

A GENDER-ORIENTED APPROACH TOWARDS BRECHTIAN THEATRE:  
FUNCTIONALITY, PERFORMATIVITY, AND AFFECT IN MOTHER COURAGE  
AND HER CHILDREN AND THE GOOD PERSON OF SZECHWAN

by  
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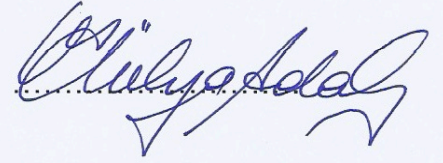
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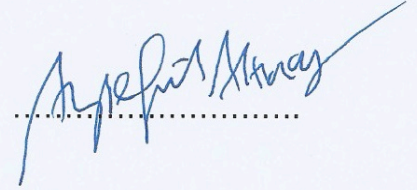
A GENDER ORIENTED APPROACH TOWARD BRECHT'S THEORY AND  
IDEOLOGY: FUNCTIONS, PERFORMATIVITY, AND AFFECT IN MOTHER  
COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN AND THE GOOD PERSON OF SZECHWAN

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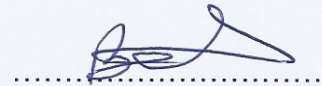
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## ABSTRACT

### A GENDER-ORIENTED APPROACH TOWARDS BRECHTIAN THEATRE: FUNCTIONALITY, PERFORMATIVITY, AND AFFECT IN MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN AND THE GOOD PERSON OF SZECHWAN

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Keywords: *Bertolt Brecht, epic theatre, performativity, gender, affect*

This thesis presents a gender-oriented critique of Bertolt Brecht's theory of epic theatre and his two plays: *Mother Courage and Her Children* and, *The Good Person of Szechwan*. Feminist theatre scholars often criticize Brecht's plays for not paying enough attention to gender issues and merely focusing on a class-based agenda. The main issues that these scholars highlight regarding Brecht's plays and theory include the manipulation of female figures through functionalizing them in order to achieve certain political goals. Other criticisms focus on how female characters are desubjectified and/or desexualized through this instrumentalism. On the other hand, feminist critics also consider epic theater techniques to be useful in feminist performances. Considering all these earlier criticisms, this thesis aims to offer new perspectives for the gender-focused analysis of epic theatre and Brecht's later plays. Similar to many other criticisms, I conclude that the embedded instrumentalism of epic theater techniques such as materializing and functionalizing the issues as well as the characters, in most cases leads to stereotyping the female characters. In order to apprehend the impact of Brechtian *gestus* on such results, I utilize Judith Butler's theory of performativity. Additionally, I also utilize affect theory in order to investigate the total effect of the lack of emotional intensities or "affect", and the grotesque use of emotions on the female figures. After closely examining the two plays of Brecht, I argue that the marginalization of emotions or the complete lack of them encourages essentialist normative judgments towards female characters. Lastly, I conclude that the overall impact of the certain epic theatre techniques runs the risk of rendering, even the otherwise strong, unconventional and independent female characters stereotyped and objectified.

## ÖZET

### BRECHT'İN TİYATRO KURAMINA İLİŞKİN BİR TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYET ELEŞTİRİSİ: CESARET ANA VE ÇOCUKLARI VE SEZUAN'IN İYİ İNSANI'NDA İŞLEVSELLİK, PERFORMATİVİTE VE DUYGULANIM

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Anahtar sözcükler: *Bertolt Brecht, epik tiyatro, performativite, toplumsal cinsiyet, duygulanım*

Bu tez, Bertolt Brecht'in epik tiyatro kuramına ve kendisine ait iki oyuna –*Cesaret Ana ve Çocukları* ve *Sezuan'ın İyi İnsanı*- yöneltilmiş toplumsal cinsiyet odaklı bir eleştiri sunmaktadır. Brecht, feminist tiyatro teorisyenleri tarafından oyunlarında toplumsal cinsiyet konularını göz ardı ettiği ve sadece toplumsal sınıf odaklı bir anlatı izlediği için sıklıkla eleştirildi. Bu teorisyenlerin dikkat çektiği temel noktalardan birisi kadın karakterlerin belli başlı politik amaçlarla işlevselleştirilmeleriydi. Bazı diğer eleştiriler de bu yolla kadın karakterlerin edilgenleştirildiğine ve cinselliklerinin göz ardı edildiğine odaklandı. Bununla birlikte, epik tiyatro tekniklerinin feminist performanslara adapte edilmesinin faydalı olacağı da düşünülüyordu. Bu tezde, hali hazırda var olan bu eleştirileri de göz önüne alarak epik tiyatro kuramına ve Brecht'in geç dönem oyunlarına yönelik yeni bir eleştirel bakış açısı oluşturmaya çalıştım. Esinlendiğim diğer eleştirilere benzer olarak, ben de epik tiyatro tekniklerinin karakterleri ve meseleleri işlevselleştirmesinin pek çok durumda kadın karakterler üzerinde stereotipikeştirici etkilere sebep olduğu ve bu etkilerin toplumsal cinsiyet normlarını yeniden ürettiği sonucuna vardım. Bu sonuçların etkenlerini daha detaylı bir şekilde açıklamak ve Brechtien *gestus*'un kadın karakterler üzerindeki etkilerini anlamlandırmak adına Judith Butler'ın performativite kuramından faydalandım. Buna ek olarak daha öncesinde yeterince değinilmemiş bir konu olan, epik tiyatrodaki duygulanım eksikliğinin ve duyguların birer araç olarak grotesk şekillerde kullanılmasının kadın karakterlere yönelik kalıp yargıları teşvik ettiğine işaret ettim. Son olarak, tüm bu etkenlerin karakterler üzerindeki toplam tesirinin aksi takdirde güçlü ve bağımsız olan kadın karakterleri bile stereotipik bir şekilde nesneleştirme riskini taşıdığı sonucuna vardım.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Feminist criticisms of Brecht's plays as well as Brechtian epic theatre have increased and sometimes taken different directions. Scholars like Elin Diamond, Sue-Ellen Case and Sera Lennox have contributed a lot to the literature with their resourceful works. Along with them, it has been a matter of question whether the Brechtian techniques would be constructive for feminist performances or not. Some of the criticism mostly focused on the acting techniques and the ways of adapting some of them in feminist theatres in order to enhance the impact of the performances. Many scholars have argued that the adaptation of Brechtian epic theatre techniques to feminist performances would be useful for feminist theatre (Diamond, 1988; Smith, 1991). Some criticisms, on the other hand, mostly directed to the plays written by Brecht for the ways that the women characters were represented. These analyses often merged the criticism towards his plays and criticism of epic performance theory (Case, 1985; Lennox, 1978; Wright, 1994). Likewise, in this thesis the sort of criticism that I would like to conduct is to examine Brecht's plays closely in order to elaborate on female representations in these plays. Doing so, I will also consider some of the acting methods that are related to epic theatre techniques, which has an impact on the female characters. However, my focus will not be on a comprehensive analysis of the epic theatre techniques and their adaptation to feminist performances. Since already existing literature offers a good range of information about these sorts of adaptations, I will only refer to the techniques that, I believe, have important impacts on female stereotyping. I will argue that the single focus on criticism towards capitalist, bourgeois and ultra-nationalist discourses in these plays lacks an intersectional perspective. Within this context, the problematic aspects of female representations are mostly left unattended. In the following chapter, I will introduce Bertolt Brecht and the epic theatre. Then, I will elaborate on some



aspects of certain Brechtian techniques such as coldness and Brechtian *gestus*. I will point out that the lack of emotional intensity within these techniques has serious effects on female representations. I will also explain how these techniques, in some cases, block intersectionality between class and gender, and mostly create stereotypical female characters. Lastly, I will map the relevant feminist criticisms towards Brechtian epic theatre and towards Brecht's plays, and situate my arguments among these criticisms.

### **3.1. Bertolt Brecht and Epic Theatre**

The term "epic theatre" was first used in early twentieth century. Even if it is mostly associated with Brecht, theatre scholars and practitioners like Max Reinhardt, Vladimir Mayakovsky and Erwin Piscator contributed a lot to the birth and survival of epic theatre. Still, Brecht brought together the pieces, systematized and characterized the epic theater under a single theory. Bertolt Brecht is a German playwright, poet, and theatre practitioner. He was born in Augsburg in 1898 and he died in East Berlin in 1956. He started writing poems and theatre plays in Munich during his years in medical school. In 1917 after he read a play written, *Der Einsame*, by Hanns Johst, who later became the popular poet of Nazi Germany, he got extremely upset by the "false idealism and sentimentality" of the play and he decided to rewrite it (Esslin, 1960, p. 22). In this version the sentimentality left its place to satire and historicity, while false idealism was replaced with criticism towards the blindfolded faith in ideology. That is how Brecht created his first play *Baal* in 1918 as the precursor of his epic theatre. After on, he sustained this method of counter-argumentation and carried this attitude to his plays as well as to the theory of epic theatre.

Although the points of beginning and ending of his life falls on Germany, in between those dates, which also include two world wars, Brecht continued his life in many different countries. As early as 1923 Brecht became a target of the Nazis due to his overtly Marxist attitude in his writings. Consequently, he had to leave Germany in 1924 and headed to Austria, and afterwards maintained his life in several countries including Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Soviet Union, Finland, and USA. He was influenced

by different cultures and traditions of the places he visited. Thus, it would not be wrong to say that epic theatre was created on exile.

It is not easy to give a clear-cut definition of epic theater since it is a constitution of many different elements. However, it would be a proper introduction to start with explaining its anti-mimetic principles, which underpins all techniques deployed within epic theatre. The term mimesis is derived from the act of “mime”, to imitate. It simply implies the repetition of the reality within the pieces of art. Mimesis was the one and only source of drama and poetry according to Aristotle. In this context, Aristotle prioritizes aesthetic pleasure, fear and those lessons taken from the catharsis of the characters. According to him “tragedy is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in appropriate and pleasurable language” (Aristotle, Undated). According to this definition, drama is an imitation of the reality. Artists mime nature and people’s lives on the stage. However, the acts that have been chosen to mime were those “appropriate” and “pleasurable” ones, meaning that the plays were reflections of the types of actions, which were approved and accepted by the majority of the society. Drama also aimed at giving the audience a form of enjoyment to meet their artistic needs. Nevertheless, mimesis was not the mere reflection of the “appropriate” reality; instead what Aristotle expects from drama was to represent a corrected and idealized form of reality.

From 19<sup>th</sup> century on realistic drama adopted the principles of Aristotelian mimesis. However, principles of mimesis necessitated the actor to fully embody the character on the stage and such coalesce mystified “the process of theatrical signification”, and consequently only represented a perspectival reality which is entirely dependent on the producer (Diamond, 1997, pp. 4-5). Likewise, inspired by this Aristotelian tradition, mimetic/imitative forms of art of Brecht’s time in 20<sup>th</sup> century came to a point where the reality in all of its forms was reproduced to please the masses. Adorno and Horkheimer developed the theory of culture industry by referring to these imitative and pleasurable aspects of the cultural productions of twentieth century (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). They argued that the new demand-based forms of cultural entertainment industries removed the intellectual aspects of art from these tools of entertainment. The output of such a logic results in categorizing the audiences, addressing the common demands of each group, and securing a final product that hoped to be appealing to the

largest possible masses. Eventually, this effort to satisfy large masses with the means of mass cultural entertainment productions causes these final productions to replicate each other. As a result, they concluded that the industry destroys the authenticity of art and culture, and the final products only appeal to audiences' need for amusement, not intellectual enhancement:

The amusement itself becomes an ideal, taking the place of the higher values it eradicates from the masses by repeating them in an even more stereotyped form than the advertising slogans paid for by private interests. Inwardness, the subjectively restricted form of truth, was always more beholden to the outward rulers than it imagined. The culture industry is perverting it into a barefaced lie. It appears now only as the high-minded prattle tolerated by consumers of religious bestsellers, psychological films, and women's serials as an embarrassingly agreeable ingredient, so that they can more reliably control their own human emotions. In this sense entertainment is purging the affects in the manner once attributed by Aristotle to tragedy and now by Mortimer Adler to film. The culture industry reveals the truth not only about the style but also about the catharsis. (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. 115)

Similarly, Brecht concludes that the Aristotelian interpretation of art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century promotes the specific interests of the culture industry and consequently reaffirms the ideologies and dogmas dictated by capitalist forces. This appreciation of theatre renders theater a cultural apparatus that bears the responsibility of conserving the ongoing structure of the society upon the audience. Brecht's idea of epic theatre offers an opposition to manipulation of theater in order to scare people off from social change. Epic theatre opens up space for the possibility of a different kind of theater with the exact opposite aim: to induce social change. In order to do so epic theatre aims to replace the elements of mimesis, which is the sustenance of the culture industries, with an attitude, which requires constant reminding of the audience that what happens on the stage is not real:

The naturalistic stage is in no sense a public platform; it is entirely illusionistic. Its own awareness that it is theatre cannot fertilize it; like every theatre of unfolding action, it must repress this awareness so as to pursue undistracted its aim of portraying the real. Epic theatre, by contrast, incessantly derives a lively and productive consciousness from the fact that it is theatre. This consciousness enables it to treat elements of reality as though it were setting up an experiment, with the 'conditions' at the end of the experiment, not at the beginning. (Benjamin, 1998)

In that sense, one of the main aims of epic theater is to bring about a form of alienation or estrangement towards reality. The way that epic theater achieves to create such an

effect is called *Verfremdungseffekt* (V-effect) or alienation effect (A-effect). The main point of A-effect is not just to represent the characters or incidents in their own way of being, in stead aiming to create strangeness towards the very substance of characters and incidents through this technique that Brecht adopted from the Chinese theater. He defines the technique as “turning the object of which one is to be made aware, to which one’s attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected” (Brecht, 1964, p. 143). He also concludes as the following:

The artist’s object is to appear strange and even surprising to the audience. He achieves this by looking strangely at himself and his work. As a result everything put forward by him has a touch of the amazing. Everyday things are thereby raise above the level of obvious and automatic. (Brecht, 1964, p. 92)

Thus, the stage was treated as a laboratory in which everyday realities and socio-political events were approached with a “strange” attitude. Arising estrangement was crucial to make the audience take a step back from the reality and approach and problematize it with an attitude of the social scientist. At this point, the play that Brecht had written in 1947, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* might well explain such conceptualization. In the play the notion of motherhood is questioned and problematized. In this specific “experiment” Brecht comes up with the idea that the real mother of a child is not the one who gave birth to it but rather it is the person who takes real care of the child and loves it truly. Doing so, he also problematizes the issue of inheritance versus the impact of effort and labor. During the play just like an experiment he proves to us, step-by-step, which mother is capable of what by putting them in contradictory positions. We observe the experimentation and in the end we come to terms with considering whether another kind of motherhood is possible or not. As a result, the audience is encouraged to build some arguments against the traditional definition of motherhood through questioning the impact of nature versus nurture.

The important nuance here is what brings the audience to come up with unconventional ideas. *Lehrstücke* plays a key role there. *Lehrstücke* is another important technique of epic theater that encourages the audience not to simply acknowledge the orthodox values and norms. The term *Lehrstücke* was translated to English as learning-play or teaching-play. It is a technique when actors on the stage also function as instructors of

the play's subject. However, one should underline that *Lehrstücke* does not offer prescriptions for different political actions or societal resolutions. It is not a lecture of Marxism, or any other kind of social theory (Steinweg, 1976). Rather, the technique makes an effort for introducing dialectics as a method of thinking and a way to criticize the reality. Through such simultaneous positioning of dialectics within a context in which the audience and the actors are mutually dependent, the technique aims for "the reciprocal positioning and counter positioning of theory and practice of theoretical thought and practical behavior" (Mueller, 1994, p. 85). It is this non-patronizing, humble attitude of epic theater that encourages people to question the real life situations by comparing them with the situations on the stage. This way the audience would be able to reflect on the play and convert their interest into a sort of expertise:

Nothing is more characteristic of Brecht's way of thinking than the attempt which epic theatre makes to transform this primordial interest directly into a technical, expert one. Epic theatre addresses itself to interested persons 'who do not think unless they have a reason to'. But that is an attitude absolutely shared by the masses. Brecht's dialectical materialism asserts itself unmistakably in his endeavor to interest the masses in theatre as technical experts, but not at all by way of 'culture'. 'In this way we could very soon have a theatre full of experts, as we have sports stadiums full of experts'. (Benjamin, 1998, p. 4)

Theatre is rendered a form of instructive entertainment for the working classes. What "experts" within this context mean does not, by all means, indicate that these people will immediately become theatre theoreticians or practitioners. However, they will be able to respond to it and improve their skills of its interpretation just as they do so during and after watching a football game. The way that Brecht achieves to attract the masses' attention whom he qualifies as people "who do not think unless they have a reason to" is by appealing to these people's reasoning by gestural actions. Benjamin refers these actions as "quotable actions" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 12).

