

## EPIC THEATRE AS A MEANS OF FEMINIST THEATRE IN CARYL CHURCHILL'S *MAD FOREST*

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### Abstract

This paper aims to discuss how Churchill utilizes epic theatre as a means of giving voice to her feminist concerns including sexual and class repression, oppression, inequality, oppressive nature of violence, sexual conflicts, sex and gender in her play *Mad Forest* which is marked by her strong commitment to the socialist and feminist politics. In her play she calls into question the traditional sexual/gender roles and identities imposed on females by the male-dominated culture to encourage the audience to question the roles considered natural for women in a patriarchal society through the defamiliarization effect of epic theatre. Churchill uses the techniques of epic theatre to politicize her female characters by positioning them in the structures of power within the marital and familial relations where the politics are primarily sexual. She also makes use of Brecht's conception of history to deconstruct and falsify the history which has been constructed by males, and thus promotes patriarchal values. Churchill aims to foreground the female voice which has been silenced in a patriarchal capitalist world by making her female characters reinterpret, reclaim and reconstruct the past from a feminist perspective.

**Key Words:** Epic theatre, feminist politics, gender, history, defamiliarization

### CARYL CHURCHILL` in *MAD FOREST* ADLI OYUNUNDA FEMİNİST TİYATRO ARACI OLARAK EPİK TİYATRO

### Öz

Bu makale Caryl Churchill`in sosyalist ve feminist politikaya bağlılığının ifadesi olan *Mad Forest* adlı oyununda cinsel ve sınıf baskısı, zulüm, eşitsizlik, şiddetin baskıcı doğası, cinsiyet ve cinsiyet çatışmaları gibi feminist kaygılarını seslendirmek için epik tiyatrodan nasıl faydalandığını tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır. Churchill, epik tiyatronun yabancılaştırma etkisini kullanarak ata erkil toplumda kadınlar için doğal kabul edilen rolleri seyircinin sorgulamasını teşvik etmek amacıyla geleneksel cinsiyet rollerine ve erkek egemen toplum tarafından kadınlara empoze edilen kimliklere kuşkuyla yaklaşmıştır. Churchill epik tiyatro tekniklerini, kadın karakterlerini cinsel politikanın egemen olduğu evlilik ve aile ilişkilerindeki güç yapıları içerisine konuşlandırarak politize etmek için kullanmıştır. Yazar ayrıca erkekler tarafından kurgulanan tarihi geçersiz kılmak ve bozmak için Brecht`in tarih anlayışından da faydalanmıştır. Churchill kadın karakterlerine geçmiş feminist bakış açısıyla yeniden yorumlatarak, yeniden sahip çıkarak ve yeniden yapılandırarak, ata erkil dünyada suskunlaştırılan kadınların seslerini ön plana çıkarmayı amaç edinmiştir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Epik tiyatro, feminist politika, cinsiyet, tarih, yabancılaştırma

## **1. Introduction to *Mad Forest* and Epic Theatre**

Caryl Churchill is one of the most successful and best known socialist-feminist playwrights. She has played a leading role in shaping the contemporary theatrical world both on national and international stages by encouraging feminist thinking about the theatre. She experiments with the theatrical forms to find a dramatic means of giving expression to her political and social ideas. Churchill has adapted the most influential dramatic form of the 20th century 'Brechtian Epic Theatre' which offers a new and fresh perspective into the dramatic landscape. Brecht has devised special techniques in the areas of dramatic constitution, language, staging and acting since he believes that the realistic drama reflects the ideology of a bourgeois capitalist society, as quoted in Wright, "Old form of theatre taught us to view the world in the way that the ruling classes wanted it to be viewed" (27). Brecht strongly disagrees with the naturalistic illusion of the realistic drama that what happens on the stage is real. According to Brecht, theatre is an illusion, and the audience should be made and kept constantly aware of this fact. Fuegi (1972) states that epic theatre's counter-discursive, counter-hegemonic elements have appealed to a new generation of women playwrights. Laughlin points out that the structuring devices and narrative methods of epic theatre have been useful to feminists who seek to move away from realism towards a representational style more relevant to women's experiences (148).

