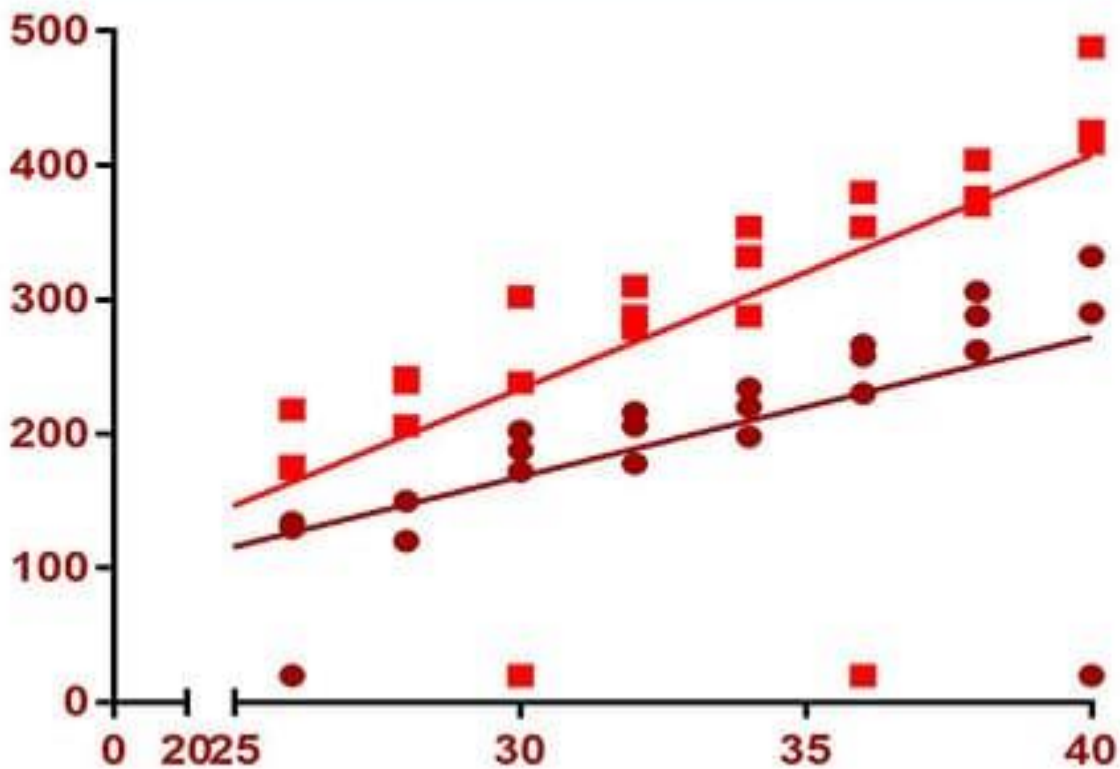


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Social class control and domination in America: A critical revisitation of the Great Depression as lived by Americans, through the novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck

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ABSTRACT

One of the crucial events that have marked the world in general and the United States of America in particular in the early twentieth century, has been the Great depression ; it was a great economic crisis faced by the America, the already most powerful nation of the world. And if America was a victim, it is clearly no doubt that the Great Depression was an international concern. In America, even though all social classes of people have suffered this economic crisis, the main victims have been the lower class, the one composed of employees and farm workers who have been exploited and despised by those wealthy people, bankers and employers, with government being passive. This has turned many into permanent migrants in search of better living. Such a situation could not go without drawing the attention of many writers, and the novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck is set in that context. Steinbeck has then sought to expose and condemn both the American's upper social class disastrous policy and attitudes toward the working class, and the American government's siding with the rich to worsen the great majority of people's bad condition. In the novel, Steinbeck's protagonists have first been deprived from the land they were born to live on, and have been obliged to migrate just to face an increasingly worse situation that will turn them from peaceful peasants into defensive murderers.

