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Act of Resistance against Government Policies in Slavery as Reflected in Uncle Tom's Cabin

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Abstract

The aims of this research were to find the implementation of government policies toward the African-American slaves in America and act of resistance against slavery system as reflected in the novel Uncle Tom's Cabin. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method by applying sociological approach in analyzing Uncle Tom's Cabin with reference to Wellek and Warren on the relationship between literary work and social context in which it was written. Data sources are primary and supporting data. The primary data are taken from Uncle Tom's Cabin, and supporting data are taken from the books, journals, articles, and some sources from internet. In this novel, the researcher found that; 1) Government policies toward the African-American slaves reflected in Uncle Tom's Cabin are Slave Codes 1705 and Fugitive Slave Act 1850 2) the act of resistance by the slaves against slavery system reflected in this novel is passive resistance. Passive resistences are shown by the characters of the slave such as runaway, tell a lie, and protesting the authority of their owner.

Key words: *Resistance, Slavery, Uncle Tom's Cabin.*

1. Introduction

Slavery is an existing social problem which is against human right. It uses human as object of exploitation, which is one of the worst conditions that have existed throughout the history of human beings. The system on slavery allows people to enslave the other people. Slavery makes slaves receive a lot of anger, resentment and pain throughout their life, and it is not only affected to the slave himself, but also the slave's family. Slavery in its application not only uses human as an object of exploitation, but it also develops as a partial system that support the slaveholders as the practitioner of this system. Those conditions can make several problems rising among the slaves such as war and resistance. According to Horsley resistance can be appeared and carried out by individuals, family and people in society who feel oppressed, frustrated, and presence of injustice situation (Horsley, 2004) Human discrimination is one thing that makes people doing the act of resistance for example discrimination or violence of ideology, race, and skin.

In this research, the researcher chooses an American novel "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*" by Harriet Beecher Stowe that published in 1852, because the novel brings out the issue about slavery in North and South colonies of America. The practice of slavery in the South is very different from the North. In the south, slaves were treated with brutal, inhumane, even became an object of trading by their master. According to the preface of this novel, Stowe explores the idea of slavery because of her own experiences in order to protest the

Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 (Stowe, 1878). Fugitive Slave Act is a law to forbid anyone in the United States to help a runaway slave from South Colonies and threatened the peace of free slaves and free blacks who thought they were runaways (Mecklin, 1917).

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the term resistance refers to the slave actions against the system of slavery by their masters. Resistance in this novel cannot be separated from the main character. His story had a big impact to the readers, A black man who is very religious, has a family, obedient and even willing to be a debt payment tool is sold by his kind master, treated like a property after get a new master, and even dead when trying to help some slaves to runaway. It proves that slavery was a brutal system for human, even for the good master who treat his slave in a good way. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* then becomes the most successful abolitionist media and antislavery propoganda at the time. This novel increases anti-slavery sentiment in the North, so the number of the abolitionist has got more and more.

Injustice, mistreatments and government policies in favor of slavery by the Southern Colonies in this novel made the writer interest in raising the issue of resistance by the slaves. After reading the novel, the writer found how struggle of the African-American slaves to defend against the injustice and violence from their master as human being. Slaves were punished by whipping, shackling, hanging, beating, burning, mutilation, branding or imprisonment. Slave masters even beat pregnant women. The mistreatment of slaves frequently included rape and sexual abuse of women. Some slaves died while trying to resist sexual attacks. According to the novel, sexual abuse of slaves was partially rooted in Southern Colonies of America as a culture and it views women of any race as property.

Even though slavery in America formally ended by the ratification of the Amandement XIII in December 6, 1865 but in reality, there are still many implementations about slavery, not only in America but also around the world. Furthermore, the researcher will analyze the actions of resistance by slave, under the title "Act of *Resistance against Government policies in Slavery as reflected in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel Uncle Tom's Cabin* by" it is due to the fact that there are still many systems in slavery that should be abolished.