How could the actions be possibly quoted? Although repeating or rephrasing someone else's statements is a very common practice in daily life, in journalism, in literature and so on, in theatre how would you differentiate acting from repeating someone else's actions or representing them on stage? In epic theatre, it is accomplished through "quoting" the behavioral patterns of character's socio-economic background. Brecht calls such collections of behavioral elements *gestus*. Thus, when the audience sees a male construction worker on stage, from his way of eating to his exhausted way of

walking at the end of the day, they would be able to read this character's class, or his relation to economic resources by his bodily movements and behaviors. In other words, Brechtian *gestus* can be defined as actor's gestures, actions or conversations that hints at the social circumstances of the character and the conditions of social realities about the specific group the character belongs to. Still, one must underline that the quotable actions, *gestus*, are very much different than the techniques of realistic acting styles in the way that while the actors that deploy the techniques of the latter are mostly focusing on completely being that character and continuously embodying it, those who perform the former put a distance between himself/herself with the character by overtly showing that s/he is "quoting" the behaviors of a group of people. This is also a point where epic theatre distinguishes itself from mimetic forms of art.

### **1.2. Representations, Emotions and Coldness in Epic Theatre**

Indeed epic theatre came to be very successful at representing different social groups through successfully utilizing the *gestus*. In his writings Brecht kept reminding his readers of the fact that humiliating and making fun of minorities and the oppressed groups by marginalizing their actions and/or positions was nothing more than cruel. Instead he defended the use of such tools of entertainment against authority figures. That is why his representation of authority figures and their *gestus* was full of black humor. For instance, if we take the God figures in *The Good Person of Szechwan* as an example, who arrive at the city of Szechwan in search of a good person, the idea of representation in epic theatre might be much more clear. The gods in the play could not find a place for accommodation since very poor people of the city do not have neither enough place nor enough food for them. Comparing Ancient Greek Theatre's almighty Gods and Goddesses with the Gods in *The Good Person of Szechwan* who discuss that they failed at fulfilling their missions in being proper Gods; and comparing Greek Theatre's deus-ex-machina endings in which the holy hands of Gods put an end to the problems of human beings and Brecht's Gods who simply run away from the situations so as not to deal with human beings burdensome problems gives a good idea of difference between reproduction and representing. Thus, reproducing the already

existing power relations that make people suffer was denied, instead these types of characters and situations were represented with a touch of humor and thus recreated<sup>1</sup>.

In this sense one can define epic theater as a revolutionary movement that liberated the theater from its duty to entertain an audience who is leaning back comfortably in their seats expecting to enjoy, to laugh at, to fear from or to cry on whatever is happening on the stage. In stead, what Brecht preferred was a form of social realistic theater fed by a Marxist class criticism. Such interpretation of class leads to a form of theatre that is very aware of the dangers lying under the feelings of empathy and fear of Aristotelian plot. Epic theatre was fed with the idea that a society who is empathizing with the “villain” –as a reference to bourgeoisie, fascists or capitalists- could never reach a dialectic way of thinking. Instead, the audience should build a critical stance towards those “villains”. Thus, empathy, pity and fear would ruin this aim of arising criticism. An audience who are menaced by the disasters that the characters who acted out of social norms went through would not manage to think and act freely.

One critical impact of Brecht’s performance theory on the consequences discussed in this thesis is the principle of bypassing emotional elements out of the stage. Epic theater practitioners are much concerned about calling out to audiences’ political reasoning rather than their emotions. This abolishment of feelings of empathy prevent the spectators from getting lost in the rush of emotions so that they would be alarmed at all times and be able to respond to what happens on the stage, rather than feeling comfortably sorry or pitiful for the events or characters. According to Benjamin “the relaxed interest of the audience for which the productions of epic theatre are intended is due, precisely, to the fact that practically no appeal is made to the spectator’s capacity for empathy” (1998, p. 18). Thus, one can clearly declare that epic theatre replaces empathy with astonishment.

By avoiding emotional participation, epic theatre aims to prevent the Aristotelian catharsis. According to Aristotle “in a dramatic rather than narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish a catharsis of these emotions”(Aristotle, Undated). In a play, which would perfectly fit in Aristotelian

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<sup>1</sup> What is meant by the difference between representation and reproduction here is explained on 12th page .

terms, the audience is first exposed to a rush of emotions. These emotions mostly include fear and pity. Aristotle's tragic hero, who goes through a catharsis as the result of his/her sins and mistakes, manages to gain the forgiveness of the audience at the end and leaves them with feelings of empathy and pity. At the end of the play both the audience and the character are purged from extreme feelings in order to regain the state of harmony. This way, all kinds of archetypical and excessive behaviors are avoided. The characters, mostly noble, washed by this catharsis, are changed and reformed through supreme values. The aim is to educate the intimidated audience not to make the same mistakes the tragic hero did during the play and take a lesson from his or her situation. As a result, audience itself, through intimidation and fear, is transformed into the defenders of the social order and put into a very passive position.

Brecht reflected on two specific aspects of Aristotelian forms of art in order to understand the structure that endorses the catharsis in favor of creating a docile society and preventing the social change. The first aspect that he is critical of, as I have already mentioned in the beginning, is the principle of mimesis. Although Brecht admitted the necessity for observing the nature and real life through the course of production, he rejected the idea of imitating reality as it is:

Observation is a major part of acting. The actor observes his fellowmen with all his nerves and muscles in an act of imitation which is at the same time a process of the mind. For pure imitation would only bring out what had been observed; and this is not enough, because the original says what it has to say with too subdued a voice. To achieve a character rather than a caricature, the actor looks at people as though they were playing him their actions, in other words as though they were advising him to give their actions careful consideration. (Brecht, 1964a, p. 196)

Here, Brecht, in a way, refers to the critical difference that Benjamin makes between the reproduction of reality in mimetic/Aristotelian forms of art and representation of reality in epic theatre (Benjamin, 1998). According to Benjamin, reproduction indicates duplicating an image, a scene, a person or a situation as it is, while representation is more than showing, or describing. It has a sense of taking sides. Reproducing the already existing power relations on the stage was something that Brecht was opposed to. Instead he wanted to represent the oppressed groups and make the spectator critically think about these power relations since showing them as they already are would not serve his aim for creating social and political change:



The dynamic, idealistically-oriented kind of drama, with its interest in the individual, was in all decisive respects more radical when it began life (under the Elizabethans) than in the German pseudo-classicism of two hundred years later, which confuses dynamics of representation with dynamics of what has to be represented, and has already put its individual 'in his place'. (Brecht, 1964a, p. 45)

How epic theatre aimed at representing, not reproducing, the reality brings us to the second aspect of mimetic forms art that he claimed to impede social change: identification. Identification or empathy was an important obstacle of achieving his main aim. A spectator who identifies with the character on the stage might empathize with the moral decisions that the character makes. Yet, Brecht strictly opposed the idea of audience taking part in the moral decision making process of the characters because he wants the audience to be alienated from the events and characters. This way the audience is enabled to take a step back from the play and critically reflect on the situations and characters.

In order to prevent identification, epic theatre discarded the floods of emotions and their purging off. Brecht wanted the audience to be astonished rather than feeling bitter or heartbroken. Still, the tension should be kept at the top level so that the audience would neither burst into tears nor relieve with taking a lesson from the tragic hero's suffering. Within this context, the created tension is mostly based on the social realities of the events such as war, poverty, and corruption rather than emotional foundations. When asked about the author's poetic participation in the characters and events in a play, Brecht's response was highly clear-cut:

I don't let my feelings intrude my dramatic works. It'd give a false view of the world. I aim at an extremely classical, cold, highly intellectual style of performance. I'm not writing for the scum who want to have the cockles of their hearts warmed. (Brecht, 1964, p. 14)

Here, Brecht strikingly caricatures the image of the audience regarding their reaction towards emotional representations on the stage. However, his attitude towards the expression of emotions was not that sharp in practice. He agreed that the actors to some extent can show the emotions, however, these emotions would only be shown as far as the actor does not totally embody the feelings of the character and does not arise feelings of identification and empathy among the audience. Such embodiment and identification would contradict the alienation principle of epic theatre. Brecht calls this

mood of alienation from emotions “coldness”. He adopted this technique and the term from Chinese theatre:

Anger is naturally different from sulkiness, hatred from distaste, love from liking; but the corresponding fluctuations of feeling are portrayed economically. The coldness comes from the actor’s holding himself remote from the character portrayed, along the lines described. He is careful not to make its sensations into those of the spectator. Nobody gets raped by the individual he portrays; this individual is not the spectator himself but his neighbor. (Brecht, 1964, p. 93)

Lethen (2001) in his book *Cool Conduct: The Culture of Distance in Weimar Germany* examines the new objectivity literature after revising the unsentimental and “cold” discourse that post-World War artists and scholars adopted in their works. Brecht is one of the intellectuals that Lethen often refers to explain this new objectivity. He also explores the meaning and function of “Kälte” (cold) which is translated as “cool” in this work as an important component of the new objectivity. During his reflection to one of Brecht’s poems he defines coolness as “the quality that marks him off from the warm zones of the tradition-minded Social Democratic communities” (Lethen, 2001, p. 132). Thus, Brecht’s attempt of distancing both the actors and the audience from the bourgeois tradition driven spheres of life through coldness is an aspect that supported this technique. Moreover, through coldness, identification and emotional flows are prohibited and the characters become available to be functionalized without the disruption by sentimentality.

### **1.3. Gestic Marxism and Gender Identities in Brecht’s Works**

Brecht’s principles of blocking identification and limiting the emotions to their minimal are also appertaining to his political and ideological orientation. Principles of Marxism have a strong impact on his art. As I mentioned above one of the main reasons that identification is avoided in epic theatre is for preventing the audience from being included in the moral decision-making processes on the stage. Although morality in Marx’s writings was a highly debated issue among Marxist scholars, based on the writings of Marx himself, one can deduce that Marx rejected any source of normative judgments created by the bourgeois society by referring to these lines: “Law, morality, religion are to [the proletarian] so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests” (Marx & Engels, 1970, p. 78). Leaving the

bourgeois normative judgments behind, Marxism turned its face to rational thinking. According to Marx, rationality is the source of human activity, and there are two forms of rationality of human action (Little, 1981). The first form is the ability of human's manipulation of physical properties of nature through rational beliefs. The second form is "rational assessment of ends and purposes" (Little, 1981, p. 80). Within this practical approach towards human actions according to Marx a human being should be able to calculate his/her surroundings and use the necessary means within the limits of rationality in order to achieve his/her ends. Brecht's instrumentalism very much resembles this principle. In fact, his theatre was an end-in-itself in which he used full potentials, from characters to stage design, plotline, gestures, mimics, music and every single detail on the stage to achieve his aim and to push for social change.

Within this Marxist framework Brecht's plays aimed to achieve the purpose of transforming the society through functionalizing the characters and plotlines. Techniques such as montage and *gestus* served for this aim of instrumentalization of theatre. Definitive functions and different types of *gestus* were fundamental to epic theatre. Each character and situation was ascribed certain symbols. Through these functions and symbolisms, the audience was made to give meanings to, understand, reflect on, and criticize the play. For example, a water seller on the stage would not only serve as an individual character, but also represent a social class, or category.

However, all these techniques, functions and ideological attributions should not be interpreted as if Brecht ignored the fact that the audience needs some sort of pleasure to show up at the theatre. Purging the emotions off the plays does not necessarily mean purging off all sorts of pleasure. Brecht specifically declared that the spectator should be prevented from taking pleasure out of emotional flows on the stage. Still, many other elements like humor and music were used in order to keep the audience engaged. Moreover, Brecht's plays prove that he was also concerned about staging artistically intelligent plays and elegantly arranged stage designs so that, the intellectual component of artistic productions would stay within the sphere of pleasure and would not be casted aside as the mass productions of twentieth century did like Adorno and Horkheimer also pointed out. Thus, while the transmission of ongoing emotions from the stage to the audience is prevented, this sentimental lack is compensated with artistic elements, jokes and songs. In this way, the spectator is alienated from the emotions, put into the shoes

of a theatre critic and entertained at the same time. Doing so, Brecht aimed to create new forms of pleasures:

And our enjoyment of theatre must have become weaker than that of the ancients, even if our way of living together is still sufficiently like theirs for it to be felt at all. We grasp the old works by a comparatively new method – empathy- on which they rely little. Thus, the greater the part of our enjoyment is drawn from other sources than those which our predecessors were able to exploit so fully. We are left safely dependent on beauty of language, on elegance of narration, on passages which stimulate our own private imaginations: in short, on the incidentals of the old works. These are precisely the poetical and theatrical means which hide the imprecisions of the story. (Brecht, 1964a, p. 183)

Thus, the collection of these new techniques, invention of new sorts of pleasures, implementation of Marxist rationalism and instrumentalism to the theatre, and rendering the stage as a classroom or a dais all constituted the backbone of epic theatre. Consequently, the themes of Brecht's plays generally revolve around socio-economic and socio-political phenomena.

However, the messages that Brecht wanted to pass the masses through problematizing these issues were not gender specific. In many cases, I argue that Brecht's Marxist rational instrumentalism runs the risk of overruling gender specific issues and mostly focuses on male dominated systems of suppression. His tendency to functionalize, instrumentalize and objectify the characters stimulates peculiar issues regarding the gender identities and stereotypes. As a result, the accentuation of the issues of class politics, and ignoring the gender issues as a problem that is above the social classes, obstructed an intersectional interpretation of gender and class.

According to many scholars, one significant impact on gender representations in Brecht's plays is his political orientation (Case, 1985; Lennox, 1978; Wright, 1994). Marxism inspired him a lot, and significantly contributed to the formulation of the epic theatre. Likewise, some of the Marxist theoreticians approach to women and gender issues and their implementation in some socialist societies seemed to influence Brecht's representation of female characters in his plays. Although it is not clear how much Brecht was influenced by the women's position in Weimar Republic or Soviet Union or any other places that he lived in, what becomes clear for sure after reading through his works is that he was influenced by the representation of women within the Marx's and

Engel's writings in general<sup>2</sup>. Thus, grasping a better insight of the representation of women in his plays and later examining the perspective of earlier theoreticians such as Marx and Engels who inspired him a lot on the issue is crucial.

Even if the debate over women's issues in the context of Marxist ideology is not unilateral and still ongoing, the earliest debate by Marx and Engels is basically based on women's position among the labor force. According to Engels the main reason that poses a fundamental obstacle to women's liberation was their duties at home. He discussed that women's participation more in the labor force and less in the domestic sphere would consequently change their material circumstances:

This state of things was brought about by the modern great industries, which not only admit of women's liberal participation in production, but actually call for it and, besides, endeavor to transform domestic work also into a public industry. Man's advent to practical supremacy in the household marked the removal of the last barrier to his universal supremacy. His unlimited rule was emphasized and endowed with continuity by the downfall of matriarchy, the introduction of patriarchy, and the gradual transition from the pairing family to the monogamic family. This made a breach in the old gentile order. The monogamic family became a power and lifted a threatening hand against the gens. (Engels, 2010, p. 326)

The argument here does not only address women's taking part in the production process but also challenges the structure of the monogamic family. According to Engels the reason that the matriarchy is overthrown was the issues of property and heritage. Under the case of matriarchy, when the father of the child was unknown it was impossible to figure out who would inherit the father's property. Oppositely, patriarchy provided the basis for a unitary or a monogamous family instead of those pairing families and consequently the problems of inheritance and property was resolved through this patriarchal monogamous family structure. Under such circumstances women would stay at home, do the housework and take care of the children. Engels suggests that what would save these women from the suppression that they have been experiencing is possible through their participation in the labor force. Especially for proletariat who does not have any property to pass on to other generations, they argue that women's labor is at the utmost importance for their emancipation. Thus, Engels blames the

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<sup>2</sup> Brecht was an enthusiastic reader of Karl Marx and Engels. What I mean by "in general" is major works of these philosophers and attitude towards women in these works. However, by saying this, I do not aim for generalizing one common perspective of Marxist ideology towards women or gender issues in general.

conception of private property for women's suppression under the capitalist modes of production. However, to some extent, he does not elaborate on the impact that substantiality of patriarchy has on the issue.

Still, there was some effort to align the impact of capitalist forces together with the impact of patriarchy on women especially by materialist feminist scholars (Delphy, 1981; Ehrenreich, 1976; Hennessy & Ingraham, 1997). However, some other scholars were skeptical about the way that Marxism and feminism were aligned. The leading figure in this discussion was Heidi Hartmann. According to her such a cooperation usually tend to "subsume the feminist struggle into the 'larger' struggle against capital" (Hartmann, 1979, p. 1). Particularly, when these two ideologies were being considered together, the systems of oppression were mostly defined through women's oppression within the capitalist system of production. Consequently, women's oppression within a patriarchal system was usually overlooked. Hartmann also underlined that in many cases Marxist analysis has turned a blind eye on the embedded sexism that Marxism features. According to her, the elements of Marxist sexism lie under ideology's denial of the issues of women, which does not stem only from the material relations. Women are only conceived according to their classes and their problems and issues are also defined over such phenomenon.

Within this sphere, Brecht's plays in many cases illustrate the tension between the earlier writings of Marx and Engels on women and the concerns of feminist scholars as uttered by Hartmann. Hartmann's criticism is also valid within the context of Brecht's plays considering how women and family were represented in his plays is very much in line with that of earlier scripts of Marx and Engels on the issues. The female characters in most cases are made to embody the social functions of women in the referred Marxist scripts. *Mother Courage and her children* from different fathers from different nationalities can be considered as a reaction against the bourgeois family structure. In a similar way *Shen Te* might be interpreted as a woman participating in labor force, keeping in mind her transformation from a self-employed prostitute, to a cruel tobacco boss. However, there are significant problems considering how the gender roles of these characters are staged. The issue of motherhood in *Mother Courage* has complex signifiers that carry the risk of reproducing the stereotypical models. As for the case of *The Good Person of Szechwan*, even if *Shen Te*'s cross-dressing signifies the difference

between the position of exploited and exploiter, the implications of gender difference within this context is overlooked. It is very risky interpreting the cross-dressing as some liberating force for women and rendering such liberation possible only through a male masquerade.