Keywords: Economic Crisis, Working class, Migrants sadism, Passive government

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1. Theoretical framework of the study

1.1 Contextualizing the novel

John Steinbeck published *The Grapes of Wrath* in 1939, in full context of the Great Depression that started a decade before. It was a period when the economic systems of the European and American leading powers were in collapse, with a high rate of unemployment and very limited business activities. This predicament, worsened by the advent of the Second World War, lasted about eleven years, the principal victims being among the lower class citizens including the poor, farmworkers, set under the inhuman exploitation by the middle class in their excessive strive for interest. This harshness and sadism of the middle class over the poor in America is what Steinbeck's novel portrays and depicts. It also paints the complicity and silence of the government in that plague which ruined the majority of the United States' population. As he was set to start the writing of the novel, Steinbeck wrote in a local newspaper: "I want to put a tag of shame on the greedy bastards who are responsible for the Great Depression" After completing the writing of his novel, and at the launching of it, he proudly said that he had done his "damnedest to rip a reader's nerves to rags".

Though the novel won a large audience at first and was cheered by the working class due to the sympathy expressed on their sufferings, it was also fiercely attacked and criticized by other authors, with the support of political authorities. After the publishing of *The Grape of Wreath*, the novel was banned in many American libraries; some copies of it were publically burnt as a symbol, to show the public that the book did not contain true or reliable information. For the government officials, the novel aimed at instigating to violence over the middle and upper classes. The symbolic burning then would underestimate the value and relevance of Steinbeck's work. The author also received death threats from those who found themselves badly attacked through the novel, and he was set under strict surveillance by the FBI as well, officially for avoiding him falling into the enemies' traps.

Yet, after the Great Depression was over, the novel gained back much consideration, mainly for having portrayed successfully the immigrants' social and economic conditions during the crisis. The book first won the National Award favorite fiction book and about 430.000 copies were printed, a record never reached before. Steinbeck was also granted the Nobel Prize of Literature for his novel, in 1962. The book also gained consideration and awards in some European countries, mainly in France and in the United Kingdom.

1.2 Methodology, objectives and literary theory

The present study is a strictly library research work. It has consisted in reading the novel and going through some scholars and essayists' comments on it. Then the collected data have been analyzed and synthetized. As such, the methodological approach in the study has been quantitative and analytical, but also comparative since the work has allowed moving and bridging from the fictional work to historical facts. This has helped grasp how far Steinbeck's fictional work fits in the true events of the Great Depression, with a special focus on people who lived in Oklahoma and California, and other surrounding cities and States.

In the process of understanding, analyzing and interpreting the message shed by Steinbeck through *The Grapes of Wrath*, three literary theories have been found adapted: the New Historicism championed by Stephen Greenbalt and Jonathan Goldberg, the Psychoanalysis Literary Criticism, a doctrine by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacon, and the Marxism.

On the basis of the first theory, it has been possible to examine through the novel the history and the main factors it points out. This theory has allowed displaying the cultural and intellectual heritage of the United States during the Great depression period, a period that scattered the country into three camps: on the one hand, there were very pacific and tolerant people, blind to every horror lived by the very vulnerable. On another hand, there were the governors,

sensitive but silent for fear of interfering with other influential and powerful groups. Then, on third hand, the class of wealthy and powerful farmers who cared little about the survival struggles of those people whose misery made their fortune and power. For this class, the most important daily strive is to make more profit by keeping as long as possible their employees in a kind of servitude that would make of the latter eternal needy people.

The second literary theory has allowed exploring the role of consciousness and the unconsciousness as well, in literary expression of historical facts, including the author, the readers and the characters. Here, it has contributed to highlighting Steinbeck's message and aim through his narration, and grasping the global impact the novel has had following its publishing, and the one it might have today on Americans, and the entire world. Characters thoughts and feelings have easily been apprehended, and this has sometime enable anticipating on their normal attitudes and behaviors before each quandary.

