

IDENTITY CRISIS AND ALIENATION IN *THE METAMORPHOSIS*: EXISTENTIAL APPROACH

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Abstract

This study focused on Jean Paul Sartre's theory of existentialism depicted in the main character of *The Metamorphosis* written by Franz Kafka. The aim of this study is to reveal how society influenced Gregor to experience identity crisis and the relation between identity crisis and alienation depicted in *The Metamorphosis*. Society contribute to how individual looks his identity and contribute how individual picks his own choices even if they are a free being. In case, alienation is happened when Gregor is ignore and feeling ashamed of his choices.

Keyword: *Existentialism, Identity Crisis and Alienation*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini memfokuskan pada teori eksistensialisme oleh Jean Paul Sartre yang digambarkan pada tokoh utama *The Metamorphosis* yang ditulis oleh Franz Kafka. Tujuan penelitian ini untuk mengungkapkan bagaimana masyarakat mempengaruhi Gregor krisis identitas dan hubungan antara krisis identitas dengan pengasingan yang digambarkan di novella *The Metamorphosis*. Masyarakat berkontribusi terhadap cara pandang identitas diri dan berkontribusi terhadap pemilihan Keinginan diri sendiri walaupun manusia adalah makhluk bebas. Sehingga, pengasingan terjadi ketika Gregor menolak dan merasa malu terhadap pilihannya.

Kata Kunci: *Eksistensialisme, Krisis Identitas dan Pengasingan.*

Introduction

Existentialism is a philosophy of human freedom. Man has freedom to choose his own path to make his life meaningful in this absurd world and responsible for his actions (Singh, 2016). Existentialist is more concerned with the real identity of individual i.e. existence. In case, human being has multiple identities such as a son, a breadwinner, an employer. Among those, Man starts questioning his identity such as "which is the real identity?". Those multiple identities starts confusing man to his real identity such as he is a son to his parents but a father to his children. According to existentialism in the concept of *Freedom* and *nothingness*, individual is free to choose and become what he wants to be an authentic individual and an undetermined human being (Sarkar, 2017). According to Sartre in terms of "bad faith", an individual has no essence as an individual to gain social approval for perfect roles such as a waiter who has rapid movement to his customer's order and forget his freedom as a conscious being in playing a social role. There are two forms of existence, which are: authentic existence and inauthentic existence (Sarkar, 2017).

Authentic existence is real identity of individual, while inauthentic existence is the acceptance of public opinions leading to social life such as following social morals, values and customs. Sartre

stated that individual is alienated from authentic existence of freedom of choice and try to avoid the anxiety of decision making by shifting the responsibility of choice on son, breadwinner, etc (Sarkar, 2017). This situation leads to identity crisis as an individual bound thy self to be a real human being. On the other hand, the presence of society leads an individual to negate himself in the form of alienation. When an individual starts to refuse others objectivity or accept their evaluations from society, an individual is experiencing alienation (Daronkolae & Hojjat, 2012).

According to Franz Kafka as an existentialist, His works *The Metamorphosis*, *The Castle* and *The Trial* show existentialism themes. 'The Metamorphosis' is one of the creative works of Kafka which unfolds human existential crisis and alienation in the world (Prahaldaiyah, 2019). Based on this reason, the author chooses *The Metamorphosis* as the subject of this study. *The Metamorphosis* is one of existential concept novella written by Franz Kafka, a Germany and an existentialist writer from the twentieth century. *The metamorphosis* was published in 1915. *The Metamorphosis* is a story about a traveling salesman, Gregor Samsa, who mysteriously transformed into a verminous insect. Gregor is a breadwinner of his family after his father's business collapsed. In the novella, Gregor is portrayed as a man who can not engage his authenticity and existence as a human being. He is confusing his real identity

because he is not happy with all of his choices unless death. When he is experiencing identity crisis, he is also experiencing alienation. Based on this reason, the research questions of this study are; 1) How does society influence identity crisis in *The Metamorphosis* ?; 2) what is the relation between identity crisis and alienation depicted in *The Metamorphosis* ?. The purpose of this study is to reveal that society has an influence on identity crisis and alienation.

The metamorphosis by Franz Kafka has been analyzed in many research aspects period of time by researchers. There is a previous study that is relevant to this study based on the subject, theoretical approach, and the method of this study and a thesis that has similarity in terms of theoretical approach but has different subject. The journal entitled *Absurd and its Lasting Legacy: A Study of the Existential Metamorphosis and The Outsider* by Mr.

