CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

WGBH Educational Foundation (2010) stated slaves are enforced labors where people are the property of other people. This forced labors appeared as a system designed for the staple crops production. Slavery occurred mostly in the southern states of America by mid-18th century. In the 1830s, black people outnumbered white people in the south. However, there was a high-demand from plantation or farm owners to get workers running their business. Most owners of these plantations and farms were white people. The black people worked on the small to large plantations, houses to fields, and from cities to towns.

Before the 1861 American Civil War, slaves were purchased by the masters. But the slaves were allowed to "buy" their freedom. Masters gave different prices to their slaves. Slaves were set a price regarding how good their skills were. Many black slaves worked for a long time to buy their freedom and/or their family members and then became masters. By becoming masters, they could afford money to own house, land and slaves. For blacks, owning a slave was not a cheap proposition. Most blacks, back then, didn't afford to buy slaves. The fact was some of them worked so hard that they were able to buy land and house, and finally owned slaves of their race.

There is a prominent author who portrays this South slavery issue in his novel. He is an African-American novelist named Edward Paul Jones. Releasing *The Known World* in

2003, the Washington, DC-born then received the National Books Critics Circle Award in 2003, the Pulitzer Prize in 2004 for fiction category and nominated in a 2003 National Book Award for fiction nomination. During his college in Massachusetts, Jones revealed a peculiar reality of African-American slaveholders existed in the US history especially in the South states (Mitchell, 2008).

The Known World, sets in the antebellum South, the Manchester County, Virginia, tells a story of Henry Townsend, a former slave and son of free-black slave Augustus Townsend. Henry works in the William Robbins' farm and plantation. He has known Robbins since he was a child as he was born in the farm and lived there with his parents. His parents used to work for Robbins before purchasing their freedom. Henry was intelligent, Robbins wants a higher price for his freedom. Henry remains working in Robbin's farm until his parents afford money; but his parents are allowed to visit him every Sunday. Henry then questions the love his parents have to him with their irregular visit. He interprets the infrequent visit as a proof that his parents don't love him. While Robbins is considered showering him the care he needs, the hard-worker Henry turns his devotion to his master. Becoming a young adult, Henry is persuaded to get land, house, wife and slaves of his own. Robbins gives him the negotiable prices to fulfill Henry's dreams that he gets Robbins' slave Caldonia as his wife and Moses as his reliable slave, as well as a house and farm.

The first slave that Henry bought is Moses. Moses was bought by Robbins from a French man, Jean Broussard. In Robbins' plantation, Moses grew up together with the young Henry, as Henry was born and lived there as well. Moses has known Henry for six

years and he helps Henry to build Henry's house. Robbins, who sees Henry becoming a young adult, asks Henry to buy and own Moses. He has a close master-slave relationship with Henry as he is owned by Henry. Moses has a cripple wife from Henry's farm, Priscilla, and two children from the marriage. In fact, Moses doesn't care about Priscilla. After the death of Henry, Moses who once worked as an overseer of Henry's plantation even asks Priscilla to leave the place with the children. Moses thinks he has a right to take care of what Henry has left, including Caldonia – Henry's wife.

William Robbins is the renowned wealthy white-man and a plantation owner in the County. He has plenty of slaves and farm to be run. Robbins has a wife and a daughter from her, who are whites, and also a former-slave wife, who is a black woman named Philomena, and has two children from her. However, Robbins still follows the slavery regulations. Robbins loves Philomena so much that he gives freedom to her family from his own farm. After the Philomena's runaway to Richmond several times, she brought her children with her as well in her latest runway, Robbins goes to Richmond with Henry to take her back. There Robbins hits and abuses Philomena for her escape until she's dead. On the other day, Robbins finds out how unusual the close relationship between Henry and Moses. He tells Henry to obey the law and do what a master or a slave must do because they are two different things.

There are few literary works tell stories about black slaveholders, *The Known World* pulls off the fiction focuses on black and white slave ownership. Becoming a master, the free black people don't treat the slaves less badly than the white masters do. Koger (1998) supported this by stating that, "Negro slave-owners were darker copies of their white counterparts…" (Qadosh Erectus Co., 2009).

It is to say that black masters treated their slaves similar to what the whites do. Grooms (2001) even stated that the free black people actually gain advantages of the slavery conditions and "virtue of their race" to accomplish their goals of prosperity.

However, the writer believes that there is more than just racial-related issue that shapes the enslavement situation. The social status is more than just "black and white" people. A bias social class and activity between the master and slave relationship situation occur and are portrayed in the novel. The distinction of the owner and worker classes in society can be seen through Marxist concepts of capitalism, ideology and identity. These are going to be explained in Chapter 2.

One of the reasons of selecting this topic is because of the history said there were not only white people owning slaves in the South America. The fact reveals that the free/former slaves also owned slaves, especially in the Southern America, whereas the black people were the majority population. *The Known World* captures the peculiar issue. The novel is an exceptional work for critical slavery issue in the 18th century in America that illustrates this reality. It has a sophisticated story which goes along with the complexity mazes of the slavery situation. The writer is also interested in the fact that blacks purchase their freedom and their family members, as well as land, house and slaves.

1.2 Problem Formulation

The writer discussing problems which relate to:

1. The slavery system, how life of the slave master and slave classes as they are illustrated in *The Known World.*

2. The bias identity and self-alienation in slave and slave masters as the capitalism in society affects them to happen.

1.3 Scope and Limitation

The research will be focused on the identity and alienation occurred by observing social classes and relations between slave and slave master, the altering point of view in characters' thoughts and tasks related to the influence of capitalism in society from *The Known World* novel. Besides, it links to the plot and social setting of the novel as well.

1.4 Goals and Functions

The goals of the research are:

- To reveal the class distinction between black and white masters, and slaves portrayed in the novel.
- To discover the experiences and conditions illustrated in the novel that change some characters' perspectives in seeing slave-slave master class.
- To portray the capitalism in society which alienates the characters and contributes to the bias identity of slave and slave master.

Then, the functions are:

- To reveal the fact in the history of America that besides the whites who own slaves, there are free-black people own slaves as well, specifically in the southern states.
- To unveil how the social class of slave and slave master, which is the element in the capitalist society, influences the slavery condition.

- To share a deeper understanding and raise awareness to the readers about the social impacts of enslavement in a person.

1.5 Research Methods

The writer applies qualitative research because she needs to collect non-numerical data in order to gather an in-depth understanding to come up with the answers of the problems.

The method used in the research is library research. Library research presents a lot of information about the theory of culture, American history, and else. Internet research is also used as it provides journals, published articles and reports, and e-books that cannot be found in the Library. These resources are to support the writer's data of the research. Some of books that are used are *The Mind of the Master Class* by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Beginning Theory* by Peter Barry and *Interpretations of Marx* by Tom Bottomore.

The steps in conducting the research are: First, the writer does critical reading of both the novel and Marxism data to find and collect the problems. Second, some of the characters that play the major roles of the slavery issue in the novel are taken. Next, the writer takes the capitalism, ideology and identity from Marxism theory to show the bias identity of slave and slave master, and it is to be analyzed in Chapter 3. Afterwards, the analysis in Chapter 3 is concluded concisely in Chapter 4. Ultimately, the writer summarizes Chapter 1 until Chapter 4 using Indonesian language in the end of this research.