



**CAPITALISM IN AMERICAN SOCIETY AS REPRESENTED IN UPTON
SINCLAIR'S *THE JUNGLE***

JOURNAL THESIS

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Capitalism in American Society as Represented in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, there is a phenomena about capitalism which becomes the main system in the world. Although capitalism becomes the main system in the world, there are some criticisms to capitalism. In one viewpoint, capitalism gives much wealth to capitalist class. On the other hand, capitalism becomes the main problem that gives miserable life to working class who is oftenly exploited by capitalist class in order to get profit, as represented in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*.

In this thesis, the writer is interested to analyse how capitalism influences the miserable life of working class. The writer analyses a novel entitled *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair as the object of research. The focus of this thesis is how capitalism becomes the main factor which causes the miserable life of working class.

The main purpose of this thesis writing is to show the criticism to capitalism that gives miserable life to working class as represented in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. In analysing the data, the writer uses library research method. In analysing intrinsic aspects of the novel, the writer uses some theories about theme, setting, character, and plot. While in analysing the extrinsic aspects of the novel, the writer uses some theories about capitalism, Marxist Literary Criticism, and alienation.

The result of the research shows that there are a lot of criticisms to capitalism because capitalism becomes the main factor that gives miserable life to working class. In *The Jungle*, capitalism gives influence to social aspects of human life that lead the miserable life of Jurgis and his family as the representation of working class. Capitalists class also exploits and treats working class badly. Moreover, there is a phenomena about alienation which estranges Jurgis and his family from humanitarian values as the effect of capitalism. Based on the result of the research, it can be concluded that capitalism fails in giving prosperity to working class, even capitalism becomes the main factor that gives miserable life to working class.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, capitalism is a phenomenon which gives a lot of influence for human life and world's history. It begins at the end of feudal era and arises as a dominant ideology which is used by almost all countries in the world. The word "Capitalism" is derived from the word "capital", so the economic activity depends on the capital of an individual or a group.

Capitalism grows continuously and becomes the dominant economical system which is used by majority countries in the world. Although capitalism becomes the strongest ideology that is used by almost all countries in the world, there are a lot of criticisms to capitalism. A lot of critics state that the negative point of capitalism is its high implication to divide society into two classes, capitalist class and working class, with strong imbalance in their economic status. Capitalist class always gets a lot of profit, while the

working class is always being exploited by capitalist class and only gets small wages.

Capitalism phenomena is also reflected in some literary texts. One of them is a novel written by Upton Sinclair entitled *The Jungle*. Upton Sinclair, the author of the novel, is a journalist who is sympathetic to the life of workers and supports Marx's idea. He writes a lot of novels and short stories specialize in socialism theme. He is also active in politics by joining the Socialist Party.

There are a lot of criticisms to capitalism because it fails in giving prosperity to all people. Capitalism only gives prosperity to capitalist class and fails to give prosperity to working class in America as represented in *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair. The exploitation, corruption, and bad treatment as the effect of capitalism makes the working class suffers.

1.1 Research Problem:

1. How is the social condition in Packingtown, as the effect of capitalism, which makes the life of working class suffer in *The Jungle*?
2. How capitalism treats and exploits working class in Packingtown which makes the life of working class suffer in *The Jungle*?
3. How is the alienation towards working class as the effect of capitalism as represented in *The Jungle*?

1.2 Objective of the Study:

1. To criticize the social condition in Packingtown as the effect of capitalism as represented in *The Jungle*.
2. To criticize the way capitalism treats and exploits working class as represented in *The Jungle*.
3. To criticize the alienation towards working class as the effect of capitalism as represented in *The Jungle*

1.3 Research Methods:

Based on the background of the research, the writer uses Marxist Literary Criticism in analyzing *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair. Marxist Literary Criticism is an approach to analyze the extrinsic aspect of a literary works based on Marxism theory. Bresser explains about Marxist Literary Criticism in the quotation below:

Utilizing Marx's philosophical assumptions, twentieth-century critics developed a variety of Marxist approaches to textual analysis that focus on the study of the relationship between a text and the society that reads it. At the core of all these diverse approaches are Marx and his philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality itself (Bresser, 2003: 163).

