
Food culture and power in Bertolt Brecht's *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*

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Abstract

This paper is a literary cultural study of food culture in Bertolt Brecht's *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* (1969), exposing how food culture wreaked havoc on the power relations at the time of the economic slump of the Great Depression years between 1929 and 1933. Taking Spivak's theory of subalternity, Marxist theory, and Gramsci's hegemony as the methodology to reread the play, this study attempts to find answers to these questions: how does food culture become a powerful lens that magnifies the intricate power relations between the capitalist elite and the subaltern proletariat inside the American food industry? How are the Brechtian technique and Marxist thought used as a vessel of both social and economic reform? How does Brecht seek to excavate the reasons behind hunger and social injustices by increasing the consciousness of the audience to participate, think, argue, and act? In addition, Brecht's distanciation effect is described in this paper as a wake-up call to inspire the audiences to think, criticize, and then act. It also reminds the audiences that Capitalist economic mismanagement, class struggle, and practices of power over food distribution worsen the conditions of the poorer and mute their voices, transforming them into mere subalterns.

Keywords: Brecht, *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, Spivak, food culture, power, subalternity

1. Introduction

Drawing on the Indian postcolonial professor Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's salient essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" besides the Marxist theory and Gramsci's concept of hegemony, this paper aims at spotting light upon the interplay and impact of the food culture and the practices of power, namely subalternity due to wealth and class in Brecht's play *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* (1969). Furthermore, it explains how the hegemonic practices of power over food policies (production, preparation, distribution, and consumption) expose the economic mismanagements of Capitalism and the intricate class struggle between the elite and the subaltern proletariat inside American food-processing factories in the 1930s at the time of the Great Depression. In addition, the paper handles the contrast between food and morality and shows how culinary theatre can be a powerful lens on Capitalism and labor. In *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, the subalterns' food practices represent a means of resistance to the colonial hegemony over the food, exposing the struggle of the subalterns to speak up for their concerns. Furthermore, the play celebrates Brecht's ability to use the diegetic techniques of his epic theatre (alienation, breaking the fourth wall, *gestus*, songs, and narration) which expose the food imagery, with the culinary tradition of the American stockyards, to concretely document the cultural atmosphere of the subaltern working class in the play.

2. Historical perspective

In his book *Bertolt Brecht: A Literary Life*, Stephen Parker introduced a detailed biography of Brecht, as he described him as "the most renegade modern German playwright of the 20th century who was totally heeded to the rallying cries of the poor in the blazing period between World War I, and the start of Nazism in 1933" (2014, p. 15). In his writings, Brecht stressed the crucial role of the proletariat to unite, revolt, and oppose the domination of the aristocrats then proceeded to hold power and achieve social reform and change. The Egyptian professor of theatrical arts, Nehad Selaiha, wrote in *Al-Ahram Online* that Brecht introduced "overwhelming anti-war epic plays in Munich during the Weimar Republic such as *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mother Courage* in which he humorously, absurdly, and vividly dramatizes the suffering of the victims of wars and

economic mismanagements in the 20th century and tackles with morality and virtue” (2016, p. 1). Brecht resorted to Marxism as a tool through which theatre could change and reform society by urging the audience to think and criticize. Epic theatre and Brecht's anti-illusionistic techniques were used as a suitable writing style for applying Marxist thought on his stage.

Brecht completely concerned himself with everyday life aspects like food to reach the essential needs of the masses, document, historicize and reflect his views on the then prevailing capitalist system. He used food, as the American writer Ann Dobney expressed in her book *Grub First, then Ethics, The Significance of Food in Brecht's Plays*, as “a central structural and thematic element which takes on political and social significance . . . the concept of nourishment, the harsh reality of hunger, the connotations attached to certain items of the food, and the visual impact of reaction to actual the food on the stage are all vitally important to Brecht” (1981, p. 2). In this way, Brecht's play *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* was an apt choice for it contained undertone structures about food culture and its relation to power practices, which this paper investigates.

Brecht wrote *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* in 1930 in Germany to historicize, dramatize, and criticize the plight of the working class inside the American food factories at the time of the economic mismanagements of the Great Depression. With Chicago, one of the significant cities of the food industry, as its setting, the play dramatizes the story of Joan Dark. It exposes her character as a food activist and lieutenant from a Christian missionary titled “The Black Straw Hats” who raises the action with her struggles against the violations of the capitalist practices by industrial meat traders such as Pierpont Mauler and his rich henchmen using the tradition of soup kitchens. Being under grinding poverty, Joan seeks to improve the working conditions of the proletariat, by putting the mega-tycoon millionaire Mauler and his rich cronies on trial to convince them to reopen their closed factories in front of the increasing numbers of the unemployed, providing food and shelter, and halting their exploitation. Joan condemns the selfishness of the elite classes who persist on the private ownership of the means of production, thus depriving the workers of the fruits of their

products and placing them in a grinding reign of wage slavery. She comprehensively criticizes the injustices of the system with its ever-widening gap between the top and the bottom until the turning point in her life when she experiences hunger and homelessness for a week in the streets as she was fired from the missionary after Mauler bribed its chief.

As a result of such climax, the conflict starts to be solved with the falling actions when Mauler attempts to win Joan to his side, hushing her up with food, showering her with gifts, and trying to pay her rent. Yet she continues to remind the rich merchants of the meat market to be conscientious in their deals, refuse evil and greed, stop maximizing their profit at the expense of the poor, and serve justice in the stockyards. Joan resolves the stockyards' dilemma by encouraging the workers to unite and strike as she sees that the force is the only way to escape poverty and make change and reform in the stockyards. Joan refuses to be blackmailed with hunger or bribed with food, she refuses the very same soup she first appears distributing on the stage and prefers self-starvation thus sacrificing herself at the end of the play to urge the poor to keep their dignity and freedom. She is titled as a saint of the stockyards as she teaches the poor to unite and struggle for their rights. In doing so, food and power are inextricably interwoven to indoctrinate Brecht's protagonist on how to wade across the subalternity in the stockyards.