2. Method

The writer used descriptive qualitative method. Descriptive qualitative method presents the object analysis descriptively without using scores or quantitative category (Endaswara, 2003). Descriptive method is used to explain the whole phenomenon of the object study. In this research, this method is used to elaborate the implementation of government's policy and acts of resistance by the slaves in Uncle Tom's Cabin.

In this research, the researcher used some aspects of sociological approaches. It is used to know problems related to social life. In Wellek and Warren's book *Theory of Literature* they proposed three points of sociological approaches, they are the sociology of the writer, the social contents of the works themselves, and the influences of literature on society (Wellek and Warren, 1956). Literature as an interpretation of man's mind using language as its medium refers to works of the creative imagination. In this case, Harriet Beecher Stowe is an author in the late eighteenth century that described the condition of society around her into a literary work, which is at that time slavery is a central issue in the society

In collecting the data the writer used library research method. It involves several steps. First, reading the text repeatedly and followed by listing which means making the

list of statements that related to the title of this research. Second, collecting relevant references which are considered related to this research. Last, by computing data and reporting them.

3. Result

3.1 Findings

In this research, the act of resistance by the slave focuses on the action of characters against the government policies about slavery, the policies are Slave Codes 1705 and Fugitive Slave Act 1850. There are two parts of analysis in this part. The first part, analysis about the implementation of government's policy toward the African-American slaves in America as reflected in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and the second part, about the act of resistance against slavery system as revealed in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

3.1.1 Implementation of Slave Codes 1705

The Slave Codes is a set of laws made by the Colony of Virginia to control activities related to interactions between slaves and citizens. This law is the first law that classified the condition of people who are consider as a slave. In the Slave Codes 1705 Chapter VII part I, the law states that All Negros, Mulatto, and Indian women are not being free (Hening, 1823). According to the implementation of this law, Harriet Beecher Stowe in her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* also applies the same classification through the slave characters.

Eliza had been brought up by her mistress, from girlhood, as a petted and indulged favorite. The traveler in the south must often have remarked that peculiar air of refinement, that softness of voice and manner, which seems in many cases to be a particular gift to the quadroon and mulatto women. (Stowe, 1878)

The citation above shows the implementation of the laws in Slave Codes 1705 particularly in the Chapter VII part I that a mulatto woman is supposed to be not being free. As mulatto women, Eliza is belonging to someone who has been brought her since she was a child, it means Eliza is owned by her master, which also explains her status as a slave woman.

In the Chapter XXII of Slave Codes 1705, the law mentions that all slaves is considers as property or personal belonging of their master (Hening, 1823). This law provides opportunity for the slave owners to mistreat their slaves, because, through this law, slaves can be treated in any conditions without considers slave's right as human beings.

Shelby : Well, then, Haley, how will you trade?

Haley : Well, haven't you a boy or a gal that you could throw in with Tom?

Shelby : Hum! None that I could well spare; to tell the truth, it's only hard necessity make me willing to sell at all. I don't like parting with any of my hands, that's a fact. (Stowe, 1878: 4)

As it is shown in conversation above, Mr. Shelby uses his slave as a tool of trading in his business. Mr. Shelby offers Tom in his trading, while Mr. Haley thinks it is not enough to fulfill their business agreement with just one slave, so, he asks for more slaves. The conversation between Mr. Shelby and Mr. Haley illustrates the practice of slavery which slave is used as commodity in a business transaction.

The practice of slave trade is continued by Mr. Haley. He is a slave trader from Virginia. Tom is sold by Haley to Augustine St. Clare, an owner of estate in New Orleans. Later, Augustine dies by accident in a bar, which makes his wife Marie has a right to sell Tom.

*"Yes. St. Clare's brother has written, and he and the lawyer think that the servants and furniture had better be put up at auction, and the place left with our lawyer."
(Stowe, 1878)*

Not only for being sold, from Marie's statement above, it is known that Tom is put in the slave's auction together with her property, it clearly portrays Marie's opinion that slave is equaled with property. Property in the real life is an inanimate object, which values by its functions. Meanwhile, equating slaves and property means slave is inanimate object that can be mistreated by their master.

