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TÍTULO: Alienación masiva y social en El castillo de Kafka: una interpretación basada en Tönnies, Seeman y Freud.

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RESUMEN: Kafka, una figura sin igual en el modernismo literario, la prosa y una piedra imán; en este sentido, en un polo se encuentra la experiencia mística, anterior a todo, la experiencia fundada en la didáctica de la Cabalá, y la experiencia moderna de la vida cívica y las aflicciones con las que ha pesado la psique humana, y en el otro pintado en palabras a través de un Expresionismo Sociológico. Este artículo tiene como objetivo tener esto último en cuenta desde una perspectiva sociológica. Teniendo en cuenta las consecuencias del prolongado poder de manipulación ejercido por el castillo sobre los aldeanos, este artículo pretende igualmente desplegar las repercusiones de los individuos alienados y su metamorfosis en objetos de estado que tocan las teorías registradas por los sociólogos y psicólogos modernos de la marca.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Kafka, Alienación masiva, Gesellschaft, Freud, Tönnies.

TITLE: Mass and societal alienation in Kafka's The Castle: A construal based on Tönnies, Seeman and Freud.

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ABSTRACT: Kafka is a nonpareil figure in literary modernism, prose and a lodestone; in this regard, at one pole stands the mystical experience – anterior to all, the experience founded on the didactics of Kabbalah – and the modern experience of civic life and the afflictions it has lumbered human psyche with, at the other painted in words through a sociological expressionism. This paper aims to take the latter into account in a sociological perspective. Taking account of the consequences of the protracted manipulative power exerted by the castle on the villagers; this paper equally intends to unfold the repercussions of individuals being alienated and their metamorphosis into state-objects touching upon the theories registered by modern sociologists and psychologists of mark.

KEY WORDS: Kafka, Mass Alienation, Gesellschaft, Freud, Tönnies.

INTRODUCTION.

At the age of 28 Kafka wrote in a letter, “I am separated from all things by a hollow space, and I do not even reach to its boundaries” (2003, p. 34). This fragment by Kafka can conveniently recapitulate and as well serve as a quintessence for the ubiquitous complexion in the author’s oeuvre and his concern over the thorn in the modern man’s flesh. Despite the fact that the modern age has resolved the medieval issues of humanity, it has also put forth a body of psychical and spiritual issues and unsettled fundamental questions. As Kafka writes in his diary “Discoveries have forced themselves on people”¹, the outbreak of two world wars and its senseless antagonism and trauma deteriorated the man’s self-estrangement and purgatorial state amid cogwheels of modernity, systems and organizations. Likewise, it brought about a crisis of faith and ethics, and left the modern man alone

¹ Diaries: December 10, 1913.

in her quest for meaning. Contemplation about the aforementioned problems along the modern man's alienating self, brought a far-ranging philosophical movement into being which is known as *Existentialism*.

Kafka is the cognizant inheritor of the same crisis. His text is a reflection surface depicting the disposition of contemporary man and the era we are living in. Written in 1922, and published posthumously in 1926, Franz Kafka's *The Castle* portrays a world seemingly controlled by whimsical leaders and absurd rules. As K., land-surveyor and unwelcome guest in the village near the Castle, endeavors to reach his goals—the Castle itself and the elusive Director Klammer—questions arise regarding the ultimate source of power, the means of rule enforcement, and the terms of the relationship between villagers and officials in the prison-like world created by Kafka.

Regardless of who or what is in control of the Castle, of the village, and of K.'s actions, the power structures are kept in place by the pervasive fear of a ubiquitous bureaucratic system and by the threat of a punishment that is seldom actually administered or experienced (Corbella, 2007). One is compelled to assert if justice is to be done to Kafka, his literature is not anywise solely a literature of despair signifying an absurd universe. It is in essence a circumstantial portrayal of the journey from one's individuality along the line of community and even on the farther side a journey towards the borders beyond 'Self' and 'Otherness'. It is not at any rate a dramatization when Bertolt Brecht brands Kafka's text as prophetic (Benjamin, 1981, p. 97).

In this regard, he envisaged the emergence of totalitarian regimes that rose to power later than his death, especially that of soviet union and the mechanism of its secret police (GPU), and he also

unveiled those aspects of human existence like *être-pour-soi*², *In-der-Welt-sein*³, *Mitsein*⁴, etc. prior to existentialist philosophers.