*Mad Forest* deals with Romanian history, and Churchill historicizes the social upheaval and revolution in contemporary Romania that lead up to the fall and execution of the dictator Ceausescu in 1989. The play centers on the members of two extended families, Antenoscu family (Bogdan, the father, Irina, the mother, Lucia and Florina, the daughters, Gabriel, the son and Ianoş, Gabriel's Hungarian friend), and Vladus family (Mihai, the father, Flavia, the mother and Radu, the son) and their experiences under the tyrannical regime. In this play Churchill draws on a Brechtian dramaturgy to give an epic picture of the revolution in Romania. The play consists of three parts involving the scenes before, during and after the revolution. The first and the third parts include wedding scenes, and the middle part presents the revolution of December 1989. The self-contained scenes are juxtaposed in *Mad Forest*. As Gray (1993) states, in *Mad Forest* Churchill sets up a mosaic within a tripartite structure: the weddings of two sisters, Lucia and Florina and the accounts of the revolution, and the wedding scenes are juxtaposed with those of the revolution.

Brecht maintains that the modern dramatist should address his work primarily to the spectator's reason rather than to his feelings, and the main aim must be to stimulate the critical thinking with a questioning mind. In epic theatre not only the audience but also the actors are required to avoid involvement and identification with the characters and the events in the play. Churchill employs Brecht's techniques very successfully to distance the audience from the play to highlight political, historical and social issues. Laughlin (1990) states that

distancing and disidentification in the epic theatre can be achieved by the masks actors wear or music, songs, and dance inserted into the play. Unlike the traditional epic theatre, music is not used to reinforce what is said on the stage. Brecht makes use of music to contradict and counterpoint the actions and utterances of the characters and underlie their falseness. Chiari (1971) argues that Brecht intentionally interrupts the dramatic action at critical moments with songs to prevent the suspense and climax which can lead to emotional involvement, and to underline an important point or a message in the play. Willet (1986) explains that unlike the traditional epic drama, the dramatic action of Brecht's epic theater does not involve a complex interplay of characters or situation, and any suspense or dramatic climax is strictly avoided because suspense and climax arouse feelings and emotions of pathos, terror and pity. The audience should not be carried away by the flow or rhythm of the play or the suspense to avoid emotional involvement. Like Brecht, Churchill dismisses suspense and climax in her play.

Chiari (1971) states that epic theatre functions like a lecture hall where the audience is instructed and made to think. Brecht's plays are polemical and educational plays. He insists that while still providing entertainment, drama should be didactic and capable of provoking social change. Churchill also benefits from the didactic and demonstrative side of Brecht's work, and her play *Mad Forest* is instructive. She considers the stage as the platform for the political education of the audience. In her play messages are not given directly but through historicized and dramatized events. In the play Churchill historicizes the failure of the revolution to expose the possibilities of a more democratically organized society. In the play the revolution days are recreated through the characters, and a lot of historical events and truths are presented to the audience for critical thinking.

Epic theatre, which Brecht also calls dialectical theatre or non-Aristotelian drama, aims to reveal the contradictions and inconsistencies in the bourgeois capitalist society. Therefore, dialectics depicts the instability of circumstances and changeable nature of the world. Chiari (1971) states that dialectical contradictions are also displayed in the language through oxymorons and paradoxes in epic theatre. Brecht uses oxymoronic formulations and clichés which are subverted and paradoxes to keep the audience alert, and stimulate thinking in them. Churchill uses juxtapositions and oxymorons to raise a political conflict as well. For instance, Ceausescu is presented both as a founder and a destroyer in the play. Moreover, the bloody outside contrasts with the ordinary world of the workplace and the safety of home during the revolution, "I come to the hospital from school. The 21 was a normal day on duty [...] Cars were breaking the rules and driving the wrong way up the road [...] People were crusher [...] My father insisted we go home. At home we tried to avoid the topic and get it out of our minds" (30-33). Moreover, starvation and lack of food in Romania and abundance of food in America are given in juxtapositions. Lucia explains, "There are walls of fruit in America, five different kinds of apples, and oranges, grapes, pears, bananas, melons, different kinds of melon, and things I don't know the name" (51). The food shortage in Romania is

made clear by Radu, “We are not greedy, Lucia, We don’t just think about food” (53).