Brecht witnessed the conditions of women in Weimar republic and only partially exposed to that of the Third Reich. Koonz says that women in Weimar Republic, before Nazi government took on the power, were oscillating between the struggle against economic predicaments mostly at home and enjoying their emancipation as being able to vote and right to stand for elections. Almost every party had women candidates on their lists and women issues were included in most of the parties' agendas. After the Nazis came to power in 1933, women's position varied. Communist and Jewish women or women of different races were excluded from the public sphere. Although Aryan women were able to participate in parades and political demonstrations in favor of the party, they were not allowed to have abortions and/or use birth control, they were not allowed to hold political status, and were mostly underpaid compared to their male fellows (Koonz, 1987, p. 6). Women were approached as biological sources of reproduction of the Aryan race. Even if there were women who actively participated in both pro and anti-Nazi movements outside their homes, women were mostly pushed to domestic sphere in which they would take care of their children, make sure that they grow up into proper Nazi youth and, protect and maintain the basic unit of society: the family.

However, Koonz also points out the other side of the medallion by revealing the women participants of both in Nazi and anti-Nazi organizations. Interestingly many of these women's existence have been ignored. Similarly, Cynthia Enloe (2000) in her book *Maneuvers: The international politics of militarizing women's lives* discloses how women's lives were also militarized by wars as female soldiers, laundresses, prostitutes, cooks and so on. In this sense, especially *The Mother Courage and Her Children* is worth attention especially for acknowledging both women's the participation in war in different forms and war's impact on them.

#### 1.4. Feminist Approaches to Epic Theatre and Brecht's Works

In his writings, Brecht opposes the exploitation of theater by the dominant classes of the society as well as by the culture industry. This stance paves the way for the creation of his genuine innovations in theater and unique techniques. He was also able to comprehend the historicity of such discrepancies and went way back to Ancient Greece to challenge the status quo from its very roots. By creating a non-Aristotelian performance theory the Brechtian epic techniques liberated the theatre from being a mere form of entertainment and a source of pleasure and transformed the stage into a dais on which critical way of thinking was instructed and celebrated. However, when it comes to gender issues we observe that some of Brecht's plays fail in terms of using certain efficient techniques such as V-effects and historicization for the purpose of alienating gender characteristics. As a result of this disregard many female characters end up in replicating stereotypical gender identities. The alienation techniques do not go further than criticisms mostly directed to material relations and their impacts on people who are suffering under capitalist forms of productions. As for the female figures, Brecht chiefly chose to depict self-sufficient women who participate in the labor force as many Marxist scholars imagined them to be. These characters are alienated from their material relations and chiefly their economic concerns are revealed instead of alienating them from their gendered characteristics. Since in these plays women are not perceived as a distinct class or a group that suffers from similar kinds of oppressions, their common problems are not problematized. Gender would have constituted a uniting aspect for the women of different classes and ruined the aim of creating class-consciousness. Thus, we might conclude that in these plays the gender issues might have been ignored and for the sake of elaborating on class-specific subjects an intersectional perspective is missing.

Still, claiming that Brecht's plays altogether turn a blind eye on female representation and gender issues would be a fallacy. He frequently gives space for female characters and gives voice to them to different ends. However what is done in order to alienate the female characters from the Aristotelian-like stereotypes and free them from the predetermined normative behavioral patterns is problematic. In order to investigate the answer to these questions I will both visit epic theatre theory and some of Brecht's plays in this thesis. Two plays that I will closely examine are *Mother Courage and Her*



*Children* and *The Good Person of Szechwan*. I believe that elaborating on gender issues and discovering these plays' signification on the matter has important implications.

*The Good Person of Szechwan* is an important play in terms of gender issues since we encounter a female prostitute Shen Te as the protagonist. Shen Te's inner conflict is depicted with her ambition to be a good person versus her instincts to survive on her business of trade, which she adopts on the second scene after quitting prostitution and by masquerading as her imaginary male cousin Shui Ta. Unfortunately, the play does not offer many details about Shen Te's identity as a woman or a prostitute and problems and issues arising from those. Also her disguise as a male character in order to success in business is not mentioned as a problematic necessity. The A-effects are mostly revolving around the conflict between Shen Te's economic concerns and her struggle of being a good person and contributing to her society; not around gender identities or cross-dressing. Also, after the point where she realizes that she is pregnant, even her main inner conflict of being a good person is replaced by her drive to provide for child and takes its push form the notion of motherhood. The form of motherhood that Shen Te defines as being fully devoted and selfless is still very parallel to the stereotypical definitions of and expectations from motherhood.

We see a similar case in *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Mother Courage, a widowed woman with three children each from a different husband (or partner) might seem as a peculiar choice for the main character. Mother Courage who sells goods during wartime focuses too much on her economic gain and seems to be neglecting her children. Her neglect leads to the death of her children one by one. Although Mother Courage's profile as a single mother who does not hesitate openly talking about her past with different husbands and partners have the potential to be interpreted as criticism directed to motherhood and its consequences, we still cannot observe a tactile critique of these conditions. Such potential is overshadowed by the play's focus on wartime economy and violence and Mother Courage's materialistic concerns.

*The Caucasian Chalk Circle* also carries some problematic aspects similar to those of *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Although the motherhood is questioned all through the play, the way of questioning does not go further than the discussion of who is the real mother; the one who gives birth to the child or the one who takes care of it. We

cannot trace any problematizing of motherhood as a predefined gender-specific social category or any criticism directed to the very nature and existence of motherhood. The extent that Brecht alienates his characters from their identities as being mothers only achieves to depict their materialistic or emotional concerns and positions them only within materialistic social relations. Their positioning within gender relations is poorly highlighted. We cannot observe a moment when motherhood in-itself is subjected to criticism or issues of womanhood is questioned. Apart from the female characters that I have so far mentioned, other woman characters in Brecht's plays are mostly defined through their marital or domestic positioning such as wives or daughters<sup>3</sup>; such as Betty Dullfeet as Dullfeet's wife in *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui*, Emilie as Mech's wife in *Baal*, or Celia and Polly Peachum as being Jonathan Jeremiah Peachum's wife and daughter in *The Threepenny Opera*.

Still, if not all of his plays, Brecht's legacy, Brechtian performance theory and epic techniques are great inspirations for feminist theaters. Epic techniques would enable feminist theatre practitioners to widen their means to make their concerns understood. There are certain arguments by feminists performance theoreticians indicating that Brecht's theory is open to manipulation in order to problematize gender issues and can be bridged to the feminist performance theory. Elin Diamond is one of the most significant names that has both built feminist criticism and offered feminist adaptations of Brechtian epic theatre techniques. She is one of those who are in search of a "passionate analysis of gender in material social relations and in discursive and representational structures, especially theater and film" (Diamond, 1988, p. 83). She defends that the *Verfremdungseffekt*, historicization, Brechtian *gestus* can well be used in order to fill in this gap in Brecht's plays and prevent the fetishization of representation of female body and offer a feasible seat for the female audience.

In her article *Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism* Diamond defines gender as "the words, gestures, appearances, ideas and behavior that dominant culture understands as indices of feminine or masculine identity" (1988, p. 84). Thus, she assumes that socially dominant groups predetermine the gender patterns. While these dominant mainstream definitions are perceived as "normal", the types of

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<sup>3</sup> Additionally, prostitutes are common female characters that Brecht makes use of in his plays as it will be discussed in the third chapter.

behaviors and ideas or appearances that falls out of this category would be labeled as “strange”. In this case, V-effects, which aims at creating a kind of estrangement, would definitely be a useful tool for bringing the gender in question and celebrating the “strange” type of behavior which is mostly humiliated or marginalized by the common sense. Diamond also points out that the continuity of the gender issues throughout history might be discussed through incorporating the issue’s historicity with Brecht’s usage of montage technique. Such usage might provide effective means to open debates on the historicity of the problem. Doing so, problematizing the gender issues might lead the spectators to think about them from a historical perspective.

With a feminist reading of *gestus*, Diamond (1988) argues that a feminist or a female *gestus* can be used theoretically to make room for female spectators as well as to female characters and actors. She claims that such *gestus* would free the spectators from their gendered attachments and clear off the fetishization. With a similar approach, Laughlin (1990) in her article *Brechtian Theory and American Feminist Theatre* in which she examines how the feminist theatre companies in USA benefits from Brechtian techniques also mentions how *gestus* is used in order to elaborate on gender issues. She declares that “with this Gestus the playwrights show—in the Brechtian sense—the process of female socialization and its painful impact on the women subjected to it” (Laughlin, 1990, p. 216). On the other hand, I think that not all the techniques of epic theatre are compatible with adaptation to feminist theatres. More specifically, unlike Diamond and Laughlin, I think that using Brechtian *gestus*, as a means to promote gender issues seems problematic.

To me such a manipulation carries the risk of creating just the opposite effect for some cases. Creating a *gestus* for a gender group has the risk to simplify the complexities of the gender issues even with a feminist interpretation. Reducing the scale of the issues to a series of *gestus* might not represent the whole group that the *gestus* is attributed to and might undermine different sub-groups, as I will also discuss in the following chapters. I believe that the manipulation of *gestus* and assigning dramaturgical as well as political functions to the characters runs the risk of taking the subjectivity away from the characters and reducing them to mere functions. Although such a case has its impact on both male and female characters, in this thesis my focus is on female characters. With a similar concern, Sara Lennox (1978) in her article *Women in Brecht’s Works*

investigates whether this instrumentalist perspective leads to stereotyping or not. She concludes that even though in many cases this attitude leads marginalizing women such as creating either angelic or femme-fatale types of characters, in some cases his rationalism economically frees women from their dependence on men. In fact, my argument in this thesis goes very much inline with that of Lennox's. However, how I hope to elevate this argument by approaching more closely to these functions, and considering them together with their coexistence with Brechtian *gestus*. My aim is to point out how *gestus* —with a feminist manipulation or not- imposes restrictive patterns on the characters and accentuates the functionalizing and stereotyping of the gender performativities. Moreover, I would like to examine how these functionalities and characters' *gestus* interact with deprivation of the stage from sentimentality and emotional intensities. Although there are some works examine how “coldness” and the lack of sentimentality contribute empowering of the female characters (Hanssen, 2000), at some points I will argue the opposite and reveal the cases where the lack of emotional intensities –or “affect”- and intense rationalism helps to recreate stereotypical gender identities.

Sue-Ellen Case is another scholar who wrote on the materialist rationality in Brecht's plays and its impact on female characters. In her article *Brecht and women: homosexuality and the mother* she especially focused on the representations of motherhood in Brecht's plays (Case, 1985). She argued that “the material cleanliness, extreme assiduity of language, asexual, political commitment” of the plays created an “a sexual, instrumental mother figure” (Case, 1985, p. 62). I will elaborate more on this argument in the second chapter during the discussion of motherhood in *Mother Courage and Her Children*. For this moment, however, my point of dissidence with Case would regard ignoring the difference between the essence of the character and character's representation. Many female characters developed by Brecht in their substance offer a lot for breaking down the stereotypical mentality and normative values of the society. Although it is true that some of his techniques and political aims impede such results, it would be wrong to ignore the innovativeness of some of Brecht's female characters considering the historical background and the time period that they were created in.

The first and foremost reason for choosing these two specific plays also derives from their female protagonists' potential for challenging the stereotypes as I have just

mentioned. This enables us to get to know more details about the characters and opens a broader space for analysis. *Mother Courage*, as a single mother in the midst of a war as a war merchant reveals how war not only militarizes male soldiers, but also women. *Mother Courage*'s reckless, strong and independent character is very impressive. Although character promises a lot for a feminist interpretation, its original version carries some problematic aspects especially regarding the issue of motherhood. Specifically, the lack of emotional intensities, thus the lack of affect, will be problematized within this framework, since this lack together with *Mother Courage*'s motherhood duties leaves the character without any choices other than to be depicted in a stereotypical manner.

The protagonist of *The Good Person of Szechwan*, Shen Te, especially challenges the imagined type of woman by the Nazi Germany and its politics of family. As a prostitute, a self-sufficient shop owner, and a single mother Shen Te is potentially very much challenging to societal values of the time. However, contrasting with *Mother Courage*, Shen Te is overwhelmed with an artificial and exaggerated sentimentality. She is not able to make rational decision so much that she finds the solution as impersonating as a man. Just like *Mother Courage*, Shen Te promises a lot for a feminist interpretation, but the sharp difference between female and male personas of Shen Te leads to an intense stereotyping of gender identities. Thus, I find these two protagonists, *Mother Courage* and Shen Te to be fascinating characters whose subjectivities are not shown and acknowledged sufficiently on the stage. These characters' actions and moral decisions are mostly restricted by the functionality of their *gestus* together with certain principles of epic theatre.

Another reason for choosing these plays is the years in which these plays were written. *Mother Courage and Her Children* was written in 1939 and *The Good Person of Szechwan* was completed in 1943. The significance of these years in terms of Brecht's writing career overlaps with the time in which epic techniques as well his performance theory in general have grown into maturity. Even though there are many examples of earlier plays of Brecht that takes sexuality as their main themes and elaborate on gender identities, the reason that they were not included in this thesis is Brecht's change of attitude over time. Angelika Führich (1992) and Loreen Nussbaum (1985) both analyzed Brecht's plays in terms of how the depiction of gender and sexuality changed

over time and both draw similar conclusions indicating that in his later plays women characters evolved into moral protagonists who were earlier considered as sex subjects and “sex is replaced in Brecht’s later more Marxist plays, by discourse on work and class” (as cited in Hanssen, 2000, p. 153). Thus, these two plays are positioned among Brecht’s more “politicized” and less “sexualized” later plays. I believe focusing on the plays that are written in his mature years can bring about a new perspective to the existing feminist literature on the issue, and might offer a much more reflective gender oriented analysis of his finalized theory.

During the following chapters, two plays by Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Person of Szechwan*, will be analyzed in the light of aspects of Brecht’s theory and his political orientation. I will elaborate on the embedded instrumentalism in these plays together with the definitive functions assigned to the characters. Brecht’s political aims and their impact on his art will be evaluated together with the lack of sentimentality and emotions in his plays. I will argue that some of these elements in some cases cause a gender-biased narrative in which women’s subjectivity is ignored, functionalized or marginalized.

## CHAPTER 2

### MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN

Mother Courage's story takes place during the Thirty Years War. We meet the canteen woman Mother Courage, originally named Anna Fierling, and her three children Eilif, Swiss Cheese and Katrin in 1624 in Dalarna Swedish Front. They travel with their wagon and sell certain goods and ammunition to soldiers. In the first scene Mother Courage and her children meet the Sergeant and Recruiting Officer. The Recruiting Officer, trying to find soldiers for the army, has his eyes on her oldest son Eilif. Eilif is described as a very brave and strong young man whose capacity of rational thinking might not be compatible with his muscle strength. Mother Courage strictly protests against the idea of Eilif joining the army. However, Eilif seems to be interested in such an idea. Meanwhile, the officer distracts Mother Courage's attention by keeping her busy bargaining over belts, and the soldiers take away Eilif.

In the second scene, in 1625 and 1626, Mother Courage sustains her business travelling with the Swedish army in Poland. Her second son Swiss Cheese is now the regiment's paymaster. Eilif, in the army, has built a reputation for raiding peasants' oxen in order to provide meat to the army, especially for the high ranked commanders. Mother Courage looks happy with the success of her children and the profit that she gains from the ongoing war. Three years later, Mother Courage, Katrin and Yvett Potier, camp's prostitute, encounter a surprise attack by the Catholics. Meanwhile Swiss Cheese shows up with the regimental cash box. While he tries to bring the box to his commander, Catholic spies kidnap him. Mother Courage attempts to bribe the spies, however she bargains so long for the bribe money that they change their minds and kill Swiss Cheese.

In the following scenes Mother Courage moves on with her wagon towards Poland, Moravia, Italy, and Bavaria. Now a Chaplain who needs protection travels with her and Katrin. With the ongoing war Mother Courage advances in her career. During her journey, the harsh conditions of war are depicted with wounded people demanding help from Courage, Katrin and Chaplain. Chaplain mostly tries to help to people in need, while Mother Courage constantly complains about Chaplain and Katrin's excessive feelings of compassion. She is generally concerned about the goods they give out to on these people for free.

In 1632 when a possible peace constitutes a serious threat for Mother Courage, they meet Yvett again. After she leaves, Eilif comes looking for his mother under the custody of soldiers. He has raided a peasant's house again and killed them. However during the peacetime such an act does not earn him any praise and he is sentenced to death. During the play Eilif's death is not explicitly outspoken, but rather implied. Mother Courage does not show any certain reaction towards Eilif's punishment and she continues her business when the peace ends in a very short while.