3. Critical discussion of food, power, and subalternity

This part takes into account Spivak's theory of subalternity, through her case study of *Sati* ritual, Gramsci's concept of hegemony, besides Marxist theory in a trial to identify with the food culture of subaltern working class in First World nations in Brecht's play as a by-product of the control of Capitalistic food industry. In addition, it attempts to investigate the reasons behind the subaltern's, in general and women's in particular, food insecurity, and lack of history, power and representation. Furthermore, it sheds light on subalterns' silence and their trials to regain their lost voice through food activism, labor union and strike.

Being a Marxist writer, the Italian writer Antonio Gramsci defined the concept of "hegemony" as "the practices of power over the subaltern groups either economically, ideologically or culturally" (2001, p.5).

Gramsci sees hegemony as indispensable means for “keeping and legitimizing the capitalist practices of the higher classes” (2021, p.15). Spivak reveals if dominant hegemonic representations strengthen social injustice and neo-colonial interests, then dire efforts of self-representation should be exerted by the subalterns to regain their lost history, consciousness, and voice. In the play, Mauler and his rich cronies (the hegemons) control the subalterns and render them to impoverishment and injustice only to maintain their capitalist practices.

While in power, Capitalists increase the oppression of the workers by hoarding and depriving them of food, driving them to the brink of revolt, and that is what Spivak warns, as she argues, “the link to the workers’ struggle is located in the desire to blow up power at any point of its application” (1988, p. 272). The subalterns find themselves helpless before the corruption of the hegemons: Mauler and his friends of government members who tighten their grip on power to break the law. Consequently, Spivak reveals that the essential target of any workers’ struggle is to stop any discursive power characterized by the corrupt government. On the contrary, Joan whom Brecht kept mocking all over the play for thinking that food distribution can alleviate the stress of the stockyards, appears with no power over the poor, who leave her sermons with the last spoon of soup. In this way, Brecht’s inclusion of food unfair distribution by the elite or even its hasty consumption by the subalterns revisit and pointedly explain the practices of power due to class and wealth.

In her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak raises the issue of marginalization of the subalterns because of the uneven distribution of wealth and class structure which had been taking place not only during the imperial practices of colonialism, but they went ahead due to the practices of exploitation, as Spivak asserts:

As soon as we struggle against exploitation, the proletariat not only leads the struggle but also defines its targets, its methods... they fight in those places where they find themselves oppressed. They have begun a specific struggle against the particular form of power, the constraints and controls that are exercised over them. (1988, pp. 289-290)

Similarly, Brecht’s play dramatizes workers’ struggle against Mauler--their exploiter and hegemon--who was the culprit behind the food shortage,

deep misery, and squeamishness due to his futile capitalist policies, which Antonio Gramsci sees in his Prison Notebooks, as “the indirect method of imperial dominance that continued to torture the subaltern and sapped their energies” (2004, p. 4).

The Hegemon Mauler transfers the workers’ labor-power into a commodity with a value lower to them than to him due to his continuous decrease in their wages. On one hand, Brecht’s *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* urges a reproduction of labor power which improves the workers’ skills, income, and the way they submit to their masters. On the other hand, Mauler’s manipulative usage of food and labor power stresses, as Spivak notes in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” “a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class in and by words” (1988, p. 274).

Spivak was genuine enough to think of the religious ritual of *Sati* that document subalternity in India; it is only through the power of ritual as a key cultural component that her theory of subalternity appeared controversial in post-colonial studies. In her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” she reiterates that “because of the religious halo of *Sati* ritual, widow self-immolation cannot be regarded as suicide but it can be considered as a simulacrum of truth, knowledge, and piety of place.” (1988, p. 300). If Spivak clarifies that the usage of ritual encourages Hindu women subalternity, Brecht’s absurd usage of religion and food in the play, as a supposed solution to relieve the distress of the stockyards, increases class subalternity for it makes the social inequalities, violence, exploitation caused by Capitalism acceptable and forgivable, thus working in favor of the exploiter more than the exploited.

Through the course of the play, Brecht samples Mauler’s silencing of the subaltern when he aimed to silence Joan’s helping voice to the poor. Slift explains in the fourth act how Mauler ordered him to bribe Old Man Bacon’s widow “Mrs. Luckerniddle” to stop asking about her lost husband with food. Brecht also exposes the blessing of the workers’ foreman of their silence upon the slippage of their colleague into the minced machine, even more scandalous, the foreman stresses the workers to be silent before

any inquiry about the victimized worker. Unfortunately, silence reaches its peak when the widow ignores the apprentice's speech with Slift about getting her late husband's cap as she gets up and goes out of the hall asking the waiter "to leave the plate where it is. I'll be back/ I'll come every day at noon/ Just ask that gentleman." (*Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, 1969, p. 51). And later Slift told Joan that Mrs. Luckerniddle continued to come for three whole weeks and fed like a beast. The loss of the only provider of the family and the inability to find any job urges the widow to accept food as a prize for her silence.

In an interview published in *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, Spivak states that "'speaking' itself belongs to an already well-defined structure and history of domination.... If the subaltern can speak then, thanks god, the subaltern is not a subaltern anymore" (1990, p. 158). Likewise, Joan, Mrs. Luckerniddle and the other proletariat inside the stockyards cannot speak not because of the absence of the activities which reflect their daily life conditions and subaltern culture but because of their lack of a history of domination or even a history of achievements that was only confined to the elite then to the capitalist hegemony during the 1930s.

