

CLOUD NINE IN RELATION TO EPIC THEATRE

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ABSTRACT

Brecht is considered the founder of epic theatre. With this theatrical attitude, Brecht aims to show that realism which is imposed on people by bourgeois ideology is not the ultimate truth because reality changes in the hands of the dominant bourgeois ideology. Brecht's basic influence in creating this specific theatrical attitude is Marx, and he has developed certain techniques such as 'historification', 'cross-casting' and 'doubling' to achieve his aim in the light of Marxist doctrines. With these techniques, Brecht tries to inform the audience by revealing social injustice as if they were unnatural and surprising to make the audience question the situation and take action for social change. In other words, Brecht uses these techniques to create the alienation effect. The function of the alienation effect is to make the audience aware that they are actually watching a play in a theatre and to keep them alert for critical thinking rather than emotional involvement. Caryl Churchill has used epic theatre of Brecht as a model for her play, *Cloud Nine* to make the audience raise voice against oppression rather than accept the illusion in relation to the concepts of gender and race. With the techniques of epic theatre, Churchill represents how people are exposed to rules and norms according to their bodies and colours of their bodies, so the audience is able to see how power relations are produced and maintained in relation to the concepts of gender and race. Thus, this study intends to analyse the techniques of epic theatre that are adopted by Churchill in her play, *Cloud Nine* in order to demonstrate the concepts of gender and race as constructs.

Keywords: Brecht, epic theatre, alienation effect, Caryl Churchill, gender and race as constructs

CLOUD NINE IN RELATION TO EPIC THEATRE

Caryl Churchill is one of the most significant British playwrights due to her "distinctive approach to playwrighting, distinctive because of her peculiar ability to connect with concerns of the contemporary moment and her particularly innovative manipulation of dramatic form and style." (Adiseshiah, 2009, p: 1) The plays of Churchill pose questions related to ideologies that are taken for granted, which leads her to socialist-feminist critique of society. This is because "the material conditions of class, history and *gender* are all determinants in the socialist-feminist analysis of women's

oppression.” (Aston & Diamond, 2009, p. 4) Therefore, Churchill builds her plays on the concepts of class, history and gender. She also analyses the concept of race as a white, straight, middle-class playwright whose plays are “nevertheless attentive to the need to represent a diverse range of class, race, sex and other particulars of female subjectivity.” (Aston & Diamond, 2009, p. 25) As a result, Churchill aims to challenge the concepts of gender, race, age and class, and for her aim, she uses epic theatre of Brecht as a model of her plays in order to “empower audiences against oppression rather than encourage serene acceptance of an apparently inevitable fate” (Kritzer, 1991, p. 3). Therefore, Churchill adopts Brechtian epic theatre to create social change related to gender, race, age and class issues.

Brecht is considered the founder of epic theatre. The aim of Brecht is to reveal the dangers of capitalism because

Reality was not to be regarded as something fixed, but as defined by the human mind and shaped by human action. Unfortunately, the view of the world taken by too many people was simply a set of received ideas, the ‘ruling view’, which needed to be recognized in its ideological function as ‘the view of the rulers’. (Speirs, 1987, p. 47)

His aim is also to show the possibility of communism. Brecht develops certain techniques to achieve his aims in the light of Marxist doctrines. With these techniques, Brecht tries to inform the audience by showing social injustice as if they were unnatural and surprising to make the audience question and take action for social change: “To avoid lulling the audience into a state of passive acceptance, the illusion of reality [is] shattered by the use of the alienation effect.” (Selden et al., 2005, p. 90) Therefore, Brecht uses certain techniques to create the alienation effect. The alienation effect is generally called A-effect or originally *Verfremdungseffekt* in German and means making the audience aware that they are watching a play in a theatre to keep them alert for critical thinking rather than emotional involvement for social change. Brecht uses a variety of techniques to create the alienation effect from illustrative titles to several songs and scenes. Caryl Churchill adopts certain techniques for the alienation effect to demonstrate gender and race as constructs in her play, *Cloud Nine*.

