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Alienation in Kafka's the *Metamorphosis* (on Stage): From Steven Berkoff's Vision to Lemn Sissay's Interpretation

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Abstract

This study examines the phenomenon of alienation in two different theatre adaptations of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. The adaptations examined in this study are *Metamorphosis*, written and directed by Steven Berkoff, which premiered at the London Round Theatre in 1969 and *Kafka's The Metamorphosis*, adapted by Lemn Sissay for the Theatre Royal Plymouth in 2023. The phenomenon that Marx claimed that capitalism distances people from themselves, their labour and their environment, and theorized as alienation, remains a persistent thematic core in the two theatre adaptations, as in the original text. These productions not only reaffirm the alienation experienced by the protagonist Gregor Samsa, but also extend this condition to other members of the Samsa family, reflecting broader dimensions of alienation shaped by the patriarchal form of the society. Considering that the Berkoff version of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, which was first published in 1915, was created in 1969 and the Sissay version was created in 2023, it is obvious that capitalism has undergone a great change in the intervening 108 years by expanding its geographical and economic sphere of influence. The main subject of the study is to examine the economic and social realities of their periods in the Berkoff adaptation of the late 60s, when the footsteps of neoliberalism were heard, and the Sissay adaptations, which are the product of the post-neoliberal period. Using the historical-comparative method, the study comparatively examines the alienation processes of the characters by placing the original text and the 1969 and 2023 adaptations in their historical contexts.

Keywords *The Metamorphosis* · Alienation · Franz Kafka · Adaptation · Contemporary Drama

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Introduction

Texts have circulated in various contexts for many years. From this perspective, texts occupy a role in social life as non-dogmatic, active and dynamic entities. They constantly evolve, gaining new meaning through these changes. Within the historical framework, one text that significantly contributes and nourishes this concept is Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. This seminal work from the last century has influenced countless stories, poems, films, novels, comics, and even television productions through its textual structure. The theatre productions examined in this study are adaptations of Kafka's iconic work created on different dates. The works include *Metamorphosis*, described by Steven Berkoff as "a kind of modern kabuki" (1995, p. 11), and Lemn Sisssay's *Kafka's Metamorphosis*, produced in 2023.

These theatrical adaptations from different historical and economic periods, and like all literary works, are shaped by their historical contexts. However, they remain closely connected to the original text, incorporating the events experienced by the Samsa family and the psychological, economic and social crises that the family fell into. One prominent theme is alienation, particularly the alienation of the novel's protagonist, Gregor Samsa. Gregor's willingness to go to work even as an insect, if permitted by his superior, exemplifies his existential alienation and his inability to embrace his true self. His transformation into an insect is the destruction of his true self, highlighting the loss of individuality in an automated emotionless and hopeless lifestyle. The current study examines in depth the concept of alienation, the key theme of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*.

The study focuses on two primary inferences. First, it suggests that Gregor is not the sole character subjected to alienation. Second, the study reveals that the state of isolation experienced by alienated characters, especially Gregor, manifests differently across various economic realities in different play adaptations. While alienation is undoubtedly one of the main themes of the novel; it is observed at different levels of alienation in various economic contexts. This study considers David Harvey's reinterpretation of Marx's theory of alienation within the framework of the contemporary neoliberal order as its theoretical basis. The analysis also stresses the fact that alienation operates at the intersection of class dynamics, familial structures and gender-based hierarchies.

In her book, *A Theory of Adaptation,* Linda Hutcheon asserts that "adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication" (2006, p. 7). She states that adaptations often repeat the same plot points, characters, and perhaps themes from the original work, but they process without necessarily replicating it exactly. Instead, adaptations create a new literary work or piece of art that possesses its own unique character, making it fresh, new, and interesting. Accordingly, "adaptation is a subset of intertextuality – all adaptations are obviously intertexts, but it is much less obvious that all intertexts are adaptations" (Leitch, 2012, p. 89). Julie Sanders defines adaptation as a "a highly specific process involving the transition from one genre to another: novels into film; drama into musical; the dramatization of prose narrative and prose fiction; or the inverse movement of making drama into prose narrative" (2015, p. 24).