Joan and the working class in the American society of the 1930s were deprived from the access to power which, as the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze suggests in his essay "The Thrust of Marxism", "is held by a ruling class defined by its interests" (1977, p. 214). Having the long history of domination of the meat market, the access to the government men such as the congress members, the power of information and knowledge of economic laws even before its issuance, the most expensive assets, factories, and plants in Chicago stockyards, Mauler and the other capitalist traders in the stockyards completely hold the power and authority to control the world of the stockyards, achieve their interests of the maximum profit, place Joan and the other subalterns on the margins of power, and deprive them from the true narration of their history.

Taking the Indian society as the case study in their book, *Selected Subaltern Studies*, Spivak and the Indian historian Ranajit Guha ascribed the hardship of acknowledging the real narration of British imperialism in

India, from the perspective of the Indian subaltern peasants, to the domination of elitism either colonialist or bourgeois elitism. They excluded that the processes of constructing the Indian nation and the growth of its consciousness are basically elite successes which are “credited to British colonial rulers, administrators, policies, institutions, and culture; in the nationalist and neo-nationalist writings-to Indian elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas.” (1988, p. 1). Consequently, Brecht opens his play with the worker’s description of Mauler, the embodiment of capitalist policies, as their exploiter: “our exploiter by the throat and/ we are the ones who choke!” (*Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, 1969, p. 30) whose domination and exploitation suffocate them and cause their misery. Despite the severe warnings of meeting the savage Mauler, Joan was bold enough to ask the mega-tycoon millionaire Mauler, the very same person responsible for the corruption of meat market, to improve its deterioration conditions.

In her book *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*, Rey Chow notes, “as we challenge a dominant discourse by resurrecting the victimized voice/self of the native within our readings . . . in this process the hasty supply of original contexts and specificities easily become complicitous with the dominant discourse” (1993, pp. 35-36). She stresses the inevitability of relying on appropriate specific contexts when trying to restore the absent native in dominant histories that draw more attention to the subaltern themselves than to the dominant discourse. In resurrecting his victimized subalterns, Brecht relies in his imaginative creation of the play on prolific supply of original culinary and economic contexts that really document the deplorable conditions of the subaltern during the Great Depression period such as his choice of Chicago city as the setting, which was then known as a huge industrial modern center famous for heavy industry and food production besides his meat/soup complex.

Brecht’s choice of the contradicted context of food production (meat and soup) helps to introduce on one side an image of the savage workers in this field due to the longstanding friction with animals, sharp tools of killing, and slaughter process. On the other side, from all kinds of food, Brecht

specifically chooses the tradition of thin soup kitchen to fully transfer the impression of weakness, malnutrition, hunger, and despair that prevail the life of the subaltern. Brecht manages to choose contexts and specificities that worked in favor of the subaltern discourse and were akin to a microcosm of the capitalist industrial exploitation suffered by not only the animals but also by the workers themselves, for they revealed how the subaltern were blackmailed by hunger and silenced with food. The voicelessness of the subaltern in Brecht's play was caused by not only their lack of food sources, domination, or history but also because of their lack of representation.

Spivak argues that representation is a controversial problem in post-colonial critique for it can be defined in numerous ways such as "Vertretung" and "Darstellung". Spivak, in *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, used "Vertretung, as "stepping into someone's place", to describe political representation in which one of the subalterns speaks for the needs of the others. She also saw "Darstellung as re-presentation, which means metaphoric portrayal or allegorical imaging of the subaltern" (1990, p. 108). Within the same book, Spivak discusses the problem of speaking for/in the name of somebody, she explains "it is not a solution, the idea of the disenfranchised speaking for themselves, or the radical critics speaking for them; this question of representation, self-representation, representing others, is a problem" (1990, p. 63). Spivak highly condemns the construction of the subaltern as epistemic object without the real version of them from a genuine subaltern perspective.

The writer Ella Shohat in her essay "The Struggle over Representation: Casting, Coalition, and the Policy of Identification", asserts the importance of the constant questioning of representation from the perspective of "who is being represented, for what purpose, at which historical moment, for which location, using which strategies, and in what tone of address" (1995, p. 173). Shohat claims the importance of noting who the interpreter is during the process of representation. Both these questioning and noting are cross hatched when it comes to the representation of the subaltern. She explains that the problem of their representation stems not only from their lack of dominance over their representation but also from the ugly truth

that their representations are few and defective, the matter which results in what Shohat calls “the burden of representation” (1995, p. 173). Such burden creates the impression that these few images express all the minorities in general, not a specific one in particular, thus resulting in disrespect for the variety of marginalized societies.

Another reason for the problem of representing the subaltern, as Shohat adds, is that:

The presentation of the marginalized in the sphere of the dominant culture depending on its language and image negatively affects the political representation of the subaltern, because representation is the way people are thought of, the few and defective images of the subaltern can be harmful for the true subaltern. (1995, p. 174)

Thus, inquiries must be made about the producer of these representations and the representative voice of the marginalized subaltern. Because of the metaphoric characters of these representations, subaltern writers must ask who can truly speak for whom? When a spokesperson or a specific image is thought of as allegorical, representation of the subaltern itself transforms to a complicated and harmful one.

Through introducing his epic protagonist Joan in the play, Brecht exposes “Vertretung”, a subaltern representative who speaks for the needs of a subaltern in a hard time of economic crisis. She was a lieutenant from the Salvation Army that endeavors to ease the tensions of the stockyards through soup and religious sermons. Being hungry for a whole week, unemployed, expelled from the Black Straw Hats, and homeless, Joan was completely in the place of every true subaltern during the Great Depression.