Churchill has found Brecht’s political interests and experimental techniques invaluable to her socialist feminist dramaturgy. Worthen states that Churchill rejects the traditional dramatic form which she regards as the patriarchal encodings in the dominant system of representation (182), which masculinizes the content through the male image as the subject and the female image as the object. She breaks down the conventions of realistic drama which serves the purposes of capitalist ideology and patriarchy to emphasize the feminist position against traditional male dramatic structures. This paper aims to discuss how Churchill employs the principles and techniques of epic theatre to give voice to her political and social ideas in order to stimulate and provoke feminist thinking with a special focus on the role of history in her play *Mad Forest*. The present study foregrounds the female characters and includes only the female points of view, their consciousnesses and experiences in the play.

## **2.0 *Mad Forest* as Epic Theatre**

Churchill develops an effective approach to representing women’s experiences using an epic dramaturgy. She creates her characters as social subjects “at the intersection of economic, religious and political forces which regulate and discipline their sexuality and prescribe their gender” (Reinelt, 175). In the light of Brecht’s epic theatre, Churchill creates a new understanding of gender politics to politicize the female characters in her plays. Brechtian theory becomes a prescription for her work to challenge the dominant social and political order which is characterized by class and racial repression, oppressive nature of violence, and sexual conflicts. Churchill uses the techniques of epic theatre to show a woman’s position in the various power relations and structures. Laughlin puts forward that Churchill reflects the links between women’s public and private lives; that is, the links between inner and social realities since the internal reality is filled with the social suppression of womanhood (160). A political system of power and oppression constitute a dominant motif in *Mad Forest*. The female characters struggle against suppression and restraints. In the play Lucia is used as a means to resist the oppressive political system. She rebels against this oppression first with her determination to marry an American and move to the USA to live with her husband. Her decision is considered a betrayal to the country by the government. As a consequence, she and her family are exposed to political abuses and threats by Ceausescu’s repressive government which maintains an extensive system of restrictions on the lives of the people through the securitates who attempt to intimidate Lucia’s family:

Your daughter was trained as a primary school teacher; she can no longer be employed. Your wife works as a tram driver and has recently been transferred to a depot in the south of the city which

doubles the time she has to travel to work. You have been a foreman for some time but alas no longer. Your other daughter is nurse. There is nothing against her except her sister (18).

Michel Foucault defies all regulatory social constructs, and focuses primarily on the functioning of sexuality as a regime of power. He argues that sexuality is constructed through the exercise of power relations, and it is a vehicle for modern power in that it is through discourse about sex and sexuality that we are controlled, regulated and normalized. He considers body as the principal target of power and proposes the notion of `biopower` which includes the techniques that allow the administration of bodies (Foucault, 1980; Phelan, 426). Since the body is the principal site of power, the social control of women is performed through their bodies and sexuality. The role-play scene in which Florina (who plays the role of Elena), Radu (who plays the role of Ceausescu), Ianoş, Lucia and the other characters enact the trial and execution of the Ceausescus releases not only hatred and sexism but also reveals sexual power relations in which the female is exploited as a sexual object, and the sex performed upon her by the males is abused as a weapon to victimize the other male who possesses that female body. In the role play, Elana Ceausescu (Florina) becomes the victim of male violence, cruelty and subjugation. She functions as the battlefield where the oppressed, who are the victims of Ceausescu, can dominate their oppressor Ceausescu, "Gypsy. Murderer. Illiterate. We've all fucked your wife. We're fucking her now. Let her have it" (70).