In 1636, Mother Courage and Katrin are in the protestant town of Halle in Bavaria during the last scenes. The town is under Catholic threat. When Mother Courage is away to buy some cheap supplies and leaves Katrin alone, the Catholic Lieutenant threatens the villagers if there anyone makes any sound they would be shot dead. Katrin climbs on a roof and starts drumming in order to awake the town and warn them about the attack. The soldiers shot Katrin. When Mother Courage is back she finds Katrin's dead body. She sings a lullaby and moves on with her wagon saying "I hope I can pull the wagon by myself. Yes, I'll manage, there's not much in it now. I must get back into business" (Brecht, 1966, p. 111).

## **2.1. Mother Courage's Function**

"Is it necessary to make Mother Courage a less good person?" says Eric Bentley in the foreword for his own translation of the play (1966, p. 14). After he revisits different printed versions of the play, he discovers that Brecht obviously made Mother Courage less sympathetic after each revision of the scripts. Avoiding empathy towards the



characters and events were essentially important for Brecht, and it may be for this very reason that he depicted Mother Courage as an antipathetic figure in some situations. However, since the character is forced to make moral decisions under dilemmatic situations, Brecht's constant attempt to present Mother Courage as unlikable as possible may seem unfair to the character. I believe this is why we need to further elaborate on Brecht's way of presenting the character.

The conditions Mother Courage is portrayed in consistently force her to make a choice between certain contradictory options. For example, she has three children to take care of. However, the only way for her to fulfill her mission of taking care of these children is by taking advantage of the war, which actually poses a serious threat to her children's lives and wellbeing. Every time she tries to provide more for her children, one of them gets killed because of the decisions she makes, like leaving her mute daughter unattended during a siege to buy cheap supplies from fleeing merchants in order to make extra profit.

During the play, in order to contribute to the contradictory nature of the plotline, Brecht uses not only moral contradictions pertaining to issues of motherhood and war, but also humorously conflicting side stories. Eric Bentley provides an example for such case by referring to Mother Courage's essentially cowardly behavior bestowed her the nickname "courage" (Bentley, 1966, p.10). Mother Courage runs 'courageously' between two fires with a great 'cowardice' since she was so afraid that the breads she had to sell would have gone moldy if she had waited for the fires to stop. "They call me Mother Courage 'cause I was afraid I'd be ruined," says Mother Courage (Brecht, 1966, 25).

In this case, epic theater techniques such as alienation effects and *gestus* forces the audience to be estranged from the situations that Mother Courage was trapped in through these humorously and/or tragically contradictory elements. According to his own words, Brecht does not want the audience to be lost in the dreadful events that Mother Courage goes through. Instead he urges the audience to reflect on the harsh conditions of war, its social and economic impact on the people, and how people take advantage of it:

The success of the play, that is to say the effect the play provokes, was indisputably great. People on the street were pointing Weigel and saying "Look, this is Courage!". Still, I do not believe that the audience neither in Berlin nor in other cities understood the play. Everyone was so sure that they took a lesson from the war, they would not understand that Courage had no lessons to take from the war. They would not understand what the playwright meant to say: People do not take lessons from war. (...) The people who saw the play in 1949 or in the following years did not see the complicity of Mother Courage in the war or her urge to profit from it; they only saw her failure and the dreadful situations that she suffered. (Brecht, 2013, pp. 119-120)

Apparently Brecht was very concerned about the audience's possible interpretation of the play in a way that they would read the play's message through Mother Courage's personal story. Thus, provisional changes that he made in the text by presenting Mother Courage in a less sympathetic way might be interpreted as a result of this concern. The play was intended to bring the depiction of the conditions of war and how the war was sustained to the forefront. The aim was to achieve this by using the cases of moral discrepancies, such as leaving Mother Courage in situations where she is compelled to choose between her children's safety and financial benefits without which she cannot provide any safety to her children. As a result of the choices she makes and her reactions to the consequences of these decisions, the audience does not reflect on her children's loss of safety, even of their lives, rather the focus would mainly remain on the economic and social corruption that war brings about.

Furthermore, use of ironically inconsistent situations throughout the play can also be interpreted as a combination of the elements of humor and epic techniques, which was hoped to result in the estrangement of the audience. In spite of Brecht's attempt to involve humor and estrangement in the play so as to prevent moral participation of the audience, I believe, this effort does not stop the audience from leaving the theater with some judgment towards Mother Courage's moral decisions she had made when she was on the horns of dilemmas, which caused her children's death. The consequences of her actions under such circumstances carries the risk of arising moral judgments among the audience about the mothering style of Mother Courage and the definition of motherhood. Thus, Mother Courage's greediness and obsession with business, and her portrayal as an extremely materialistic person have the risk of being associated with her motherhood, depicting Mother Courage as a "bad mother".

Actually, the problem here is more than the specific case of Mother Courage and her mothering style. The main issue is how motherhood is defined through the course of events in a world where the heteronormative norms are dominant. Generally accepted definition of motherhood in society draws a self-sacrificing, caring, compassionate, benevolent profile for mothers. Such an image is constantly promoted and sustained through traditions, customs, education and many more different sorts of indoctrinations. Sue-Ellen Case in her article *Brecht and women: homosexuality and the mother* also argues how Brecht promoted the traditional type of motherhood that is created through “impregnation through the heterosexual practice of intercourse” and defined as a “sexless, gender-specific, instrumentalized” identity (1985, pp. 65,73). According to this traditional definition, child-rearing duties are only enforced on the female whose sexuality is also undermined in a patriarchal manner. She mentions different types of motherhoods such as surrogate motherhood and lesbian motherhood, which are currently evolving and challenging the traditional idea of mothering. Case criticizes Brecht for not mentioning these new orientations and not paying attention to challenging the norms of motherhood claiming that in Brecht’s plays “mothers are central to plays which exclude desire/sexuality in their political content/function and focus upon asexual political issues with a sense of necessary dedication to the future” (1985, p. 67). She argues that mothers are alienated from their individual selves within a political discourse that represses the discourse of desire in favor of uprising a specific way of political reasoning.

Although such case can be partially true for Shen Te, or other mothers in Brecht’s early plays that Case examines, it is hard to define Mother Courage as a sexless or asexual female figure. Considering the opening scene in which Mother Courage reveals all her husbands from which she had different children, and the different husbands that helped her with raising them, it would be wrong to identify her as if she is entirely deprived from her sexuality. Her attraction towards the Cook also supports this argument. Still, even if it is true that she holds the duties of child rearing as the female mother figure; Mother Courage’s case is not as simple as the traditional definition of motherhood necessitates it to be. I argue that her extreme personal characteristics such as her greediness under the war circumstances have as much impact as her motherhood duties on the development of the plot throughout the play.

The play does not critically discuss the concept of motherhood as a distinct subject as a common pattern of Brecht's later works<sup>4</sup>; still, it is profoundly critical of the traditional family structure. Indeed, the description of Mother Courage's family can be interpreted as an illustration of this criticism. In the first scene, during the conversation between Mother Courage and the Recruiting Officer we learn that each of the three children of Mother Courage comes from a different father from different nationalities and each of them have different family names. Some of the family names do not even correspond to the biological father's name. This first impression of Mother Courage challenges the generally accepted norms about the notion of family, as well as women's sexuality. However, this liberating stand for women's subjectivity is not substantially supported for the rest of the play. More specifically, at first we may perceive Mother Courage as a woman who is comfortable with her sexuality, but throughout the play this perspective is lost, and her womanhood is reduced to being a mother. We do not see anymore the woman who had three children from three different men, and who is very open about this fact. In the end, the play highlights her decisions as a mother in the midst of a war. Her actions have only the aim of providing for her children. She takes moral decisions by considering the survival of her children. Moreover, her motherhood is further stressed by the fact that her moral judgment can only have an impact on her children, and on nothing else.

Within the context of the play, the moral decisions taken by Mother Courage seem only to have significant effects on her children. And these effects on her children do not seem to extend to herself. To exemplify, despite the death of her three children, she survives the war, and we do not see any change in her way of thinking and behaving. Right after the scene where her son was killed because she was bargaining hard not to give too much bribe to the spies, the scene is depicted as if she behaves like nothing has happened, she goes on buying, selling and bargaining. Up to this point, Case's argument is partly valid. However, her ongoing existence as a merchant even after her children's

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<sup>4</sup> *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is an exception among Brecht's later plays that the discussion of motherhood takes place. As I have already mentioned in the Introduction, the discussion on motherhood does not go further than a nature versus nurture discussion.

death has other significations. All in all, Mother Courage's gender identity and sexuality might be depicted mostly as a mother but her economic existence as a merchant has important impacts on her motherhood. Still, this dialectic between these two different dynamics falls short for altering the normative judgments towards motherhood. In fact, very interestingly, even though Mother Courage provides a very solid example for the kind of stereotypical motherhood that Case defines, her occupation and the circumstances of war together with the elimination of empathy carries the risk of depicting Mother Courage as an insensitive mother that "fails" to provide the "necessities" of child-rearing. Thus, the coexistence of a mother who only and constantly works for her children and a mother who constantly fails at her attempts for different reasons makes it almost impossible for the audience not to build generic judgments about motherhood.

The definitive functions assigned to the characters have also an important impact on these consequences. As I mentioned before, Brecht uses each and every character, *gestus* or act to achieve an aim: Instructing a dialectical way of thinking. In order to do so the characters are marginalized, and their certain specific aspects are exaggerated so that the character event, or concept could earn a specific function. As I have already mentioned Sara Lennox discusses the same issue as well in her work *Women in Brecht's Works*. Lennox argues that Brecht's understanding of instrumentalism and implementation of this goal-oriented concept to human relationships is mostly made visible through female characters (1978, p. 95). Although her focus in her essay is not merely on mothers, she elaborates on the instrumentalization of the mothers as well. She refers to the line Brecht wrote for describing the motherhood of Mother Courage:

Even more Mother now, Mother of the many fallen,  
Mother of the struggling, the Mother of the unborns, she now  
Cleans up the government. Puts stones into the rulers'  
Extorted meal. Cleans weapons. Teaches  
Her many sons and daughters the language of struggle  
Against war and exploitation, member of an armed force  
Across the whole planet, persecuted and persecutor  
Not tolerated and intolerant. Beaten and inexorable. (Lennox, 1978, p. 86)

Lennox's interpretation of these lines makes sense. She underlines how Mother Courage is deprived of her subjective will and given the function of a mother. She says "a major virtue of this mother figure is her willingness to be instrumentalized serving others while ignoring her own subjective needs" (Lennox, 1978, p. 86). Although her

argument is highly relevant to these specific lines, when the play is approached as a whole, Mother Courage does not correspond to this saintly defined type of Mother. It is true that her subjectivity is taken away, however what is given her in return is not an identity of an angelic mother, rather she is attributed an identity of a savvy merchant. Her function as also mentioned by Brecht is to serve as a means for depicting the dialectical structure of capitalist war economy. So, the economic interest Mother Courage earns over war keeps her motherhood in the background in some scenes while still having a constant impact on it. I think in the general frame of the play Brecht's choice of leaving Mother Courage desperate in between two conflicting situations is a result of this purpose; representing two contradictory positions and revealing their coexistence. Especially the symbolic value of Mother Courage's survival at the end of the play must be mentioned at this point even after all her children dies. Throughout the play Mother Courage serves as a representative of the small-scaled merchants who earn profit over wars and help maintenance of the systems of war. According to Brecht the system will not come to an end, so Mother Courage, as a symbol, will never die.

What is aimed to be highlighted here is to signify that there will always be people who would support wars, knowingly or unknowingly, for their relatively small economic interests. However, the play also very successfully shows that how they do it out of necessity. In Mother Courage's case it is for taking care of children, in others it might be for other needs of survival. Thus, the state of being constrained constitutes another dynamic of the play embodied in Mother Courage's partnership relation with the war. However Brecht does not let his character to promote war-even if out of necessity- and muddle through it. Although he says that he does not want to suggest moral judgments to the audience, it is all but impossible not to do so considering Mother Courage's loss of her children. A sergeant foreshadows the situation at the very beginning of the play:

SERGEANT (looking after Mother Courage and her children):  
When a war gives you all you earn  
One day it may claim something in return!" (Brecht, 1966, p.33)

Ultimately, the losses Mother Courage faces are connotated with her function as a war merchant in the play. This function is determined through economic means only. Despite the play's success of depicting the persistent system of war economy, within the frame of this contradictory continuity, subjectivity of Mother Courage is reduced to a function in the play. In other words it is disputable whether she really has subjectivity or

not. Mother Courage's moral decisions function as the generator of the events<sup>5</sup> in the play; that is why she is the one who partially causes the death of her children together with the war's deadly circumstances. This symbolism constitutes the main dynamic in the play. This dynamic makes the acts of Mother Courage highly predictable and routinized. Although as mentioned above Brecht's aim was to show this routinized involvements in war and their permanency, Mother Courage's participation in the war economy is not supported with any other dynamics or complexions regarding her subjective reaction to the incidents. Limiting her actions and, both rational and emotional reactions, to functions carries the risk of marginalizing her other aspects. I argue that especially purging her off from emotional reactions towards her children's deaths and accentuating her parsimony has significant consequences. One of the main consequences of such emotional lack is possible reproduction of normative judgments about motherhood.

Although I do not agree with Lennox's argument on the mothering style of Mother Courage, it would be wrong to discard her efforts for taking care of her children and serving the function of the one and only source of support for them. During the play we observe Mother Courage as a caring mother. She seems very concerned about her children's prosperity. She does not want her sons to join the army and risk their lives. She also seems very concerned about Kattrin when she gets wounded on the face and shows deep attention and compassion towards her. Nonetheless, her constant search for moneymaking, even if its main purpose is to support her children, brings about her children's end as a result of very similar rationality. The symbolism of repeated mistakes of Mother Courage for the aim of moneymaking and her greediness overshadows the overall "affect" of losing a loved one. The stressed notion of continuity of the capitalist system by Brecht outweighs the emotional compensation.

The instances where normative judgments towards motherhood can be deduced as a result of the symbolisms and functions mentioned above should be examined at this point. During the play the audience is alienated from the blinding emotional effects of

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<sup>5</sup> I do not argue that Mother Courage is independent of the whole context. It is clear that her position is determined by the conditions of war. Thus, for the rest of the text impact of Mother Courage as a symbol will be considered together with the impact of the war all by itself.

war and commodity fetishism. The corruption of the army during the war is revealed. The soldiers steal from the army, and the sergeants receive bribes. Mother Courage also takes her advantage out of the current situation. In an environment where almost everyone is corrupted, Mother Courage stands out among bribers and corrupt officials with her hard-nosed nature and boundless bargains. Throughout the storyline, the moments of Mother Courage's children's deaths overlap with the peak moments of Mother Courage's stinginess or bargaining. When a sergeant attempts to recruit Eilif, Mother Courage is busy bargaining for the belts that the army officers wanted to buy. When Swiss Cheese is held hostage, Mother Courage bargains so long that the spies change their minds and kill his son. Kattrin is killed while Mother Courage has left for the town to stock low-priced goods that the fleeing shopkeepers are selling. Observing the sequence of the events, the audience might explain her behaviors such as bargaining for too long and leaving her children unattended by referring her "improper" motherhood, and perceive her as a "bad mother" in the generic sense of the notion. Although this is not the point, I do not agree with the argument that claims Mother Courage to be a "bad mother". What I think is that even the existence or rising of such normative concepts duplicates and validates the normative definition of motherhood regardless of whether it is defined thorough an affirmative perspective or not. Consequently, within the dialectical way of thinking that Brecht was very passionate to develop among the audience, the audience is inevitably invited to build their arguments over the stereotypical definition of motherhood.

At this point one might ask, if the play runs the risk of associating Mother Courage's greediness with a being an "insensitive" or "inappropriate" mother and reproducing this everlasting argument, is it ever possible the other way around? If Mother Courage were described as less greedy, would survival of her children be possible? Answering such question is not an easy task, since the situations that Mother Courage goes through is constructed in such a contradictory manner. The kind of moral decisions that Mother Courage is forced to make as a result of the background Brecht tailored for her as well as by the course of events, would anyhow comprise a flaw. If she had not cared for and obsessed that much about her business, she would not have achieved to feed her children anyway. So, if she had not worked that hard for her business, would we blame her for not providing enough for her kids, as a "good mother" should? I do not think so; because as I already mentioned I do not find such an argument valid. I think the reason



that makes the audience fall out of empathy and judge Mother Courage is the fact that Brecht represents her as an extremely greedy penny pincher. However, within the flows of different concepts and signifiers her motherhood is associated to these excessive features and consequently motherhood as a stereotypical definition is reaffirmed.

Esslin says that “As so often with Brecht, it is left unclear whether the author shares his character’s view or not” (1960, p. 159). In Mother Courage’s case it is clear that Brecht was directing criticism towards her rather than sharing her ideas and moral decisions. I believe that he wanted to accumulate a form of reaction towards her actions by “punishing” her material driven behaviors by taking her children away one by one. What makes this dramaturgical choice much more powerful is the contradictory position of a mother figure within a capitalist system who is forced to constantly promote consumption for her children. Likewise, the type of mother that Mother Courage portrayed is a mother trapped under the circumstances of capitalist forces, in our case a war that is fed and sustained through these forces. Rothman (2004) argues in her article *Motherhood Under Capitalism* that the essence of capitalism constantly stimulates people to make more money and own more goods, and according to her such an essence extends its impact on motherhood as well. Under these circumstances “the commodification of children and the proletarianization of motherhood” (Rothman, 2004, p. 19) is inevitable. Hence, the struggle of Mother Courage to take care of her three children and her continual effort to provide for them might be interpreted as a consequence of the capitalist system.