Indifferent with the continuous trials of silencing her, warning and threatening her not to represent the poor, Joan speaks for the poor: “Joan: And so I speak. / (to the poor) you’ll have work again on Monday” (*Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, 1969, p. 61). She was bold enough to talk as a food activist against the meat king who refuses to listen to her and described the poor as beastly wicked creatures. So, Joan appears for the poor, according to Spivak, “as their master, as an authority over them, as unrestricted governmental power that protects them from the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above. (Their) political influence...therefore

finds its last expression" (1988, p. 306).

Through the introduction of Joan, as a representative of the poor, and the allegorical culinary image of the exploited subaltern which appeared in the consumed human ingredient (Old Man Bacon), Brecht exposed a mixture of the political representative (Vertretung) and allegorical re-presentation (Darstellung); both kinds of representation urge the subaltern working class to rebel, strike, and save no effort in self-representing, which can be heard by the ruling classes.

Spivak stresses the truth that "representation is a sort of speech act between a speaker and a listener and the subaltern tries to self-represent or even introduces a representation that falls outside the lines laid down by the official institutional structures of representation" (1988, p. 306). She continues: "this act of self-representation from the speaker is not identified by the listener for it doesn't suit the awaited from this representation." (1988, p. 306).

Joan, the spokesperson of the poor, finds no response or even listening from the side of the capitalist trader Mauler. She tries to expose a kind of representation that falls inside the lines of representation laid down by the ruling class, she talks to Mauler in the language he understands, that is of money and accumulated capital, urging him to provide food. Yet, her act of representation does not suit (the listener's) Mauler's capitalist expectation of enormous effort and bloody turmoil on the side of the subalterns. In this way, Brecht's genuine craft in representing the subaltern either by means of political and social representative (Joan), or by allegorical culinary images (Old Man Bacon) helps to really represent the subaltern meat workers in their real work conditions and make the audience criticize their suffering.

But when it comes to Joan as a subaltern woman, the problem of her representation takes a deeper level of inferiority and squeamishness. Spivak discusses the reasons behind women inferiority through raising the issue of gender subalternity "during the cultural practice of widow self-immolation known as Sati" (1988, p. 298). Spivak clarifies that women in India find themselves speechless in front of not only the dominant classes or the hegemony but also the indigenous men of their own country who

want them to accomplish the *Sati* ritual as “a sign of loyalty and love for their late husbands. She correctly noted that imperialism’s image as the establisher of the good society is marked by the espousal of the woman as object of protection from her own kind” (1988, p. 297).

The British colonizers did not know that Hindu widows and society consider this custom as a sacred practice not as a suicide, they instead insisted on the civilizing mission of imperialism as “the white men saving brown woman from brown men” (Spivak, 1988, p. 293). The Indian women found in *Sati* a panacea for all their suffering from either the white colonizers or the brown indigenous of their husbands’ families, they desire and choose death of their free will to relieve them from their agony, inferiority, squeamishness, sexual abuse, and patriarchal violence towards their weak bodies.

On the contrary, the novelist Edward John Thompson disapproves the concept of *Sati*, in his book *Suttee: A Historical and Philosophical Enquiry into the Hindu Rite of Widow Burning*, as a reward for he sees it as “a punishment for the victims: for no offense but the physical weakness which had placed them at man’s mercy; the rite seemed to prove a depravity and arrogance such as no other human offense has brought to light” (1928, p. 132). Like Thompson, Spivak rebukes the sympathy of the modern enlightened Indian males with the courage and the free will of the widow performing *Sati* for they accept in this way “the production of the sexed subaltern subject with the pretext of its being a reward” (1988, p. 299).

Brecht’s description of Joan in the play as “a pure and childlike soul” (*Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, 1969, p. 118) says a lot about her innocence, piety, and physical weakness. His portrayal of Joan’s bending against the storm in the scene of her death and canonization embodies the fragile humanity inside detrimental, hostile society. The impression of female physical weakness was powerfully contrasted with the masculine physical power of butchers and livestock-men whom “physical bulk was emphasized by their style of dress, uniform for each group: wide brimmed Stetsons and padded shoulders for the farmers, bowlers, black morning coats and trousers with unusually broad strips for the businessmen” as Ronald Speirs declares in his book *Bertolt Brecht* (1987, p. 87). This

contrast leaves Joan as helpless subaltern women before the patriarchal domination of Mauler, Slift, and Snyder.

In his book *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, Steven Morton makes it clear that Spivak relates gender subalternity of women to the failure of historiography to fully document the contribution of women in independence or even development after it; hence it was hard to recover the voice of the subaltern women from genuine subaltern female perspectives. Women have no right to think independently; that is why their contribution to society is limited, “they were pleased with the role of man’s shadow which ends when the light fades away from the husband, then the widow find nothing but to trace the dead’s shadow” (2003, p. 132). As a result, they lost vigor and mobility and ended up as subjugated. Moreover, men save women’s effort and existence to use it later whenever needed, and this makes her feel neglected and inferior. This is exactly what takes place when the chief of the Black Straw Hats, Major Paulus Snyder tried to use Joan as a tool of pressing Mauler to financially provide his missionary; he utilizes her effort and servile existence to fulfill his need for money and sustenance. Moreover, Mrs. Luckerniddle, the widow of Old Man Bacon, was bound to her house during her husband’s life, guarantying the basic needs of life for her house, yet after her husbands’ death, she discovered her inability to confront the hunger caused by Mauler who silenced her and even more detrimentally, rewarded her for such silence with food in an act he himself characterized with villainy and viciousness.