Similarly, Lucia's relationship with a Hungarian, Ianoş brings to the surface racism through which the patriarchy subjugates and victimizes women to gain dominance and victory over the other. When Florina, Lucia and Gabriel visit their grandparents along with Hungarian Ianoş, the grandmother feels uneasy and disturbed by the presence of Ianoş, and she warns Lucia that she can be victimized as a result of this love affair, "I knew a woman married a Hungarian. His brother killed her and ripped the child out of her stomach" (57). In Part III the racial conflict breaks out between Ianoş and Lucia's family. Although Lucia resists to be subordinated by Ianoş by saying, "You think I am a slave? I am not your slave" (84), when Bogdan asks Ianoş to keep away from his daughter, Ianoş counterattacks Bogdan by exploiting Lucia's body as a weapon to gain control over him, "I'm already fucking your daughter, you stupid peasant" (84).

Women are restricted by patriarchal rules and bans. They lack freedom to use their free will to make decisions or take actions. Everything they do or say should conform to the state policy or ideology. Before the revolution, the female characters construct themselves through the discourse of oppressive regime. Early in the play, we see Flavia as a teacher spouting propaganda and praising Ceausescu while addressing her students in a monologue on the merits of the president without questioning its truth:

Today we are going to learn about a life dedicated to the happiness of the people and noble ideas of socialism...the personality of this great son of the nation is everything in the country that is most durable and harmonious, the huge transformations taking place in all areas of activity, the ever more vigorous and ascendant path towards the highest stages of progress and civilization. He is the founder of the country. More, he is the founder of man (16).

Her dialogue with her dead grandmother also shows how her grandmother has been victimized by the ideologies she has to comply with. This dialogue about the history digs out the dark caves of the repressed collective memory of females, "When I was your age the war was starting. I welcomed the Nazis because I thought they'd protect us from the Russians and I welcomed the Communists because I thought they'd protect us from the Germans. I had no principles. My husband was killed" (26).

### **2.1 Brecht's conception of history in *Mad Forest***

Brecht's plays take on a historical character since historization plays an important role in his theatre. As quoted in Laughlin, Brecht states:

The actor must play the incidents as historical ones. Historical incidents are unique and associated with particular periods. The conduct of the persons involved in them is not fixed and universally human. It includes elements that have been or may be overtaken by the course of history and is subject to criticism from immediately following period's point of view (152).

In epic theatre history should be repeated and theatricalized, rather than imitated as if it were happening for the first time to avoid suspense and dramatic climax which can lead to feelings and emotions (Worthen, 158). For the same reason, in *Mad Forest* the revolution is given as an off-stage reality to prevent an emotional involvement. Churchill introduces a great number of ordinary Romanian citizens in the second part to narrate what has happened before and during the revolution so that the audience do not identify with the family characters presented in the first and third parts. The audience learns how the revolution occurred through the accounts of these ordinary people living in Bucharest, and their speeches are presented in a fragmentary manner not to create feelings of fear or pity, and to prevent the audience from getting emotionally involved with their experiences as the narrative voice instructs, "*Each behaves as if the others are not there and each is the only one telling what happened*" (29). Epic theatre presents a series of loosely connected scenes, and episodes are held together by the voice or a pointer of a narrator rather than a plot. Similarly, Churchill applies a fragmentary episodic style by rejecting a traditional linear plot structure and a cause-effect relationship between the scenes.

Brecht makes use of various documentary devices, and he treats the dramatic actions as documentary case-histories by providing an objective report of past facts not to create suspense or climax. In *Mad Forest* history is narrated by the eyewitnesses, and they reflect the past with the objective and scientific details through the investigative eyes. As in a typical epic theatre, the eyewitnesses repeat what has taken before and during the revolution in Churchill's play. The narrative of the witnesses is a historical reconstruction of an event that has already happened to bring the scenes back to the audience's attention so that the history of all the incidents can be questioned in a critical way. Churchill exhibits the history in a documentary-like manner in *Mad Forest*, "He [Ceausescu] started his revolutionary activity in the earliest years of his adolescence in conditions of danger and illegality, therefore, his life and struggle cannot be detached from the most burning moments of the people's fight against fascism and war to achieve the ideals of freedom and aspirations of justice and progress" (16). The play is very much like a chronicle reporting past events:

On December 20 people were wearing black armbands for Timișoara. There was plenty of people but no courage. Nothing happened that day [...] On the morning of the 22 there were broken windows and people washing the street [...] On the 22 the army went over to the side of the people. On the 25 we hear the trial and their [Ceausescu and his wife's] deaths (29-35-42).