Cloud Nine is an influential play that highlights gender as a construct through the use of the techniques of the alienation effect. Churchill applies epic theatre to demonstrate how power relations are formed and maintained to preserve such constructs. Since “power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself” and “[i]ts success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms” (Foucault, 1981, p. 86), Churchill tries to reveal the power relations that construct the concept of gender. To begin with, she sets the first act in Victorian times and the second act in 1979. Setting the play in the past and building a connection with this historical time and the events of the contemporary world to show that what was once taken for granted is now strange or vice versa is called ‘historification’ by Brecht, and the reason is that

It is true that a man will respond differently according to his circumstances and his class; if he were living at another time, or in his youth, or on the darker side of life, he would infallibly give a different response, though one still determined by the same factors and like everyone else’s response in that situation at that time. (Brecht, 1992, p. 191)

Thus, the audience prevents themselves from involving in the events emotionally and focuses their observation on the intellectual aspects of the play. As Elin Diamond states (1988), “spectators are prevented from identifying emotionally with any single action or character, but are encouraged to make connections between a previous historical moment and their own.” (p. 193) As a result, the audience is able to question the events and comment on them during the play. Victorian times present the audience strict domestic roles: While man is the subject, woman is always the object. It is understood from the nick names of Betty that are given to her by her husband, Clive such as “little dove” (Churchill, 1985, p. 253). Also, Harry’s words to Betty summarize the roles of a woman in that period: “You are a mother. And a daughter. And a wife” (Churchill, 1985, p. 268). Moreover, Betty reminds another woman, Ellen, the governess, of their roles by rejecting Ellen’s affection toward herself: “I love you too, Ellen. But women have their duty as soldiers have. You must be a mother if you can” (Churchill, 1985, p. 281). Furthermore, Clive shows the danger of being casted out by saying “how disgusting” (Churchill, 1985, p. 282) to Harry for his homosexuality and makes him feel regretful about it and finds the sole remedy for him in marriage: “You must get married” (Churchill, 1985, p. 283). Harry submits to it by marrying Ellen. On the other hand, the second act of the play takes place in 1979, one hundred years later, which is not a realistic organisation of events. To comply with this unrealistic alignment of historical periods, the characters are depicted as only twenty-five years older. This shows the intentional artificiality of the play and prevents the audience from being affected emotionally. Unlike Act 1, Act 2 presents the audience the disintegration of strict domestic roles: Woman becomes the subject of the actions. It is best seen in the actions of Betty. She decides to divorce Clive as she states, “I’m going to leave your father and I think I might need to get a job” (Churchill, 1985, p. 294). Also, the new character, Lin says, “I’m a lesbian” (Churchill, 1985, p. 291) without any hesitation, and she raises her daughter, Cathy alone. Moreover, Victoria leaves her husband, Martin, moves to Lin with her son, Tommy, and starts sleeping with Lin (Churchill, 1985, p. 317). A new character of this act is Gerry who is “very involved with [Edward]” (Churchill, 1985, p. 319). As a result, Churchill makes the audience compare the Victorian times and contemporary times to illustrate the historical changes over time. This means that there is nothing unchangeable in society. Therefore, “gender and sexuality [are not] innate ‘essences’ but social constructions that can be contested and redefined.” (Dolan, 2010, p. 14) The issue of gender imposed on people is actually a construct built by power relations, and it is possible to change it by taking actions in life.