Each adaptation of a text inherently becomes a new text in itself. However, it is also a continuation of a previously created text, building on its foundations and bringing its narrative or thematic elements into new contexts. Thus, "Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication" (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 7). The multifaceted nature of adaptation highlights the complex relationship between specificity and persistence; New interpretations and presentations breathe new life into existing works while preserving their ties with their origins. For example, a remake of a popular film reflects the spirit of the original story while being enriched with contemporary technologies and narrative techniques. These processes ensure both the preservation and renewal of the literary and artistic heritage, offering audiences and readers familiar yet fresh experiences.

Catherine Rees states that "the adaption is not an act of sly plagiarism; it is a deliberate and self-conscious attempt to engage with an original text and offer a new approach or direction" (2017, p. 3). Rees (2017) also suggests that adaptation increases artistic pleasure. To fully appreciate this pleasure, the audience must have a clear understanding of the origin of the new text. For instance, enjoying Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1967) would be unfeasible without recognizing its connection to *Hamlet* (2006), as the two works are intertwined through shared characters and plotlines. Actually, it might be nearly impossible to fully engage with the work unless one understands its source, yet the audience cannot fully enjoy the wise jokes, the sense of irony and fate that form the crux of Stoppard's comedy, and the inverted perspective of focusing on the hapless side characters rather than the main characters.

Social and historical contexts play a key role in text adaptations. Major literary works vary according to each period's historical climate and social events. In these adaptations, the themes and characters of the work are reshaped according to the historical context of that period. Likewise, Lewis Carrol's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) tells the strange and fascinating adventures of a young girl, Alice, in a fantasy world that she enters by following a white rabbit. In this world, absurd events replace the rules of logic, and Alice interacts with the interesting characters she encounters on the other hand, *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), directed by Tim Burton, is a direct adaptation of the novel. As Kamilla Elliot (2010) reports, the movie scenes are surprisingly verbatim, but Burton has reflected Alice's adventures in different places and with different characters in the novel on the big screen in a "videogame structure" (p. 5). This adaptation reflects the sociological climate of the 2010s and addresses the real soul of the new millennium when video games were the major entertainment tool for people. This adaptation draws the audience directly into the utopian world of the novel while also addressing the contemporary concerns of modern audiences.

Julie Sanders states that "a political or ethical commitment shapes a writer's, director's, or performer's decision to re-interpret a source text" (2006, p. 2). George Orwell's *1984* the critique of totalitarian regimes and the significance of individual freedoms through various film and theatre adaptations across different eras. The 2013 modern theatre adaptation by Robert Icke and Duncan Macmillan revisits the novel's themes from a contemporary viewpoint. In her column in *The Guardian*, Kate Hennessy expresses surprise that *1984* reached number one on Amazon and questions why so many people are turning to such a bleak dystopian novel. She claims that "it's because after Trump's election the word 'unprecedented' was used a lot. Yet in 1984 there was a place where all this, and worse, had happened. Fictional, yes, but still a precedent, and a safe space to process the realities of a post-Trump world" (2017). Therefore, the novel has regained meaning in today's complex political and social climate.

The main argument of this study is that the narrative of the Samsa family reveals not only Gregor's transformation but also the alienation experienced in different ways by the other members of the family. This argument, as the basic guiding principle of the article, addresses the concept of alienation in a multi-dimensional framework. In this context, the study includes in its analysis the forms of alienation that Marx associated with the labor process, as well as gender-based alienation and the experience of the precariat emerging in today's capitalist societies. This observation aims to make visible not only Gregor's individual tragedy but also the broader structural and ideological framework affecting all members of the family.

Alienation and Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*

1984 has been adapted to different genres of literature and visual arts in the light of historical and political contexts. Nonetheless, the core themes of the original text, the politics of fear and political oppression, remain constant. Similarly, although Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, first published in 1915, has undergone various adaptations, one of the novel's main themes, alienation, remains unchanged. *The Metamorphosis* deals with Gregor Samsa's physical transformation and the resulting deep alienation he

experiences. The universality and timelessness of Kafka's narrative is constantly emphasized by being reinterpreted in different branches of art.