In accordance with epic theatre, the revolution in *Mad Forest* is dramatized through journalistic information which is very much similar to newspaper records:

There were two camps, army and people, but nobody shooting. Some workers from the people's Palace come with construction material to make barricades [...] In the square there is much army and tanks. It was 99% young people in the square with police and soldiers near them. Later the army shoot the people and drive tanks in them [...] There were two kinds of, normal bullet wounds and bullets that explode and break bones in little pieces [...] The General in charge of the army had killed himself and been announced a traitor. There was a state of emergency declared (31-36).

The way the revolution is narrated and historicized is of great significance for the feminist politics. In *Mad Forest* Churchill voices the common experience of the community rather than focusing on particular individuals during or after the revolution by connecting the personal experience with the experience of society. Brecht is opposed to realist drama since it focuses on discrete individuals. He argues that the dramatist should direct attention to general human behaviors and socio-historical causes of events (Laughlin 155). Being influenced by Brecht, Churchill depicts how the revolution took place through the assessments and experiences of the various characters who represent the totality of the society. Among the eyewitnesses are a painter, girl student, translator, boy student,

bulldozer driver, doctor, securitate, soldier, housepainter and a flowerseller. Since the focus is not on the experiences of separate individuals, their narrative is given in such a manner that one cannot remember who speaks or the genders of the speakers. So, they echo the common experience of all the people in Romania. The idea of community is also conveyed through the fact that during the revolution, people do not act independently but they are able to take action within a group, "People were shouting, 'Come with us. Come and join us' When you are with other people you keep walking on [...] In a crowd you disappear and feel stronger" (36-37).

Churchill utilizes epic theater as a means of change and socialist correction of the mistaken emphasis on the exclusion of females by the patriarchy and oppressive political and social systems (Reinelt, 181). Churchill does not treat women as the passive other but part of the society in *Mad Forest*. Men and women are made to jointly constitute the historical reconstruction of the revolution. In a patriarchal culture only men can take an active role in public affairs, and females are identified with private and domestic affairs. Culturally and politically, the public sphere dominates the domestic, and hence men dominate women. However, Churchill presents the female characters not as isolated and excluded from the public life as the passive objects but as members and inseparable part of the society. They are not domesticated or made to passively watch what is happening during the revolution from the inside of their homes but located out on the streets. They are working as housepainters, doctors and as securitates during the revolution along with their male counterparts. Therefore, Churchill shatters the patriarchal myth that males control and rule the public realm by bringing equality between the sexes in their active participation in social, political and economic life.

History, in epic theatre, functions as a means of distancing the dramatic events. Laughlin maintains that historization gives the audience a chance to see historically significant forces and changeable conditions shaping a character's situation and the continued impact of these dramatized conditions on other historical periods so that the audience can reevaluate and reinterpret the past in a critical manner (147). Brechtian historization suits well the aims of feminist theatre. *Mad Forest* incorporates such historization for the exploration of the power relations between men and women. Churchill historicizes dramatic events to show the social, political and historical conditions as well as workings of regulative and restrictive patriarchal structures that shape the women's lives in communist Romania to give an opportunity to the audience to revisit and reexamine the history. Churchill sets out to deconstruct and falsify the history which has been shaped, exploited and ruled by the male-dominated society, and thus supports patriarchal values. Most of the female characters in the play are created as active speaking beings. She intentionally makes the female characters talk about the history, so that history can be reclaimed and reconstructed from the female perspective with their own women's consciousness to foreground the female voice which has been silenced by oppression and repression in various power relations.