Another technique that Churchill uses is ‘cross-casting’ which means the actors’ “swap[ping] roles with their partners during rehearsal” because “it is good for the actors when they see their characters copied or portrayed in another form. If a part is played by somebody of the opposite sex, the sex of the character will be more clearly brought out” (Brecht, 1992, p. 197). While Brecht requires cross-casting in rehearsals, Churchill uses it on stage. This makes the audience think critically about their own assumptions related to the issue of gender. As a result, by using cross-casting, Churchill reveals how people are controlled and ruled through their bodies. As Foucault explains (1981), “the mechanisms of power are addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate, or its capacity for being used” (p. 147). Therefore, Churchill makes the audience question how bodies are given certain meanings historically

and socially. Thus, Churchill highlights how social roles are learned through the use of cross-casting. In the play, Act 1 centres on Clive who is a white, middle-class, heterosexual man, and who is not cross-casted to emphasize his position. Betty, on the other hand, is played by a man. The reason is revealed through her own words at the beginning of the play: "I live for Clive. The whole aim of my life / Is to be what he looks for in a wife. / I am a man's creation as you see. / And what men want is what I want to be." (Churchill, 1985, p. 251) In other words, she identifies herself in the way that her husband wants her to be. This prevents her from "valu[ing] herself as a woman" (Churchill, 1985, p. 245). As a result, Churchill makes the audience consider their beliefs critically in terms of the imposed meanings on the bodies. What Clive looks for in a wife, as Betty suggests, is revealed when Betty begs for forgiveness about kissing Harry: "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Forgive me. It's not Harry's fault, it's all mine" (Churchill, 1985, p. 277). Although Clive has an affair with Mrs. Saunders, a widow, by "disappear[ing] completely under her skirt" (Churchill, 1985, p. 263), he acts as the authority toward Betty. He claims his forgiveness toward Betty because he thinks that the action of her kissing Harry comes from "the weakness of [her] sex" (Churchill, 1985, p. 277). Then, he continues counting certain stereotypes for women: "Women can be treacherous and evil. They are darker and more dangerous than men" (Churchill, 1985, p. 277). He also goes on by imposing another duty to Betty: "The family protects us from that, you protect me from that. You are not that sort of woman." (Churchill, 1985, p. 277) On the other hand, Mrs. Saunders is 'that sort of woman' for Clive, and he says, "You terrify me. You are dark like this continent. Mysterious. Treacherous" (Churchill, 1985, p. 263). This indicates that he categorizes women into two: "delicate and sensitive" (Churchill, 1985, p. 253) or "dark and treacherous" (Churchill, 1985, p. 263). He also categorizes Harry's homosexuality as a "revolting perversion and a disease" (Churchill, 1985, p. 283). He finds marriage as a cure to this disease. Betty's lines to Ellen "Ellen, you're not getting married to enjoy yourself" (Churchill, 1985, p. 286) demonstrates her internalization of his imposing stereotypes for women. As a result, being played by a man, Betty provides the audience to see the role of men in the construction of gender. In the play, Edward is also played by an opposite sex, a woman. Clive's introduction of his son reveals how social roles are learned: "My son is young. I'm doing all I can / To teach him to grow up to be a man" (Churchill, 1985, p. 252). Not only Clive but also Betty teaches Edward appropriate male behaviours. While Edward is playing with the doll, Betty warns him bitterly not to play with it again: "Edward. I've told you before. dolls are for girls. . . . You must never let the boys at school know you like dolls. Never. never. No one will talk to you. you won't be on the cricket team. you won't grow up to be a man like your papa." (Churchill, 1985, p. 274-275) Thus, Betty tries to preserve the role that Clive imposes on Edward. Since Edward is played by a woman, the audience can see the construction of gender and its damage on homosexuals. As a result, Churchill uses the technique of cross-casting of epic theatre to show the sexual oppression created with the construction of gender norms. On the other hand, Act 2 centres on Betty who is played by a woman for "she gradually becomes real to herself" (Churchill, 1985, p. 246). In this act, she leaves her husband and starts to work: "Clive always paid everything but I do understand it perfectly well" (Churchill, 1985, p. 294). Even, she tries to "pick up" (Churchill, 1985, p. 320) Gerry, the homosexual character. Betty's leaving her husband and flirting with Gerry indicate that Betty is free from Clive and male influences. In this sense, this freedom is demonstrated by the body of a woman.