In doing this research, the writer also uses library research method in order to complete some objects of the research. According to Semi, the library research method is:

Library research is a research which is done in the researcher's room or in a library, where the researcher acquires data and information

about the object of research from books or audiovisual sources (Semi, 1993: 8).

The writer collects some references from various sources like book as the main source, articles, journals, and electronic source such as internet as supporting sources. After the data is collected, the writer selects some references which support the research. The selection is needed in order to help the writer in choosing the material which is appropriate with the research and getting the best result.

2. Author's Biography and Novel Summary

2.1 Author's Biography

In "Upton Sinclair Biography", it was described that Upton Sinclair was born on September 20, 1878 in Baltimore, Maryland. He was the only child of Upton Beall Sinclair and Priscilla Harden. His father was a wine, men's clothing, and hats salesman. In his childhood, the Sinclair family lived in poor condition. Although he lived in poor condition, Sinclair showed that he had high interest in science and knowledge.

In 1906 Sinclair published *The Jungle*, a novel which told the story of unfair labor practices and unhealthy situation in a meat-packing factory in Chicago. Before writing *The Jungle*, Sinclair observed for seven weeks into the meat-packing factories. The novel was about a Lithuanian immigrant named Jurgis Rudkus, who worked in a meat-packing factory in Packingtown, and his family. The novel explored how the working class like Jurgis and his family were mistreated by capitalist class.

In 1933, Sinclair became a candidate for Governor of California from the Socialist Party. He and his team designed a program named "End Poverty in California". His programs that were inspired from socialism idea made him became a popular candidate in the election nomination. Many people believed that he would win the election. However, various kinds of black campaigns, negative stigma about the socialist, and the influence of much money of his enemy made him defeated in election of Governor of California.

Sinclair died on 25 November 1968 after had published more than ninety books. Sinclair devoted his writing career to documenting and criticizing the social, political, and economic conditions in the United States. He wrote in both fiction such as novel and short story, and in non-fiction such as articles in newspaper. He exposed his view of the injustice of capitalism and its impact such as the exploitation of workers and social poverty.

From a lot of books and papers he had written, he had gained at least one million dollars, mostly donated to the development of the Socialist Party and reform movements. At the end of his life, Sinclair had been remembered as the author of the socialists who dared to voice his opinions through writing and literature.

2.2 Novel Summary

Jurgis Rudkus and his family migrated from Lithuania to Chicago with the purpose of seeking a better life. They came to a small area in Chicago called Packingtown. Packingtown was the center of immigrant residence from Lithuania and it was well-known as a center of the meat-packing industry. Their high spirit for a better life made them optimistic to reach success in America.

At the beginning of their arrival in America, Jurgis and Ona hold a wedding party at a bar in Packingtown. In keeping with tradition they knew in Lithuania, they invited a lot of people to join the party. As they knew in Lithuania, people who came to the party would leave some money to help the host of conducting party. However, after the party finished, they realized that no one left money for the party. They should pay more than a hundred dollars to the owner of the bar. Jurgis as the head of the family was determined to work hard to pay that debt and fulfill the family needs. Jurgis who was young and strong could find a job quickly.

The increasing cost of living and their obligation to pay the debt makes Ona (Jurgis' wife), Marija (Ona's sister), Dede Antanas (Jurgis' father), and Stanislovas (Ona's brother who was very young) were forced to find a job. However, searching for a job in

Packingtown was full of intrigue and corruption, especially for immigrants. For example, Dede Antanas found a job only after agreeing to pay a third of his salary to the agent who gave him the job.