In chapter XLIX part VI, the rule explained about verification of slave status as a free man. Actually, Slave Codes never provides any benefit for slaves. Slave's liberty must be proved by legal document from the government which causes many African-American descents in America still in the circle of slavery.

Augustine : "Whew! Cousin, what will the Abolition Society think? They'll have a day of fasting appointed for this backsliding, if you become a slaveholder!"

*Ophelia : "O, nonsense! I want her mine, that I may have a right to take her to the free States, and give her liberty... if you really are willing I should have her, I want you to give me a deed of gift, or some legal paper."
(Stowe, 1878)*

Conversation above implies that slave can be removed from slavery by the permission of his owner and it requires a formal paper or recognition from the government. Formal requirement is needed to qualify the status of slave as a free man as it is also shown in the chapter XXVIII;

He read his little Eva's Bible seriously and honestly... and one thing he did, soon after his return to New Orleans, and that was to commence the legal steps necessary to Tom's emancipation, which was to be perfected as soon as he could get through the necessary formalities. (Stowe, 1878)

Based on Slave Codes 1705 chapter XLIX part VI, slave who is promised a liberty by his master without government's recognition will not be counted as a free man.

Slave Codes 1705 also provides a law to punish a disobedient slave. In the Chapter XLIX part XVI the law on Slave Codes states that slaves who disobey their master will be punished with thirty nine lashes (Hening, 1823). The practice of this mistreatment is clearly shown when Marie sends her slaves to receive a punishment. It is described on conversation below;

Slave : "Do, do go to Miss Marie for me! do plead for me! She's goin' to send me out to be whipped look there!" And she handed to Miss Ophelia a paper. It was an order, written in Marie's delicate Italian hand, to the master of a whipping establishment to give the bearer fifteen lashes.

Ophelia : "What have you been doing?"

Slave :*"You know, Miss Feely, I've got such a bad temper; it's very bad of me. I was trying on Miss Marie's dress, and she slapped my face..." (Stowe, 1878)*

The legal policy about punishment for disobedient slave causes whipped as a common punishment in the South colonies. As it is shown from the quotation above, Marie sends her slave to receive fifteen lashes on the whipping-post in the New Orleans. This practice shows the cruelty on slavery that supported by the government at the time. Using a whip to punish slave becomes a habitual among the slaveholders. Impact, the application of this law becomes a form of physical mistreatment toward the African-American slaves.

Government's policy on slave codes not only validates whipping as punishment for slaves, but in part XXXIV Slave Codes 1705 also provides legal protection for all slaveholders that incidentally cause a slave dies. it can be seen from conversation below;

Ophelia : *What now? Why, those folks have whipped Prue to death...Haven't you got any selectmen, or anybody, to interfere and look after such matters?*

Augustine : *It's commonly supposed that the property interest is a sufficient guard in these cases...It seems the poor creature was a thief and a drunkard; and so there won't be much hope to get up sympathy for her. (Stowe, 1878)*

Prue is one of the victims of cruel master who is locked in cellar and punished until she is dead. Prue's master kills her because of her habitual drunkenness, she becomes a drunker because two of her children are sold and her one remaining child dies of neglect and hunger when she is not permitted by her master to take care for him. As it is implied on Augustine's statement above, the master's justification becomes his power to avoid any criminal's accusation in society, which also implies the fact that slaves live without any protection from the government for their master's cruelty.