If the notion of private property has achieved to operate within the relationship between the mother and child, and now a mother is both the owner and responsible of her own body together with that of her children Mother Courage has the burden of four. Within this structure the only solution that allows her to provide for her children is prompting the consumption through war as a merchant. Obviously Brecht wanted to problematize the dilemma of Mother Courage as a mother under these circumstances, and blame the circumstances of capitalism for her subject position, but the extent that he draws the attention to this dilemma is not clear since in many cases he deprived her of subjective or emotional reactions. We cannot observe significant reaction of Mother Courage towards her children’s death until the very last scene in which she sings a very touching lullaby after Katrin’s death. Although the scene is highly intense, it is cut by Mother

Courage's instant turnaround to get back to business. In this case the audience is appealed to observe the continuity of war economy, but the circumstances of a mother under these conditions are left aside with this immediate change of subject. Consequently, this attitude leads to a hazard of commodifying Mother Courage's children and reaffirming an "insensitive mother" instead of problematizing a mother's conditions under capitalism.

On the other hand, I argue that the excessive fondness of business and greediness of Mother Courage is what breaks all sorts of ties of identification between the audience and Mother Courage, not her "insensitive" motherhood. Although these excessive characteristics of Mother Courage are the necessary consequences of a mother under the circumstances of war, there arises the risk of interpretation of these characteristics as an indicator of her attitude towards her children. In this case, the overall lack of empathy towards Mother Courage runs the risk of leading the audience to associate her motherhood with these excessive aspects of her personality. It is true that Brecht probably adds these aspects in order to prevent the spectator from empathizing with a character that takes advantage of the war, tries to make a profit on it and indirectly promotes it. However, while doing so he does not elaborate any discussion on motherhood or gender roles. Especially the fact that Mother Courage loses all her children at the end of the play make such definitions much more stronger. Eventually, this question arises: Is it Mother Courage herself—her carelessness and greediness—that paved the way for her children's death or is it the conditions of war? According to Brecht's dialectics it must be both of them. Just like the Marxist poet Nazım Hikmet says: "And if we're hungry, tired, covered with blood, / and still being crushed like grapes for our wine,/the fault is yours--/I can hardly bring myself to say it,/but most of the fault, my dear brother, is yours" (2004, p. 46).

If we agree that "the fault" partly belongs to Mother Courage's exaggerated characteristics, where does the notion of motherhood stand in such a context of Marxist dialectics? As Bentley asked, if Mother Courage had not been necessarily a less good person, could her children have survived? Or, if she had been less greedy and more "motherly" and still had lost her children, would we still be discussing the notion of motherhood in this play's context? I think we would not. I think the effort made to prevent the audience from empathizing with the character, in some cases, as it does for

Mother Courage, reproduces the stereotypical gender roles. In Mother Courage's case for instance, Brecht's dialectics does not come up with a criticism or a synthesis of those two extreme ends of "good" and "bad" motherhood identity. Even if it might not be on purpose, excessive characteristics and emotional unresponsiveness of Mother Courage hinder such a consequence.

## 2.2. Semiotics of the Play

Emotional connotations constitute an important impact on the theatrical or dramatic communication process. Brechtian *gestus*, alienation effects and elimination of empathy in many terms lack the emotional connotations of the events on the characters. These epic techniques and coldness in acting together with the lack of emotional transition also reproduces the already existing stereotypical gender roles, especially motherhood, in *Mother Courage and Her Children*. In order to enhance this argument each sign that I mentioned in the play should be analyzed together with their different connotations. Understanding the semiotics of the play will bring about much clarity to my argument in which I claim that the signifiers and signified concepts are confused throughout the play.

The term semiotics was coined by Ferdinand de Saussure in the nineteenth century. Semiotic analysis mostly focuses on how the meanings are developed and transferred through mechanisms of signification and communication. Semiotic analysis places special emphasis on signs and symbolism in languages. Saussure himself defines semiotics as follows:

A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be a part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology' (from Greek *semeion* 'sign'). Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them. Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be; but it has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance. Linguistics is only a part of the general science of semiology; the laws discovered by semiology will be applicable to linguistics, and the latter will circumscribe a well-defined area within the mass of anthropological facts. (Saussure, 1966, p. 16)

Later, Mukařovsky from Prague School applies this system of communication to pieces of art so to understand the flow of information from a theatrical performance or

dramatic text to spectator. In this system Mukařovský (as cited in Elam, 2005) defines work of art itself as the semiotic unit of signifier while he points out that the signified is endured in the “‘aesthetic object’ residing in the collective consciousness of the public”.

According to Mukařovský the performance texts are macro-signs:

The performance text becomes, in this view, a macro-sign, its meaning constituted by its total effect. This approach has the advantages of emphasizing the subordination of all contributory elements to a unified textual whole and of giving due weight to the audience as the ultimate maker of its own meanings. It is clear, on the other hand, that this macrosign has to be broken down into smaller units before anything resembling analysis can begin: thus the strategy adopted later by Mukařovský's colleagues is to view the performance not as a single sign but as a network of semiotic units belonging to different cooperative systems. (Elam, 2005, p. 5)

Within this frame, the total effect aimed to be created by Brecht in *Mother Courage and Her Children* is a critical stance towards the continuity of war economy. He tries to achieve this end by signifying the people who take advantage of it as the generator of this continuity. However, other contributory elements, other than the profit that Mother Courage gains over war, stir up confusion about the relationship between the signifier, signified, and their connotations. The audience, who tries to make sense of these relationships, is also affected by those contributory elements. Two most important elements in this play are motherhood, and Mother Courage's stingy and not much likeable character. Motherhood is used as a component of dialectics, which symbolizes Mother Courage's helplessness and desperation. Her extreme characteristics on the other hand are used as tools of alienation that would prevent the audience from identifying with Mother Courage.

The contributory elements' input to the total effect reveals other issues. First of all motherhood already has its own connotations in audience's mind, many of which explained above (female sex, childcare etc.). While Mother Courage as a symbol signifies the continuity of war and its economy, relating the motherhood, which gives life, to war, which takes life, has significant consequences. Her greediness and continuing morally “wrong” decisions signifies the continuum of war economy. However, since there is another signifier, which is motherhood, with connotations it brings about such as care, compassion, sacrifice and so on these connotations might be

perceived as if they are contrasting with Mother Courage's personality. Consequently, two contrasting profiles contradict each other. One profile is not specifically problematized within the macrosign of the play. It is motherhood and its connotations. The second one is a war merchant with openly signified characteristics of self-interest, greediness and parsimony. Inadvertently, the latter characteristics are ascribed to motherhood and unwittingly perceived as a signifier of the protagonist's motherhood. Due to the complexity of these different significations, eventually, the self interest and greediness which connotates with "bad" mothering, arise and reaffirm these essentialist definitions of motherhood out of a picture where issue of motherhood is not particularly discussed.

Case (1985) also elaborates on semiotic connotations of motherhood specifically on Brecht's manipulation of it using Derrida's concept of "under erasure" term. Under erasure, originally *sous rature*, refers to those terms which have subversive and sophisticated meanings that their connotations extends their meanings the term itself becomes "inadequate but necessary" (Sarup, 1993, p. 33). Case argues to use a term like "mother" which extends beyond its meaning and "implies a constellation of political resonances as well as historical processes which are unfortunate in their restrictive gender and sexual prescription for both practice and theory" there lies the risk of manipulating the meaning of the term (1985, p. 65). She argues the connotations that Brecht's mothers implies constellates around a patriarchal discourse. Thus, Brecht's mothers connotate with terms like female sex, child rearing, and other distinctions I mentioned earlier.

### **2.3. Discarding the Affect and Mourning**

Therefore, taking semiotics into account might clarify how the argument of motherhood occurs throughout the play. Such an explanation addresses how Mother Courage's antipathetic behaviors carry the risk of misleading the audience by relating them to her motherhood. Still, this clarification does not provide an answer to our previous concern. We know that Brecht wanted the audience not to have pleasure out of emotional moments, and render Mother Courage as a woman who does not react emotionally to the situations, which all caused these disarray of signifiers. Still, one should ask if the abandonment of the pleasure through emotions and sentimentality necessarily mean

abandonment of all kinds of feelings that the audience might possibly identify with. Brecht's answer would probably be yes. However, I think even if the audience does not identify themselves with the character, the abstract notions that have been discussed on the stage might arise connotations I mentioned earlier, which have the risk of finally developing into moral judgments. Thus, such superfluous or inadvertent moral judgments can be limited, if not totally discarded, by highlighting the emotional responses of the character, considering that the effect of astonishment sometimes falls short for drastically life changing experience the characters go through since it is very momentary and usually is not carried to the next scene. A significant example of such case in which the "affect" of astonishment is inaccurate might be Mother Courage's astonishment when she sees her son Swiss Cheese's dead body and pretends as if she does not know him.

Swiss Cheese is described as Mother Courage's honest child. For this reason he was recruited as the paymaster of the regiment. During the third scene Swiss Cheese tries to save the regimental cash box from the Catholics and carries the cash box along with him. When the Catholics attack unexpectedly, he hides the cash box in Mother Courage's wagon. Three days later when the attack is still ongoing, Swiss Cheese becomes extremely anxious about his sergeant's possible thoughts about him. He is very much afraid of being perceived as a thief after all the things his sergeant did for him. Although Mother Courage warns him not to walk around with the cash box and mentions the Catholic spies who would capture him, eventually, Swiss Cheese's honesty, sense of responsibility and ambition to be appreciated by his sergeant gives him the courage to decide to take the box back to his sergeant. Shortly after this attempt the spies catch him when Mother Courage is not around.

Mother Courage learns what has happened and decides to bribe the spies and claim Swiss Cheese back. To collect the necessary amount of money she asks Yvette to arrange the Colonel who is in love with her, to pawn the wagon. Yvette convinces the Colonel to pay two hundred guilders for the wagon. Mother Courage hopes to give the two hundred guilders to the spies, rescue Swiss Cheese, get the regimental cash box back and use the money in the cash box to pay back to the Colonel. She commends Yvette to approach to the spies, pretend as if she is Swiss Cheese's sweetheart and bribe the soldiers in order to get Swiss Cheese back. Yvette goes there, convinces the spies to

bring Swiss Cheese back in turn for two hundred guilders. During the bargain, she also overhears that Swiss Cheese has thrown the cash box into the river so that the Catholics could not get a hold of it, and she informs Mother Courage about it. Mother Courage panics and worries about not being able to take care of Kattrin and Swiss Cheese if she does not have any money left. Then she starts bargaining. She insists on paying one hundred and twenty guilders so that she could spare eighty guilders to move on with her children. However, the soldiers do not accept Yvette's offer of one hundred twenty guilders and shoot Swiss Cheese. Hearing that Mother Courage repents "I believe—I haggled too long" (Brecht, 1966, p. 64).

Meanwhile the Catholics still want the cash box and suppose Mother Courage has it in her wagon. In order to understand Mother Courage's relation to Swiss Cheese they decide to test Mother Courage's reaction by showing her Swiss Cheese's dead body and ask her whether she knew him or not. Yvette, now extremely upset by Mother Courage's obsession with bargaining, mentions that she eavesdropped about this plan and commends Mother Courage not to respond in any way when she sees the body:

YVETTE: Now you've done it—with your haggling. You can keep the wagon now. He got eleven bullets in him. I don't know why I still bother about you, you don't deserve it, but I just happened to learn they don't think the cash box is really in the river. They suspect it's here, they think you're connected with him. I think they're going to bring him here to see if you'll give yourself away when you see him. You'd better not know him or we're in for it. (Brecht, 1966, p. 64).

When the spies bring over the body astonished by the image of her own son's dead body Mother Courage could not say a word. She simply shakes her head to state that she does not know whom the body belongs to. Otherwise, it would cost her, her own life:

SERGEANT: Here's a man we can't identify. But he has to be registered to keep the records straight. He bought a meal from you. Look at him, see if you know him (He pulls back the sheet.) Do you know him? (MOTHER COURAGE shakes her head.) What? You never saw him before he took that meal? (MOTHER COURAGE shakes her head.) Lift him up. Throw him in the carrion pit. He has no one that knows him. They carry him off. (Brecht, 1966, p. 64)

Mother Courage might have two motives here, both mutually dependent. The first one is her urge of survival. Second is her devotion to her children. At the time of the

incident, Kattrin totally depends on Mother Courage. Mother Courage also mentions that she is not married yet and that is why she has to consider her before making any decisions. She acknowledges that her absence or death would have harsh consequences on Kattrin. She is also very much afraid of the possibility of Kattrin's ending up as a prostitute like Yvette if they do not have enough money to live on. This brings us back to one of the situations we defined earlier, in which Mother Courage is stuck in between two fires. If she pays two hundred guilders she will be left with two children depending on her with no money. If she bargains, there is a risk of losing Swiss Cheese. Consequently she chooses to bargain to save some money. However, this bargain costs her one of her children's life. At the end of the scene, when there is nothing more to be done to bring Swiss Cheese back Mother Courage acts rationally and pretends as if she does not recognize the body of Swiss Cheese. Such choice of action seems like the most intelligent decision to be made under the war circumstances. Although Mother Courage's response is the most logical one and the moment of her astonishment is immensely striking, right at the beginning of the fourth scene (the third scene ends with Mother Courage's desperate head shaking) Mother Courage is singing and complaining about the damage that the soldiers caused on her wagon. The dreadful occurrences cannot be traced in the next scene by any means.

As I already mentioned, it would be wrong to say that Brecht totally disregards the emotions. What Brecht discards in these plays is the transmission of the emotion from stage to the spectators and its possible interaction among the spectators. The kinesis of emotions was blocked by outspokenly uttering the emotional states of the characters or with acting "coldly". The mimics and gestures were minimized in order not to digress the subject matter of the play. "Matter- of-factness dampens intensity" says Massumi (1995, p. 86). Thus, there must be a unit of analysis in order to appreciate what meant by the "intensity", since there are instances where a semiotic analysis falls short to explain the effects of the intensities of the play on the audience, because of the fact that the emotional connotations do not completely correspond to what is meant by these intensities. Massumi also argues that "approaches to the image in its relation to language are incomplete if they operate only on the semantic or semiotic level however that level is defined (linguistically, logically, narratologically, ideologically, or all of these in combination, as a Symbolic)" (Massumi, 1995, p. 87). In order to fill this gap and grasp a better understanding of what is aimed by the prevention of these intense



moments in which the emotions are transmitted from one to another and the consequences of such interaction, affect theory will be approached.

I will use Massumi's definition of affect. Massumi defines it as "the gap between the content and effect" (Massumi, 1995, p. 84). When exposed to an image, a scene, or an object the effect that is not connected to the image's context or that is irrelevant to the emotions it connotes in a semiotic sense of the image's meaning considered as affect. Affect is the critical point in which these two ends, object and effect, is bifurcated. The intensity of affect fills this openness. Its ability of transience and transmission have the possibility of creating those shared moments that goes beyond emotion but felt in the depth of the bodies. The critical point where affect occurs is not limited to emotions. Actually it is much different than emotions. Massumi points out that even the bodily significations of affect and emotions are different. He says that when the emotions mostly alter heartbeat and depth of breath, affect is felt through skin.

Thus, what would be the relevance of affect theory to Brecht's performance theory and his plays? Affect's distinct mold, its difference from the emotions and especially its aspect of "unassimilability" is our departure point here. Referring to Brecht's writings that I quoted earlier above one can deduce that he achieved to exclude emotions by assimilating them in the context of dialectic materialism instead of totally discarding them. His description of how a servant announces her mistress' death perfectly demonstrates his understanding of staging the emotions:

(...) she announced the death of her mistress by calling out 'dead, dead' in a wholly unemotional and penetrating voice, her 'Jocasta has died' without any sorrow but so firmly and definitely that the bare fact of her mistress's death carried more weight at that precise moment than could have been generated by any grief of her own. She did not abandon her voice to horror, but perhaps her face, for she used white make-up to show the impact which a death makes on all who are present at it. (...) Plunged in self-identification with the protagonist's feelings, virtually the whole audience failed to take part in the moral decisions of which the plot is made up. (Brecht, 1964a, p. 28)

As can be induced from Brecht's own statement, the emotions were either marginalized or not displayed and, acted out in an extremely exhibitiv way –even with impressions created with make-up- so that the audience would alienate from the moral decisions of the characters. As a result, the emotions are assimilated and altered. Thus, we might

conclude that Brecht did use emotions however what he especially avoided were those affective moments where a gap occurs between the object and the emotions. To Brecht, such a gap carries the danger of being fulfilled with the feelings of pity or revealing out empathy. In *Mother Courage and Her Children*, Mother Courage's recklessness as not responding emotionally to her children's death must be for the same reason as well: avoiding pity and empathy and, the emerging affect that could be shared, transformed and transmitted among the audience. The strength of affect would spoil Brecht's efforts of alienation and disfavor towards perpetrators of war. However, as I mentioned earlier lack of affect also reflects on the discussion of motherhood and generates a debate over the stereotypical types of identities. Even if Mother Courage does not wholly correspond to a stereotypical model with her other aspects, the lack of emotional reaction and her extreme interest in business regardless of what happens to her children might denote a so called "bad mother" image. Still, interpreting her repetitive mistakes as some sort of carelessness would be misleading. Rather, drawing the attention to the lack of mourning throughout the story and calling her state of doing nothing "acedia" in a Benjaminian sense would be much more appropriate at this point.