The Indian historian Pandurang Vaman Kane clarified in her book, *History of Dharmasastra*, that:

In Bengal, the fact that the widow is entitled to practically the same rights over family property which her deceased husband would have had . . . must have frequently induced the surviving members to get rid of the widow by appealing at most distressing hour to her devotion to and love for her husband. (1962, p. 633)

Fearing for his economic interest and accumulated millions of dollars, Mauler seeks to silence the widow and escape her continuous questions and maybe legal punishment with food. Mauler’s concern for money and private property goes hand in hand with that of the late husband’s family

for their property which makes them encourage and urge the Indian women to perform Sati lest that the widows may inherit instead of their late husbands. Even more detrimental, the workers take advantage of the widow's physical weakness and poverty and plainly spoke about the terrible accident of her husband and about distributing his personal cap and coat among them before her. Despite the fact that Slift, Mauler's broker, is a subaltern from her own country, he works to silence her in favor of the capitalist trader Mauler. Being torn between the patriarchal domination of Mauler and that of her subaltern peers of meat workers, Mrs. Luckerniddle could not help but to share in workers strikes organized and represented by Joan and she starts to look for a job to sustain herself.

Those Hindu widows performing Sati are viewed as martyrs, who sacrifice themselves to commemorate their late husbands, their martyrdom is regarded as a cry of protest to the bilateral subalternity they face. Such martyrdom is analogous to Joan's who sacrifices herself to the good of the poor in a noble and sacred style that they titled her Saint Joan of the stockyards. Joan's sacrificing herself at the end of the play is regarded, like that of *Sati*, as a rallying cry of objection to the violent world of the capitalist bourgeois Mauler and the patriarchal domination of her subaltern peers like Slift and Snyder. Her death is not considered as a crime, rather a reward that would commemorate her knowledge, piety, and efforts to save the stockyards. Spivak makes it clear that restoring the voice of the subaltern woman requires recovering their lost history, representation, and contribution to the development of society and if they speak, they will end up to a just world in which they can be equals of men.

In their book *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean state that one of the key reasons for the flood-gate controversies around Spivak's famous postcolonial essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is the difference between speak and talk. They demonstrate that "speaking involves the participation of at least one listener whereas talking is to one's self; it is not supposed to be heard and can be in the form of soliloquy, meditation, and prayer" (1996, p. 139). They add that "for the success of the process of communication, speaking should include a sender, a receiver, a message,

an objective, and a feedback, which is the most effective factor” (1996, p. 139). Spivak sees that the subaltern women can only talk about her suffering but she cannot speak because the objective of the process of communication between her as a (sender) and the non-subaltern (receiver) is not completely achieved due to:

The interruption of the element of noise which hinders the true grasping of the message, hence the process of speaking is incomplete. The element of noise, Spivak excludes, results from the socio-economic, racial, and cultural atmosphere of both the listener and the speaker. (1996, p.140)

When Joan first visited Mauler and asks him to end the misery of the poor, her communication was interrupted by the element of noise caused by his refusal to listen to her and his misconception of her message. Joan's message was to transfer the hunger of the unemployed, but Mauler misunderstands it believing in their wickedness and greed. So, the process of communication between the subaltern sender (Joan) and the non-subaltern receiver (Mauler) did not fulfill its sought objective. In this sense Joan, according to Spivak's perspective, only talks about her suffering but cannot speak for she cannot be heard.

Spivak puts it clear that the First-world countries achieve their economic interests as they

tend to grow an industrial capital through strict measures such as the destruction of the indigenous industries in the third-world countries, reorganizing territory division, and transferring of the raw materials needed for the industry to the First-world factories. This raised the need for prolific industrial production in the first world factories; especially American factories before the time of the Great Depression. (1988, pp. 287-288)

Likewise, the American market traders like Mauler, after World War I and what ensued after the Great Depression, sought to control the market, depriving the poor of a fair share of the accumulated goods and subsidies which flooded the American market by European countries who lost the war. Brecht introduces how Pierpont Mauler takes advantage of his economic power to manipulate the needs and morals of the poor workers in canned meat factories in Chicago. His exploitation is made clear when he conscripts his broker Sullivan Slift to accompany Joan on a tour inside the stockyards to show her the workers' moral corruption. Instead, Joan listens to a serious complaint of one of the apprentices:

APPRENTICE. I'm in bad shape these days. The extra twenty cents you earn in the manure cellars led me

to work on the bone-grinder last year. There I got lung trouble and chronic eye inflammation. My efficiency has gone down since then and I've only been taken on twice since February.

SLIFT. Keep the things on. And come to Canteen Seven Today at noon. You'll get a free lunch and a dollar there If you tell Luckerniddle's wife where you got that cap and coat. (*Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, 1969, p. 46)

During the tour, Brecht succeeds to foreground the exploitation of the workers through a counterattack he launched against Mauler. He turns the tables on him by exposing his manipulation of the workers who are obliged to accept food and money as bribes to hush the co-worker's widow. In addition, this incident explains how food production and uneven distribution of food are used as a medium for exploitation as they "provide so many opportunities for the production of shame and humiliation in the face of social ignorance and squeamishness" (2010, p. 126). Therefore, the unfair distribution of food, workplace hazards, and exploitation faced by the workers are the features of how unjust power practices oppress the proletariat in the play.

Brecht exhibits how the whole course of actions in *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* seeks to jolt the spectators into understanding the unforgivable paradox shaped by the economic power of capitalism of the elite's overproduction versus the subalterns' underconsumption and its resulting unfair distribution. On one hand, the play scandalously shows how Mauler burns the enormous surpluses of canned meat, despite the dire need of his workers for the food. On the other hand, it presents Joan's trials to alleviate the stress in the stockyards through introducing scant thin soup to the poor.