Alienation has been a concept of discussion in philosophical and academic circles for decades. For example, "in theological discourse it referred to the distance between man and God; in social contract theories, to loss of the individual's original liberty; and in English political economy, to the transfer of property ownership" (Musto, 2021, p. 3). Karl Marx was the philosopher who placed the concept in an economic and political context by drawing from Hegel's works. As Sean Sayers (2011) states, Marx regarded labour as the fundamental and central activity in human life. While this perspective is implicit throughout his works, it is most thoroughly addressed in the 'estranged labour' concept in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1982). In Marxist terms, alienation's "origin and continuing basis in civilized society arises from the alienation of labor which characterizes all systems of private property from slavery to capitalism. Alienation expresses the fact that the creations of men's hands and minds turn against their creators and come to dominate their lives" (Mandel & Novack, 1973, p.7). This study adopts this definition of alienation as its framework, positing that the alienation experienced by the characters in *the Metamorphosis* adaptations, particularly Gregor Samsa, aligns with this conceptualization.

There have been several adaptations of *The Metamorphosis* for years. The 2012 film adaptation, directed by Chris Swanton, remains faithful to Kafka's work and details Gregor's psychological and physical transformation. In this film, Gregor's alienation is clearly seen in his relationships with his family and society. Brian Howard's 1983 opera adaptation "chillingly portrays the psychological disintegration and alienation of Gregor Samsa and the journey to callous disregard of his once-loving family" (2018). In a dance adaptation of Arthur Pita staged by the Royal Ballet in 2011, Gregor's transformation and alienation are explained through dance movements and body language. In Peter Kuper's graphic novel adaptation published in 2003, Gregor's transformation and alienation are emphasized with Kuper's characteristic visual style, and Gregor's physical change and his break with his environment are visualized. Saul Steinberg's 1969 illustration re-imagines Kafka's story in a single detailed drawing, while Gregor's transformation and alienation are expressed through the details and symbols in the drawing. These different artistic adaptations explore Gregor Samsa's theme of alienation in various formats and variations, revealing the universal and timeless nature of Kafka's work.

In David Farr and Gísli Örn Garðarsson's *Metamorphosis*, staged by Vesturport Theatre in 2006, Gregor's transformation and alienation are expressed through stage design and acrobatic movements. Additionally, "David Farr and Gisli Orn Gardarsson, as joint adaptor-directors, see it as domestic tragedy and political metaphor. Gregor becomes an image of marginalised people everywhere" (2006). Farr and Gardarsson transpose the theme of alienation in Metamorphosis to a political context, set against the backdrop of the lingering impact of the 9/11 attacks, the ongoing Iraq War, and the politically polarized world. Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* has inspired a wide range of artistic adaptations, each interpreting the work through distinct creative lenses. Across these interpretations, the characters, most notably Gregor Samsa, experience varying degrees of alienation from the self, their labour and the broader social environment.

Analysis of Alienation in Steven Berkoff's and Lemn Sissay's Adaptations

Steven Berkoff's *Metamorphosis* and Lemn Sissay's *Kafka's Metamorphosis* illustrate alienation in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* on stage and serve as the primary focus of this study. In Steven Berkoff's *Metamorphosis*, the physical transformation and alienation of the protagonist, Gregor Samsa, are accentuated through expressive body language and facial expressions. Berkoff's distinctive physical theatre technique dramatically stages Gregor's estrangement from both society and his family.

Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* begins with the following sentences: "As Gregor Samsa woke one morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed into some kind of monstrous vermin" (Kafka, 2009, p. 29). In Steven Berkoff's theatrical adaptation, Gregor's father, Mr. Samsa, appears in the first scene and speaks: "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams…" (2017, p. 79). Afterwards, Gregor's mother, Mrs. Samsa continues the conversation: "He found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect…" (p. 79). "Kafka did not specify what kind of creature Gregor became" (Joyce, 2009, p. 10), but what is certain is that Gregor has distanced himself from being human. Despite the lack of a clear explanation by Kafka for Gregor's transformation into a gigantic insect, Gregor does not question his horrifying transformation or his new existence. Instead, his immediate concern about the complications that will arise if he cannot get out of bed and go to work serves as the first indication of Gregor's alienation. As Marx (1988) states, an alienated worker "does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind" (p. 73). When analysed from this perspective, both in the original text and in Berkoff's adaptation, Gregor has turned into a machine, even a quasi-human mechanism, which serves as a profound representation of alienation.

Unlike the original text and Berkoff's adaptation, Lemn Sissay's *Kafka's Metamorphosis* (2023) does not commence with Gregor's transformation. Furthermore, Sissay named the first act of the play "Pre-Metamorphosis" (2023, p. 3). Gregor's transformation is not depicted in the first scene of the play. Sissay opts to begin the play with her sister Grete's words instead of Gregor's. In the first scene, Grete moves through the room and "drapes herself in fabric and looks in the mirror" (Sissay, 2023, p. 3). Sissay gives the first signal from the very beginning of the play that he will create a character of Grete that is significantly different from the original text and Berkoff's adaptation. In the same scene, Grete says: "Hello, my, name, is, Grete Samsa… And I love life" (p.5). These dialogues are entirely absent from Kafka's original text. Berkoff's adaptation also largely omits details about Grete's inner psychological state or emotions. In Berkoff's *Metamorphosis*, during a scene in which Gregor articulates his exhaustion from hard work, Grete is depicted approvingly with the remark "he works so hard" (2017, p. 80) while she prepares milk, coffee, and breakfast for Gregor. Grete's existence in the play is designed to bolster and enhance Gregor's narrative.

In Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, Grete is portrayed as a 17-year-old young girl who maintains amicable relations with her family and shares a particularly strong bond with her brother, Gregor. She is also characterized by her artistic development, notably as skilled violinist. Throughout Kafka's work, Grete also changes, but this transformation is mostly confined to her maturation from adolescence into "a handsome, fully figured girl" (2009, p. 74). Nina Pelikan Straus (1989) critically analyses the portrayal of Grete in Kafka's work in the context of gender studies and feminist criticism, contending that Grete is ensnared in a patriarchal cycle. According to her, Grete "whose mirror reflects women's present situation as we attempt to critique patriarchal dominance in order to create new lives that avoid the replication of invalidation" (p. 652). Conversely, the long monologues dedicated to Grete in Sissay's adaptation are particularly significant:

> The problem I have (although I think more than I speak and I think it is not a problem, actually) is that I like to speak which makes me more boy than girl, boy girl. Grilboy. Groy. Dad wanted a boy. I am not supposed to know but I do. So I speak quietly giving an impression of one thing when I am actually quite another altogether. I am a girl and girls do things. I play violin. (Sissay, 2023, p. 14).

Grete's statements demonstrate a profound awareness of societal gender roles and the expectations imposed on women. While Grete states that she does not like to talk, she associates this situation with "male" characteristics and questions societal gender norms. Terms such as "Gril boy" and "Groy" express Grete's confusion regarding her gender identity and her fluidity between gender roles. These statements

illustrate how society tries to enforce specific stereotypes on women, leading to feelings of alienation when individuals fail to conform. The fact that her father wants a son intensifies the pressure and expectations placed upon Grete, diverting her from her authentic self. Grete's statements show that she is moving away from both her and her gender roles. Defining herself as "more boy than girl, boy girl" puts her at the intersection of gender identity and social expectations, and reveals that this situation alienates her from her true self. Her assertion "I'm a girl and girls do things" points out the alienation and internal conflict she feels as she tries to conform to gender roles. Doğan (2021) argues that such situations are effective in revealing the hierarchical and class dynamics and power relations surrounding the characters. Within this framework, the intertwined structure of Grete's identity and her state of alienation becomes visible.