The third theory, which has been the most dominant, is the Marxist Approach headed by Karl Marx. Karl Marx perceived human history to have consisted of a series of struggles between classes, between the oppressed and the oppressing (that is, as he puts it, "the haves" and "the have-nots"¹). For Marx, materialism is the ultimate driving force in history; on this basis, focus is set on the ideological content of a work, and explicit and implicit assumptions and values are made about race, culture, class, and power. The Marxist criticism examines the nature of power structures within a novel. A Marxist critic then asks questions like: Who has power? Who lacks power? What is the relationship between power and wealth? Who is exploited by whom and why? How does power remain constant or shift throughout a work of literature? What makes certain characters powerful? And all such

questions seem to have their answers through John Steinbeck's here novel. The Marxist approach also examines commodities, possessions that give power; for this and undoubtedly, typical commodities are things like land and money but they can also be things like social position, knowledge, which meets Steinbeck's vision through his fictional work.

1.3 Literature Review

The issues of class domination and the Great Depression crisis have been concerns of many other authors, fiction writers and essayists. Dr Joseph Merlino, author and psychiatry adviser to New York Daily News Broadcasting, when interviewed about how he perceived class domination said that "this is a problem only if it is getting that individual into difficulties; if he or she (the victim) is not happy with it, or when it's causing problems in their social and professional lives"². Here, Merlino is meaning that people who dominate others economically feel pleasure doing so simply because they take profit and enjoy seeing other people in misfortune and misery, which is nothing but sadism. Clarifying the concepts of sadism and masochism, Sigmund Freud describes, through his work entitled *Three papers on Sexual Theory*, published in 1905 under the section: *As Stemming from aberrant psychological development from early childhood*, "Being sadistic is an abnormal condition of psychiatric function". For him, a normal person cannot enjoy watching others' pains; when someone is suffering because of you, you should normally get unease and this will take you to sympathize and help that person.

As it might be guessed and expected from the bourgeois class, following the publishing of the here novel, John Gardner, appreciating Steinbeck's fictional work, says in his *The Art of Fiction* (1984) that "Steinbeck wrote, not a great and firm novel but, a disappointing melodrama in

¹ Simba/Hamlet *BEDFORD TEXTBOOK* PAGES 1565-1567

² Garcia, Reloy, (1993), *The Rocky Road to Eldorado: The Journey Motif in John Steinbeck's The Grapes of*

Wrath, Steinbeck Quarterly 14.03-04 (Summer/Fall 1981): 83-93

which complex good is pitted against un mitigated, unbelievable evil". For Gardner, Steinbeck had exaggerated the workers conditions through his plotting the novel, with the aim to dramatize both the middle class and the higher class' ruling of the economic and political life of America. In the same document, Bryan Cordyack harshly attacked Steinbeck's novel. He portrayed the novel as "a pack of lies". But the worse attacks came from the Associated Famers of California whose manoeuver had been revealed to the whole world. Because they were displeased with the book's naked truth depiction of California farmers' conduct and behaviors towards the migrants they were attracting with their bad job advertisements. They therefore rejected in bulk what Steinbeck wrote in his novel, calling it "Communist Propaganda"³. In that same process, W. B. Camp, one of the greatest cotton producers led a ceremony of the novel's burning in Bakerfield, one of the cities mentioned in the novel.

In response to all those detractors and provocative actions, Steinbeck wrote in a local newspaper that "they are angry, not because they are attacked by me, but rather because they are attacked by the truth, from a book, obscene in the extreme sense of the word"⁴

2. The profit makers from the Great Depression

2.1 The Government's guilty passiveness

The whole misfortune the farm workers have lived along through the novel, from Oklahoma to California, is enrooted from the tough natural disaster they witnessed in the first chapter; the dust bowl covers all the farms. This thick dust falls over the crops days and nights as rain and men and women huddle in their houses, and they tie handkerchiefs over their noses when they go out, and wear goggles to protect their eyes to avoid sickness. Farmers "stare dazedly at their

dying crops wondering how they can feed their families and more, how they can overcome this never seen and dreadful natural disaster. They look at the ruined corn drying fast powerlessly. The working condition and environment as introduced by Steinbeck describes not only poverty, but also the carelessness attitudes of the employers.