Like Betty, Edward is played by the same sex, a man. His words “I’d rather be a woman. I wish I had breasts like that, I think they’re beautiful. . . . I think I’m a lesbian” (Churchill, 1985, p. 307) indicates that Edward has reconciliation with himself and his sexuality, and his reconciliation is highlighted by the body of a man.

Besides, Churchill uses ‘monologues’ among the techniques to interrupt the actions while the characters address the audience directly. Her aim is to strengthen the gender issue as a construct in the play. The monologue of Betty about her masturbation signifies the unity of the body and the self, which is a challenge to the oppression of gender norms. While at first she feels bad about it, she stops regretting it: “I felt triumphant because I was a separate person” (Churchill, 1985, p. 316). This demonstrates her self-acceptance. Another important monologue belongs to Gerry. His detailed description of masturbation and sex with men on the train (Churchill, 1985, p. 297) demonstrates his content in being with different people. After having sex with Gerry, they start to ask him certain questions such as “Why don’t [they] go out for a meal?” or “What’s [his] phone number?” (Churchill, 1985, p. 297-298) This means that men impel him to have a close relationship with them, but Gerry refuses it and goes on his sex life with “somebody really great who never say[s] a word, just smile[s]” (Churchill, 1985, p. 298), which means that Gerry likes the idea of having sex with men, but not beyond it. On the other hand, his second monologue ending with “Edward! Edward!” (Churchill, 1985, p. 311) reveals his love for Edward. As it is seen, Gerry experiences changes in his feelings like many people do. The aim is to make the audience confirm homosexuality.

Moreover, Churchill employs ‘doubling’ which means the actors’ playing more than one character in a play. The aim is to remind the audience that they are watching a play. In other words, this technique “undermines identity, throwing [the audience’s] focus not in individual agents but on the form and patterns of the whole.” (Aston & Diamond, 2009, p. 9) Churchill adopts doubling through creating certain relations between two characters. She states, “I like seeing Clive become Cathy, and enjoy the Edward-Betty connections. Some doublings aren’t practicable, but any way of doing the doubling seems to set up some interesting resonances between two acts” (Churchill, 1985, p. 247). Thus, the doubling between Edward and Betty has a certain relation: Both of them have strong pressure from Clive. While Betty internalizes that she has duties (Churchill, 1985, p. 261) that are imposed by Clive, Edward rejects the idea that he likes playing with dolls (Churchill, 1985, p. 276) because of the oppression he feels that is caused by Clive. Therefore, in Act 1, Betty and Edward are both unable to free themselves from male oppression. However, in Act 2, they both achieve the construction of gender: Betty leaves her husband (Churchill, 1985, p. 294), and Edward accepts the identification with femininity (Churchill, 1985, p. 307). Therefore, the double casting of certain characters in the play provides “a way of seeing that prompts [the audience] to locate in the same situation the forces of oppression and the seeds of resistance” (Newton & Rosenfelt, 2012, p. 22). As a result, once more, the construction of gender is highlighted with the use of doubling.

Cloud Nine is an important play which demonstrates race as a construct through the use of the techniques for the alienation effect. Churchill’s selection of Victorian times for Act 1 and 1979 for Act 2 has another significant purpose in relation to race besides gender. The aim is to display the construction