Brecht has introduced a concept of dialectics, and he deals with dialectical view of history. Dialectics depicts constant shifting of figure, zigzag development, the instability of circumstances and changeable nature of the world (Wright, 36). Brecht suggests that “There is something in things, people, circumstances which make them what they are and what they are not. For they develop, don’t stay the same, alter to the point of unrecognizability” (qtd. in Wright, 55). Dialectics is used to show that history and human life cannot be treated as static in epic theatre since all causes, effects and relations are dynamic, and they are continually in the process of developing. Man can change, and he is not timeless or a consistent whole but contradictory and ever-changing, thus the emphasis should be placed not on timeless human nature but historically changeable features of human. Wright maintains that dialectics is used in favor of change and transformation, and so the world is subject to criticism and change in Brecht’s epic theatre (55). Churchill writes *Mad Forest* in the dialectical manner, and it is a good example of Brecht’s dialectical practice in the theatre. In the play, history is changeable, subjective and open to criticism. Flavia’s attitude towards the past can be taken as a proof of changeability of the history and human. After the revolution her son Radu criticizes her for her misrepresentation of the past:

Radu: Do you remember once I came home from school and asked if you loved Elena Ceauşescu? And you said yes.

Flavia: No, I don’t remember... Why are you saying this, Radu? ...You’re manipulating me to make me feel bad. I told you the truth about plenty of things.

Radu: I don’t remember (67).

Before the revolution Flavia expresses what she is expected and dictated to say by the manipulative regime, and describes Ceausescu as “This great son of the nation [...] founder of the country. More he is the founder of man” (16). Although he is presented as a hero by her in the first part, after the revolution he has been executed for his despotic rule and practices, and Flavia voted for the Liberal.

When the tyrannical pressure and control is removed, the female characters, with their growing awareness, expose their female consciousness to call into question the revolution days and other historical events. They respond to the social, political and economic events critically. Flavia and Florina have raised a lot of questions concerning the way the revolution took place, “How many people were killed at Timișoara? Where are the bodies? (54), How far do you think Moscow was involved in planning the coup?” (78). Before the revolution Flavia has the misassumption that what is presented in history books is the accurate representation of the past, “All I was trying to do was teach correctly. Isn’t history what’s in the history book? Let them give me a new book, I’ll teach that” (65). When Flavia is liberated from the authoritarian system, she develops a questioning and critical mind, “Twenty years marching in the wrong direction. I’d as soon stop. Twenty year’s experience and I’m a beginner. Yes, stop” (68). Flavia constantly

questions the male-constructed history after the revolution to deconstruct it since history does not reflect the reality, and it is written subjectively by those in power in accordance with their ideology. So, she becomes determined to rewrite the history from a female point of view, “All that history wasted [...] I’m going to write a true history, Florina, so we’ll know exactly what happened” (78-80). It is the past shaped by the males, and women need to create their own history.

## **2.2 Defamiliarization Effect in *Mad Forest***

In epic theatre Brecht has contrasted the Aristotelian concept of empathy with his own concept ‘defamiliarization’, ‘estrangement’ or ‘alienation’. The alienation device presents the familiar world in an estranging or defamiliarizing manner to make the audience see the things which they have not noticed beforehand without any emotional identification. It prevents the audience from evaluating things in a habitual manner by opening a fresh perspective on aspects of life so that the audience can avoid overfamiliarity with the things. Brecht wants the audience to look at dramatic actions in a critical spirit with the estranged eyes of the discoverers (Chiari, 164). Speirs states that Brecht distorts the clichés to stimulate thinking in the audience by presenting the theatrical world in a strange way (43). Churchill makes use of the defamiliarization effect of epic theatre to destabilize not only the history but the idea of gender. Her play *Mad Forest* aims to distance the audience with Brechtian techniques from conventional perceptions. Churchill employs Brecht’s alienation techniques to defamiliarize the audience with the traditional gender roles assigned to the women by the patriarchy so that they can re-evaluate the positions and roles of the females in society with detached eyes. She accomplishes her aim by reversing conventional expectations of male/female behavior, and by disrupting sexual stereotyping and role conditioning in *Mad Forest*.