Sissay's *Kafka's Metamorphosis* includes another detail about Grete that completely contradicts Kafka's original text. Grete declares: "I hate the scales. I hate the rosin. I hate the first position. I hate the third position. I hate these scales. The scales! I hate the violin. I hate the fidgety strings which harden my finger skin" (2023, p. 14). Grete's aversion to playing the violin demonstrates the immense strain and pressure she experiences in trying to conform to social expectations. The study of music, particularly violin playing, has often been associated with sophistication and elegance, qualities traditionally linked to feminine values. Grete's dissatisfaction with this issue and her hatred towards the violin, which she regards as an insect "sucking the blood from my (her) neck into its body" (Sissay, 2023, p. 15) everything related to it shows that she is stuck between her own identity and society's expectations and therefore feels alienated. Grete's hatred of the wires that harden the skin of her fingers is more than just a physical discomfort, it symbolizes her feeling that her personal freedom and life are being limited. For her, musical terms such as charts, rosin, positions and scales mean more than just a physical occupation, but a spiritual and emotional captivity. These elements symbolize the conflict between Grete's own wishes and personality and the imposed expectations, and the alienation created by this conflict.

Straus (1989) points out that "Traditionally, critics of "The Metamorphosis have underplayed the fact that the story is about not only Gregor's but also his family's and, especially, Grete's metamorphosis." (p. 652). This observation serves as the foundational premise for this article, which seeks to explore the broader implications of the narrative on the Samsa family. Besides Gregor and Grete, Mr. and Mrs. Samsa also experience alienation. The social conditions and political context that affect Grete and Gregor are equally applicable to them. As Marx and Engels (1988) declared in a capitalist society "the bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation" (p. 212). In Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and adaptations by Berkoff and Sissay, the original novel and play adaptations are set within a political and economic framework that indicates a capitalist state structure. Mr. Samsa, while not afflicted with any significant health problems, is unable to work. Mrs. Samsa, who suffers from asthma, dedicates most of her time to chores without leaving home. Following his father's bankruptcy, Gregor has been working at the company he joined to pay off his family's debts for five years without even taking a sick leave. Consequently, the family is facing severe economic difficulties.

In Berkoff's adaptation, in scene two, the family comes together after Gregor turns into an insect. The family talks about the unemployment and cost of living they face following Gregor's transformation and his consequent loss of employment:

Mr. Samsa: It'll still be necessary to earn enough for our expenses

Mrs. Samsa: Of Course

Greta: Let me work! I'm longing to go out to work.

Mr. Samsa: Yes, you could always take washing as your mother did in the bad old days.

Mrs. Samsa: But it's only till Gregor gets better.

Mr. Samsa: We don't know that. (Berkoff, 2017, p. 103)

Gregor's transformation into an insect symbolizes not only a physical transformation but also a profound shift in the roles and relationships within the family. Although Mrs. Samsa still has hope, and the family members begin to worry about providing for themselves, as they consider him now economically useless. This indicates that Gregor is perceived not as part of the family, but merely as an economic resource. This indicates that Gregor is perceived not as a family member but as an economic resource, highlighting his alienation from the family's human values. The primary concern becomes economic difficulties and the need for employment, illustrating that the family's connections are defined by economic conditions. Grete's aspiration to find a job and Mr. Samsa's suggestion to take up laundry work, as his wife does during difficult times, exemplify how labour alienates family members. Viewing work as a burden and necessity suggests that individuals are distanced from their own identities and human values.

In Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, Mr. Samsa's transformation follows a symbolic course. According to Harold Bloom (2009), Mr. Samsa was too exhausted to work at first and therefore lost his authority to Gregor. Mr. Samsa was "forced back to work by Gregor's inexplicable condition, Mr. Samsa becomes a bank messenger and is required to wear a uniform to work. After taking in some lodgers to help pay the bills, Mr. Samsa shows his renewed authority by kicking them out at the end" (p. 35). In Berkoff's adaptation, Mr. Samsa's character development follows a similar course to the original text. In the first family meeting after Gregor's metamorphosis, the family members talk:

Mr. Samsa: Gregor, yes, Gregor - although he worked hard, he never seemed to be a part of it- don't think he wanted to - stood outside it somehow - as if he was saying: "This is nothing to do with me" ... he didn't really like work, he downright his answered it.

