

**Beyond the Stage: A Critical Analysis of Emotion and Meaning in
Brecht's Masterpieces Cultural, Humanitarian and Political Connections
in Ethiopian Theatre**

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1. Introduction:

Bertolt Brecht's theatrical legacy reflects one of the most fundamental architectural alterations in twentieth-century performance art, transforming the stage from an Aristotelian tradition of emotional catharsis and passive spectator-ship to a revolutionary model of intellectual inquiry. Brecht established "Epic Theatre," a framework intended not to reflect reality as an immutable destiny, but to interrogate and deconstruct it. This study, entitled "Beyond the Stage: A Critical Analysis of Emotion and Meaning in Brecht's Masterpieces," examines the significant impact of Brechtian philosophy within the distinct cultural, humanitarian, and political context of Ethiopian theatre. The *Verfremdungseffekt*, also known as the Alienation Effect, is at the core of this approach. It works by purposefully removing the audience from emotional immersion in order to elicit a critical consciousness.

In the Ethiopian context, this theoretical framework found a natural ally in the indigenous poetic tradition of *Sem-enna-Worq* (Wax and Gold), where a surface narrative hides a deeper, often subversive, political core. This inherent linguistic duality allowed pioneering playwrights such as Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin and Debebe Seifu to adapt Brechtian masterpieces like *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Mother Courage* into a localized vernacular that resonated deeply with the "Land to the Tiller" movements and the revolutionary fervor of the mid-20th century.

The primary objective of this research is to deconstruct how these Brechtian markers have been integrated into the Ethiopian theatrical canon, specifically focusing on the transition of the audience from passive observers to active participants in the democratic process of meaning-making. To achieve this, the study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing a combination of primary and secondary data. Central to the investigative process is the practical observation of the directorial praxis of Manyazewal Endeshaw. Manyazewal's work serves as the definitive bridge between theory and practice; he masterfully employs minimalist scenography and the "Social Gestus"—the physical manifestation of social relationships—to highlight the class struggles and humanitarian anxieties inherent in the Ethiopian experience. By analyzing rehearsal processes and performance archives, the research seeks to illustrate how Manyazewal's direction breaks the "fourth wall" to confront the spectator, thereby transforming the theatre into a site of political mobilization rather than mere "culinary" entertainment.

Building upon this practical observation, the study delves into the textual legacy left by Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin and Debebe Seifu, whose translations and adaptations of Brechtian scripts are marked by a sophisticated "literarization." Their work respects the rhythmic and tonal demands of Amharic while maintaining the sharp political edge of the original German texts. The research questions driving this inquiry focus on the extent to which these adaptations redefined the concept of humanitarian suffering on

the local stage. In *Mother Courage*, for instance, the focus shifts from the personal grief of a mother to an analytical critique of the war economy—a theme that carries immense weight in the historical context of Ethiopia's internal and external conflicts. Through an analysis of these connections, this study documents the global significance of Brecht, incorporating the scholarly perspectives of Walter Benjamin and Jane Plastow the latter of whom taught theatre at Addis Ababa University starting in the late 1978s to validate the claim that Brechtian theatre is a transnational medium of resistance.(paulos 2023:12) Benjamin's assertion that Epic Theatre "discovers" conditions rather than reproducing them provides the scholarly foundation for understanding how Ethiopian theatre acts as a mirror to systemic injustice.

Furthermore, the research explores the political connectivity of these masterpieces, arguing that the use of a "Narrator" in Ethiopian adaptations serves to disrupt the theatrical illusion, forcing the audience to sit in judgment of the historical and political events unfolding before them. This methodological approach integrates archival research from the Ethiopian National Theatre with a comparative analysis of Brecht's original theories, such as those found in *A Short Organum for the Theatre*. The synthesis of these elements reveals that the Ethiopian stage has utilized Brecht to create a unique aesthetic of reason, where emotion is not eliminated but redirected toward a demand for social change. This scholarly journey moves beyond the physical confines of the stage to illustrate how theatre serves as a living dialogue between art and the urgent evolution of society, asserting that the humanitarian and political connections found in Ethiopian Brechtian adaptations are essential to the broader understanding of African studies, media, and culture.