Churchill’s use of gender reversal underlines the artificiality, conventionality and constructedness of the characters’ sex/gender roles. She treats satirically the fixed gender identities imposed on both sexes by the patriarchal hegemonic ideology to encourage the audience to question the roles considered natural and essential for women in a male-led society. For instance, the professions such as ‘doctor’, ‘securitate’, ‘tramdriver’ and ‘housepainter’ are associated with males but in *Mad Forest* the female characters carry out these professions. Moreover, among the people who narrate the revolution, the girl student seems to act more bravely during the revolution. She wants to be out in the street to actively participate in the revolution, and she blames his father who tries to keep her inside for being coward:

I wanted to go out but my father had locked the door and hidden the key. My father said I couldn’t go out alone [...] I insisted we go out. I began to cry, I felt ashamed I hadn’t done anything [...] I wanted to put on my army clothes and go out and shoot- I got three out of three in

the shooting test when I was in the army [...] I thought of an excuse, so we went out together. My father insisted we go home, I said he was a coward (34-40).

Churchill points out the potential existence of new directions and possibilities for gender roles. She offers that the potential for personal empowerment and change could be obtained through the enjoyment of sexual pleasure which is previously denied by hegemonic social constraints. In the play, Lucia rejects any conventional womanly stance. She enjoys her sexuality freely through her love affair with Ianoş before marriage, later she decides to marry an American. Lucia's awareness of her own sexuality enables her to move from the position of sexual object to that of sexual subject. Although the idealized image of women promotes the chastity and loyalty of females, Lucia shatters this myth. While the preparations for her wedding are going on, it is implied that she is still having an affair with Ianoş, "Lucia and Ianoş standing in silence with their arms round each other" (27). When she gets pregnant from him before the wedding, she has an abortion with the money from the American husband. Although Ianoş feels guilty and ashamed of this pregnancy, Lucia does not think she has done something to be ashamed of. In the play unlike a predictable female figure, Lucia rejects motherhood, so she can easily get rid of her baby by having an abortion. Lucia also lacks maternal love and dislikes children. She does not show Toma, a child whom Ianoş is going to adopt, any affection; on the contrary, she seems to be disturbed by his existence when she goes to visit her grandparents with Ianoş and Toma, "Do we have to have him with us all the time?" (57). Her speech is curt and cold, and in contrast to the stereotyped woman image who is emotional, affectionate, docile and sensitive. Lucia can easily become hostile, forceful, violent and aggressive. When Toma pounces on the last piece of her chocolate, she shouts at him angrily, "You horrible child. I hate you" (59). A mother is seen as responsible for the reproduction of the biological children of the patriarchy and for the continuation of a patriarchal culture. Thus feminist writers view motherhood as an obstacle in the path of women's liberation since females are reduced to mothering, nurturing and other maternal qualities, which continues to produce male dominance in a patriarchal culture.

Churchill challenges perceptions of rigid distinctions and inequality between men and women in her play. Her approach to the patriarchal ideology destroys the prevailing image of a leading male figure versus a passive recipient female. Conventionally, aggression, intelligence, force, and efficiency are associated with male while passivity, ignorance, docility, virtue, and incompetence are identified with the female. However, Churchill reverses the conventional expectations of male and female behavior by creating an active female positioned against a passive male. Florina who works as a doctor accuses Radu of spending his days doing nothing but sitting in the square and talking, "What have you done today? Sat in the square and talked? You just want to go on playing hero, you're weak, you're lazy" (73). On the other hand, Florina is working very hard, "I like

working, I like being tired, I don't like listening to you talk" (72). Similarly, Gabriel's and Flavia's different reaction to the Securitate's demand that they should spy on people foreground female characters more courageous and stronger than males. Gabriel, like his father, easily yields to the authority, and cannot refuse when he is asked to write a report for the securitate, "I prayed all night I'd be strong enough to say no. I was so afraid I'd be persuaded./ I've never been brave [...] they made me sign something [...] I signed it" (23-24). However, Flavia is blacklisted for her work as a history teacher since she has not accepted to work for the securitate, "I didn't inform on my pupils, I didn't accept bribes. Those are the people whose names should be on the list" (65). It is obvious that Churchill's characters refuse to adopt conventional values which mold them into stereotypical males and females by experiencing new sexual practices in new gender roles.