In Packingtown, the factory did not provide good protection to worker who got an accident. Jurgis sprained his ankle and was unable to work anymore so he should rest for three months. The factory still cut Jurgis' wages and did not give Jurgis some money for his treatment. After Jurgis was recovered from his injury, he wanted to work again. However, the factory refused to give his job back. After a long period out of work, Jurgis worked again at a fertilizer plant. On the other hand, the situation in the family was getting worse when Kristoforas, the youngest son of Teta Elzbieta (Ona's mother), died of food poisoning.

One night, Ona did not come home after work. Jurgis found that Phil Connor (Ona's boss) had raped Ona. Jurgis attacked Connor and finally Jurgis was arrested by the police. After an unfair trial, Jurgis was sentenced to one month imprisonment. The condition of the family would get worse because Jurgis was no longer be able to give money.

After the death of Ona, Jurgis felt very depressed. However, Teta Elzbieta convinced Jurgis to stay motivated because he has to keep his small children alive. Once again, Jurgis looked for a job and found a job at the steel mill. He determined to dedicate his life to his small children. However, he was frustrated again when he knew that his children died in a pathetic condition. In desperation, Jurgis left his family and went to the countryside as a tramp.

One night, when his spirit was lost due to poverty and misery, Jurgis attended socialist political free speech. Jurgis listened to speech of an orator seriously. Inspired by these speeches, Jurgis joined the socialist party. He got a job as a hotel doorman which was managed by a socialist party. His life was better now. Finally, he became more active in the party and could meet his family in fairly good condition.

3. Literary Review

3.1 Intrinsic Aspects

3.1.1 Theme

According to Perrine, “the theme of a piece of fiction is its controlling idea or its central insight (1988: 90)”. The theme is a unifying generalization about a life in a story described in a novel. In order to derive the theme of a story, the reader should know the central purpose of theme: whether what view of life it supports or what insight into life it reveals (1988: 90).

3.1.2 Setting

According to Barnet, “setting is the time and place of a story, play, or poem. The setting of a story - not only the physical locale but also the time of day or year or century – may or may not be symbolic (1989: 1224)”. While Meyer states that, “setting is the context in which the action of a story occurs (1990: 107)”.

3.1.3 Character

According to Barnet, definition of a character is “a figure in a literary work or the personality of such a figure (1989: 37)”. According to Perrine, character has a close relation with plot. “Plot was considered apart from character, as if the two were separable. Actually, like the ends of a seesaw, the two are one substance; there can be no movement at one end without movement at the other (1988: 65)”.

3.1.4 Plot

According to Perrine, definition of plot is “the sequence of incidents or events of which a story is composed (1988: 41)”. Plot describes the structure of actions of a story, as these are ordered and rendered toward achieving particular emotional and artistic effects (1988: 41).

According to Perrine, there is a most familiar type of the development of plot that connect the story: exposition, raising action, climax, falling action, and resolution (1988: 48).

3.2 Extrinsic Aspects

3.2.1 Capitalism

According to *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, capitalism is “an economic system in which a country’s trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state (1995: 165)”. An individual right is the base of capitalism,

where individual can do economic activity without interference.

3.2.2 Marxist Literary Criticism

Marxism Ideology is a unifying idea by German philosopher, Karl Heinrich Marx, which covers some aspects of human life such as politics, economy, society, culture, even literature. Its main concern is about the difference between working class/proletariat and capitalist class/bourgeoisie also the clash of them. Bresser (2003: 162) states that:

Marxism had already flourished in the nineteenth century as a pragmatic view of history that offered the working classes of society an opportunity to change their world and their lives. By providing both a philosophical system and a plan of action to initiate change in society, Marxism offered to humanity a social, political, economic, and cultural understanding of the nature of reality, society, and the individual, not a literary theory (Bresser, 2003: 162).

According to Bresser, Marxism does not begin as an alternative, theoretical approach to literary analysis until twentieth-century. In twentieth century, there are some writers and critics who have developed a variety of Marxist approaches to textual analysis that focus on the study of the relationship between a text and the society that read it (2003: 163).