Mrs. Samsa: How can you say that when he worked so hard?

Mr. Samsa: Oh, I know he worked hard - but did he ever see his face sometimes after he had come home it was hard with resentment - saying it is for you I'm doing this. (Berkoff, 2017, p. 104)

Mr. Samsa's alienation can be critically analysed through Gregor's transformation and his remarks about work in the dialogue. Mr. Samsa asserts that despite Gregor's diligent efforts, he is unwilling to integrate himself into the business, instead positioning himself as detached from his job. This detachment mirrors Mr. Samsa's sense of alienation from his family and society. Gregor's dissatisfaction with his professional life and his underlying resentment of working solely for his family echo Mr. Samsa's disappointment and alienation. When Mr. Samsa observes his son's expressions of dissatisfaction upon returning home, and he perceives that the job holds no intrinsic value for Gregor. This realization reflects Mr. Samsa's sense of purposelessness and profound estrangement from social roles. Mr. Samsa's alienation can also be easily observed in Sissay's play *Kafka's Metamorphosis*:

> There'll be no begging. No bone woman stories anymore. No luxury of stories! The dinner parties preceded the boy and were in a time before dear Grete was born. Gregor has enjoyed the fruits of my labor and needs to share. And as long as he is under my roof he will do as I say. All of you will. This is the rule of this house. I hate the story of the beggar. I was forced to tell it. The boss who would only visit on payday because that's when our cupboards were full. The interest on the debt! 'Tell the story of the beggarwoman, Mr. Samsa - beggars can't be choosers, Mr. Samsa.' So they got what they were given. I told it so many times I believed it myself (2023, p. 38)

Mr. Samsa reflects his deep disconnection from his family and his own humanity and his disillusionment rooted in the restless pressures of a capitalist society. His disdain for 'the luxury of the stories' and his rejection of empathetic narratives highlight a shift towards utilitarian values where personal history and emotional connections are subjugated to economic survival and authoritative control. His enforced storytelling, driven by debt and economic dependency, symbolizes the erosion of individual autonomy and identity under the weight of financial obligations. The repeated telling of the beggar's story until it becomes a belief truth illustrates the internalization of alienation, where one's sense of self is moulded and diminished by the external social economic forces. This dynamic is reflective of broader social alienation, where human relationships and personal dignity are often compromised by the imperatives of economic survival and social hierarchy.

These words uttered by Mr. Samsa in the play poignantly illustrate the concept of alienation within the context of contemporary historical social and economic realities. Sissay's adaptation is situated in the contemporary context, reflecting the pervasive influence of the global neoliberal economic order. Berkoff's and Kafka's Mr. Samsa characters are also accustomed to living in capitalist societies, yet Sissay's Mr. Samsa lives in the core of neoliberalism, whose "operation of capitalism is not confined within any national borders but across the globe" (Wong, 2022, p. 97). Thus, it becomes evident that The Samsa Family, as reinterpreted by Sissay, exists within a more acute and detrimental phase of capitalist exploitation. The most distinctive example of this situation is seen in Gregor's business trips. In the original text and Berkoff's adaptation, Gregor's travels are limited to domestic train journeys. However, in Sissay's version, he travels to Istanbul, which he calls "a magnificient Trading city" (2023, p. 10), China and other European cities. This shift signifies that the company Gregor works for operations as a contemporary trans-national corporation. Unlike the historical and economic contexts of both Kafka's original text, written in 1915, and Berkoff's adaptation, first staged in 1969, the neoliberal era is characterized by a propensity to induce a more profound alienation among employees.

According to David Harvey (2014), alienation "refers to how affections, loyalties and trust can be alienated (transferred, stolen away) from one person, institution or political cause to another" (p. 267). Harvey argues that the concept of alienation has historically evolved to the detriment of workers with the development of capitalism. In the contemporary period, which he describes as the endpoint of capitalism, he characterizes alienation as a broader social relationship and states that all social relations are encompassed within the mechanism of alienation. According to Harvey (2014), This mechanism "can be exceedingly damaging to the social fabric" (p. 267). This is exactly what happens to the whole family in Sissay's *Kafka's Metamorphosis.* The transformation experienced by the family reflects a neoliberal mechanism of alienation that permeates its social and economic relations in their entirety.