of race by setting the play in different periods, which is called historification, as it is mentioned before. Act 1 takes place in Africa during the period of English colonialism when Britain is at the peak as the great colonizer as Clive claims, “Elsewhere in the empire the sun is rising” (Churchill, 1985, p. 256). Thus, the audience is able to see what Britain was like before. Britain occupies Africa in order to “care for them and bring them to be like Joshua” (Churchill, 1985, p. 277) who is so called civilised by his master with the values of Victorian times because it is believed that “[African people] are savages” (Churchill, 1985, p. 260). As a result, like women, black men are also repressed by white men and led to fulfil the desires of those men, as Joshua states, “What white men want is what I want to be” (Churchill, 1985, p. 252). Joshua is the one who is allowed to participate in British culture through his service to white middle class family. Therefore, “[his] skin is black but [his] soul is white” (Churchill, 1985, p. 251). This creates hatred of his own people, and it is obvious when he spies and reports his own people to Clive: “The stable boys are not to be trusted. They whisper. They go out at night. They visit their people. Their people are not my people. I do not visit my people.” Joshua distances himself even from his own family. When his family dies, Clive offers him a day off to visit his own people. However, Joshua states: “Not my people, sir. . . . My mother and father were bad people. . . . You are my father and my mother” (Churchill, 1985, p. 284). As it is seen, Joshua tries to break all his connections with his family, in other words, with his blackness. Nevertheless, he is always reminded of his inferiority by the family he serves for: Edward makes him a horse and plays with him. This does not bother the family members; on the contrary, they are pleased: “Nice Joshy played horsy. What a big strong Joshy. Did you have a gallop? Did you make him stop and go?” (Churchill, 1985, p. 256) Although Edward is only nine years old, Joshua realizes, with the words of Edward, that Edward is also Joshua’s master: “You fetch her sewing at once, do you hear me? You move when I speak to you, boy” (Churchill, 1985, p. 278). In this scene, Joshua refuses to bring some thread when Betty asks him to, and he insults her as “[y]ou’ve got legs under that skirt. . . . And more than legs” (Churchill, 1985, p. 278). Since Edward is being raised with Clive’s racism, he protects Betty as an ideal mother figure, which is another idea of patriarchal system. Here, Churchill depicts that black men may have power over white women, but they never have any superiority even over white male children. With regard to this issue, there occurs a duality in Joshua’s identity, and this causes him to put a gun to Clive’s head at the end of Act 1 (Churchill, 1985, p. 288): “Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect” (Fanon, 1967, p. 10). Considering the examples and the utterances of the characters, of Joshua here, the audience realises that race is a construct that is imposed on people by imperialistic and patriarchal societies.

Churchill also uses cross-casting technique for racial oppression created with the construction of racial norms. Like bodies in the issue of gender, colours are given certain meanings. People are dominated and ruled according to their colours, and they are made to take it for granted. The aim of Churchill is to demonstrate this racial oppression to the audience. A white man’s playing Joshua in the play serves for this aim. Joshua’s speech reflects his acceptance of the role that is imposed by white men: “My master is my light. / I only live for him” (Churchill, 1985, p. 251-252). Thus, he tries to meet the demands of white men, which results in losing his freedom to identify the self. However, when there is no real authority, he succeeds in getting rid of the oppression partly through telling “bad stories”

(Churchill, 1985, p. 279) which are actually the ones that form his true identity. When Edward wants him to tell another story, Joshua mentions a creation myth:

First there was nothing and then there was the great goddess. She was very large and she had golden eyes and she made the stars and the sun and the earth. But soon she was miserable and lonely and she cried like a great waterfall and her tears made all the rivers in the world. So the great spirit sent a terrible monster. a tree with hundreds of eyes and a long green tongue. and it came chasing after her and she jumped into a lake and the tree jumped in after her, and she jumped right up into the sky. And the tree couldn't follow, he was stuck in the mud. So he picked up a big handful of mud and he threw it at her. up among the stars. and it hit her on the head. And she fell down onto the earth into his arms and the ball of mud is the moon in the sky. And then they had children which is all of us. (Churchill, 1985, p. 279)

Joshua's religious tenet has a conflict with the Christian tenet internalized by the colonialist society. Edward's expression "Nobody else is even awake yet" (Churchill, 1985, p. 279) reveals that these kinds of stories are inappropriate and wrong according to the white male authority. Although this demonstrates that Joshua does not totally leave his own identity, the repression of racism makes itself apparent in his words: "Of course it's not true. It's a bad story. Adam and Eve is true. God made man white like him and gave him the bad woman who liked the snake and gave us all this trouble" (Churchill, 1985, p. 280). Once more, Joshua rejects his own identity because of his internalization of racial oppression. As a result, Churchill demonstrates the audience race as a construct of power relations governed by imperialistic societies.