Ultimately, this study reinforces the importance of documenting these directorial and literary contributions to ensure that the legacy of practitioners like Manyazewal Endeshaw, Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, and Debebe Seifu is preserved as a cornerstone of Ethiopian intellectual history.

Through this narrative flow, the research positions the Ethiopian theatre not as a peripheral recipient of Western theory, but as a sophisticated center of innovation where revolutionary art meets ancient tradition to foster a collective national consciousness. By analyzing the "Masterpieces" through this specific Ethiopian lens, the work provides a critical contribution to global theatre studies, offering new insights into how art can function as both a cultural repository and a hammer for socio-political transformation.

By analyzing the humanitarian depth and political connectivity of these adaptations, this research argues that Brecht's influence in Ethiopia transcends mere stylistic imitation. Instead, it represents a cultural synthesis: a process where European avant-garde theory meets Ethiopian social reality to create a theatre that is intellectually rigorous, politically potent, and deeply rooted in the quest for human dignity. Through this lens, we move "Beyond the Stage" to understand theatre as a living dialogue between art and the urgent evolution of society

2. Objectives

The overarching goal of this study is to evaluate the symbiotic relationship between Bertolt Brecht's "Epic Theatre" and the evolution of modern Ethiopian theatrical aesthetics. To achieve this, the following specific objectives have been established:

- ➤ To Deconstruct the Brechtian "Alienation Effect" within Ethiopian Praxis

The research aims to analyze how the *Verfremdungseffekt* (Distancing Effect) is adapted to the Ethiopian stage, specifically looking at how it aligns with or diverges from traditional Ethiopian storytelling techniques.

- To Evaluate the Directorial Methodology of Manyazewal Endeshaw

A core objective is to conduct a critical appraisal of Director Manyazewal Endeshaw's work. This involves examining how he utilizes Brechtian "Social Gestus" and minimalist scenography to translate universal humanitarian themes into a localized Ethiopian vernacular.

- To Analyze the Synthesis of "Wax and Gold" (Sem-enna-Worq) and Epic Theatre

This study seeks to explore the linguistic and philosophical connection between the Ethiopian poetic tradition of Sem-enna-Worq and Brechtian "literarization." The objective is to determine if the inherent duality of Ethiopian language serves as a natural vehicle for Brechtian critical distance.

- To Investigate Theatre as a Tool for Political and Humanitarian Consciousness

The research will assess how masterpieces like *Mother Courage and The Caucasian Chalk Circle* have been used in Ethiopia to mirror socio-political struggles—specifically focusing on themes of justice, class conflict, and the human cost of war.

- To Document the Cultural Impact of Brechtian Adaptations

Finally, the study aims to establish a scholarly record of how Brechtian influence has shaped the identity of national theater landscape, moving the audience from passive "feeling" to active "thinking."

3. The Global Influence of Brecht's Revolutionary Theatre

The spread of Bertolt Brecht's revolutionary theatre around the world is a rich and complex history of dialectical adaptation and cultural re-contextualization rather than a linear history of stylistic mimesis. Beyond the Eurocentric boundaries of its Berlin Ensemble beginnings, Brecht's "Epic Theatre" spread to the Global South and, with a special structural resonance to the Ethiopian stage, not as a strict aesthetic doctrine but rather as a flexible, politically charged toolkit intended for socio-structural change. The successful replacement of Aristotelian empathy the conventional dependence on catharsis—with a rigorous form of critical inquiry is one of the main conclusions of this academic investigation. Through

the deliberate application of the *Verfremdungseffekt* (V-effect), also known as the "Distancing Effect," practitioners around the world used metaphoric transposition to challenge established state censorship.

By rendering the familiar as "strange," the stage was metamorphosed from a site of passive emotional consumption into a "secular pulpit" for dialectical social analysis (Brecht, 1964, p. 37).

In the specific Ethiopian theatrical landscape, this is exemplified by the deployment of a Narrator in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. This device facilitates a "cognitive rupture," empowering the audience to decouple from the immediate pathos of the characters and instead occupy a position of analytical adjudicator over the legal and moral structures being parodied on stage. This shift fundamentally alters the spectator's role, moving from a witness of tragedy to a judge of systemic failure.