In Sissay's work, Chief Clerk arrives at Gregor's door and calls out to him:

> Right, I see that, rather than it be between you and I. Man to man. Maybe your parents need to hear the truth… What is that noise?! I was going to tell you in private but you do not even open the door. Not even to your own family. Your position in this company is *not* secure, Gregor. Maybe it's good for your parents to hear it. Your work has been below par.
>
> Mrs. Samsa *gasps.*
>
> You are not reaching the targets.
>
> *A gasp this time from* Mr. Samsa (2023, p. 25)

Chief Clerk shows up at Gregor's door, threatening him with job loss due to his failure to meet sales targets. These threats highlight the insecurity of Gregor's position, a scenario not depicted in the two adaptations of *The Metamorphosis* included in this study, nor in the original text. This precarious working condition is entirely consistent with the neoliberal economic system, which is mostly governed by transnational corporations. In Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor, "the boss's creature" (2009, p. 31) is portrayed as a proletariat who is closely subservient to his employer. However, in Sissay's adaptation, Gregor is depicted as an insecure member of the precariat, so entangled in the corporate bureaucracy that he is barely unaware of who his employer is. Giving background information about contemporary capitalism, Guy Standing (2018) defines the precariat as a new emerging class:

> Since 1980, the global economy has undergone a dramatic transformation, with the globalization of the labor force, the rise of automation, and—above all—the growth of Big Finance, Big Pharma, and Big Tech. The social democratic consensus of the immediate postwar years has given way to a new phase of capitalism that is leaving workers further behind and reshaping the class structure. The precariat, a mass class defined by unstable labor arrangements, lack of identity, and erosion of rights, is emerging as today's "dangerous class." (p. 1).

The precariat is a socio-political class consisting of economically disadvantaged individuals with diverse identities in terms of gender, nationality, sect, race, and lack of social security. Standing (2011) traces the historical process of precariat formation to neoliberalization, which emerged in the 1970s and soon affected the entire camp of capitalist states. To Standing, "neo-liberal model was that growth and development depended on market competitiveness; everything should be done to maximise competition and competitiveness, and to allow market principles to permeate all aspects of life" (p. 1). In this context, neoliberalism introduces labour market flexibility to enhance the competitive potential of employees, which inherently leads to precarity. Considering this context, Sissay's Gregor is undoubtedly a member of the precariat.

In Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor is described as a traveling salesman, yet in Sissay's adaptation, he is referred to as a "commercial trader" (p. 27). At the same time, this may initially appear to be a simple update to his job description in response to changing conditions. However, it is a strategic class tactic that the employer implements against the employee. As Standing (2011) asserts, "someone in a static, going-nowhere job is given a high-sounding epithet to conceal precariat tendencies. People are made into 'chief' or 'executive' or 'officer' without having an army to lead or a team to forge" (p. 17). For example, employees are given prestigious-sounding job titles such as 'recycling officer' instead of bin emptier, 'cleaning consultant' instead of cleaner, or 'media distribution officer' instead of paper boy, yet these fancy titles cannot hide the fact that they actually have to work for very low wages. In this context, the fact that Gregor moves from the position of traveling salesman to the title of 'commercial trader' in Sissay's adaptation, coupled with his deteriorating economic compared to the original text, clearly exemplifies his inclination to be a member of precariat.