The Government, unfortunately, does nothing to help or secure the poor victims. Even if it could be admitted that the government and the employers can do little about the dust bowl phenomenon, steps could have been taken to plan for reducing the disaster, such as moving workers and their families from the affected areas, taking sanitary measures to protect them against diseases. The Government's duty have to protect those pitiful farmers by any means necessary because the latter highly contribute to the country's economy, and their contribution in this moment of economic crisis, where even the strongest economic systems were shaken.

The American officials' passive attitude has contributed. The dust bowls disaster sequence has made many workers to lose their properties, their honor even their dearest fellows. The government care little about the victims, but do not spare effort in favor of the employers, since the latter are thought to better contribute to the facing the crisis by contributing to the economic rise. On the contrary, the federal government officials have encouraged the eviction and dispossession of the poor workers from the lands they have worked and lived on for decades, basing on the pretext that they are unable to meet their obligation with banks and landowners. All the farmers are ordered to leave the lands and fall back to unemployment, and then into misery. The Government's reaction has been all the same with the inhuman treatments farmers have been from bourgeois class, when the formers

³ Windschuttle, Keith, (2002), *Steinbeck's Myth of the Okies*. The New Criterion, Vol. 20, No. 10, June.

⁴ Garcia, Reloy, (1993), *The Rocky Road to Eldorado: The Journey Motif in John Steinbeck's The Grapes of*

Wrath, Steinbeck Quarterly 14.03-04 (Summer/Fall 1981): 83-93

have been evicted from their home lands, which have represented all their hope for living and survival. As such, every time when having to mediate between banks and landowners in the one hand, and the farmers in the other hand, the government have always parted with the more powerful. Yet, they are all conscious that the farmers' work is essential in the survival of every other pieces of the social economic channel. It is then not conceivable that the government just watch the working class collapse under the hard exploitation of those wealthy class people who just take profit from the poor farmers. The Government therefore had better find mitigate solutions to appease the different camps pacifically, even protect the farmers who are the most vulnerable, Joads the main characters of the novel, being a prototype.

Indeed, the illwinds suffered by Joads and many other victims of the wicked people in the novel, has come from both the Government's guilty silence and the banks and landowners inhumanity. The government's passive attitude, has lead the victims to a chaotic situation. This has been especially portrayed in chapter 29. The victims of flood have been refused reliefs and assistance because the rules are set that one must be living in the camp for a year minimum. Such a sadistic regulation and attitude from official authorities are surely not favorable human protection and development which are key-elements of the human rights and every country's Constitution as well.

2.2 Inhumanity of Banks and Land owners

Synergically the banks and the landowners have decided to evict the farmers from the lands; and the main reasons are that in the one hand some are unable to pay off their debts to the banks (Joads) and in the other hand, others can no more provide much and high profits to their landlords (tenant farmers). Farmers are also accused of lands impoverishment through cotton cultivation; but who has encouraged for intensive cotton production and whom does this production benefit? For sure, farmers take very little profit from the fruit of their work, and it would

then be awkward to take them as responsible for any land impoverishment.

The real motive behind land owners' decision is to attribute the lands to wealthier people, then those from whom they who can get more profit, regardless the consequences on those poor farmer. And as a sadistic joke, the disinherited farmers are advised to go to California where there are a lot of jobs. Sadism, for sure is a characteristic of Steinbeck's oppressors. Some of the lower class, since the author has portrayed the "regretful" way they consider their attitude as follows: "Most owners were kind because they hated what they had to do, and some of them were angry because they hated to be cruel, and some of them were cold because they had long ago found that one could not be an owner unless one were cold". Such a description is a revelation that the ill doers are conscious about their actions, but they just can't avoid, and this is the true expression of sadism. They all know that their actions are causing disaster and misery among the poor farmers, yet they act for the pleasure of enjoying it pitilessly. Despite farmers' begging their mercy to let them till the next year, hoping that next year to be more promising, they have refused and have had them leave the farms shortly after (chap5)