In Ethiopia, the seminal works of Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin (HaHu 1976) and Debebe Seifu (Enateina Ijeje 1969) illustrate this phenomenon, as they leveraged ancestral narratives to bypass the perceived "inevitability" of contemporary state oppression (Plastow, 1996, p. 54). By refracting the present through the lens of the past, they compelled audiences to view current social conditions "historically" rather than purely "emotionally," thereby fostering a "dual consciousness." In this state, the spectator recognizes the character's struggle not merely as an isolated personal misfortune, but as a systemic manifestation of broader socio-economic forces (Benjamin, 1973, p. 12).

A significant corollary to this is the reciprocal influence of Eastern aesthetics; it is a critical scholarly finding that the "Global Brecht" is an iterative feedback loop. Brecht's own immersion in the stylized, non-emotive performance techniques of the Peking Opera provided the fundamental blueprint for his rejection of Western naturalism. This "symbolic movement" was later re-imported to Africa as a modernized tool for revolution, aligning with remarkable synergy with indigenous traditions of episodic, non-linear storytelling and oral epics.

Furthermore, the research identifies *Social Gestus* the physical embodiment of social rank and power dynamics through codified body language as the primary mechanism for cross-cultural adaptation in Brechtian praxis. This finding is acutely evident in the directorial methodology of Manyazewal Endeshaw, who meticulously strips the stage of "culinary" or purely decorative elements to prioritize the *Gestus* of class friction (Willett, 1959, p. 176). Whether manifested in the spatial dominance of a landlord over a landless peasant or the desperate, rhythmic cling of *Mother Courage* to her wagon—viewed here as a mobile site of capital—these physical markers transcend linguistic barriers.

Finally, the global influence of Brecht reached its teleological apex in the evolution of the passive spectator into the active "Spect-actor." As evidenced in the "Learning Plays" (*Lehrstücke*), the objective shifted from mere cognitive reflection to tangible social mobilization. This trajectory, furthered

significantly by Augusto Boal in the Global South, transformed the theatre into a "rehearsal for the revolution" (Boal, 1979, p. 122). In Ethiopia, this is manifested through the "Breaking of the Fourth Wall," where the actor's direct address serves as a catalyst for national consciousness. It proves that Brecht's revolutionary footprint is fundamentally a call to move beyond the physical confines of the proscenium and into the urgent, active evolution of the collective society.

4. The Interplay of Brechtian Biography and Ethiopian Modernism

The biographical trajectory of Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) is intrinsically linked to the cataclysms of the early 20th century, serving as a fundamental blueprint for the development of "Epic Theatre" as a tool for social reconstruction. Forging his identity within the trauma of World War I, Brecht's evolution from a disillusioned medical orderly to a Marxist dialectician necessitated a radical departure from the Aristotelian "theatre of illusion." His primary innovation, the *Verfremdungseffekt* (V-effect), was designed to strip the stage of its emotional trance, transforming the audience into an assembly of critical observers (Brecht, 1964, p. 91). In the Ethiopian historical context, this methodology arrived during the intellectually turbulent 1960s and 70s, a period defined by the "Land to the Tiller" student movements and a desperate search for a functional aesthetic that could articulate class struggle. Scholars have noted that Brecht's biography of Exile and Resistance found a profound psychological echo in Ethiopia, where playwrights faced similar systemic displacements and utilized his "Masterpieces" to navigate the treacherous waters of state censorship (Plastow, 1996, p. 112).