### **2.3 Marxist Ideology and Epic Theatre in *Mad Forest***

In epic theatre Brecht argues that the playwright deals with social, historical and political processes that determine people's life. He states, as quoted in Chiari, "The stage does not reflect the natural disorder of things. It aims at the natural order of things [...] this order is historical and sociological" (173). Brecht's plays are mostly political. Since he is politically committed to Marxism whose doctrines are based on labor, economic determination and social actions, he has dedicated his life and writings to the spreading of his political beliefs and ideology. His preoccupation with Marxism and the idea that man and society can be intellectually analyzed leads him to develop his theory of epic theatre. Brecht aims to establish systematic links between Marxist ideology and epic theatre. He strives hard to turn Epic theatre into a typical Marxist theatre as an instrument of social and political change (Speirs, 1987). Brecht thinks that when the audience are faced with the contradictions of the society, they can turn towards Marxism, and discover Marxist solutions to their problems because by means of Marxism the world can move towards justice and ideal society (Chiari, 174-175). Marxists maintain that sexism and existing gender hierarchy could not be eliminated without the overthrow of capitalism (Chinchilla, 295).

Churchill also believes that the purpose of theatre is political, and she sees Marxism as a social device or an instrument for changing reality of bourgeois capitalism. In *Mad Forest* there are a lot of references to labor, laborer and economic order. However, in Romania the communism is turned into dictatorship and authoritative regime, and Marxist doctrines are misused. Yet, it can be observed that socialism has created the feeling of community and equality between sexes. The males and females are not treated as hierarchically situated binary opposites in which the males are superior to the females but they are regarded as equal. Chinchilla maintains that women's labor has heightened women's importance as economic producers (299). People are perceived not as females and males in public domain but laborers since both equally contribute to the

production. The importance of both genders is measured as economic producers as stated by Ceausescu, “For each and every citizen work is an honorary fundamental duty. Each of us should demonstrate high professional probity, competence, creativity, devotion and passion in our work” (24). Marxism provides equality in the social relations of daily life, control over production/reproduction and greater freedom in sexual expression.

Marxism requires revolution, and Brecht’s wish is to create a world changed by revolution. A revolutionary influence can be felt in many of Brecht’s work. Churchill is also allied to the communist revolution, and same tendencies are displayed by Churchill in *Mad Forest*. Her preoccupation with the revolution gives a political dimension to her play. The revolution in the interests of democratization has remained an enduring concern of Churchill’s theatre, and it surfaces in her play, *Mad Forest*. This play is concerned with revolutionary ideals since she incorporates Brecht’s doctrines of Marxism, and communist ideology which suggests that no change is possible without revolution. The characters in the play are haunted with the idea of revolution. They were expecting a revolution as narrated by the eyewitnesses, “It was frightfully predictable [...] Boy Student: I was sure at last something happens [...] Let’s hope it has started [...] people are shouting against Ceausescu, shouting ‘Today in Timișoara, tomorrow in al the country’ [...] We are happy someone fight for our people” (29-30).

### **3. Conclusion**

Brecht’s plays and theories set up models and provide inspiration for Churchill. Brecht’s works have played a significant part in shaping her feminist theatre which takes on historical and political character. Churchill combines epic drama with her strong socialist feminist perspective in her play *Mad Forest* to explore political, social and historical issues from a feminist point of view and to make the history play characteristic of women’s drama in *Mad Forest*. *Mad Forest*, in which Churchill historicizes the social upheaval in contemporary Romania, shows her mastery of Brecht’s epic dramaturgy to portray communities in the midst of epidemic change. Churchill has re-framed Brechtian theatre to bring historical and political drama into a more effective relationship with the perspective and demands of feminist dramaturgy. She challenges the constructions of gender and sexuality, and rejects a traditional representation and dramatic narrative which leads to the exclusion and denigration of women. She challenges traditional male and female roles, and the positions they are allowed to occupy in society by disrupting sexual stereotyping in *Mad Forest*. She believes that the representation of female experience through epic theatre by female writers will make a change in drama. Her female characters in *Mad Forest* are all presented as active speaking beings who struggle against male oppression and repression, and who reject the history constructed by the male-dominated society. They set out to create the history with their own female consciousnesses.

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