To this categorical refusal, the squatting men are upset and deeply disappointed, and this can be seen from their reaction: "what do you want us to do? We can't take less share of the crop, we're half-starved now ". Those farmer are now living miserably, and their kids are starving; . "they don't have clothes but torn an ragged". This fifth chapter paints out how much the farmers are miserable. No foods to eat, no clothes to wear properly and, they are upset by the natural disasters as well. As the banks or companies "don't breathe air, don't eat side meat" they couldn't feel any pity to the miserable men; the bank. The monster has to have profits all the time. It can't wait". The bank here is compared to a monster for bankers behave exactly as such, as a devil, a monster. Like a terrifying, dangerous and sadistic creature, the bank is trying

suck the poor farmers from the least of their breathe. The author has portrayed it well in chapter five, when he writes that “the bank is something more than men.... Men made it, but they can't control it.”

Yet, those farmers, now angry men, do not just sit and endure this unfortunate situation. One of them has rightly threatened: “I don't aim to starve to death before I kill the man that is starving me“. The farmers, to face the case, have preferred to stay and die on their lands rather than leaving for the unknown places where their miserable conditions might be worsened. For Joads, his land cannot be so easily grabbed because “Grampa took up the land, and they had to kill the Indians and drive them away.... Pa was born on that land and it was a bad year that led him to borrow from the banks a little money”. This is how the bank, a monster, has finally owned that land. It is then unfair being evicted from this land that represents all for them: their hope, their pride and the only wealth remaining to them after losing everything.

The bankers are aware of the miserable situation of the farmers and their families; and know very well that the poor farmers are not capable of raising the expected profits because of the dust bowl that has stricken them, and destroyed all their crops. But the banks don't care about how they can survive, once sent away either. According the farmer one year, as they have begged for it, to meet the bank's requirements is not much demanded, but the heartless landowners do not aim at anything that would be profitable for the poor; the latter deserve no allowance either, that could help them get prepared for the new adventure they are forced to. This attitude from the banks and landowners shows clearly their lack of humanism. Their attitude has made the farmers lose most of their stuffs, sell some of them very cheaply and burn or let the non-packable ones. “Their pet (cat) turned to wild animal surviving of mice and other insects”. Muley Graves, one of the victim farmers, would rather die on his land than be dragged out of it; he has refused to follow his family to California, and has stayed

there with his two dogs, hunting jackrabbits and other animals for survival. Curiously the tractor drivers are chosen from the deceived farmers' neighbors. They, are paid shabby money to “clear these people out (chap6); they are just paid “three dollars a day “, just what is needed to feed their kids. They cleared everything, wrecked all the houses and let more than twenty families starving and upset. Heartbroken by the landowners and bank or Monster without any sympathy from the Government, the farmers were pulled out and let to their souls. They finally opted the adventure towards California; a very perilous adventure, for another eventful life.

3. The Great Depression and Migrants' unfinished misfortune

3.1 Social conditions in the new farms.

After being evicted from their home lands, the farmers have had no choice but go to California where job opportunities are highly advertised through papers and billboards. Thinking that they have turned back the sadistic men, bankers and landowners, who snatched their properties from them, the new candidates for the California farm job have had their dreams once more turned to nightmare, even before they reach their final destination.

First of all the long trip has been sowed with misfortune signs from the beginning to the end. Joads has lost four of their dear fellows; his Grampa and Granma have passed away on the way. They have all died from the difficult conditions in which they have been obliged to move. Grampa has passed away in Bethany and is buried poorly (chap13). His grave has been labeled “this here is William James Joad, dyed of a stroke, old old man. His folks buried him because they got no money to pay for funerals. Nobody kill him. Just a stroke and he dyed”. The precision on his epitaph is important, since the police might eventually discover the grave, and since it is forbidden to bury a fellow without informing the authorities, which requires paying a huge amount of money, they can get into trouble. Life as a whole has proved pitiless for the poor; as a living man, they have to pay the penalty,

and once dead, their people have to spend much as well for their burial. Granma also has soon died because, awfully sick from the long distance they ran through and the nostalgia of her dead husband (chap18).