From a creative arts perspective, the Ethiopian "re-imagining" of Brecht represents a sophisticated cultural synthesis rather than a peripheral imitation. The historical reception of his work was mediated by giants of Ethiopian literature such as Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin and Debebe Seifu, who recognized a startling synergy between Brecht's episodic structure and the indigenous African Oral Tradition. By integrating the Brechtian Narrator—a figure that disrupts the fourth wall—Ethiopian practitioners were able to align European avant-garde theory with the traditional role of the village storyteller, thereby grounding "foreign" theory in local soil. Furthermore, the linguistic duality inherent in the Ethiopian poetic tradition of Sem-enna-Worq (Wax and Gold) served as a natural vehicle for Brechtian "distancing." Just as Brecht sought to reveal the underlying social mechanism beneath the surface plot, the Sem-enna-Worq tradition allowed Ethiopian dramatists to hide a "Gold" of political subversion beneath a "Wax" of translated historical drama (Benjamin, 1973, p. 18).

The contemporary practical application of this biographical influence is most visibly manifest in Ethiopian stage Theaters. Manyazewal's praxis serves as a vital case study in the translation of the Social Gestus

Brecht's term for the physical manifestation of social relationships—into a localized Ethiopian vernacular. By meticulously stripping the stage of "culinary" or decorative elements, Manyazewal forces the spectator to engage with the raw, physical reality of power dynamics, such as the spatial hierarchy between the ruling elite and the disenfranchised (Willett, 1959, p. 175). This creative choice mirrors Brecht's own biographical insistence on a "rational theatre," proving that the humanitarian and political connections in Ethiopian theatre are not merely theoretical, but are lived through the bodies of the performers. Ultimately, the synthesis of Brecht's life and Ethiopian art reveals a theatre that functions as a shadow legislative assembly, where the stage becomes a site for the urgent democratic rehearsal of a more just society (Boal, 1979, p. 122).

5. The Ontological Reconstruction of Humanity in the Ethiopian Theatrical Arena

The discourse of humanity within the arena of Ethiopian theatre is fundamentally an inquiry into the resilience of the human spirit amidst the fluctuating tides of socio-political upheaval. Unlike the Western focus on individualistic psychological interiority, the Ethiopian narrative constructs humanity through a communal and dialectical lens, where the "human" is defined by a reciprocal relationship to justice, ancestral land, and collective memory.

This construction aligns seamlessly with the Brechtian rejection of a static "universal human nature" in favor of a human subject that is historically determined and perpetually capable of transformation. By stripping away the "illusion of inevitability," Ethiopian playwrights have utilized the stage to reclaim human agency from the wreckage of conflict and systemic disenfranchisement (Brecht, 1964, p. 193).

Building upon this theoretical infrastructure, the humanitarian dimension of Ethiopian theatre is articulated through the sophisticated linguistic and philosophical framework of *text and sub text approach*. In this tradition, the "humanity" portrayed on stage operates on a dual plane: the "text" provides the surface emotional struggle—often a narrative of suffering or endurance—while the "sub text" reveals a profound humanitarian critique of power and moral decay. Scholars argue that this indigenous mode of "distancing" allowed practitioners to portray the human cost of war without descending into the passivity of pity. By evoking a "rational empathy," the theatre forces the spectator to move beyond mere sympathy for the character's plight and toward a structural understanding of the forces that dehumanize the subject (Plastow, 1996, p. 142). This synthesis ensures that the representation of humanity is never merely decorative but is always tethered to an urgent pedagogical purpose (Benjamin, 1973, p. 22).

Furthermore, the practical manifestation of humanity is most potently observed in the Social Gestus employed by Ethiopian directors. In his directorial praxis, the "human" is not found in the actor's facial expressions alone, but in the physicalized relationship between bodies in a shared, often minimalist, space. By utilizing a stripped-back scenography, Manyazewal accentuates the "humanity of the oppressed," highlighting how the body itself becomes a site of resistance against dehumanizing political structures. This focus on the *Gestus*—the physical embodiment of social rank and human dignity—transcends the boundaries of the proscenium, inviting the audience to recognize their own humanity within the struggle of the performer (Willett, 1959, p. 176).

Consequently, the Ethiopian stage serves as a "rehearsal for human rights," where masterpieces like *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* are re-imagined addressing local anxieties regarding justice and the protection of the vulnerable (Boal, 1979, p. 122). Ultimately, the exploration of humanity in the Ethiopian theatrical arena reveals a sophisticated Sociopolitical Aesthetic that bridges the gap between the local and the global. The research concludes that by integrating Brechtian "Masterpieces" into the Ethiopian vernacular, creative practitioners have expanded the definition of humanity to include the active, critical participation of the spectator. In this context, theatre is no longer a passive mirror of human suffering but a "hammer" used to forge a more humane social reality.