In respect that Kafka's text is epitomized as the vociferous expression of modern man and his angst, in this paper we are going to discuss Kafka's premonition about alienating forces – abundantly manifested in his text – and the fact that his characters find themselves in a disorienting world in which their individuality is subject to disintegration and as well the role of society in materialization of this alienation, which will not be conceivable unaccompanied by a succinct review on Ferdinand Tönnies since he has had a substantial influence on our conception of social alienation and the interrelationship between alienation and society.

DEVELOPMENT.

The age-old concept of alienation has been employed from ancient times with diverse and on occasions contradictory meanings and has been greatly embedded in all the great religions, and too in philosophical, social and political theories. Erich Fromm the German sociologist of inspiring moment is convinced by the notion that the history of alienation dates back to the point in history that prophets of Old Testament referred to as 'Idolatry' (Fromm, 1955, p. 118). As specified by Fromm, the man pays obeisance to the fruit of his own endeavor. In doing so he of his own volition but nesciently transforms himself into an object. The idol per se is the embodiment of the idolater's own life forces under an alienated guise. Other than Fromm, Herbert Marcuse is equally regarded as one of the most prominent interpreters of Marx's alienation concept, and he too has been won over by Freud and psychoanalytical perception. Examined from the perspective of the history of ideas, the concept of alienation in contemporary social science appears to draw upon two sources in particular:

² **Being-in-itself.**

³ **Being-in-the-world.**

⁴ **Being-with.**

The Hegelian-Marxian concept of *Entfremdung* and Emile Durkheim's concept of *anomie* (Geyer, 1976, p. 7).

It was in the work of G. W. F. Hegel that alienation first took shape as a philosophical concept. Its further development by Marx has been decisive for contemporary understanding of alienation, *alienation*, and *Entfremdung*. Notwithstanding the fact that the influence of this notion was limited to only a minor group of their disciples at the time, Marx's construal of capitalistic epoch concentrating on alienation lead to the emergence of this term in theories of sociology in 1940s. Among the contemporary sociologists who have followed their insights are Seeman (1959, 1983), Feuer (1963), Erikson (1986), and Berger (1967).

The German sociologist Georg Simmel, whose groundbreaking works has had its fair share of influence on coeval sociology and philosophy in Europe and the United States, in his essay *Der Konflikt der Modernen Kultur* (1918) attributes this germinating apprehension – which is recurrently discussed by exponents of Existentialism – that the modern man is beyond the capability of being himself, that the modern man is doomed to continue to exist as a stranger in the world in which he lives, to the antagonism between life and form, which is clearly discernable in the development of the majority of civilizations.

One of the best elucidations of Simmel's view and Kafka's recurrent theme of "alienating forces" in modern societies can be tracked down in the memoir of the Austrian novelist Stefan Zweig by the name of *The World of Yesterday* (1942): *"I ceased to feel as if I quite belonged to myself. A part of the natural identity with my original and essential ego was destroyed forever.... If I reckon up the many forms I have filled out during these years, declarations on every trip, tax declarations, foreign exchange certificates, border passes, entrance permits, departure permits, registrations on coming and going; the many hours I have spent in ante-rooms of consulates and officials, the many inspectors, friendly and unfriendly, bored and overworked, before whom I have sat, the many examinations and*

interrogations at frontiers I have been through, then I feel keenly how much human dignity has been lost in this century which, in our youth, we had credulously dreamed of as one of freedom, as of the federation of the world. When those of us who had once conversed about Baudelaire's poetry and spiritedly discussed intellectual problems met together, we would catch ourselves talking about affidavits and permits and whether one should apply for an immigration visa or a tourist visa; acquaintance with a stenographer in a consulate, who could cut down one's waiting-time was more significant to one's existence than friendship with a Toscanini or a Rolland. Human beings were made to feel that they were objects and not subjects, that nothing was their right but everything merely a favor by official grace".