Brecht says that Mother Courage never takes lessons (Brecht, 2013), while Bentley claims that she is incapable of learning (Bentley, 1966). Anyhow, I think that she has issues with memory and past. Benjamin, in his essay *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, explains the marked difference between historicity and historical materialism saying that "Historicism gives an 'eternal' image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience of the past" (1992, p. 254). What he means by historicism is the traditional ways of historiography in which the ruling classes' victories are built up, praised and sustained through generating empathy towards victors. These victors has held the spoils as their possessions and transmitted them over from generation to generation together with their approach to these spoils as "cultural treasures" (Benjamin, 1992, p. 248). Benjamin believes that this kind of a historicity, together with its selective and narrated ways of memorializing the past suppresses the class struggle embedded within the history and produces conformism and hopelessness. Instead, historical materialism imagines a "redeemed mankind" who are purged off from this perspective of the past, and he believes that such recovery is only possible through historical materialism:

Historical materialism wishes to retain the image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. (Benjamin, 1992, p. 247)

Historical materialists are aware of the fact that the history imposed by the ruling classes is distorted. Benjamin claims that historical materialism can clear the air from the acedia created by the history of the ruling classes. He defines acedia as “indolence of the heart” which “despairs of grasping and holding the genuine historical image as it flares up briefly” (Benjamin, 1992, p. 248). The source of acedia is the empathy that the historicism builds towards the victors who undermine the anonymous contribution of oppressed classes to the history. Historical materialism brings about hope to replace the melancholy and apathy created by acedia with its promise of “bringing the memory to the past”, to remember, acknowledge, mourn for, and revive the past that people were forced to erase from their memories. Thus, what has been lost is promised to be brought back.

Eng and Kazanjian takes on from this point and refer to Benjamin’s understanding of memory and past in their relation to the notion of loss. They address how historical materialists’ approach to the relationship between loss and its remains within the context of mourning. They interpret Benjamin’s seeking for establishing an open relation with the history as affirming the practice of mourning in contrast with the acedia originated by historicism. According to the authors Benjamin describes a struggle between the hopeful historical materialism and hopeless historicism.

(...) Benjamin proffers a continuous double take on loss—one version moves and creates, the other slackens and lingers. Although it is always haunted by acedia, mourning need not be given over in every instance to the regressive fate of a historicism bent on permanence and fixity, sustained by and endorsing an empathy with history’s victorious hegemonies. Indeed, the politics of mourning might be described as that creative process mediating a hopeful or hopeless relationship between loss and history. The essays in *Loss* collectively examine this process, exploring how loss has been animated for hopeful and hopeless politics. (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003, p. 2)

The hope of material historicism is established through its affirmative relation to mourning, while the pessimism spread by the historicism is caused by acedia. Historicism with its permanency and fixity shuts down the hopes for change through acedia by divesting possibilities of redemption for oppressed people. This

way history takes a form of unchangeable condemnation in the eyes of these people who are haunted by acedia. However, mourning differentiates itself from this passivity, breaks the ties of empathy towards the faux-victors and hegemonies, and offers an active participation of the past into the present.

At full length of his essay Benjamin talks about revitalizing the history by reclaiming the relationship with our past and rediscovering a sense of common experience oppressed but reserved within the bodies and minds of the living and the dead. The closest title that I can designate to such experience is affect, or more specifically, inspired by Eng and Kazanjian, affect of mourning. Within the context of historical materialism, symbolically taking away a human being's practice of mourning breaks their ties with the past. The affect of mourning brings about the real 'courage' to take a step back from the already existing power circles and systems of oppressions. The continuing existence and repetitive actions of Mother Courage and her state of acedia towards these actions' consequences, on the other hand, signifies the linear continuum of history, which Benjamin hoped, that would be blasted by men's control over the present and remembrance of the past in order to redeem people from suppression. At this moment of being redeemed there lies the hint of building an active relationship with the past and renouncing the acedia that is built through suppression. The celebration of the victors stops at that moment, because people know that these victories were won over the very struggle of the suppressed who are neither recognized nor glorified. Forsaking the continuity of history and claiming it back in its nonlinear dynamic force constitutes the basis of historical materialism.

Mother Courage, on the contrary, is situated at the core of this linear continuity, a war. What is critical at this point is the fact that Mother Courage helps with the maintenance of this continuity. Moreover, she seems to be unaware the constructive principle of history. It is as if she is incapable of thinking constructively and understanding the oppression of the past. Instead, she internalizes and habitualizes the laws of war. She does not fight for altering the circumstances. In such a case Mother Courage is almost depicted as a tool of the ruling classes because of her contribution to the war's economy, which also signifies its continuity. Mother Courage's conformism with the ongoing system runs the risk of depicting the recreation and empowering of historicism. Marxist discipline on the other hand aims to exterminate these kind of approaches.

Hence, Brecht as a Marxist himself, by making Mother Courage less sympathetic, and greedier, by taking away her kids one by one, by cursing her with acedia, symbolically reprobates the bourgeois historicism. It is in line with Brecht's technique to take over the risk of creating an image of emotionally indifferent mother for the sake of addressing the danger of the hopeless historicism. Mother Courage is not depicted while mourning after her dead children until the very last scene when Katrin is killed. Even this scene is cut short with Mother Courage's attempt to get back to her business. Moreover, to my concern, taking the mourning out of the picture has important impacts on how the gender identities are established in the play, especially motherhood, which brings us back to my previous conclusion. The lack of affect, categorically mourning, and acknowledgement of the loss, builds on the idea of stereotypical "indifferent" mother under erasure and reproduces such definition on the stage by creating an emotionally indifferent mother and overshadows the critic of historicity that lies behind the main argument of the play.

While Mother Courage as a symbol of war's perpetuator belongs to the hopeless historicism of capitalism, the protagonist of the next play that I will elaborate on, Shen Te, as the symbol of socialism and solidarity is depicted with a hopeful perspective towards the future. However, the same concepts that I have discussed in this chapter such as functionalizing the character or marginalizing some of their aspects still cause some problem regarding the gender identities in its generic forms.

Brecht did not want the audience to focus on the individual story of Mother Courage with her losses, her pains, and her sufferings. That is why she is sort of incapacitated from humane feelings such as mourning. According to Brecht these sentimentalities would prevent the audience from observing the larger political consequences of the war. However, what is skipped here is the fact that the personal might be political as well. Mother Courage was not depicted while she was suffering or mourning because of Brecht's antagonism and cynicism against representation of emotions in realist forms of art. Yet, In Mother Courage's case, a properly depicted mourning of a mother and her sufferings might have been full of political connotations. Doing so, the chaos created by different significations and functions would have been eliminated as well and the

motherhood discussion would have been partially<sup>6</sup> freed from the stereotypical restriction. Moreover, connotations of motherhood as a predefined gender identity in its generic form might not have been arisen at all.



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<sup>6</sup> The reason that I use the word “partially” is the fact that Mother Courage as a female single mother and as the only guardian of her children already conforms to the generic definition of a mother. Still, with the inclusion of memory and mourning the character would be purged off from the moral judgments towards her, which are highly possible to occur among the audience considering the semiotic connotation of motherhood. Such choice would also accentuate her understanding of the concepts like family, father and husband, which would challenge to their generic meanings.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE GOOD PERSON OF SZECHWAN

In both of the plays that are analyzed in this thesis the protagonists are economically independent, self-sufficient female figures. *Mother Courage*, as I have already explained, is a merchant who provides for her children by herself. *The Good Person of Szechwan*'s protagonist Shen Te's profession on the other hand changes through the course of events. We first met her as a prostitute, then she becomes the owner of a small tobacco shop and after that she develops into a boss of a tobacco factory masquerading as a male persona.

The plotline of the play has gone over significant changes over time, which also reveals the Brecht's change in attitude and ideological orientation. The first version *Fanny Kress or the Whore's Only Friend* was written in 1927. It was about a shop owner who disguised herself as a man in order to earn money and help the prostitutes. The second version was completed in 1930 and its name was *True Love/Commodity Love*. This time the protagonist was a female prostitute who dresses as a man during the day time and work as a prostitute during the night. In the final version of the play which was finalized in 1941 the protagonist stops prostituting after buying herself a shop (Hanssen, 2000, pp. 160-161).

The play starts with water seller Wang's excited waiting for the gods coming towards Szechwan seeking a truly good person. After meeting the gods, Wang tries to find a place for the gods to spend the night. Nobody wants to accommodate them since the town has been pervaded by poverty and deficiency. Only Shen Te, who is a prostitute at that time, volunteers to accommodate them in her humble home. Shen Te is depicted as

a very naive, well-intentioned, angelic person who enjoys helping poor people even though she is not much wealthier than them. The gods are very pleased with finding someone good in Szechwan and after spending the night at Shen Te's home they give her some money in return.

With this relatively high amount of money, Shen Te buys herself a tobacco shop. However, Shen Te's extremely kind and naive nature prevents her from earning any money and sustaining her business. She keeps doling out money, rice and even tobacco. Eventually she ends up having to lose all her money. In such a desperate position, when her landlady asks Shen Te for a reference and later when a carpenter wants to charge her extra money, she decides to masquerade as her imaginary male cousin Shui Ta so that she can resolve her problems through this persona who could function as a referee and, in some cases as a scapegoat. Shui Ta appears to be a tough relentless male figure who interferes during the situations in which Shen Te cannot say no or deal with. Shen Te dresses up as Shui Ta, replacing her when necessary and does the things that she would not do because of her kind demeanor.

Meanwhile Shen Te meets an unemployed young male pilot, Yang Sun, and falls in love with him. Yang Sun, very much interested in Shen Te's money and business rather than being engaged with her emotionally; unknowingly talks to "Shui Ta" about his plans of marrying Shen Te and implies if could do so, he could receive enough money from her to fly back to Peking to start a new job there. Even though Yang Sun seems very reluctant to Shen Te's love and only interested in her and "her cousin's" money, Shen Te does not break up with him since she is blinded by love.

During their wedding ceremony, when Yang Sun is expecting Shui Ta to bring money, Shen Te discovers that Yang Sun plans to go to Peking all by himself. Shen Te resents this and tells him that Shui Ta will not bring over the money. By showing two plane tickets, Yang Sun convinces Shen Te that he will take her with him, however, since they waited for Shui Ta too long, the priest has left and the wedding has been cancelled.

After a while Shen Te realizes that she is pregnant but tells no one about her situation except for the water seller Wong. She continues masquerading as Shui Ta to make people work for his/her business in exchange for supporting certain basic needs such as



food and accommodation. Towards the end, Wong reveals Shen Te's pregnancy. Hearing this, Shen Te "disappears" and Shui Ta is blamed for the disappearance of Shen Te. During Shui Ta's trial in front of the Gods, Shen Te confesses that she has been masquerading as her imaginary cousin. Some of the gods find her guilty, but others do not and they leave without a consensus. The play ends with an open ending. One of the actors speaks directly to the audience asking them to provide a happy ending.

### **3.1. The Impact of Cross-Dressing and Gender Performativities as Parts of Gestus**

Considering the play's Marxist and non-moralist narrative, the plot seems to reflect mostly on material relations. The play shows us how the exploiter and exploited can actually be embodied in the same body as it is done with Mother Courage by representing her both as a victim and promoter of war. These dialectics and dualities are mostly founded on the contrast between the exploiter and exploited, and the perpetrator and victim. However, these dualities are dependent on materialistic determinism, mostly ignore cultural determinism and consequently, the gender roles. For instance, while the women are empowered by being depicted as economically independent, their function during the plots and contribution to the development of the message in many respects promotes patriarchy.

Especially, the dichotomy underlain in Shen Te's cross-dressing is highly striking. The sharp difference between Shen Te and Shui Ta is much more than a difference in their positions within the relations to the means of production or the contrast between the exploited and exploiter. What adds more to this dichotomy is the fact that Brecht is playing with these stereotypes such that these two contrasting masquerades raise the ideas of not only a "good person" and "bad person", but also a female figure and a male figure. Moreover, after a point we start to read the characters as "good but dumb woman" and "relentless but smart man". Such judgment is derived from the characters' *gestus* and their *gestus*' impact on their process of decision-making. Each *gestus* assigned to the character makes these stereotypical characteristics even sharper and much more generalizable since the "quoted actions" of *gestus* is attributed to a specific group of people.

It is true that these plays' main concern was based on class discussion. Shen Te's highly quoted lines also clarify this point: "A rumbling stomach is no respecter of persons". Thus, it might be disputed whether the gender questions were attempted to be discussed in this play regarding to or regardless of class. Similarly, the complications that would arise from the manipulation of gender roles and cross-dressing seem to be neglected. However, what we know with certainty is that *gestus* was used as an important indicator to predict the material circumstances of the characters, not their cultural background or gender roles. In order to clarify this point and illustrate Brechtian *gestus*, one might refer to the prologue scene where Wang is speculating about who the gods might be based on the appearances of the people passing by:

It cannot be those men –*he studies some workmen passing by*- they are coming away from work. Their shoulders are bent by the burdens they have to carry. That fellow is no god either, he has inky fingers. At most he may be some kind of clerk in a cement works. I would not take these gentlemen –two gentlemen walk past- for gods even: they have the brutal faces of men who beat people, and the gods find that unnecessary. But look at these three! They seem very different. They are well nourished, show no evidence of any kind of employment, and have dust on their shoes, so they must have travelled far. It is them! (Brecht, 1965, p. 3)

The scene perfectly sums up the Brechtian *gestus*. The gods in this scene are defined according to their wealth, type of (non)employment and physical appearances. The divinity, religious connotations and cultural significations are removed from the picture. By drawing the attention to the gods' economic circumstances, the authoritative power that they have originated from the religious myths is deconstructed. Therefore, the audience is alienated from the mainstream definition of gods over their religious and cultural power. In a very similar way, while defining a woman, a man or a cross-dressed character, the depiction of their socio-economical background is prioritized. However, the gender stereotypes are usually left untouched, meaning that the socially constructed gender norms and standards in most cases are not subjected to criticism. In other words the deconstructing criticism, which is created through alienation effects, is directed to material relations not to the very norms that create the gender roles. Consequently, Brechtian *gestus* -even if unintentionally- reproduces what Butler calls "gender performativities" on the stage in a non-deconstructive way without addressing substantial criticism to them.

Butler argues that repeated acts and socially constructed performances are a huge part of gender identities. In other words, acts and gestures as products of corporeal significations, which are produced on the surface of the body are considered performative:

Such acts, gestures, enactments generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. (Butler, 1999, p. 173)

These actions, gestures, words, and behavioral patterns externally, through discursive means, and internally, through the process of internalization, create the gendered body. These identities are subject to a constant policing and recording both by the self and by society. The notion of being watched or policed should be noted here since the existence of such a condition renders these actions as performances. However, considering how these performances occur as results of the cooperation between both internal and external dynamics of the dictated performativities, these actions should not be reduced to the results of violent or abusive means. Although in some contexts, one's failure to perform might result in violent consequences, mostly performativities are habitualized, and internalized, and not questioned. They are usually produced with the implicit consent of the individual. These identities that are expressed and embodied by means of specific performativities are entirely socially constructed. At this point, Butler qualifies these identities as myths. She concludes that gender identities are arbitrarily constructed throughout the history, as results of illusions and idealizations of both men and women; therefore, there cannot be a "true" gender or "false" gender.

Butler argues that gendered bodies revolve around three dimensions of corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. In order to distort this cycle with a deconstructive example, Butler elaborates on the corporeality of drag. On the one hand, a drag's gender performance and anatomical sex are apparently different from each other. On the other hand, his/her gender identity is out of question. Drag only imitates the "ideal man/woman" performances. Within this imitative structure in which gender performances are continuously reproduced, drag by overtly revealing the process of imitation poses an alienation to this gender parody. Elin Diamond says that "if an identity is different from itself it can no longer be an identity" (1988, p. 85). If the

identities are recognized, repeated and reproduced through performances, then the discrepancy among anatomy, performances and the identity disproves the validity of gender identities. Such invalidation and alienation reformulate the gender identities as no more than an illusion.

The similarity of Brechtian *gestus* and Butler's approach to performativity is conspicuous. Actually, within the context of epic theatre, Brecht makes use of these gender identities as a part of character's *gestus*. However, using especially the stereotypical performances and approaching them solely from an economic perspective reproduces the gender identities without constituting any alienation from them. Especially for the case of *The Good Person of Szechwan* using Butler's theory and her example of drag as tools of interpretation in construing gender issues and their manipulation through characters' *gestus* throughout the play is of capital importance for many reasons. The most self-evident reason that necessitates a further examination is that the fact that the protagonist is a cross-dresser. Analyzing the dynamics of both of the protagonists' personas, the differences between them and the connotations of these differences offer us a broader understanding of Brecht's approach to gender issues.