This forced migrating has done much to scatter most of the poor farmers' families as well. Noah Joad, the eldest son of Joad and Connie, has abandoned his family half way. He has decided to stay in a river bank to fish and live by that activity for he thinks his parents don't really take care of him. "Ma felt upset and disappointed when she got the information," family's fallin apart" (chp18); Connie, Rose Sharon's husband, has left the family-in-law abandoning his pregnant wife to an adventure. He never comes back till she has delivered a stillborn child in a dramatic situation, a period when the flood reduced them to needy and pitiful folk (chp29). Yet he has finally regretted migrating to California. He would rather stay in Sallisaw and studied nights about tractors and earn three dollars a day (chp20). Rose has been deeply choked by her husband's deceiving departure and the collapse of their dream. With the death of their dog when a speedy car ran over it in the route 66, Joads has got enough bad signs predicting a miserable adventure. Since an ill wind never comes alone, the Great Depression has not only led whole families to find themselves away from their lands, but it has also scattered many families.

When they came to California, a supposed promised land, the journey to which already has shed bad signs,. Joads has found that the place is a melting pot; thousand other families have come from different parts of America, in search of the jobs promoted by the advertisement. This is an indication that Joads and his people are not in a typical situation, since there many more people looking for the same think as them. Most importantly, their former situation seems to be similar; this forced them into a kind of collaboration and solidarity; they have all come from places of sadness and worry and defeat, and because they have all come to a mysterious place, they have huddled together, and they talk together.

They have shared their lives, their food and the things they hope for in the new city (chap17). The positive thing out of the migration is then the opportunity for showing love and solidarity. But they soon realize that the jobs they had been advertised is a bluff. Truly there are jobs, but the jobs have turned very badly, probably because of the number of needy people increasing day after day. Definitely, when the demand exceeds the offer, the employers become so powerful that employees have no choice but cope with the conditions. "When the landlords need hundreds farm workers they make an exaggerating advertising in billiards and handballs they shared to thousands people. As they live in extreme poverty they come in mass and they propose them low salary. If some refuse others are waiting because they have some folks to feed; and after the ripe all of the workers are kicked out" (chap20) .

The landowners in California don't have any pity towards the migrants. They are not different from those bankers and landowners in Sallisaw. For here again, man will work just to find what to feed his family with the company's food and finally he become debtor to the company in which he is working. "A man might work and feed himself and when the work was done, might find that he owed money to the company". (chap19). As in Sallisaw, the landowners and companies owners just looked for interest, others suffering is not their concern.

Moreover, there exist high sadistic behaviors and severe wickedness among the landowners. It is true that the squatters are living in the hardest social conditions but the small local farmers stand also to be ruined by the large producers. The latter monopolizes the processing industries and set a huge barrier the small producers cannot pass through. That nasty and sadistic act towards the smaller farmers has ruined the latter severely, for they cannot sell their crops nor use them. "Their fruits are being rotten on the ground, and the decaying mash in the wine vat in poisoning the air" (chap25). They see their crops wither and their debts towards banks rise

sullenly. The large farm owners' sadism has reached a critical level, for they see hungry and needy migrants and they burn crops and bury pigs instead of saving them. "They burn coffee for fuel in the ships. Burn corn to keep warm, it makes hot fire" (chap25). They Dump potatoes in the rivers and place guards along the banks to keep the hungry people from fishing them out; they slaughter the pigs and bury them, and let the putrescence drip down into the earth; They watch thousands people dying of malnutrition and hunger and they have made foods rot and must be forced to rot. They dump the oranges but these are not eatable because the kerosene is sprayed on them. Both migrants and small farmers are heartbroken but they could do nothing in the souls of the people "the grapes of wrath are falling and growing heavy, for the vintage" (chap25). More than bad, those wealthy people are rather wicked; they have a particular satisfaction watching poor people starve. They would rather destroy what they don't need or want for food than allowing those lower class people taking profit from it. Such a pitiful cohabitation between the poor and the upper class people has marked the Great Depression period, with the rich looking down and getting satisfaction from the starving of the poor.