3.1.2 Implementation of Fugitive Slave Act 1850

Fugitive slave acts is firstly introduced in 1793 and modified in 1850 as the most controversial part of the Compromise 1850 United State. It is made to empower slaveholder's property and provided them with legal weapons to capture slaves who had escaped to the Free Northern States. The implementation of this law can be seen when fugitive slave asking for help to Mr. and Mrs. Bird;

But, Mary, just listen to me. Your feelings a real quite right, dear, and interesting, and I love you for them; but, then, dear, we mustn't suffer our feelings to run away with our judgment; you must consider it's a matter of private feeling, there are great public interests involved, there is such a state of public agitation rising, that we must put aside our private feelings." (Stowe, 1878)

Mr. Bird is a senator in Ohio that votes for the legalization of Fugitive Slave Act 1850. From his statement above, he implies his agreement to run this law by refuses to help fugitive slaves. Mr. Bird believes helping a runaway slave is criminal action and should be implemented above his personal feeling as human beings.

In the section 7, Fugitive slave act 1850 gives a sanction for those who help a runaway slave with one thousand dollars, and imprisonment for six months, and for the

slaves, they will be punished with the same law and the existing law for them (Yale, 2008). This law clearly supports the cruelty on slavery which the slaveholder has a power to punish everyone who helps a runaway slave. It can be seen from the quotation below;

Legree : "I have done just that thing, Tom, unless you'll tell me what you know about these yer gal. D'ye hear? Speak" stamping, with a roar like that of an incensed lion.

Tom : "I han't got nothing to tell, Mas'r. (Stowe, 1878)

Tom is suspected as criminal after helping two girls running away from Legree's plantation. It is also shown that Tom is being mistreated brutally by his master because he refuses to reveal the runaway slaves. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 is very detrimental law for the African-American slaves in the United States. It expressly prohibits a slave running away from his master, even if he in the worst condition.

3.1.3 Act of Resistance against Government Policies on Slavery

The impact of government's policy toward the African-American slaves in America is an action of resistance by the slaves. It is occurred to fight the injustice and cruelty on slavery system that applied in America, particularly in the South Colonies. In Uncle Tom's Cabin the resistance of the slaves is classified as a form of passive resistance to slavery. The concept of passive resistance describes the series of acts which slaves expressed their unhappiness with and held back their incorporation in the system in a very elementary or primary way. This action can be shown on some characters, they are;

3.1.3.1 Eliza

Eliza's passive resistance is in the form of running away. She knows that her master Mr. Shelby agrees to sell her only child Harry to a slave trader.

Eliza : "I'm running away Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe carrying off my child, Master sold him!"

Tom : "Sold him?" echoed both, lifting up their hands in dismay.

Eliza : "Yes, sold him! I crept into the closet by Mistress' door tonight, and I heard Master tell Missis that he had sold my Harry, and you, Uncle Tom, both, to a trader; and that he was going off this morning on his horse, and that the man was to take possession today. (Stowe, 1878)

Eliza's decision to leave Mr. Shelby's plantation is influenced by her experience for losing two of her babies. Fears, pressures, and frustrations lead Eliza to resist her master by refuses to give her son and running away to Canada. In this case, Eliza breaks the rules on slave codes and also has to deal with the Fugitive Slave Act for her action.

3.1.3.2 George

As talented slave, George realizes that his efforts to survive will be useless if he still belongs to Mr. Harris. George decides to leave Mr. Harris's plantation and plans a way for running away to Canada. His decision is influenced by his frustration and cruelty of his master

"Well, then, Eliza, hear my plan. Mas'r took it into his head to send me right by here, with a note to Mr. Symmes that lives a mile past. I believe he expected I should come here to tell you what I have...I've got some preparations made, and

there are those that will help me; and, in the course of a week or so, I shall be among the missing, some day." (Stowe, 1878)

3.1.3.3 Uncle Tom

Tom's passive resistance is described when Legree declares his ownership to own Tom's soul and body, bravely, Tom refuses to acknowledge Legree's statement, as it is shown in conversation below;

Legree :...Here, you rascal, you make believe to be so pious, didn't you never hear, out of yer Bible, 'Servants, obey yer masters'? An't I yer master? Didn't I pay down twelve hundred dollars, cash, for all there is inside yer old cussed black shell? An't yer mine, now, body and soul?"