One significant problem of the play is the lack of criticism towards gender performativities while handling a cross-dresser. As a result of the lack of criticism, normative/discursive gender identities are reproduced for the sake of bringing class issues and social/material relations into view. The main reason that Shen Te decides to cross-dress is to rid herself of her kind and naive personality, which always subjects her to exploitation. This way she could get rid of the responsibility of being good all the time and defend her economic profits. Still, she complains about the impossibility of being a good person without being exploited:

The good  
Cannot remain good for long in our country  
Where cupboards are bare, housewives start to squabble.  
Oh, the divine commandments  
Are not much use against hunger. (Brecht, 1965, p. 48).

The extreme state of poverty and misery of Szechwan certainly overrides humane feelings such as helping others and solidarity when people's survival is at stake. The only person left with such feelings is Shen Te, however, she also needs to survive and it

is not possible with her exceedingly generous behavior. Hence, the first question that might be asked here is that why she does not change her own attitude if she is tired of being exploited? Why does she feel the necessity to masquerade? She could just as well give up doling out the poor and act the same way as Shui. The main reason that constrains Shen Te from acting freely is the money that she receives from the gods in exchange for being a good person, which she uses as the capital of her tobacco shop. In a part when she lacks enough money to repay carpenter's debt, which is actually owed by the former shop owner, she says, "What will the Gods say?" She feels responsible and guilty for a debt that does not belong to her. During the play we also encounter many scenes during which the gods are checking on Shen Te in order to make sure that she still behaves in good manner. The gods keep checking on Shen Te and her good behavior by using Wong as their agent. This control mechanism and the anxiety of Shen Te to fulfill the expectations of gods who appears as male characters also have some symbolic significance.

The policing by the gods is very much similar to Butler's sense of the success and failure of performativity. The subject is constantly being reminded, disciplined and forced to perform the necessary imitative actions. In Butler's sense these actions constitute illusionary gender identities while in Brecht's case these moral decisions and actions illustrate the character's social and material conditions. Given her circumstances Shen Te's decision of masquerading makes sense. However, the point when she decides to masquerade as a male raises the question: why? What is the reason behind Shen Te's choice of cross-dressing and what are this act's possible consequences?

The social realities of time and place might be considered as an explanation for Shen Te's choice of cross-dressing. The patriarchal structure of the society might have forced her to make this decision. Disguising as a man might grant her male privilege that would keep her good in the eyes of the society. However, in the play we encounter women characters who are single, independent and implacable at the same time. Mrs. Mi Tzu, who is the proprietress of Shen Te's tobacco shop, might stand as a solid example. At the beginning of the play she becomes very upset seeing the poor people in her property and is very much worried about the poor people Shen Te accommodates in the shop. Mrs. Mi Tzu has no pity for the people in need as well as for Shen Te if she delays the rent payment. In a way, Mi Tzu appears to be a female Shui Ta. Thus, it

would not be wrong to suggest that the social context of the play does not constitute a significant obstacle for Shen Te to maintain her business in disguise of another women. The aim of Brecht for such a dramaturgical choice then might be to highlight the difference between the two different faces of Shen Te, since the change of gender would make the divergence even deeper. Although the cross-dressing involves extreme changes of attitude towards material relations, Brecht does not specifically defines a considerable change in gender performances in the text. The actor working on the role by all means might work on differences in postures, gestures, mimics and bodily significations; however, Brecht himself does not define such “male” or “female” *gestus* in the text. Instead, the *gestus* he assigns to Shui Ta manifests the differences between the *gestus* of exploiter and exploited. As a result, Shen Te’s choice to appear as a male persona brings about connotations that link the type of behavior to one’s gender identity. Correspondingly, the lack of visible gender performances and the surfacing of complicating connotations distinctly differentiate Shen Te from Butler’s drag; therefore, an alienation from gender identities is not attained.

Shen Te is depicted as very self-sacrificing, helpful, compassionate and warm-hearted. She loves helping the poor even if she is very poor just like the rest of the town. She is also so honest that she does not want to take the money from the gods at the first place saying that “I am not good. I have an admission to make: when Wang asked me if I could shelter you I had hesitations” However, the gods insist on her to take the money pointing out her good personality and how she has overcome these hesitations. The extreme goodness, honesty and naivety of Shen Te, on the other hand, in some cases make her appear easy to fool and much less intelligent. Her relationship with Yang Sun is the most suitable illustration for such argument.

Yang Sun might be qualified as a typical misogynist who throws insults to women, and humiliates them, but his function in the play reveals how Shen Te internalizes these kinds of treatments towards women and prostitutes. Shen Te meets Sun in the park while he attempts to hang himself. She tries to approach him and dissuade him. Yang knows that Shen Te is a prostitute and replies her saying that “You can’t do business with me. Besides, you’re too ugly, Bandy legs” (Brecht, 1965, p. 10). While Shen Te insists on talking him into changing his mind, she learns that Sun is a pilot without a job, and tries to persuade him that he could find a job. During the conversation Sun

keeps humiliating Shen Te by giving her insulting responses. At the end Shen Te achieves to change Sun's mind and falls in love with Sun after having sexual intimacy under the rain with him although he does not pay any attention to her, care about her or show any kind of affection to her. The only thing Shen Te does to test Sun's affection towards her is by putting him to a test saying that he would marry Shu Fu, a wealthy widowed man, since her cousin does not support her relationship with Sun. Sun who had earlier sounded out Shui Ta about Shen Te's financial situation, very easily persuades Shen Te to run away with him by paying her factitious compliments.

In contrast to Shen Te, Shui Ta is in good control of his feelings. He is a very intelligent businessman, with an astute, crafty and self-seeker personality. He is also very successful at crisis management. He is able to think rationally at times of moral decision-making and does not fall for the mistakes that Shen Te normally does in critical situations. He is completely purged off from Shen Te's mercy and compassion. He is very much relentless towards the poor and does not see any harm in exploiting their labors. After he steps into Shen Te's tobacco business and makes the poor living under his roof work for his business, he starts driving significant amount of profit. After a while, he establishes a tobacco factory. He achieves such accomplishments by staying totally negligent to poor's demands and prevents any kind of excessively emotional state of mind.

Still, Shen Te's hysterical love for Sun that she persistently hold on to, even though she knows about his real intensions over his talks with Shui Ta, is hard to explain. Pointing out her lack of capacity of intelligence would be undermining her business mind and rationality that she shows during her masquerade as Shui Ta. However the play's context divides these two masquerades in a very sharp way that after a while one cannot make sense of the emotional decisions that Shen Te makes. Such a sharp difference brings about the idea that Shen Te would only achieve to overcome her emotional obsessions by wearing a men's suit and appearing as a man in order to act rationally. Shen Te's femininity depicts her as a prisoner of her hysterical emotions and lack of ability to use her intelligence in a sufficient way as long as she is dressed as a woman. The symbol of a feminine body and female apparels constitute an obstacle for any kind of rational decision-making and emotional stability. All through the play these deficiencies are substituted by a male masquerade. Eventually, Shen Te's escape from

her kind, considered personality also signifies her effort to run away from her gender identity. Such signification justifies and reproduces the already existing gender norms on the stage and connotes femininity with excessive emotions and irrationality and; masculinity with intelligence and coherence. Consequently, what looks like an innocent solution to some material troubles at the beginning, leads to substantial amounts of gender stereotyping.

Elisabeth Wright (1994) in her article *The Good Person of Szechwan: Discourse of a masquerade* examines these striking differences between the characteristics of Shen Te and Shui Ta. She argues that Brecht addresses the cross-dressing in the play in a unilateral way and she attributes this perspective to the single mechanism of Marxism. What she means by single mechanism is the tendency of the Marxist theoreticians to analyze the issues only by referring to class conflicts and material relations. In this sense, Shen Te embodies the exploited, and the exploitive mechanisms are embodied by Shui Ta. In other words Shen Te symbolizes the oppressed by capitalist forces while Shui Ta symbolizes a servant of the capitalist machine. However, the discursive and oppressive dynamics in the play is not limited with capitalism. At this point, Wright refers to Gramsci who coined the term hegemony. Gramsci argued that there are a number of systems such as culture and religion that dominates the individual and societies other than capitalism's single mechanism. The sum of these different oppressive mechanisms constitutes the hegemony. Wright's interpretation of Gramsci's system of multiple mechanisms brings around the gender issue as the second mechanism to the surface of discussion in the context of *The Good Person of Szechwan*. She argues that Shen Te's oppression is "economic as a prostitute, psychic as a romantic beloved, social as a pregnant mother" (Wright, 1994, p. 123). Within these systems of oppressions Wright develops an interesting argument stating that Shen Te is also represented as a masquerade herself. She is divided in two different personalities but none of them is her real self. So, she is not a full-fledged character, but only a counter-existence or symbol for "social construction of femininity". According to Wright, among the Lacanian realms of real, imaginary and symbolic, Brecht in this play fails to represent the symbolic realm of gender identities. Since women are not taken as a category or a specific group during the play, the dual existence of Shen Te and Shui Ta does not go further than the contradiction between the good and the bad in imaginary realm in which Shen Te is represented, as an "angel to the slums" while Shui Ta is the



fierce capitalist. Moreover, Brecht's lack of interest in the symbolic realm ends up in "idealization of the phallic" through reason and control and "hystericization" of "'womanly' masquerade".

Although Wright's arguments are very much well grounded and addressing the multiple mechanisms has crucial importance in order to elaborate on the gender issues, I must disagree with the part that she perceives Shen Te as a masquerade only. Claiming such an argument means undermining the embodiment of Shui Ta and Shen Te within the same body, but to ascribe them two totally disengaged forms of substance. However, there is not a magic wand that turns Shen Te into Shui Ta without her consent. It is very risky to undercut Shen Te's subjectivity, which is already threatened by stereotypical definitions of gender identities throughout the play. Ultimately, it is Shen Te at the end of the play who reveals her "real self" in front of the gods and is judged by them. Thus, I think the problem of the play is not generated by Shen Te's missing selfhood, but instead, both the lack of display of connection between these two characters, and extreme display of and emphasis on the stereotypical characteristics of gender identities which are associated with different notions such as good and bad, or socialist and capitalist types of behavior. Alternately, the forces behind Shen Te's decision of masquerading as a male persona and the problems of how this choice and its implementation is depicted should be addressed in order to grasp a better understanding how the gender identities and performances operate during the play.

The discourse of being a good person and the bribe-like money that Shen Te receives from the gods becomes an unbearable and oppressive burden for her. Since the discourse is generated by the gods, a source of religious authority, the burden also develops into an inevitable assignment. This authority turns Shen Te into gods' bribed pushover or some sort of an instrument whom they would manipulate to imitate a world in which the good is still alive as if they have fulfilled their mission of sustaining a world that the good is still alive. In this structure, in which the gods are seeking for success -even if it is fake-, the poor is seeking for food, shelter and money-even if they are misappropriated-, and everyone is seeking for their own interest, Shen Te is

portrayed as the only person left to be manipulated by both of these parties<sup>7</sup>. In order to escape from this manipulation that later transforms into a system of oppression, Shen Te develops herself into a relentless business man, Shui Ta, and creates her own system of oppression in which she uses both the money from the gods and the labor from the poor. Until this point the story seems to be about these interconnections and corruption that everyone somehow is both oppressed by and gain favor over each other. However in such an approach to the plot the elephant in the room is not pointed out. The discourse of being a good person is only imputed to Shen Te, a woman who finds the resolution by dressing like a man. In the web of the different signifiers and connotations Shen Te's womanhood might lead to the assumption that being good, naive, emotionally driven and even unintelligible and irrational is associated with the characteristics of women, and being relentless, intelligent and rational with those of men. When Brecht's techniques, especially *gestus* that tends to generalize these characteristics, are considered these gender identities gives way to stereotypes and a gender-biased narrative.

Smith (1991) also warns the theatre practitioners about the representation of characters and the manipulation of *gestus* saying that a possible disconnection between these two characters and two distinctly irrelevant bodily *gestus* might cause a disconcert of significations. She mentions Travis Preston's production from 1984 of *The Good Person of Szechwan* and points out how the company chose to present Shen Te. All the disruptions that the company makes on the original Brechtian *gestus* address our points of discussion. They have carried the components of female performativity to Shui Ta's actions and created a blurred rather than clear-cut distinction between these two characters in order to restore Shen Te's subjectivity. Although such a dramaturgical intervention gives the authority of her own body to Shen Te and by revealing the consent of Shen Te in cross-dressing processes recognizes her subjectivity, still, even with these adaptations the risk of affirmation of the gender performativities continues to exist.

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<sup>7</sup> This point is interesting in the sense that Shen Te here constitutes both a contrast and similarity with *Mother Courage*. Both of the characters are placed in corrupted environments. As I already mentioned *Mother Courage* stands out with her tough nature within such a structure however Shen Te seems as if she cannot handle the situation because of her essentially good nature.

The lack of display of the connection between the characters and exaggeration of such a difference also serves for the main message or the macrosign. The macrosign of the play is very much in line with that of *Mother Courage and Her Children*: the dialectic of both being a sufferer and perpetrator of capitalist forces. Eventually, Shen Te is also marginalized with some aspects just like Mother Courage. However, Shen Te is marginalized not only within the limits of her material relations but also within sexual and moral dimensions. I think that since Brecht is heavily focused on the macrosign, the play lost track of these latter issues that arise as contributory elements. These contributory elements can be listed as gender performativities and moral behaviors that are directly associated with the macrosign. These two aspects complicate the main argument of the play by offering different connotations that would provoke very much sexist conclusions. I have already discussed how gender performativities are rendered as an element of the character's *gestus* in a way that acknowledges and reproduces them. In the specific context of the play, Shen Te's decisions are made through emotional mechanisms while Shui Ta's are rational and based on calculations of profit and loss. The sharp transition between these two states runs the risk of association of lack of rationality to female behavior and lack of emotions to male behavior. Since the already existing stereotypical characteristic of gender roles also maintains these characteristics I think the process of such an association is inevitable. As a result the forces that makes Shen Te to masquerade are not subjected to criticism but justified. Instead, the main criticism is addressed towards the capitalist nature of Shui Ta's behaviors. However this conclusion is not generated from Brecht's individual approach (or lack of approach) to gender issues, but also highly interconnected with Marx and Engel's approach to women.

Anne Herrmann (1989) in her article *Travesty and Transgression: Transvestism in Shakespeare, Brecht, and Churchill* examines three plays, one of which is *The Good Person of Szechwan*, that use transvestism as a dramaturgical mean in order to convert and challenge the historicized social infringements. During her analysis of *The Good Person of Szechwan*, Herrmann argues that the transition between feminine and masculine stands as a metaphor of socialism and capitalism. Since this transition does not have any sexual underlying she does not think that we can call Shen Te a travesty. Instead, she argues that Shen Te is depicted as a subject position, not as a psychological

subject that cross-dresses for different reasons. What makes her position more specific is the fact that the subject position is “conceivable only in its relation to the masculine” (1989, p. 134). Herrmann attributes this limitation to the image of a “bad father” as Yang Sun, and a “good mother” Shen Te. Although Yang Sun is out of picture at the end of the play, Shen Te imagines her child as a pilot in the future who would bring around brighter days. The child’s definition through his father can also be interpreted as the revolution the socialist dreamt of is only conceivable through masculinity. Herrmann attributes this relation to the Communist Party policy on women of the time:

Like Shakespeare, who ceased to put cross dressed heroines on the stage once they began to appear on the streets, Brecht used his women figures to embody Communist Party policy at a particular historical moment. The discrepancy between women on stage and their roles on the stage of history reinforces the role of the cross-dressed heroine as metaphor. (Herrmann, 1989, p. 147)

In *The Good Person of Szechwan* we observe a very similar attitude towards Shen Te. During the play, her struggle for survival is defined through her economic means of survival and her existence is portrayed as a metaphor. However, the metaphor of cross-dressing also runs the risk of pointing out the women’s incompetence of economic survival, which actually is a conclusion that goes against the idea of Marxist scholars’ perspectives that I referred so far. The play carries the hazard of being interpreted as if a woman by her own is not qualified to sustain a business under capitalist forms of production. Even if the capitalist forces are blamed for this reason, this does not change the fact that symbolically a woman is deprived of her ability to pursue her business appearing as a feminine figure, and there is not a counterargument or criticism against such point except for the last scene of the play when the audience is asked to come up with a resolution “to help good people to happy end” (Brecht, 1965, p. 109). The answer to this call, on the other hand, is so dependent on the audience yet so obvious: socialism, since the dichotomy embodied in Shen Te and her male masquerade Shui Ta constitutes the metaphor of the dichotomy between socialist and capitalist types of behaviors. In the end Shui Ta is eliminated and the basis for audience’s solution is explicitly prepared. As a result, socialism is implied as the force that would bring about emancipation to the women.