In addition, Brecht's alien usage of "human ingredient" as part of the food production system criticizes the mismanagement of the food industry, altering food from being a primal instinct to being a source of disgust and abjection.

He manages to transfer through this accident the cynic mentality of the capitalist trader Mauler who struggles to keep himself away from such calamity inside his factory and away from the deplorable conditions of his laborers through persuading himself with ideas such as human wickedness, as he argues in the play, "On oxen I have pity, man is wicked" (*Saint Joan*

of the Stockyards, 1969, p. 44). In this way, Brecht assures Spivak's rendering that "power is manipulatively exercised the way it is in order to maintain Capitalist exploitation" (1988, p. 290).

Speirs explains that Brecht's following "the classic capitalist economic cycle of overproduction, crisis, stagnation, resumption of production whereby economic power is concentrated at the end of the cycle in fewer hands than at the beginning" (1987, p. 71) demonstrates how Mauler's capitalist policies deprive the proletariat of the fruits of their labor on one hand as he prefers throwing the accumulated food than giving it to his needy workers. On the other hand, he introduces soup to the dying Joan and also bribes the widow and Joan's colleagues of the Black Straw Hats with food. His manipulative usage of the food enables Brecht to transfer a real capitalist trader who trades his workers' freedom, dignity and even tiresome efforts.

Moreover, the unfair food consumption in the play documents Mauler's economic power and class power as he was seen as the only character in the play eating a good amount of food prepared on the stage by his broker, as he confirms, "SLIFT. I'll force a rare steak on him . . . Maybe he'll come to himself after enjoying some raw meat. (*He goes and broils Mauler a steak on a gas cooker*)" (*Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, 1969, p. 64). The big piece of lean meat cooked on an expensive apparatus and served by Mauler's servant reflects the high social status of Mauler as a wealthy trader. His status is in stark contrast with the poor workers whose cheap food is eaten after being served by the impoverished girls of the missionary of "The Black Straw Hats". In the play, the tradition of the soup kitchen, with its two sides of the low quality of fatless soup and the small quantity of only one plate, documents how the food was prepared, distributed, and consumed by the subaltern proletariat during the economic crisis of the 1930s. In addition, it historicizes the food culture of the subaltern in America who faced starvation when President Herbert Hoover, as Kenneth Whyte clarified in his book *Hoover: an extra ordinary life in extra ordinary times*, cut the governmental rations, forcing the poor to resort to churches and charity houses instead (2017, p. xv).

Within the course of action in the play, Mauler is depicted as a powerful

character hiding behind a mask whose basic interest is to maintain his relationships with those in power in a world filled with chaos and loss. Through his control over the food, Mauler reflects how much power a single character can have in the structure of the stockyards as he manipulates their freedom and dignity also with such control.

In his book, *Marxism and Literature*, the Marxist writer Raymond Williams, emphasizes that “culture during the time of Marxism was a class culture that should be comprehended in the light of a system of industrial production and through productive forces” (1977, p. 90). That is why Brecht chooses in the play the microcosm of food (meat) processing and his Marxist incongruous bulk of concepts (his goodness/the wickedness of the poor) and personalities (the elite Mauler/the subaltern Joan) to reflect the class struggle between the aristocrats and the subaltern in America during the economic slump of the Great Depression of the 1930s.

In his essay, “Revolutionary Artistry-- Brecht, Marx, and the Evolution of Epic Theatre”, Wyatt Anderson clarifies how Marxism enables Brecht to urge his audience not to sympathize with the plights of the poor, rather to “critically think of the reasons behind their poverty, engage in finding solutions, act, and effect” (2020, p. 1). In the play, Joan expresses this social inequality, and its resulting class subalternity, between the subaltern proletariat and the so-called elite rescuer Mauler when she outlined the widening gap between them as follows:

Joan: you see, there's a gulf between top and bottom

Bigger

Than between Mount Himalaya and the sea

And the vileness of those above is measureless

No help, because the system

They have built is peerless:

Exploitation and disorder, beastly and therefore

Past understanding. (1988, pp. 121-122)

This sensed inequality between the proletariat and the elite helps to deliver a translation of image of capitalist exploitation and domination. It renders the subaltern's invisibility and marginalization in face of the visibility and translatability of the upper class's capitalist domination. Later, Joan stresses the considerable difficulty of bridging this gap between the top and the bottom because of the vileness of the so-called rescuer. In this

sense, Marxism provides him with a wide patchwork to closely evaluate the different social classes, understand their history and contributions, and encourage his audience to change the world around them.

In their book *Economics: Marxian Versus Neoclassical*, Richard Wolff and Stephen Resnich see Marxism as a “method of socioeconomic analysis that view class relations and social conflict using a materialist interpretation of historical development and takes a dialectal view of social transformation” (1987, p. 130). Brecht deploys historical materialism in the play through focusing on the real history of food materials, both meat industry and soup kitchens, as an aura suitable to document the food culture of the American subaltern through the conditions of the common street man.

In *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, Brecht pointedly asserts the contrast between food and morality. Joan expresses this contrast when she realizes how “this whole system is a seesaw, with two ends that depend upon each other” (*Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, 1969, p. 59). She tells Mauler that morality will remain a secondary interest that is impossible to achieve until the basic concerns of the workers such as food and shelter are attained. This contrast assures the moral lesson of the play that force is the only possible way to obtain the basic needs of the subaltern, as Joan explains, “only force help when force rules and/ only men help when men are ” (*Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, 1969, p.122). Later, Joan realizes that bribing the poor via food encourages the exploitation of the capitalist policies which mute the subaltern and drive them to endure hunger and poverty. Consequently, Mauler is completely keen to pay for the food and the shelter of the poor girls of the Christian missionary of the Black Straw Hats. Moreover, the food/moral dialectic documents how the practices of the elite’s power over food distribution, production, and consumption among the proletariat manipulate their freedom and dignity.