3.2.3 Alienation

Alienation is a concept developed in Marxism as a part of criticism to capitalism. According to *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, alienation is a condition of “feeling different from others and not part of a group (1995: 28)”. In www.marxist.org, it is stated that “alienation is the process whereby people become foreign to the world they are living in”.

4. Analysis

4.1 Intrinsic Aspects

4.1.1 Theme of *The Jungle*

The theme of *The Jungle* is about the failure of capitalism in giving prosperous life to working class. Capitalism, which becomes the main ideology and economic system in the world that used by almost all countries,

promises a prosperous life with much wealth to everyone. That condition attracts Jurgis and his family to go to Packingtown in order to get prosperous life. However, in Packingtown, capitalism often only gives prosperity to capitalist class and fails in giving prosperity to working class.

4.1.2 Setting of *The Jungle*

The setting of place of *The Jungle* is Packingtown. Packingtown is a city in Chicago which becomes the center of Lithuanian immigrants like Jurgis and his family. Packingtown is also the center of meatpacking industry in America.

The setting of time of *The Jungle* is about early 1900s when there is a conflict and contradiction in the world between capitalism and socialism. Sinclair illustrates that Packingtown, which is located in United States of America, is dominated with capitalism as its main system although there is also a small group of people in Packingtown who join Socialist Party and shows their support to Socialism.

The social setting of *The Jungle* is a place dominated by capitalist class and the working class becomes marginal group of people in economic status which gives impact to other aspects of human life such as politics, law, and culture. For capitalist class, Packingtown is a city where they can get prosperity, not only in economic status but also in other aspects of human life such as politics, law, and culture. On the other hand, for working class, Packingtown is a city which is full of misery where they are very poor in economic condition and have weak power in politics, law, culture, and social condition.

4.1.3 Characters in *The Jungle*

4.1.3.1 Jurgis Rudkus

Jurgis Rudkus is a Lithuanian immigrant who comes to America with his family in order to get a prosperous life. He is a responsible man who has a strong commitment that he will work hard in order to earn much money for his family. "He answers her again: "Leave it to me; leave it to me. I will earn more money. I will work harder." (Sinclair, 1906: 30).

4.1.3.2 Ona Lukoszaite

Ona Lukoszaite is Jurgis' wife. She is also an immigrant from Lithuania who comes

to America with her family. Similar with Jurgis, Ona also has high spirit to survive in America. She also has commitment to work to help Jurgis earns money. However, her spirit is destroyed when capitalism forces her to work hard when she should takes care her baby.

4.1.3.3 Mike Scully

Mike Scully is a corrupt businessman and politician which becomes the representation of capitalist class. He owns a lot of factories in Packingtown. He also becomes the leader of the ruling party in Packingtown. His position makes him dominates all aspects of human life such as economy, politics, law, and social status.

4.1.4 Plot of *The Jungle*

In exposition, it is illustrated that Jurgis and his family come to Packingtown from Lithuania to get better life. When they arrive in Packingtown, they are amazed with the modernity in that city. They are optimistic that if they work hard, they will get prosperity.

In raising action, it is illustrated that after they get some job, they realized that they have some trouble with the job, such as bad working condition, exploitation, small wages, etc

In climax, it is illustrated the frustrated condition of Jurgis and his family. They get financial crisis so they cannot take care all member of the family well. Some of them die in miserable condition such as Jurgis' father, Jurgis' son, Ona's sister, and Ona.

In falling action, it is illustrated that Jurgis is frustrated with the miserable condition of his family after the death of his son and his wife.

In resolution, it is illustrated that Jurgis joins to the Socialist Party as his struggle to fight against capitalism. He becomes an important member to the party because he often give some brilliant idea to fight against capitalism related to his experience.