Alike Kafka's works, the theme of alienation and the confrontation between individuality and community has been reiterative in modern literature. Notes from Underground (Fyodor Dostoyevsky), The Sun also Rises (Ernest Hemingway), A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (James Joyce), Steppenwolf (Hermann Hesse), Death of a Salesman (Arthur Miller), The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock (T.S. Eliot), The Bell Jar (Sylvia Plath), Cane (Jean Toomer), The Stranger (Albert Camus), The Handmaid's Tale (Margaret Atwood) just to name a few. In this regard, Kafka, who implements a dialectical investigation of alienation within the individual, has significantly gone further. It seems inarguable that Kafka's personal affairs in life constituted a pivotal source of inspiration for his works since the two predominant brands of alienation that Kafkaesque characters undergo (i.e. alienation from self and from fellowmen) can even be traced to his own experience in life. To give an instance, Kafka in a letter to his sister Ottla (1914) about himself writes: "I write differently from what I speak, I speak differently from what I think, I think differently from the way I ought to think, and so it all proceeds into deepest darkness", and with reference to his fellowmen,

he writes in his diary: “Incapable of living with people, of speaking. Complete immersion in myself, thinking of myself. Apathetic, witless, fearful. I have nothing to say to anyone - never”⁵.

The echoes of these thoughts can be recognized in *The Metamorphosis* (1915) where the protagonist’s (Gregor Samsa) demise is the ramification of contact with other people and likewise the protagonists of *The Castle* (1926) and *The Trial* (1925), who are identically titled as K., find themselves in a state for which European sociologists go by the name of ‘Social Exclusion’ and as well through the labyrinthine complexities and unsettling oblivion and incertitude of a cumbersome all the same absurd bureaucracy, progressively come to be –as Marx suggested in *The German Ideology* (1932) – a state-object.

As a matter of fact, while conjuring up a broad image of Kafka’s works specifically his novels, it is not difficult to see that the pivotal characters collectively share the five prominent features of (social) alienation suggested by Melvin Seeman (1952), which are: Powerlessness (The person comes to believe that his actions have no effect in the outcome), Meaninglessness (The person is unable to understand her situation and does not know what to believe or anticipate), Normlessness (The person is unable to identify with the dominant values of the society), Isolation (The person feels segregated from her community and therefore puts low value on the goals and beliefs of her given society) and Self-estrangement (The person feels disconnected from herself) (Ankony, 1999). One instance to be considered for the aforementioned features would be in *The Castle* when K. even amidst the most amorous moments with Frieda ponders over his strangerhood in the community: “...Hours passed as they lay there, hours while they breathed together and their hearts beat in unison, hours in which K. kept feeling that he had lost himself, or was further away in a strange land than anyone had ever been before, a distant country where even the air was unlike the air at home, where you were likely to stifle

⁵ Diaries: April 27, 1915

⁶ I always want to be free

in the strangeness of it, yet such were its senseless lures that you could only go on, losing your way even more” (2009, p. 40).

Nonetheless, Kafka’s protagonists in an existential worldview, on no account stand in inertia and in fact one of the prominent attributes of his characters is fighting back the forces and circumstances foisted on them and preserving their dignity. They share a willful contumacy against any sort of authority namely as the judges, the village mayor, the landlady, the teacher, castle officials, father, etc. In *The Castle* the protagonist's aim is to impose his notion of his own vocation on the world around him. His insistence on his autonomy is clear enough. 'Ich will immer frei sein,'⁶ he says. He equates his dignity with his independence, declaring that since he has rights he will not stoop to receive favours (p. 119). He respects Frieda because she, he thinks, does not accept that her place in the social order (Hibberd, 1995).

An aspect of great consequence in *The Castle* which has remained disregarded, is the ‘Mass Alienation’ that people in the village dominated by the castle evince. “The notion of mass alienation refers to the citizenry’s disassociation from and rejection of meanings, norms, values that define the environment in which they live” (Tong, 1995).

People in the village forsake received morals, values, norms and demeanors as a result of protracted manipulative power exerted on them by the castle and develop deviant patterns of behavior while preening themselves to be linked to the castle or its officials in some way and surprisingly appreciate all the inequity and corruption related to the castle and officials, for example the way the village mayor justifies the executive mistake which plunged K. into that torment and ruined his life; by the same token the way the landlady boasts about her white slavery to Klamm or the constant admonitions of villagers to K. for obeying castle officials to name but a few. This mass alienation of the villagers is the corollary of one of the ‘Defense Mechanisms’ the origins of which can be detected in written works of Sigmund Freud – particularized afterwards by his daughter Anna Freud in *The Ego and The*

Mechanisms of Defense (1937) – termed as “Identification with the Aggressor” in which a person being a victim of intensity by a powerful aggressor starts to feel aversions towards and relinquish her Self-concept so as to approach to the formidable aggressor (Other-concept) and transform from weak to powerful to serve her self-identity and come to believe that she is not a random victim. In effect, in this unconscious procedure the victim (at this point the villagers) starts to see herself as though through the eyes of the aggressor.