Parminder Singh, Research Scholar in Chandigarh, India published in December, 2016. The journal identified and compared existentialism approach in *The metamorphosis and the outsider*; The second journal entitled *Existential Approach to Franz Kafka's The Metamorphosis* by Sameer Francis and Diwakar Prahaladaiah, St. Joseph's Evening College (Autonomous), Bengaluru, India published in February, 2019. This study is portrayed the concept of absurdity and alienation in the novella. The third journal entitled "Shame and Alienation in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*" by Karla S. Minar and Anton Sutandio, Maranatha Christian University published in 2017. This research explains how Gregor characters is caused by shame and alienation by using existentialism theory and criticism approach.

Existentialism is a philosophical thought of human authentic in meaningless and absurd world. It deals with human freedom to be a real being accompany by the condition of human existence to their action, responsibility, thought and emotion (Mart, 2012). There are themes of existentialism, they are: absurdity, alienation, anxiety, forlornness,

responsibility, authenticity, individuality, passion/engagement, death. According to Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, The awareness of human freedom and the responsibility that comes with it makes human is hidden from thyself. How human sees the world depends on their characters and it could be changed by thy self. Pressure and demands that individual get is based on the way individual sees the world. An Individual can change the way he seeing the world as the result of his perspective changed but he will pretend that their characters is fixed and unchangeable. Rather than feeling the anguish and anxiety, an individual tends to choose avoid and deny the responsibility of his action (Mart, 2012). On the other hand, a human is free to choose what he wants to be or

become the real human being. According to Sartre, Authenticity is human becomes truth to thyself as a human being and in the world they live in. There are two types of manners of being, which are being for itself and being in itself. Being for itself is subjective being while being in itself is objective being. Identity is the ideal of "one" and "one" comes into human reality (Sartre, 1956).

In *Being and Nothingness*, Being for others is ignorance the judge of others. According to Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, There are some issues that freedom is a primary need of human existence, There is no God thus no prior value and even if there is a God, it does not make a difference because it is human free choice to accept the value, and the last, freedom is linked to other's freedom (Sartre, 1956). According to Sartre, Freedom is the definition of man. Man is responsible for his world because it is his realm of meaning to his acts, to responsible for everything in it and he has a freedom to choose whatever he wants and wills according to his own standard and value. Being authentic is being true to one's own existence while bad faith is acts to self that there is no any choice and seek practical interest according social roles and value system that are entirely foreign to our awareness and to our responsibility. According to Ronald Aronson, he undertakes a genealogy of Sartre's works that he seeks to understand the individual as the source of the society and its alienations, then society as the source of individuals and their alienations. According to Sartre, when human ignore the responsibility for their action, alienation occurs and he mentions that ignorance is an aspect of alienation.

"By the mere appearance of the other, I am put in the position of passing judgment on myself as an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the other... I could feel irritation, or anger before it as a bad trait of myself which gives to my expression an ugliness or baseness which I do not have, but I could not be touched to the quick. Shame is by nature recognition. I recognize that I am as the others see me. There is, however, no question of a comparison between what I am for myself and what I am for the other as if I found in myself, in the mode of being for itself, an equivalent of what I am for the other" (Sartre, 1956, Prahaladaiah, 2019)

Based on quotation above, alienation is accompanied by sense of shame. Shame is a negative evaluation of self or behavior that raises a desire to hide, escape or disappear followed by a feeling of inferior, hopeless, powerless and worthless (Candea & Szentagotai-Tatar, 2018). There are two types of shame, they are: internal shame and external shame. Internal shame is a negative evaluation of self, self as a judged and the judge E.g. "I am a failure" while external shame is other's negative evaluations toward an individual "They think I am a failure". Shame is associated with self-awareness which is an inheritance of

self-conscious. An individual who feels or experiences shame is followed by self-representation, self-criticism and self-evaluation. In such case, individual starts to alienated. (Hooge, Breugelmans, & Zeelenberg, 2017).

When an individual is in a threatening situation, it is paving the way of fear and anxiety. In a case when an individual feels shame, they try to escape and avoid the situation as a mechanism to maintenance of fear and anxiety (Muris, Meester, & Asseldonk, 2018). On the other hand, an individual triggers an anxiety and maintain alienation when an individual has a discrepancy between qualification and demands in the social environment for a certain action. (Gouva, Mentis, Kotrotsiou, Paralikas, & Kotrotsiou, 2014).

Research Methodology

To analyze the way society affected Gregor's identity crisis and the relation between identity crisis and alienation, the author used *The Metamorphosis* novella by Franz Kafka as the source of the study and Gregor Samsa as the subject of the study. The method of the study is using existentialism by Jean Paul Satre to reveal identity crisis and alienation depicted in the text. The author also used previous studies to find additional data to answer the statement of the problems.

Finding and Discussion Identity Crisis

Man is free to choose and become what he wants. Man has to maintain balance of his society and individual sides. He has choices to be a real human being and he is responsible for his actions that he chooses (Howlader, 2020). According to Sartre, Individual has two sides which are individual side and society side. If an individual chooses society rather than his individuality, he will lose his individuality and if he chooses society over himself, society will abandon him and he will lose the support and approval of the society. In Gregor's case, he chose society over himself. He took over a breadwinner position after his father business collapsed and sacrificed himself to earn money (Howlader, 2020).