The migrants' situation during the Great Depression has got worse and worse day after day. So that they have been obliged to do very low paid jobs because they have folks waiting hungrily in tents and camps, and even if they refuse the job with hope that employers will see the wages to the rise, the farms owners will get other hungry men to accept doing it. Indeed, thousands of hungry people are looking for Jobs even for loaf of bread in order to avoid starving.

Not satisfied for the already worse conditions of the migrants, the California wealthy men will manage and deprive them from the remaining things that make them survive. They won't show any satisfaction unless those poor people become effectively miserable. "Previously, the wretchedness made Wallaces sold his car just for no dollars because they ran out of food and

other stuffs. The same car was resold at 75 dollars in Bakersfiel 'a week after". No rescue or humanity is accorded to the needy people from the wealthy men .They can see them starving, living in miserable conditions, they don't care .They even planned for other policies to worsen their conditions. For instance Thomas paid 30 cents an hour to his workers, he honestly appreciated and said they deserved more. But after a meeting in which he took part with farmers Association, this price dropped down to 25 cents an hour and it could even drop down days after (chap22) . Though disappointed the poor migrants have had no choice but take it like that.

Landowners made people suffer and no one of the migrants and farm workers could raise his voice to protest against the injustice they are victim of. He who dares claim for more wages, not only will lose his job, but also those wicked people will make sure that he never finds any job elsewhere in the neighborhood. This system is called "blacklist", a label of rebel and trouble maker stuck on protestation leaders. Employers are so sadistic that they don't help migrants to live at least decently through the poor wages they pay them, nor give them a chance to look for better conditions elsewhere. Jobs are also scare because of the number of migrants looking for even they very low paid ones. Folks starved every day. When Joads runs out of foods and money, Ma has forced her fellows to go to Marysville where they heard about jobs opportunities. She says that "we're a-goin' to Marysville. I don't care what the pay is" because she could watch "this here fambly starve no more" (chap 26). Ma is convinced that if her fellows (Pa, AL, Tom, Casy and uncle John) find job, no matter how much they are paid, they will no more die from hunger. She has even started dreaming for a better life "If we pick plenty peaches we might get a house, pay rent even, for a couple months. We got to have a house" (chap 26). But that dream has never come true because of people's sadism. In addition the migrants have to respect the rules established by the clerks and farm owners otherwise they won't be paid for the jobs they

do. For instance Joads has found a work of picking peaches in a farm where they are paid five cents a box but no bruised fruits; they had to “put ‘em in easy or they’re working for nothing” (chap 26). Before being engaged in the farm Joads is warned on the conducts to follow. “We don’t want no trouble with you. jes’ do your work and mind your own business and you’ll be all right” (chap 26). That code of conduct was their guideline. The farm owners set the price five cent a box just to attract people. Once they came they drop it into two and half a box of picked peaches. This is the amount Casy and his fellows are paid before they have protested and give up the work. So they have been driven off. Casy is well-informed that the five cent would drop down again to two and half, and therefore he is about to organize a strike to protest against such sadistic and wicked attitude towards workers. “Found bothersome and trespassing their interests, the landowners have got him killed” (chap 26). The revenge of Casy’s murder has made Tom inactive in the remaining scenes of the novel. He is severely hurt on the head by the one he killed’s fellow. Casy is killed and his murderer is killed too by Tom. Joads has been obliged to hide him and leave the camp to secure and protect the whole family from the jam they would be found in when the land lords heard that Tom is involved in that insurrection. Finally, Tom is obliged to run away far from his folk because Ruthie has divulged his secret to some kids with whom she has fought. Steinbeck, through the novel, has then made the migrant plight to go like a channel of events and ill winds. From their being exploited by their home banks and landowners, they have found themselves forced into mass migration, and now concerned with murder cases.

With regard to what the migrants have lived in the farms, one could rightly say that both the migrants and the landowners are struggling to preserve their own interests. The migrants have been struggling to have better life conditions through their works. And in the other side, the landowners in need of more profits have been

making the migrants work more and get less money. They have made the migrants fall in the trap of exaggerating advertising. The handbills they distributed to lots of people mentioning that they need numerous workers were a bluff. They attract the poor and heartbroken farmers to reduce them into needy and begging people. They are imposed harsh working and payment conditions because of their situation.

