one of the miserable labor is Uncle Tom. He wants to amuse himself and friends by singing a gospel, but his master prohibits him to do it. The master does not him to sing a religious song because this will incite the religious feeling in which the master will make them feel the experience as human beings. They are alienated from the idealization of human beings. They have to throw their own emotion away as human beings even only in ideas.

The third is thing-like relation. As a human being, Uncle Tom’s master, Mr.Shelby admires the piety of Tom, but as a man who

wants to end his debt, he knows that he has to sell Tom. Mr. Shelby asks Haley, the slave trader to redeem his debt by bartering with Tom, the pious black slave. The following quotation describes the situation:

“I am sorry to part with Tom, I must say. You ought to let him cover the whole balance of the debt; and you would, Haley, if you had any conscience.” (Stowe, 1994:10).

The above quotation describes the conversation between Mr. Shelby, Uncle Tom's master and Haley, a slave trader. Uncle Tom is traded as a commodity by the two people. The process of trading Uncle Tom as a compensation of the debt that Mr. Shelby has is a part of reification. When a process of reification takes place, a human being is changed into a thing. This process of changing someone into a thing happens because people have relation with others as a thing like relation. From the quotation above it can be learnt that even though Mr.

Shelby has known well the personality of Uncle Tom as a man, he cannot quit the situation in which he has to reduce the status of Uncle Tom as a man into a thing.

Mr. Shelby himself knows that he cannot offer more things to sell. Therefore, his slaves in which Uncle Tom is one of the slaves have to be sold. The following quotation supports the statements:

“Hum!-none that I could spare; to tell the truth, it's only hard necessity makes me willing to sell at all. I do not like parting with my hands, that's a fact.”(Stowe,1994:11).

From the above quotation, it can be learnt that Mr. Shelby knows that he comes to a condition that he has to sell his slaves, including Uncle Tom because he does not nothing more to sell. However, in this position he has exploited human beings as things that he can trade. Therefore it can be learnt that he has made Uncle Tom a thing rather than a human being.

The process of selling Uncle Tom is described in the following quotation:

The trader and Mr. Shelby were seated together in the dining room after-named, at a table covered with papers and writing utensils.

Mr. Shelby was busy in counting some bundles of bills, which, as they were counted, he pushed over to the trader, who counted them likewise.

“All fair,” said the trader;”and now for signing these yer.”

Mr. Shelby hastily drew the bills of sale towards him, and signed them, like a man that hurries over some disagreeable business, and then pushed the over with money (Stowe,1994:41).

The above quotation describes the occurrence when Mr. Shelby sells Uncle Tom to Haley, the slave trader. Uncle Tom is traded because he is a commodity. As a commodity, he is not regarded fully as a human being who has freedom and dignity. In the sight of the capitalists, like Mr. Shelby and Haley, slaves mean commodities.

Because of that reason, it can be studied that the two capitalists

treat Uncle Tom as a thing, like a cotton field, a horse, etc., that can be traded.

## E. Conclusion

This research finds that Uncle Tom in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* experiences reification. Uncle Tom's experiences of reification. The experiences are found in the forms of depersonalization, alienation of labor and thing-like relation. This research suggests that to build a sincere human relation, the relation can be achieved when human beings starts to understand that all human beings have goodness and the good value of human beings must be developed maximally, so that the exploitative relation among human beings can be minimized.

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