"So he had then begun to work with particular zeal, and almost overnight had advanced from junior clerk to travelling salesman, which of course gave him much more scope to earn money;". P.481

Gregor is responsible to his duty as a breadwinner. He does anything to earn more money. His duty is not his essence. Being an individual, he has no essence. In Gregor case, Gregor is tried to be a perfect mechanism to gain support and approval from the society.

According to existentialism, individual may

face a crisis of identity which is a phenomenon when an individual has multiple identities. For example, Gregor has identities as a son, breadwinner, and a worker as travelling salesman. Gregor was free to choose what he wants. But Gregor was not happy about what he choose. He started to complaint about his exhausting work. He wanted to quit after he paid all of his parents' debts.

"'Oh God,' he thought, ' what strenuous job I've chosen! On the move day in, day out. The stresses of this work are much greater than in the office at home, and on top of that I'm plagued with all this travelling, have to worry about catching trains, put up with irregular bad meals and constantly meeting different people for a short time without ever getting to know the more closely'". P.460

According to Sartre in terms of "Bad Faith", Gregor shows his inauthentic side which applied what society wants and expects and dumped his own happiness or will. When Gregor accepted his duty to be a breadwinner, he thought that there was no choice and that was the time to be a breadwinner. According to Sartre, when an individual thinks that there is no choice but he obviously do, no matter how inconvenient it maybe for him. "We insist for example, that we have no choice when we obviously do, no matter how inconvenient it maybe for us. We also talk about ourselves as though we were all of a piece, endowed with some 'nature' from which all our actions, no matter how objectionable they may be to others, flow as if by some unchangeable logic of necessity" (Sartre, 1956).

For the first time of his transformation, Gregor has an identity crisis when he starts to confuse what he is and no longer confident that he is a human.

"That was the voice of animal', said the head of clerk". P.469

"He felt a part human society again". P.469

"He was no longer confident that he could judge himself". P.469

After overcome his transformation, Gregor started to think what he wanted to do to re-organize him. Gregor starts to adapt with his new physical and his society start to abandon him. In this case, Gregor choose individual side over his society side. Gregor started to getting used to with his physical and sense of animal changes and forget his identity as a human.

"Sometimes he imagined that the next time the door opened he would take over the family's affair again just than before" P. 496

After his transformation, Gregor pretended that it is his own will. He couldn't ignore others' judgement

towards him. That is why he changed the way he sees the world.

"When Gregor heard his mother's words he realized that the absence of all direct human contact in the course of these two months, combined with his monotonous life at home, must have confused his mind, for there was no other way he could explain to himself how he could seriously wanted his room cleared. Had he really wished to have his warm cozy room with its comfortable family furniture turned into a cave in which he would be able to crawl around whatever he wanted, but at the cost of very soon completely forgetting his previous existence as a human ?". P.488

Based on the quotation above, Gregor suffered identity crisis. That he starts to think what he wants to be and his own will and what is the true identity that he wants. According to Sartre, the way people see the individual influence the action of individual and tend to make them inauthentic.

"Whenever discussion turned to the need to earn money, the first thing Gregor did was to leave the door and throw himself onto the cool leather sofa beside it, burning with shame and grief". P.483
"Sometimes he imagined that the next time the door opened he would take over the family's affair again just than before" P. 496

He is no longer a breadwinner and employer. In this case, it is influenced by Gregor's existence as a money maker. Society started to abandon him and label him as a useless creature.

Alienation

There are two types of alienation that occurs in *The Metamorphosis*. Gregor alienated himself from others as his choice of his action and Gregor is alienated by others after his transformation because of others' evaluation (Gregor as the object of others) (Minar & Sutandio, 2017). According to Sartre, one of the aspects of alienation is ignorance (Daronkolae & Hojjat, 2012). Gregor is judged by others as an ignorant person, he has no friend and being judged by others. Gregor thinks that his work is the main purpose because he has to travel and cannot get close to them.

"Meeting different people for a short time without ever getting to know them more closely, to hell with it" P. 460

"You also know very well that a salesman who is away from the office almost the whole year around can so easily become a victim of gossip, chance and unfounded complaint he can not possibly defend himself against". P.472

In this case, Gregor deceits himself, he blames his work and does not think that the main reason is him. Sartre stated that

"One aspect of alienation is ignorance. It is a mode of inter-human relations. Its type is that of refusal in the sense that to be judged ignorant by others acts as a cause does on my freedom" (Daronkolae & Hojjat, 2012).

As a result that Gregor thinks that others alienated him. In case, Gregor is the first one who alienated himself to others.