4.2 Extrinsic Aspects

4.2.1 Social Condition in Packingtown

4.2.1.1 The Failure of Capitalism in Giving Prosperity to Working Class

Jurgis lives with terrible economic condition and financial crisis. Although he

works hard for all day, he only gets small wages to fulfill his need. Capitalism only gives much financial profit for capitalist class and makes working class like Jurgis becomes wages slavery.

Because of their poor economic condition, Jurgis and the family are still trapped in three basic economic problems for human: food, clothes, and house. They cannot think to other aspect of life such as education for their children or health care for the family. As a consequence, they are not smart enough to know how to survive in capitalist system in Packingtown. In this case, capitalism shows its dark side for humanity that it only makes the working class become a wages slave and makes the life of Jurgis' family becomes uneasy

4.2.1.2 Corrupt Relationship between Capitalist and Politician

Mike Scully who has big power over the mayor of the city is easily gets benefit for his business or individual benefit. Because of his power, he can manipulates the taxes data of the city, so he does not need to pay any taxes for his factories, even uses city payroll to pay his workmen. He also controls the media, so there are few media which dare to expose this scandal. If there is a media which exposes the scandal, he can do everything to make himself safe, by his power, his money, and his relation with the mayor.

4.2.1.3 Corrupt Relationship between Capitalist and Law Instrument

It is an irony in democracy that law, which ideally becomes an instrument to bring justice in daily life, is abused by the authority to save people who have interest and can buy the law by their power, their money, or their relation to authority. Connor, a businessman who has relation with the police, judge, and bureaucrat, seems immune to law. On the other hand, Jurgis, who is a poor people, even cannot say that Connor does a rape crime to his wife because he cannot rent a good and expensive lawyer.

4.2.1.4 Capitalism's Attack on Cultural Life

Religion, as one aspect of culture, also gets impact of capitalism. Jurgis becomes skeptical to the function of religion. Jurgis thinks that religion cannot solve the real

problem in society like social and economical problem. Religion only becomes a kind of opium, a drug which gives people composure but it cannot solve the real problem.

4.2.2 The Way Capitalism Treat and Exploit Working Class in *The Jungle*

4.2.2.1 Exploitation of Worker's Energy

In reality, often capitalism exploits worker's energy in a large scale but working class only gets small wages. This condition often happened especially in lower rank labor like Jurgis. Jurgis does not have high skill which guarantees them to get job with much wages. His energy as lower rank labor is exploited by the factory and he only get small wages.

4.2.2.2 Unsafe Working Condition in the Factories

In Packingtown, capitalist class always tries to sell their product as expensive as they can in order to get more profit. On the other hand, they will try to make the production cost as cheap as they can. For example, capitalist class will treat their factories efficiently and will never facilitate their factories with good facilities which are inefficient. Since they are not really care about working class poor financial condition, they will not really care about the bad working condition from the factories. A lot of workers in Packingtown work in bad condition from the factories which is dangerous for their safety

4.2.2.3 Bad Treatment of Capitalism to the Customer

In Packingtown, the principle of capitalist class to get money as much as they can and to sell the product as cheap as they can often makes capitalist class seems do not really care about the product they sold to market. Sometimes capitalist class does not really care about their product's quality. Often they only focus in how to make a product efficiently and sell it as cheap as they can to get more buyers. Jonas who works in a meat-packing factory finds the bad condition of his factory's product. He realizes that often the factory uses bad meats but they try to process the bad meats until it seems good and it is proper to be sold

4.2.2.4 Practice of Corruption in the Factories

As the time goes, Jurgis also knows the practice of corruption in the factory where he works after he meets Buck Halloran. Buck Halloran tells Jurgis how to be corrupt and gets profit for himself. It is usual for Buck Halloran to manipulate the wages distribution for worker, even he orders Jurgis to help him and promise to Jurgis that he will give some money if Jurgis help him and stay quiet for the secret. Considering the poor financial condition of his family, Jurgis agrees to help Buck Halloran for extra money

4.2.3 Alienation towards Working Class

4.2.3.1 Alienation from Human Nature

Little Stanislovas is a fourteen years old child who is forced to work to help his poor family earns money. Even he should manipulates his age two years older so he can work legally because the child labor law forbids children under sixteen years old to work. Considering that Stanislovas is a fourteens years old child who is actually should go to school and study, capitalism estranges him from his human essence as a child who should gets knowledge from school.