6. The Political Arena: Theatre as a Dialectical Laboratory in Ethiopia

The architecture of politics within the arena of Ethiopian theatre is characterized by a sophisticated interplay between state authority and artistic subversion. In this context, theatre functions as a "shadow parliament," providing a discursive space where systemic critiques are voiced under the veil of aesthetic distance. This political utility is fundamentally rooted in the Brechtian concept of Historicism, which posits that by presenting the present through the lens of the past, the "natural" order of political oppression is revealed as a temporary, alterable construct. During the revolutionary fervor of the 1960s and 70s, Ethiopian practitioners adopted this "Epic" framework to challenge feudal and imperial structures, effectively transforming the proscenium into a site of ideological mobilization (Brecht, 1964, p. 190). As Milkias (2006, p. 143) observes in his seminal analysis of Ethiopian political culture, the student movements recognized that the "educated elite used the stage as a pedagogical weapon," leveraging theatres to dismantle the traditional aura of the monarchy.

Central to this political synthesis is the indigenous Ethiopian tradition of Sem-enna-Worq (Wax and Gold), which serves as a sophisticated defense mechanism against state censorship. In the political arena, the

"Wax" represents the overt historical or translated narrative, while the "Gold" carries the subversive political critique directed at the contemporary regime. Scholars have noted that practitioners like Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin and Debebe Seifu utilized this linguistic duality to navigate the treacherous political climate of the Derg era, proving that the Ethiopian stage has long been a "site of double-speak" where truth is whispered through allegory (Plastow, 1996, p. 158). This aligns with the broader continental perspective found in *Theatre and Politics in Africa*, where performance is viewed not as mere entertainment but as a "rehearsal for revolution," as the stage becomes a vital venue where the marginalized can articulate grievances against the post-colonial state (Milkias & Plastow, 2004, p. 82).

Furthermore, the political connectivity of Ethiopian theatre is physically manifested through the *Social Gestus* in the directorial praxis of Manyazewal Endeshaw. By stripping the stage of decorative elements, Manyazewal accentuates the "micro-politics" of the body—how power is performed through posture, proximity, and movement. This focus on the physicalized relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed mirrors the global shift toward a "Theatre of the Oppressed," where the goal is to move the spectator from a state of passive witnessing to active political consciousness (Boal, 1979, p. 122). In productions at Ethiopian stages, the direct address to the audience and the deliberate breaking of the "fourth wall" serve as pedagogical tools, forcing the citizenry to acknowledge their agency within the broader political narrative (Willett, 1959, p. 176).

Ultimately, the analysis of politics in the Ethiopian theatrical arena reveals a "Humanitarian-Political" synthesis that transcends mere propaganda. The research concludes that by integrating Brecht's "Masterpieces" into the local vernacular, Ethiopian artists created a unique performance form that is both intellectually rigorous and politically potent. As Milkias emphasizes, the "theatricalization of politics" in Ethiopia allowed for a critical dialogue that external political institutions often failed to provide (Milkias, 2006, p. 167). In this arena, the stage is not a place of escape but a site of confrontation, proving that theatre remains Ethiopia's most resilient medium for negotiating the complexities of power, justice, and the quest for human dignity.

7. Focused Elements in Brechtian-Ethiopian Synthesis

The following idea is constructed from my dual vantage point as a theatre practitioner and a Performance Studies researcher. It synthesizes my fieldwork at Addis Ababa University and my critical observations of Brechtian productions of the Goethe-Institut, particularly focusing on how these "Masterpieces" transcend mere stagecraft to become rational inquiries into the Ethiopian socio-political condition.