### 3.2. Prostitution in Marxism and in Brecht's Works

As I already discussed, the representation of women characters in Brecht's later plays, especially the mothers, is very much in line with the relevant scripts of Marx and Engels. However, it would be wrong to argue that Brecht's approach to female characters and that of Marx and Engels completely coincide with each other. One main issue that leads to this argument is the issue of prostitution. Brecht has written many characters that earn their lives through prostitution without building normative judgments against these characters. Marx, on the other hand, portrays prostitution as an extension of mass commodification towards human body and a result of the bourgeois morality. Thus, the body itself becomes a commodity within capitalist markets. According to some Marxist theoreticians this commodification would bring about "alienation, objectification, and the proliferation of other symptoms, disorders, and diseases that we see under late capitalism" (Van der Veen, 2001, p. 31). Marx declares that he used prostitution as a metaphor for prostitution of the labor in general:

Prostitution is only a specific expression of the general prostitution of the laborer, and since it is a relationship in which falls not the prostitute alone, but also the one who prostitutes – and the latter's abomination is still greater – the capitalist, etc., also comes under this head. (Marx, 2009, p. 42)

Even though these lines seem to be highly metaphorical and perceive prostitutes as sufferers of capitalism, the comparison of "abomination" between the prostitutes and those who prostitute them still address a sort of disapproval of the profession itself. Marx finds the abolition of prostitution necessary since he identifies it as an extension of capitalist system's logic of commodification. He evaluates the substance of bourgeois family together with that of prostitution and anticipates that both would dissolve through the communist revolution (Marx & Engels, 2002, p. 255). With a similar attitude, socialist writer and politician August Bebel also dwelled on prostitution and its impact on society in his book *Women under Socialism* and he came in terms with the idea that prostitution is "a social institution in the capitalist world, the same as the police, standing armies, the Church, and wage-mastership" (1971, p. 96) and should eventually be eliminated.

Body politics of Marxist discourse is usually structured over the promise of freeing men from the alienation created through the capitalist modes of production and rendering the bodies as fully functioning part of the communist societies just like a healthy human

body with well functioning organs. Thus, bodies were perceived as the operational pieces of a mechanism. On the other hand, about sexuality and sentimentality many Marxist scholars positioned their arguments in opposition to the definitions of these terms by capitalist market economies. They mainly argued that capitalism only superficially promotes freedom of sexuality by creating “a culture that celebrates a superficial drive for pleasure leads not to fulfillment but to an aimless, unhappy search for gratification” (Seidman, 2003, p. 17). The ideas of carrying sex into public sphere and glorifying the sex industries were opposed and prostitution was one of the industries that are implied by these statements.

Brechtian epic theatre’s approach to actors’ bodies was not much different than that of Marxist doctrine. According to Brecht “the body itself, its actions and gestures, are determined by ideological relations” (Schutzman & Cohen-Cruz, 1994, p. 129). In epic theatre, actors’ bodies were instrumentalized on the stage in the service of dialectic thinking. Although this instrumentalism leads to functionalizing the characters and leads to the disempowerment or de-subjectification of the characters as I have already discussed, Brecht seemed more comfortable with the idea of prostitution when it comes to instrumentalizing the body itself when compared to Marx and Engel’s attitude towards prostitution in their so far referred scripts. Still, there are some points that should be discussed on Brecht’s handling of prostitute characters within the limits of their bodies.

In *The Good Person of Szechwan*, Shen Te is a prostitute, a factory owner and a mother at the same time. However limits of her body does not allow her to continue cross-dressing even for economic aims due to her pregnancy. Although her pregnancy is covered since people attribute Shen Te’s pregnant body to Shui Ta’s growing belly as a result of his economical well being, after a point she had to reveal herself. Thus, we might conclude that her female body and her fertility constitute the most obvious obstacles for her to continue her business even in disguise as a man. Her pervious occupation, prostitution, on the other hand, is not distinctly discussed during the play within the framework of body politics. There are only a couple of scenes that refer to or imply prostitution. For example, in the first scene the gods’ are anxious about the possible misunderstanding that would be created by the money they donate her. In the following scene Sun humiliates some prostitutes including Shen Te when they first

meet. Other than these and some other insignificant references Shen Te's previous profession seems to be slurred over. In one sense this could be pointed out as normalization of freedom of women in claiming their own body. On the other hand, such circumlocution might lead to misperceptions as Smith also mentions:

Shen Te's body becomes a complex signifier: Shui Ta's increasing girth, apparently due to wealth and appetite, conceals the illegitimate child. As an intexical sign, the visible pregnancy, transformed into the more "respectable" condition of prosperity and gluttony, politicizes what is normally iconic in the sign, a sentimental image of motherhood. (Smith, 1991, p. 498)

Hanssen defines Brecht's approach to prostitution as "rational and passionless" in her article *Women of Streets: Prostitution in Brecht's Works* (2000, p. 154). She argues that prostitutes of Brecht are depicted in such a "cold" way that this technique has empowered them through their control over their own bodies without being emotionally attached to them:

Prostitutes in Brecht's dramas are cold enough to market themselves as a commodity or as the working title of his play *Der Gute Mensch von Sezuan*, *Ware Liebe* (Commodity Love), and savvy enough to control the man they exploit while appearing to serve" (Hanssen, 2000, p. 155)

Although Hanssen is right about how Brecht empowered these characters through purging them off from the moral judgments and sentimentality and such a case is valid especially for Yvette, I do not think that Shen Te is altogether inline with the coldness that is mentioned here. Moreover, I think that the way that the coldness technique is deployed in some cases even causes an excessively sentimental and even "hysterical" figure. In fact, as mentioned both by Hermann (1989) and Wright (1994) her "good" aspects are overtly marginalized and her emotional responds were incapacitated from rationality. Such a marginalization overshadows the fact that Shui Ta is in fact Shen Te the same person and breaks the ties between Shen Te's sentimentality and Shui Ta's coldness.

Another prostitute figure that needs further attention from the plays analyzed here is Yvette from *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Yvette, for instance, just like Mother Courage, earns her life through making money over war. However, her capital is her own body. She is described as "a very good-looking young person" during her first

appearance on the stage (Brecht, 1964a, p. 42) The song that she sings to Katrin in the third scene reveals her life story:

When I was only seventeen  
The foe came to our land  
And laying aside his saber  
He took me gently by the hand.

First came the May Day Rite  
Then came the May Day night.  
The pipes played and the drums did beat.  
The foe paraded down the street.  
And then with us they took their ease  
And fraternized behind the trees

Our foes they came in plenty  
A cook was my own foe.  
I hated him by daylight  
But in the dark I loved him so.

First came the May Day Rite  
Then came the May Day night.  
The pipes played and the drums did beat.  
The foe paraded down the street.  
And then with us they took their ease  
And fraternized behind the trees

The heavens seemed to open  
Such passion did I feel  
But my people never understood  
The love I felt was real.

One day the sun rose slow  
On all my pain and woe.  
My loved one, with the other men,  
Presented arms and stood at ease  
Then marched away past all those trees  
And never did come back again. (Brecht, 1966, pp. 44-45)

The implied gang rape in here as “fraternization behind the trees” is told in a cold way through a song about Yvette’s love story. Yvette sings this song to reveal the tragic events that she experienced in order to teach a lesson to Katrin so that she would not fall in love with a soldier during wartime. The lack of sentimentality within the narration of the tragic events and the stress on the horrific conditions of war overshadow the intensity of a rape scene. Consequently, the coldness of the song does not seem to affect Katrin as well. Katrin’s admiration for Yvette is highlighted throughout the play. She keeps imitating her behavior. Especially the scene when she



steals Yvette's red boots and duplicates her actions is significant. This moment of imitation constitutes an expressive example of how Brecht made use of gender performativities. Yvette's red boots are powerful symbols of sexuality and important parts of her performativity alongside with her colored hat, stockings and drinking behavior. Mother Courage very hesitantly does not want Kattrin to carry such symbol with her during the war time because she is so afraid that Kattrin might end up as a prostitute just like Yvette. Yvette is only allowed to wear these boots after she gets a scar on her face that makes her disqualified for such an occupation. Thus, even if the prostitute figure is purified from the emotional attachment to her body as a commodity or overtly sentimental behaviors, the image of the prostitute is still depicted as a young, beautiful woman whose body is properly shaped and does not carry significant unattractive traces.

Although I agree that these plays do not construct a normative perspective towards the prostitutes and mostly ascribe them the allegorical function of those who are in favor of the freedom of commodification with the help of coldness technique, still there are some symbolisms, which hints that the plotlines constitutes some sort of payoff for these characters. For instance, towards the end of the play Mother Courage comes across Yvette. She has married to a colonel who has died recently during the scene, and now she is "older, fatter and heavily powdered" (Brecht, 1966, p. 88). The symbol of fatness related to gluttony is a popularly used metaphor for the capitalist exploiters of labor. Brecht uses the same metaphor for Yvette demonstrating her ill gotten earnings over the war by pointing out her overweight and heavy make-up. Shen Te is, on the other hand, rewarded for her good behavior and quitting prostitution. From the moment that she starts to benefit from the prize she receives from the gods for being a good person she stops prostitution and even bestowed the qualities of a "proud mother" in the end. Still, these significations do not change the fact that Brecht's intentions were non-moralist. The symbolic criticisms addressed to the prostitutes were not directed towards their occupation but mostly related to their material positions within the capitalist structure.

As a result, it is disputable whether we can define Shen Te as a prostitute, or not, since she stops that profession at the very beginning and it was not mentioned again. Her most highlighted occupation as the owner of a tobacco factory is attributed to her male

masquerade, which Shen Te also quits at the end of the play. In the end, the only attribution left for Shen Te is the motherhood. Towards the end of the play Shen Te introduces her unborn son to audience saying that she will protect her child “sharp as a tiger” no matter what the consequences will be. She describes her son as follows:

An airman!  
Salute a new conqueror  
Of unknown mountains, inaccessible countries! One  
Carrying letters from man to man  
Across the wastes where no man yet has trod! (Brecht, 1965, p. 73)

The hopes for the future is again dependent on a phallic substance, which renders Shen Te only as a intermediary for bringing the hopes for the future in disguise of human beings –more specifically male human beings- to the world. The play takes the risk of minimizing the impact of women only to birth-givers in the building of history making. By using the gender performativities as parts of characters’ *gestus*, the gender identities are continually reaffirmed and, consequently, the audience is not alienated from patriarchal forms of oppressions. Although the manipulation of prostitutes can be interpreted as women’s empowerment over their bodies, since the empowerment is determined through one’s sexual being, women’s substance is again reduced to their sexual or fertile functions.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

Brecht was a canonical playwright of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Brechtian epic theatre opened up a new spectrum within the theatre history. The audience's autonomy was now acknowledged and the fourth wall of realistic drama was demolished. The stage was politicized. The new techniques that are introduced by epic theatre offered a unique performance style that shook the very foundations of mimetic acting techniques. Alienation effects and manipulation of *gestus* challenged the spectator's willing suspension of disbelief and also served as functional tools for Brecht's political aims and introducing dialectics as a form of introspection. Through these techniques epic theatre also aimed to discard empathy and all sorts of identification with the character since such feelings would alter and distort the main message of the play. Also empathy carried the risk of audience's affirmation of the moral decisions of the character. In order to prevent all these Brecht either eliminated the emotional elements or displayed them in a highly grotesque way. By discarding the emotional intensities and establishing a continual tension among the audience, the performance was hoped to keep the spectators alerted at all times while watching the plays, so that they would be involved in it and immediately reflect on the occurrences on the stage.

Although Brecht constantly reminded his readers that his plays were not lectures of Marxism and did not want the audience to form any kind of moral judgments towards the characters or the incidents, his plays did offer some sort of tribute to Marxist ideology and consequently commended a socialist morality. On the other hand, my concern in this thesis is not particularly investigating how he offered some prescriptions or lectures on different issues, rather how this attitude affected the way that the female characters are represented together with the impact of the unique techniques of epic

theatre. For this purpose, I have so far analyzed two plays by him *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Person of Szechwan* in the light of his theory, his political orientation, and epic theatre techniques.

Representation of female characters in these two plays is very much in line with the relevant scripts of Marx and Engels about the issues of women and family. From a historical materialist point of view, to be more specific from Benjamin's understanding of it, the women of proletariat must be somewhere within the depths of history that has been suppressed through the discourse of historicism. However, Benjamin himself does not utter the word women or female at all and he indicates the people by using the pronoun "man". Brecht, on the other hand, in some of his plays brings the women to the forefront that has been erased and suppressed in the midst of male victors. Additionally, these plays were successful in bringing the stories of the outcast female characters such as prostitutes, single mothers, beggars and so on. Moreover, militarization of women under circumstances of war is revealed successfully.

Brecht took female characters out of their homes and created some significant female figures that are not economically dependent on men. These women in most cases are not restricted with housework and other domestic matters. According to scholars like Marx and Engels disposal of these activities would bring about women's emancipation through their participation in the labor force. Although regarding women's positions within material relations Brecht stayed committed to this principle, we still encounter different problematic aspects about the female representations in his plays.

The first problem that I have detected is the impact of the functionalization of characters and events on the female figures. I believe that the rationale of functionality entirely corresponds to Marxist rationality of instrumentality of body and its labor. In *Mother Courage and Her Children's* case Mother Courage's function as a merchant during the wartime reveals the continuity of the war economy. Even if the war takes her children's lives one by one, her continual existence as a merchant even after the death of her children is an important signifier of the linear progression of capitalism. The emotional lack necessitated by this continuity together with lack of her subjectivity objectifies Mother Courage both as a merchant and as a mother.

Shen Te's function on the other hand is mostly to disclose the harsh contrast between the socialism and capitalism through the metaphor of cross-dressing. However, the signification of gender is overlooked within this metaphor. The embodying of generosity, naivety, sentimentality and lack of rationality in the woman, while embodying rationality, acuteness, cruelty and business mind in the male masquerade ascertains a generic discussion on gender identities. Moreover, Shen Te's function as a mother is reduced only to "giving birth" to next generations. The stereotypical gender performativities are rendered as elements of Shen Te's and Shui Ta's *gestus*. This dramaturgical preference carries the risk of reaffirmation and validation of the already existent restrictive and stereotypical gender identities. Also prostitution, both as Shen Te's former occupation and in Yvette's case in *Mother Courage and Her Children* falls into this trap of functions and performativities. As a result, these characters' sexuality and subjectivity is objectified and stereotyped.

Another important impact on female representation is the lack of emotional intensities. Although this lack's impact is not restricted to female characters and has significant effects on each and every character, my focus is its impact on women. In order to elaborate on this issue I referred to affect theory and addressed the difference between Brecht's manipulation of emotions and his avoidance of "unassimilability" of the affect to block empathy and identification. Brecht either chose to exaggerate and marginalize the emotions through "coldness" or to ignore them by cutting the scenes that would involve these intensities. This attitude has different consequences on the characters of the plays analyzed in this thesis. Shen Te is overruled by her emotions and sentimentality while Mother Courage is cursed with lack of them. One might argue that Mother Courage's lack of intense emotional reactions carries the opportunity to challenge the kind of women image whose femininity is labeled with sentimentality. However, in a very interesting way the lack of affect and mourning causes the opposite result. As a woman who is forced to make her decisions through a constant calculation of cost and benefit under the harsh circumstances of war, Mother Courage's greediness, which partly causes her children's death, and lack of display of her emotional reactions lead to an "insensitive" mother figure. Thus, even if the real case is not like that, lack of affect carries the risk of generating the audience's understanding of the play through the generic contrast between a "caring" mother and a "cold" one.

These plays' aim to constitute learning plays, *Lehrstücke*, leads them to call out the spectator to take lessons from Mother Courage's behaviors and moral decisions that are mostly taken with materialistic concerns. The same attitude gives rise to rendering *The Good Person of Szechwan* to a lecture of a Marxist dialectic. However, for the reasons explained above women's position within these frameworks is usually disregarded. I believe that Brecht does not plan most of these consequences for the female characters. These are generally consequences of the techniques of epic theatre and Marxist ideological orientation together with the lack of problematization of gender issues and feminist struggle. Certain dramaturgical choices such as instant lap dissolves, scene cuts, functionalization of the characters through symbolisms and metaphors all add up to objectification and stereotyping of gender identities.

From a theoretical perspective, this thesis while supporting some of the already existing feminist approaches to Brecht's plays and epic performance theory, at some points diverges on certain issues. Although I agree with many feminist theatre theoreticians about the fact that functionalizing of the characters has significant impacts on female figures, I disagree with those who find Brechtian *gestus* as a useful tool for feminist performances. I believe that the *gestus*'s restrictive nature tends to bring about boundaries to characters' behavioral patterns and moral decisions. Even with a feminist interpretation of it, I do not think that *gestus* –for example a “feminist *gestus*” or a “lesbian *gestus*”- would be liberating for the character as well as for the audience. Instead, I argue that these definitive sets of actions would categorize and limit the gendered behavioral patterns. Consequently, the discursive gender performativities would have been reproduced on the stage under the roof of character's *gestus*.

Lastly, on the issue of lack of sentimentality and emotions I hope to have brought about a new perspective to the ongoing criticism. As discussed by some scholars, coldness technique might constitute an empowering element for the female figures in some cases. However, I have so far tried to point that there are many instances that the lack of sentimentality, or specifically the lack of affect, created the opposite impact on female characters. Both the grotesque marginalization of the emotions and the total disregard of them as discussed throughout this thesis run the risk of leading to the objectification and stereotyping of the female characters.

Although this study does not specifically offer solutions for how these issues can be overcome, the analysis itself by addressing the specific points and problems can be an inspiration for future adaptations of these two plays. In fact, the highlighted criticisms here can be useful not only for the staging of these two plays but also other epic plays since at some points the techniques extend beyond the plotlines. That way, the study hopes to come useful for theatre practitioners with certain concerns about gender representations. The thesis might serve as a guideline for a gender-oriented revision of certain epic theatre techniques for those who are already utilizing or planning to utilize Brechtian techniques for their performances.



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