3.2 The migrants’ hardship in the camps

Their sadism and wickedness inflicted to the migrants are not limited to the farms and work places. They were persecuted even in their dwellings. The dominant class people have had total control of the migrants’ life in every aspect. The migrants are frequently deprived from their liberty, and sent for punishment. They are arrested and ill-treated for mere fault or sometimes when they just seek further information about the jobs they are hired for.

Two men came in the camp looking for workers to hire for picking fruits in Tulare County. When asked how they would be paid for by Floyd one the camp’s men, he replied that he Can’t tell exactly, yet. Bout thirty cents, I gues’. His fellow the Chevrolet, added the contract is Keyed to the price“ when Floyd has insisted on the price, the place, the period, the number of workers they need, the deputy got angry. He found Floyd bothersome and was about to scuttle his business, he ordered the Chevrolet (his compassion) to arrest him because “he’s talkin’red, agitating trouble“. Floyd was arrested and the deputy started threatening the remaining crowded people. Tom protested against Floyd’s arrest because he was their defender and the open-minded man from the group. The deputy recklessly shot at him when he was running off. But Tom tripped the deputy and Casy knocked him unconscious (chap 20)

To their sadistic and diabolic mind, they would like to hire workers in order to ill-treat them, pay them as they want and make them work days and nights with little money, or even without payment. The rich and powerful contractor’s sadism

has even gone so far as to make him shoot an innocent woman. More pitifully, to revenge the deputy defeating, a car loading armed people has come "with pick handles and shot guns. "They have worn trench helmets and some American Legion caps they ordered migrants to go to North for they ain't gonna have no goddamn Okies in this town" (chap 20). They have had to leave the camp and "not come back till the cotton's read". When removed from the camp, Joads has joined the Weedpatch camp (the government created it to secure needy migrants). All the stuffs are there: rooms, toilets, water..... costing just one dollar a week. The poor folks can take care of the camp instead of paying weekly.) The sadistic attitude of the autochthon is against that government's initiation because they don't have any control over the migrants of that camp. For "No cop can come here without a warrant" (chap 22). The migrants' fortune in that Eldorado camp has made them unhappy and therefore they looked for any means necessary to send them out from there to feel at ease. A Guard said "we ain't gonna have no peace till we wipe them camps out. They'll be wantin' clean sheets, first thing we know" (Chap 26). Their aim is to keep the migrants in a permanent needy conditions, making them suffer and reducing them to begging and starving people. The poor wages they set to those pitiful migrants are not then sufficient ill windq. They would like to put the migrants down abase, away from the Weedpatch camp.

The other heart breaking fact the migrants have witnessed is the relief refusal they had been victim of in the Box car camp. Their tents have been flowed in water. Thus they have got wet, and have been begging for foods; some of them have been forced to steal foods.

4. Discussion

The Grapes of Wrath, by John Steinbeck has painted out the pathetic life migrants, weak and poor people in America during the Great depression, in the 1930s . From the beginning to the end, the novel points out how people left heart-break for wretchedness. The migrants'

misfortune is due jointly to the landlords and banks wickedness and the passiveness of the Government. The landlords have pulled the migrants away from their lands on the basis that the latter are no more capable of raising much profit from the lands; and the Government has done little to help those poor people from this sadistic exploitation.

The sufferings the migrants have been through along the novel is fundamentally due to the heartlessness of the landlords. Both the Government and the farm owners have been accomplices in the difficult situation lived by those farmers, then forced into migration and permanent move. The Government don't want to interfere with farm owners' business because the latter provide raw materials for industries, then pay more taxes to relive from the severe plight the Great Depression has caused. Unfortunately the main victims of such an attitude have been the great majority of the people, the poor who are at the very beginning of that economic channel. Farmers, as a target for every bad treatment, are attracted through unfair advertisement posts, then to be exploited in farms and others work places. The Government in this situation has simply and willingly abandoned their role as a protector of the weak, the large majority of citizens.

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