My research into the "Focused Elements in Brechtian-Ethiopian Synthesis" as a media researcher and performance studies scholar reveals that the theatre's structural integrity depends on a purposeful reconfiguration of performance elements intended to undermine the hypnotic, "culinary" experience of traditional dramatic arts. I have seen a shift from Aristotelian empathy to a dialectical engagement in Ethiopia, where every technical decision—from linguistic layering to simple scenography—serves a deep instructional purpose meant to spur societal change. My hands-on observations verify that the *Verfremdungseffekt* (V-effect) is re-authored through the indigenous Oral Tradition.

By utilizing narrators and disruptive songs to impede the narrative flow, practitioners like Manyazewal Endeshaw prevent the audience from being "curbed by suspense," mirroring the traditional role of the *Azmari* or communal storyteller who provides moral and political commentary. This fusion ensures that the distancing effect does not alienate the spectator but instead invites them into a critical, communal dialogue about their own reality.

Central to my findings is the application of Social Gestus, which I identify as the physical embodiment of social rank and power dynamics expressed through posture and movement. In my investigation of directorial praxis in Addis Ababa, I have seen how the *Gestus* becomes a legible political text; by employing Minimalist Staging—where lighting rigs and technical apparatus remain visible, the production signals to the audience that "this is a performance, not reality." This transparency strips the stage of its decorative distractions, focusing the spectator's gaze on the "politics of the body" and allowing the theatre to communicate complex class hierarchies that transcend spoken dialogue. As noted in my research on theatre and politics in Africa, this method transforms the performer's body into a site of resistance, where a simple bow or a specific gait reveals the underlying socio-economic friction inherent in the Ethiopian class structure.

Furthermore, my research into the translational aspect of Brechtian masterpieces reveals a sophisticated "Literarization" of the script through the Ethiopian poetic tradition of *Sem-enna-Worq* (Wax and Gold). I have found that this linguistic focused element creates a "Wax" (the overt, translated narrative) that strategically shields the "Gold" (the subversive socio-political critique). This layering allows the "Epic" structure to survive as a tool for social analysis even under periods of restricted expression, forcing the audience to look beneath the surface of the dialogue to examine fundamental human needs—food, shelter, and justice. This translation process acts as a secondary distancing tool, prompting the spectator to utilize reason over raw emotion. Consequently, as Milkias (2006, p. 167) and Plastow (1996) have suggested, the Ethiopian stage ceases to be a passive mirror of life and instead becomes a "hammer" used to actively

reshape the social world through Episodic Structure and spatio-temporal discontinuity. These "interruptions" provide the audience with the necessary "pauses for thought" to meditate on the events witnessed, ultimately fostering a "Crude Thinking" (*plumpes Denken*) that reduces complex philosophical crises to their basic human requirements.

8. Manyazewal's Directing Style: A Brechtian-Ethiopian Synthesis

Manyazewal Endeshaw's methodology represents a critical departure from earlier Ethiopian Brechtian works. While previous writers focused on linguistic elegance (the "Wax"), Manyazewal prioritizes the Visual and Physical Gestus (the "Gold"), ensuring that Brecht's stage philosophy is lived through the actor's body rather than just spoken. His work is characterized by a "Direct Translation" of Brechtian concepts into the contemporary Ethiopian reality, where the stage functions as a laboratory for analyzing today's social friction.

➤ The Symbolic Directing Style and Minimalist Aesthetics

In his landmark productions, such as *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* at Hager Fikir Theatre, Manyazewal employs a Symbolic Minimalism that directly attacks the "culinary" or decorative traditions of Ethiopian commercial theatre.

Exposing the Mechanics: He strips the stage to its bare essentials, often leaving technical apparatus and lighting rigs visible to the audience.

The V-Effect: This is not a lack of resources, but a deliberate Alienation Effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*) intended to signal that "this is a performance, not reality".

Focus on Struggle: His use of neutral colors and functional set pieces forces the spectator to focus on the human struggle rather than the spectacle.

➤ Re-Imagining Character and Costume: Culture as a Socio-Political Sign

Manyazewal's approach to costume and character positioning is revolutionary in its refusal of "folkloric" romanticism. In his direction of *Mother Courage* at the National Theatre (locally titled *Emiye Bertewa*), costumes are not merely "Ethiopian dresses"; they are Historical Signifiers.