Overburdened with the deteriorating economic conditions of the Great Depression, the American subaltern flirted with the policies of Socialism. In the first chapter titled *Bourgeois and Proletariat* of their book, *Marx/Engels Selected Works*, Marx and Engels explain that

In a capitalist society, the sparked, longstanding conflict between the social

classes is the root of all social problems which can be tackled only through a social revolution which placed the working class in power and converted means of production into the social property. (1975, p. 98)

In Brecht's play, the subalterns saw Socialism as a crucial step as it restores power to the powerless and places the workers in a human industrial environment that highly evaluates them as success partners, not as wage slaves. In this sense, Brecht manages to use the food policies to unravel power relations either due to wealth or class in his play and also underscores that culinary studies can solve major world problems like hunger via unity, strike, and socialism.

4. Technique

In her article titled "Transforming World's Tragedy into Call for Social Action, The Brechtian Theatre," Roula Tsitouri notes that Brecht had "differentiated his theatrical construction from the Aristotelian mimesis" (2009, p. 123). She added that Brechtian Epic theatre "inspires astonishment rather than empathy and in order to achieve this goal, Brecht regularly interrupts the action presented on the stage through various means such as songs, props, ... and his theory of *gestus*" (2009, p.124) Brecht's Epic theatre is an anti-cathartic theatre of Aristotle where Brecht uses *diegesis* instead of *mimesis* to give an impetus to the audiences to think not to romanticize and act, not to sit as a captive audience. Brecht wants his audience not to emotionally identify with the characters on the stage. Instead, he encourages his audience to have a critical perspective of social injustice to resist it. Brecht's technique includes (alienation-effect, narration, breaking the fourth wall, *gestus*, and songs).

In his article, "Bertolt Brecht's Theatrical Concept of Alienation Effect and the Chinese Application and Transformation," The Chinese theatrical writer Weihua He argues that:

Brecht's drama appears as a theatrical vessel of decolonizing the modern stage in which Brecht advanced the concept of the alienation effect as a means of making theatre a more efficient act of resistance against the capitalist social order. (2018, p. 53)

According to Patric Pavis' definition in *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*, the alienation effect "is an aesthetic device that consists of altering our perception of a literary image by making it

unfamiliar” (1996, p. 18). In the play, Brecht’s alienation effects are employed as an eye-opener where the audience realizes the harsh truths about social injustice and Capitalist mismanagement. In an instance, the alienation effect is obvious when a man accidentally fell into the mincing machine, as Brecht writes:

FOREMAN. (*to Young Apprentice*) Four days ago a man named Luckerniddle fell into our boiler, we couldn’t stop the machines soon enough so he got caught in the bacon-marker, a dreadful thing to happen . . .

APPRENTICE. You may rely on me, Mr. Smith (*The FOREMAN goes back in through the gate*) Too bad about the man that has to go out in the world as . . . Old Man Bacon. (*Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, 1969, pp. 45- 46)

The spectators’ attention is drawn to the way the illusion “Old Man Bacon” is created, not the misery of the man himself. Such alienation makes a transition from being an aesthetic device to a collective responsibility toward the victim. Even more, it opens up the spectator’s eyes to the reality of the situation.

In his book *A Dictionary of Narratology*, Gerald Prince explains the importance of narration for the spectator: “In narration, the spectator is a player in the interplay of fact and fiction, an authorial audient, that is, one who is aware that the event is fictional” (2003, p. 61). Narration permits the spectator to take the two positions of observation as a participant inside the fiction and as an active critic of facts outside it. So, Brecht insists on diegesis in the play to urge his audience to be engaged in and focus on the events, details of the subalterns’ daily world (the way their food is produced and consumed and their struggle to get their basic needs), and the experiences of the characters instead of focusing on the characters themselves.

Brecht makes his events in the final act end up to the complete decline of the market using the detailed theatrical device of narration known as teichoscopy when he writes:

During these declamations, loudspeakers begin to
Announce terrible news: POUND FALLS! BANK OF
ENGLAND CLOSES FOR FIRST TIME IN THREE
HUNDRED YEARS! And EIGHT MILLION UNEMPLOYED
IN U.S.A.! and FIVE –YEAR PLAN SUCCEEDS! and BRAZIL

POURS ONE YEAR'S COFFEE CROP INTO OCEAN! And
THREE THOUSAND BANKS FAIL IN U.S.A.! and STOCK
EXCHANGES AND BANKS CLOSED BY GOVERNMENT
ORDER IN GERMANY! and BATTLE BETWEEN POLICE
AND UNEMPLOYED OUTSIDE HENERY FORD'S PLANT
IN DETROIT! And BIGGEST EUROPEAN TRUST, MATCH
TRUST, GOES BANKRUPT! And FIVE-YEAR PLAN IN
FOUR YEARS! (*Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, 1969, p. 123)

Teichoscopy, according to Pavis, is “a dramaturgical means of having a character describe something that takes place in the wings just as the observer is telling about it (*offstage*). This avoids having to show violent or unseemly actions on stage” (1996, p. 381). Brecht uses this device to narrate and document the historical long events of the Great Depression causing food shortage that cannot be comprehensively staged.