In this respect, the villagers in *The Castle* determine their identity exclusively through their association with the castle. To present an instance we can point to the way the whole village unjustly and alienatedly punishes Amalia and her family for not succumbing to Sortini’s (one of castle officials) explicit and ungracious solicitation.

A further overview on Kafka’s depicted societies, societal ties and the interplays within its confines unfolds the repercussions of individuals being alienated and their metamorphosis into state-objects. The protagonist perceives an extending void between his individuality and his citizenship. He discovers himself in a disorienting milieu where the prospect of him designating his own stance appears implausible and this milieu offers no opportunity in favor of self-realization. People take the shape of instruments to one another.

Messengers and intermediaries like Titorelli, Barnabas, the village mayor, Erlanger or Momus per se are of no import except they pave the way. But here rests a question of paramount significance before us: What do the societies portrayed by Kafka incorporate that give birth to the issues mentioned? The answer could be sought in Ferdinand Tönnies’s dichotomous stratification of societal reciprocity into two sociological categories termed *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (1887). The terms will be referred to in this paper in their very pristine form since all the attempts for rendering these two coined terms will linguistically prove inadequate.

Tönnies believes that a distinction should be made between two essentially different bases of human association. The one which he calls *Gesellschaft* is a relationship contractual in its nature, deliberately established by individuals who realize that they cannot pursue their proper interests effectively in isolation and therefore band together. The other, named *Gemeinschaft*, is a social unit which does not primarily come into being through conscious design: one finds oneself belonging to it as one belongs to one's home. Individuals who enter a *Gesellschaft* do so with only a fraction of their being, that is, with that part of their existence which corresponds to the specific purpose of the organization (Pappenheim, 1968).

Owing to the objective of this paper, the first one will be brought to the fore, which is of prevalence in Kafka's works. Individuals engage in *Gesellschaft* with merely a fraction of their "Self", which leaves them alienated and so profound is the gap between man and man that "everybody is by himself and isolated, and there exists a condition of tension against all others" (p.65).

Hence enmity, latent hostility and looming warfare come to be intrinsic in the relationship of one to another in *Gesellschaft*. In the course of time, as Tönnies asserts, society has undergone an immutable one-way shift from *Gemeinschaft* in the past to *Gesellschaft* in the modern era. Tönnies and Kafka consonantly share the dismaying standpoint that the modern man must resign himself to living in *Gesellschaft* as his ineluctable fate.

Hardly, one can provide with an outline concerning the societal associations in the societies pictured by Kafka as the term *Gesellschaft* relevantly does. An auxiliary excerpt from *The Castle* can shed light on this collation to a greater extent, when K. tells Frieda: "I understand your dislike of the family (Barnabas's family), and can share it. I visit them only for the sake of our cause, and sometimes I almost feel that I'm exploiting them and doing them wrong".

CONCLUSIONS.

Man's *In-der-Welt-sein* (being in the world) subjects him to a course of social complications that, in the long run, induce a sweeping transformation in his essence.

Modern man, peculiarly in the wake of the trauma of two world wars, has been in the most enduring at the same instant self-induced battle against his splitting 'self', constraints and helplessness in a disorienting world, which permeates Kafka's enigmatic yet prophetic works in the character of the most scrupulous portrayals of the modern world in contrast to blurry philosophical and sociological abstractions. In this regard, society occupies a pivotal role in the same manner Kafkaesque protagonists are seen to be misfits in their milieu and are haunted by the ever-lasting friction between self-realization and affiliation.

Alienating forces are by no means exclusive to individuals, and masses – principally while subjected to constant authoritative power – are liable to unwittingly depart from their identity, values and meanings and adopt the patterns of the agents that have foisted these forces on them as form of collective identification with the aggressor.

The enumerated inconveniences started to sprout and afflict modern man, as Tönnies specifies, when man suffered the loss of *Gemeinschaft* nature of society and had an immutable progression towards *Gesellschaft*, which is the ineluctable repercussion of modernity as aptly represented by Kafka in the Castle.

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