4.2.3.2 Alienation from the Act of Production

Ideally, an old woman like Teta Elzbieta does not work for a hard job in a dangerous condition. However, considering her old ages and her weak skill, she should work in a cellar in the factory with dangerous condition. Surely she is suffered with the condition and hates her job. However, there is no other way to help keeping her family from starvation, so she forces herself to work in that dangerous work although she feels suffered with the condition.

4.2.3.3 Alienation from Human Fellows

Jurgis family is a big family with a lot of member, and some of them are children. Considering the poor and weak financial condition of the family, its great quantities become burden for Jurgis who has responsibility to earn money, especially some children who need extra attention. Finally they decided to ask some of their children to work to reduce the burden and add their income. Because of the impact of capitalism, they are forced to take that decision. Because of poor financial condition, they cannot grow

their children appropriate with their human essence, but they only see the economical values of their children.

4.2.3.4 Alienation from the Product of Labor

Almost all the member of Jurgis family, such as Ona, Marija, Teta Elzbieta, and Dede Antanas, work in the meat-packing factory in Packingtown, which is the center of animal husbandry industry in the country. They get each position, such as in working in fertilizer, in the packing part, in distribution sector, and even in the cellar. However, nobody owns the product they just produced. They are paid for small wages, and cannot use the product he produced such as canned meat, except they buy it with their money. In this case, working class like Jurgis and his family is estranged from the product they produced.

5. Conclusion

In Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, capitalism fails in giving prosperity to all people. It only gives much profit to capitalist class. On the other hand, it gives miserable life to working class like Jurgis and his family. Jurgis family lives in poor financial condition. As working class, Jurgis and his family should work hard in meat-packing factories in Packingtown and gets only small wages that cannot keep the family alive.

The life of Jurgis, Ona, and the family as the representation of working class in *The Jungle* is very miserable. They are frustated in living their life because of the exploitation of capitalist class which is represented by characters such as Mike Scully or Phil Connor. From the beginning until the end of the story, they fail in their struggle to survive in Packingtown. Packingtown, a city which becomes the setting of the story, becomes an evil area which gives miserable life to working class such as Jurgis and his family.

The social condition in Packingtown that is influenced by capitalism makes the life of Jurgis and his family suffer more and more. In Packingtown, there is a corrupt relationship between capitalist class, politician, and law instruments that gives benefit to both of them. On the other hand, it makes the life of Jurgis and his family becomes more miserable because working class has a weak bargaining

position in society. Moreover, Jurgis family as working class also often gets discrimination in social and cultural life.

Besides its bad impacts to all aspects of human life, there are a lot of criticisms to capitalism. In Packingtown, Jurgis is exploited by the factory and he only gets small wages that cannot keep his family alive. Some members of his family also get the same bad treatment. Moreover, bad working condition in Packingtown leads to the bad factories' products and unsafe condition which causes Jurgis' injuries, even the death of some workers. There are also a lot of corruptions in the factories in Packingtown which make the life of Jurgis family as working class become more uneasy. Moreover, there are other impacts of capitalism, such as alienation towards working class. Jurgis family is alienated from the product they produce, from the act of production, from the human nature, and from the other human.

In conclusion capitalism fails in giving prosperity to all people in society as represented in *The Jungle*. It gives a lot of profits to capitalist class, but it fails in giving a prosperous life to working class like Jurgis and his family. Capitalism gives impact to social condition in society that makes the life of Jurgis family becomes more miserable. Moreover, its bad treatment to working class gives a miserable life of Jurgis and his family. Capitalism also gives bad impact to Jurgis and his family, such as alienation which estranges them from humanitarian values.

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