."But Gregor had no intention of letting her in; on the contrary, he congratulated himself on the cautious habit he had acquired while travelling of locking all doors at night, even when he was at home". P. 462

The quotation above shows Gregor alienated himself from society even to his family. As his mother said that he never goes out in the evening. He does not let anyone come to his room because he does not want others disturbing him. In case, Gregor separated himself to others because he tends to be free being and become his own real being when he is in the room. He can be whatever he wants and never disturbed by his identity and his existence in society. As his room is his real world and outside of his room is his duty or related with society matters.

"He was no longer confident that he can judge himself". P.469

According to Sartre, there are two types of alienation which are: internal shame and external shame. Internal shame is the way Gregor sees himself and external shame is the way others see him (Minar & Sutandio, 2017). In Gregor's case, his transformation is the source of his sense of shame and his family problems. He evaluates himself as a reflection of his family view toward him. Based on the quotation above, he could judge himself likewise his family toward him. This feeling of shame is followed by his anxiety toward his family. He is afraid that his family cannot accept his transformation and feel ashamed because of it. His internal shame is because he is different compared to others and how he cannot control his body while others can easily move their body. An individual tends to feel shame when an individual becomes aware with the difference between their actual self and ideal self as a comparison of the self

and the perfect image (Sedighimornani, 2019).

"The thought that they had suffered a misfortune such no one else had in the whole circle of their family or acquaintances". P.496

As we know that, Gregor's identity is a breadwinner of his family and an employer to his company. In this case, his existence to the society is money maker. When Gregor cannot produce money for them anymore, his existence is merely a useless creature. In this case, Gregor starts to alienate himself because the way others look at him as a useless creature.

According to Sartre, the way others look individual is not what the individual truly are and this causes individual alienated from others (Davichi, 2009). When Gregor turns to be an insect, his family problems is begin. In this case, Gregor starts to feel ashamed as the object for them; there is a thought of Gregor that he is a misfortune of his family because he evaluated himself as the source of his family problems and the cause that they cannot move from their apartment.

The sense of shame is also shown when his sister has intention to empty his room's furniture to make a space for him to crawl but his mother thinks the vice versa. She thinks that it is better to leave the furniture like before to help Gregor when he recovered. His mother's thought completely makes Gregor slapped in the reality that he might forget of his identity. In case, he feels ashamed when he forgot about his identity as a human, he becomes anxious. Gregor's shame leads him to do careless action as a sign that he does not behave and think clearly (Hooze, Breugelmans, & Zeelenberg, 2017). In case, he saves one furniture that caught his eyes to remind him if he was a human and makes his mother fainted because she saw him.

According to Sartre, Shame is the seed of alienation that hidden when man experience shame. Man feels that he becomes a different self; the self of which I am ashamed does not exist prior to my encounter with the other. It is the gaze of Other that confers this new self on me (Sharma, 2015:61; Minar & Sutandio, 2017).

When an individual feels ashamed, he will do something to reduce his shame. In this case, he will do something without thinking twice because he still can not reduce his sense of shame. In Gregor's case, Gregor carries out careless actions to reduce his shame because he forgot his identity as a human. He crawls to keep his humanity stuff to remind him of his identity while his mother in the same room with him.

"In the darkness of his room he could, without being seen, observe the whole family". P. 494

The man feels alienated since he cannot be what he wants in the look of the others and makes the man separated with others. Gregor is the object for others and it caused him alienated. Gregor is escaping from others objectivity and he tends to feel fear and shame. According to Sartre:

"Furthermore, the other does not constitute me as an object for myself but for him. Therefore the other's presence does not cause me as object to 'appear'. I apprehend nothing but as escaping from myself toward, even when language has revealed that the others considers me evil or jealous, I shall never have a concrete intuition of my evil or my jealousy. These will be never fleeting notions whose very nature will be to escape me. I shall not apprehend my evil, but in relation to this or this particular act I shall escape myself, I shall feel my alienation or my flow towards... A being which I shall be only able to think empty as evil and which nevertheless I shall feel that I am, which I shall live at the distance through shame or fear (Sartre, 1956)

Conclusion

Identity crisis and alienation are portrayed in the main characters of *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa. Gregor is a travelling salesman who is unhappy with his own choice. His identity as a breadwinner and an employer do not exist anymore in the society after he transformed to an insect. He starts to alienate himself as the result of his identity to the society. He is unhappy being a breadwinner and an employer. He thinks that he has no choice to pick for his own freedom. His confusing identity leads him to identity crisis due to his transformation because he is no longer know his sense of human and forget his humanity. His unhappiness toward his identity also leads him to alienation. He alienated himself to be his own real being. He separates himself from society but when he turned to be an insect, he was alienated by others because his existence is not important anymore. His existence is nothing because he is no longer engaged to his identity as a breadwinner and employer.

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