Within a variety of techniques, Churchill also gives place for songs in her play both to represent and criticize the construction of race. Using songs blocks the involvement of the audience in the play. Thus, instead of capturing themselves to the actions emotionally, the audience is made to think about these actions critically. The play opens with a song:

Come gather, sons of England, come gather in your pride.
Now meet the world united, now face it side by side;
Ye who the earth's wide corners, from veldt to prairie, roam.
From bush and jungle muster all who call old England 'home'.
Then gather round for England,
Rally to the flag
From North and South and East and West
Come one and all for England! (Churchill, 1985, p. 251)

The song represents the British Victorian family who is patriotic and honouring Britain. However, being "one and all for England" gives the impression of colonialism to the audience. Therefore, the audience is prepared for the characters and the issues to be seen during the play: what

they will see is highly about political issues. The aim is to keep the audience objective and critical on the events. Churchill also uses the phrase “sons of England” to represent and criticize the construction of gender, as well. Thus, the audience is made to be alert for gender issues, too. After several lines, the characters come together to sing another song:

O'er countless numbers she, our Queen,
Victoria reigns supreme;
O'er Afric's sunny plains, and o'er
Canadian frozen stream;
The forge of war shall weld the chains of brotherhood secure;
So to all time in evr'y clime our Empire shall endure. (Churchill, 1985, p. 252)

The song honours the Queen Victoria, but the emphasis is on colonialism. The song is ironic because the war is believed to sustain brotherhood. Moreover, the desire to govern all the countries, which is mentioned in the last line, is the indicator of greed of Britain for colonialism. Therefore, Churchill manages to inform the audience about political issues in the play in advance through songs. The construction of race reveals itself more efficiently with a Christmas carol sung by Joshua:

What can I give him
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb.
If I were a wise man
I would do my part
What I can I can give him,
Give my heart. (Churchill, 1985, p. 272)

The song depicts the Christian side of the family. However, the person who sings it is not from the family, but from an African tribe. Thus, the song stress is not on religion, but on colonialism. Joshua sings a song about a religion that does not belong to his identity. This makes the audience see the construction of race through the song in the play. As a result, the audience is able to create a critical eye on race issues.

In conclusion, Churchill uses several techniques for the alienation effect to display gender and race as constructs. Through historication, Churchill keeps the audience away from associating themselves with the events emotionally so that they can preserve their observation on intellectual aspects of the play. She demonstrates the values of Victorian times in a British colony in Africa with a connection to the events of the contemporary world in 1979. Thus, the audience is able to see how power relations are produced and maintained in relation to race and gender. Therefore, the audience is made to

be aware that these relations can be changed. In addition to historification, cross-casting is an influential technique used by Churchill. Although Brecht uses it for rehearsals, Churchill carries it on stage. By virtue of the actors' changing roles with their partners especially from the opposite sex and race, she represents how people are exposed to rules and norms according to their bodies and colours of their bodies. Hence, once more, the audience questions their assumptions related to gender and race issues. The use of monologues is another technique employed in the play. Through monologues, the actions are interrupted, and the characters address to the audience directly to make the issues in the play more apparent. Churchill clarifies the oppression of gender norms with the monologues. Therefore, the audience is kept alert on the issue of gender. It is also possible to see the doubling of characters, which is one of the most important techniques Churchill applies. It reminds the audience that what they see is only a play in a theatre. This, again, provides the emotional detachment of the audience and the ability to see the construction of gender. The last technique mentioned here is songs. Songs break the connection of the audience with the play, and they represent and criticize the issues in the play, at the same time. Churchill emphasizes the construction of race and colonialism with a reference to gender issue through two songs at the beginning of the play and a Christmas carol sung by the Native, Joshua. As a result, the audience is informed about the political issues of the play in advance.

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