It is very likely that precarization will lead to alienation in every aspect. Standing argues that "The precariat experiences the four A's – anger, anomie, anxiety and alienation" (2011, p. 19). To Standing, alienation stems from realizing that one's work serves others' purposes rather than one's own, a defining trait of the proletariat. However, "those in the precariat experience several special injections, including a feeling of being fooled—told they should be grateful and 'happy' that they are in jobs and should be 'positive'." They are told to be happy and cannot see why" (p. 21). Gregor is deeply unhappy and unable to understand the source of his discontent:

> Why don't I sleep a little more and forget all this? I work day in, day out. It is harder work than the work they do at head office. I have to deal with travel, train connections, bad cafe food, temporary and constantly changing Human relationships, I am met by everyone. I am remembered by no one. I'm done with it all. (Sissay, 2023, pp. 20-21)

Gregor's monologue occurs after his transformation. These words make it clear that he is experiencing deep alienation. His desire to forget all this by sleeping reflects his dissatisfaction with his job and life. Having to deal with constant travel, train connections, bad cafeteria food, and temporary, ever-changing human relationships puts a huge strain on him. Although he is known by everyone, the fact that he is not remembered by anyone indicates a deep lack of identity and belonging. Furthermore, he is regarded as an "asset" (Sissay, 2023, p. 23) by his company, not a human being. This situation is the most obvious example of Gregor's alienation as a precariat.

Conclusion

Metamorphosis, written by Steven Berkoff in 1969, focuses on Gregor's alienation as its theme. However, the depiction of Gregor's alienation in this work differs from Kafka's original narrative. In Berkoff's adaptation, Gregor experiences his transformation from the very beginning in this play, yet this time Gregor's transformation is experienced from the outset, similar to the original text, yet his emotional state is primarily conveyed through his family's dialogues. In contrast, Lemn Sissay's 2023 play *Kafka's Metamorphosis* distinguishes itself by depicting Gregor's transformation in the middle of the play. This conscious choice of Sissay brings Gregor's sister, Grete, to the forefront from the beginning, deviating from the original text. Sissay's adaptation further explores the alienation of Gregor's family, particularly focusing on Grete.

In Sissay's adaptation, Gregor lives in a post-neoliberal era where capitalism is structured by multinational corporations worldwide. Reflecting the demands of this period, Gregor's work has also transformed. His travels, which contributed to his identity crisis, are now international and more harrowing. Furthermore, sales targets are prominently highlighted throughout the play, placing Gregor in a relentless continual improvement process. In Sissay's work, Gregor makes it clear that his travels and incessant sales targets significantly contribute to his own alienation. Additionally, the sales targets are indicative of Gregor's job security, trying his performance to his sense of stability. From this perspective, Gregor can be seen as member of precariat, emerging from the relationship between precarious working conditions and insecurity. Gregor's alienation, depicted in all three works, is the result of different phases of capitalism. With the historical evolution of capitalism, the manifestation of alienation in the play has also evolved.

Sissay's Gregor exists within an ecosystem of alienation that extends beyond his inner world to encompass his environment, family and society. In Kafka's original text, Grete is portrayed as a young, beautiful and artistically talented woman overshadowed by her brother and father, shaped by conservative values. In Berkoff's adaptation, Grete's voice is more pronounced; however, Sissay's adaptation elevates Grete to a level where she could be considered the protagonist of the play. Grete's relationship with her violin and in Sissay's work is highly symbolic. In the original text, Grete loves playing the violin and bases her

future plans on this instrument. In Sissay's adaptation, however, she openly expresses hatred for the violin and everything it represents. This shift in Grete's attitude signifies the profound crisis of alienation she experiences.

This study has comparatively examined two different adaptations of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* to reveal how the concept of alienation has evolved. As a result of the analyses, it has been observed that Gregor is not the only character who is subjected to alienation; on the contrary, this situation affects all the family members in different ways. In Sissay's adaptation in particular, Grete's transformation reveals that alienation is not only an individual experience but also takes shape in terms of social roles and identities. The findings reveal that while the theme of alienation is preserved in both adaptations, this theme is reconstructed according to the structural realities of different capitalist periods. Whereas Gregor's transformation in Berkoff's adaptation is marked primarily by its individual and emotional aspects, Sissay's version foregrounds the character's entrapment within neoliberal pressures. Gregor's constant travels, performance targets, and anxieties regarding job security serve as clear indicators of his situation. In this context, Sissay's Gregor can be considered a representative of the precariat positioned within the precarious and fragile work conditions of contemporary capitalism.

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