In his book *Brecht on theatre*, he clarifies that:

His concern for documenting social reality in *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* pushes him towards breaking the fourth wall on his stage which is an imaginary wall separating the spectator from the actions on the stage, it is obvious that the characters and their actions are not real and the spectator know that they are watching a theatrical fiction to make the audience face action, decide and get the chance to be aroused to action. (1974, pp. 23-24)

Brecht argues that breaking the fourth wall can be through directly speaking to the audience, referring them to the fictionality of the characters to remind the audience that they are witnessing fiction. With her speech directly addressing the spectators in her first appearance on the stage, Joan breaks the fourth wall, removes the illusion, refers to the fictionality of her character and performs with the awareness of being watched

Outside the Black Straw Hat Mission.
JOAN. (*at the head of a Black Straw Hat shock troop*)
In a gloomy time of bloody confusion
Ordered disorder
Planful willfulness
Dehumanized humanity.
--- we wish to bring back
God (*Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, 1969, p. 30)

Joan speaks directly to her audience advising them to return to morality as the way out of the corruption of the world ruled by Capitalism which she assimilates to the end of the world. Brecht uses her direct advice to warn his audience against the next economic distress of the stockyards and

prepare them to resist it. Again in a performance by “The Argosy”, the students of Mount Alison University in Sackville, directed by Shelley Liebembuk, Derek Sharp notes that Loryn Losier breaks the character of Joan Dark when she directly speaks to the audience “ Hey, maybe don’t scream your lines incomprehensibly” (2019). Although humorous and messy, Losier says these words on purpose to urge herself to speak clearly to her audience, thus encouraging them to understand the moral lesson behind the play.

Pavis explains in his essay “On Brecht’s notion of Gestus” that gestus

May be a simple bodily movement of the actor (facial expression), or a particular way of behaving (gestuality), or physical relationship between two characters, or the common behaviour of a group, . . . The actor constantly controls his gestuality, in order to indicate the character’s social attitude and way of behaving. (1985, p.41)

Gestus can be seen in the play through the desperate gesture on the face of the subaltern poor widow Mrs. Luckerniddle, and the social meaning behind it. The widow shows her inner emotional disorder, not through words, rather she depends on non-verbal communication through a physical representation of despair on her face while eating one of her twenty meals as the stage directions indicate, “*She looks to the audience and delivers a silent look of despair*” (*Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, 1969, p. 46). The widow was shocked upon hearing the savage method of mincing her husband and the subsequent distribution of his stuff among his peers, but if she talks with either the workers or Joan, she may lose the left of her twenty meals and may starve. She knows that she is poor, inferior, and weak before the domination of Mauler and that she will not win anything if she sues him, so she chooses silence to save her life and accepts the bribe of twenty meals at the factory mass hall.

The visual gesture of the poor widow, her falling intonation, plain, simple, passionate, ordinary diction, and careful enunciation were her means in a trial to communicate with the rising tone and the vulgar and sharp, diction of the aristocrats. Later, Joan changes her conciliatory tone into a challenging one when she decides to resist the social injustice and exploitation of Mauler. Brecht manages to employ this difference in diction between the poor and the aristocrats to reflect their gaze towards

each other. The aristocrats look at the poor as parasites and wicked thieves, while the poor consider them as unjust and exploiters. Giteemoni Saikia asserts in her essay “Bertolt Brecht and the Songs of his Drama” that Brecht’s usage of songs as a part of his epic dramaturgy “interrupts and explains forthcoming action and detached acting that wards off audience identification which is known as alienation effect” (2014, p.1). The first song of the play by the hungry fired workers of the stockyards interrupts the second act and comments on Mauler’s capitalistic exploitation, as Brecht writes:

The Workers Alas!
Hell itself
Shuts its gate in our faces
We are doomed.
Bloody Mauler grips
Our exploiter by the throat and
We are the ones who choke!” (*Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, 1969, p. 30)

When this song is chanted, it does not only increase the emotional or psychological state of the character. Rather, it exposes that Pierpont Mauler is the main reason for hunger and exploitation in the stockyards during the opening of his most expensive hospital in Chicago. This appealing song interrupts the action of Brecht’s play, enabling the audience to have time to judge and form their perspective regarding the past and present exploitation of Mauler and his awaited appearance in the future. Consequently, the song appears much more suitable to the narration when chanted. In this way, the play fluctuates between moments of going up such as Joan’s gradual building up of sympathy for the poor workers and moments of going down when the same sympathy turned into a parody.

5. Conclusion

This paper underscores that food culture is a powerful lens on power relations in Brecht’s *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*. Subalterns’ food policies such as preparation, production, distribution, and consumption provide a suitable medium for unravelling capitalist exploitation and food insecurity suffered by the American stockyards’ workers who were exploited and muted by the hegemonic Capitalist mismanagements of the Great Depression years which turned them into mere subalterns. The quality, quantity, and the way the meat/soup complex is prepared and

served on the stage reflect the Marxist socioeconomic culinary aura of the play. Such aura investigates class struggle between the aristocrats and the proletariat and urges the latter to revolt against their subalternity to restore their dignity and voice and to achieve better living conditions in the stockyards.

Taking Marxist theory, Gramsci's concept of hegemony and Spivak's theory of subalternity as the methodology to culturally reread the play, the paper reveals that Brecht introduces food insecurity as one of the crucial causes of subalternity, that as long as the subalterns are inferior and silent, they will feel hunger pangs and lose their freedom and dignity. Brecht's distancing effect is used as a wake-up call to inspire the audiences to think, criticize, and then act. It also reminds the audiences that Capitalist economic mismanagement, class struggle (the core of Marxist thought), and practices of power (Gramsci's hegemony) over food distribution will worsen the conditions of the poorer and mute their voices, transforming them into mere subalterns.

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