Tom : "No! no! no! my soul an't yours, Mas'r! You haven't bought it, ye can't buy it! It's been bought and paid for, by one that is able to keep it; no matter, no matter, you can't harm me!" (Stowe, 1878)

As the slave, the only hope for Tom is belief to his God. He faces his cruel master and does not give up with his faith in God, when Legree acknowledges his soul, Tom clearly insists that his soul belongs to him. It also known that Tom helps many slaves running away without considering the risks and consequences for himself.

3.1.3.4 Cassy and Emmeline

Cassy and Emmeline are owned by a cruel master Simon Legree. They are used as Legree's women to satisfy his desire. Both Cassy and Emmeline cannot receive any longer mistreatments in Legree's plantation.

Come!" said she, in a whisper, fixing her black eyes on him. "Come along! He's asleep sound. I put enough into his brandy to keep him so. I wish I'd had more, I shouldn't have wanted you. But come, the back door is unlocked; there's an axe there, I put it there, his room door is open; I'll show you the way.(Stowe: 1878)

From citation above it known that Cassy put some sleeping pills to Legree's drink. This action is categorized as passive resistance because Cassy poisoning his master and then plans an action of running away. Poisoning the slave's master can be categorized as active resistance if the action is put a dangerous pill to kill the slave's master. But, in her action, Cassy uses a sleeping pill to make her way for running away.

3.2. Discussion

This research is a research that focuses on the action of resistance by the slaves as the impact of the slavery system toward the African-American slaves in the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The slavery system focuses on government policies that involve the legality of the Slave Codes 1705 and the Fugitive Slave Act 1850 in the South Colonies of America and how the efforts of the slaves to depend their right as human.

The implementations of Slave Codes and Fugitive Slave Act as the parts of Government Policies cause the life of slave in a great suffering. Slave Codes is created to define the legal status of African-American slaves. In this novel, it is the form of government's partiality toward the slaveholders, particularly in the South colonies, and it is indicating that this law makes it impossible for even the kind masters to make slavery humane. While, Fugitive Slave Act 1850 not only provides a punishment for a runaway slave, but also for those who help the runaway slave. This condition prove that there is a

problem in society. Laws are basically made to ensure security and protection of all people regardless of their position, race, or their skin.

Resistance by the slaves in this novel are caused by the slave's fear, frustration, and pressure for being an object of the law. To resist the implementation of government policies about slavery, the researcher found that Stowe uses passive resistance to show the actions of some characters to fight their masters. The first action is shown by the character of George who stand to protest his master to rescue his family, and Cassy who put some sleeping pills to her master to run away because of her master brutality and mistreatment. Some characters also use passive resistance against the authority of their master such as runaway, tell a lie, and refusing to comply with laws or orders by their master or government. Passive resistance is also done by the White as the superior group or the Owner of the slaves. But, it is categorized as an action of abolitionist. Abolitionist is a person who supported the abolition of slavery in the United State their movement is aimed to gain emancipation for all the slaves, the end of racial discrimination, segregation, cruelty and injustice for all human in the world.

From this novel, it can be said that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a form of abolitionist's movement by Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1850 in a form of literary work, it is due to the ratification of Fugitive Slave Act 1850 as part of the United State Constitution.

4. Conclusion

Based on the result, the writer concludes that in the novel *Uncle Tom' Cabin* government policies toward the African-American slaves involve the legality of the Slave Codes 1705 and Fugitive Slave Act 1850. These laws are very detrimental to the slave characters and it only provides advantage for the slaveholders as the practitioner of this system. Slave Codes are a basic law to classify the status of the slaves and Fugitive Slave Act is a law to forbid anyone in the United States to help a runaway slave and threatened the peace of free slaves and free blacks who thought they were runaways

As the impact of government policies that considers slaves as property for their owner, slave's resistance cannot be avoided. In this novel, the researcher finds that Stowe uses passive resistance to describe the effort of slaves in order to fight the system on slavery. Passive resistance is an action of non violent using by the slave that include runaway, tell a lie, and refusing to comply with laws or orders issued by the master or government.

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