Material Textures: He utilizes textures—rough burlap, worn leather, and mud-stained fabrics—to represent the weight of war on the human body.

Physicalized Hierarchy: Characters are positioned on stage to reveal Social Gestus; for instance, the physical distance between corrupt judges and disenfranchised peasants makes the class hierarchy visible to the eye.

Rational Judgment: Unlike previous directors who sought to make characters "likable," Manyazewal presents them as "functions of their social conditions," urging the audience to judge choices through a rational lens.

➤ Case Study: "The Caucasian Chalk Circle" and Mother Courage/"Emiy Bertewa"

My investigation into these two exemplary works highlights Manyazewal's ability to synthesize Brechtian philosophy with Ethiopian cultural nuances:

The Chalk Circle (Hager Fikir): Manyazewal focused on the "Land to the Tiller" sentiment, using the narrator to bridge the gap between fictional justice and the contemporary Ethiopian struggle for rights. The "Circle" was directed as a legal and moral examination of ownership, reflecting the modern dialogue on land and heritage.

Mother Courage (National Theatre - Emiy Bertewa): Manyazewal dismantled the image of the "Suffering Mother" as a tragic icon. Instead, he presented Emiy Bertewa as a businessperson whose livelihood is inextricably linked to the war that consumes her children, forcing the audience to confront the capitalist contradictions of conflict.

➤ Differentiation from Previous Scholars and Translators

Manyazewal's translation and direction differ from previous translators in their Dialectical Depth. While earlier translations were often "domesticated" to fit traditional moralities, Manyazewal maintains Brecht's "uncomfortable" edges.

Material Humanity: He understands that Brecht's idea of Humanity is not about "kindness," but about the material conditions—food, shelter, and power—that allow or prevent kindness from existing.

Crude Thinking: His work has consistently demonstrated that to understand Brecht in today's Ethiopian reality, one must apply "Crude Thinking" (plumpes Denken)—reducing complex politics to the basic human needs of the people.

9. Research Findings for Presentation

The Actor as a Researcher: Manyazewal treats his actors as social researchers, requiring them to demonstrate their character's social function rather than their feelings.

Cultural Modernization: He uses Ethiopian traditional music and dance not as "decoration," but as "Epic Interruptions" that comment on the action, effectively decolonizing the Brechtian structure.

Audience Agency: By breaking the fourth wall, Manyazewal's style transforms the stage into an arena for civic rehearsal, where the audience is empowered to think, "Things do not have to be this way".

10. Personal Reflection: Brecht's Legacy as a Catalyst for Ethiopian Social Transformation

As a researcher and practitioner deeply embedded in the theatrical landscape of African Theatre, culture, media and politics, my investigation into Bertolt Brecht's masterpieces—particularly through the lens of Manyazewal Endeshaw's visionary direction—has been a transformative journey. My extensive work has demonstrated that Brecht's contribution to Ethiopian theatre is not merely a historical footnote; it is a vital, breathing cultural exchange that continues to redefine our stages.

➤ **The Intellectual Synthesis: Rational Critique and Indigenous Allegory**

My research confirms that the most profound outcome of this German-Ethiopian cultural exchange is the hybridization of German Rational Critique with the sophisticated indigenous Ethiopian tradition of Semenna-Worq. In my professional reflection, this is precisely where the revolutionary power of Brechtian theatre resides within our local context. By utilizing the familiar cultural framework of multi-layered meaning, these productions create a strategic entry point for the audience. While the surface narrative provides accessibility, the underlying socio-political critique invites a sharp, analytical inquiry into our contemporary existence. This synergy allows the theatre to transcend passive entertainment, evolving into a discursive platform where Ethiopian audiences can scrutinize their own social conditions through a rigorous, critical lens.

➤ **The Emotional Paradigm Shift: From Pathos to Conscious Inquiry**

In the traditional Ethiopian theatrical canon, there has historically been a heavy reliance on raw emotion and tragic empathy. However, my practical investigation into Brechtian productions has fundamentally shifted this perspective. I have witnessed the efficacy of the Alienation Effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*) firsthand as a tool for intellectual liberation. By deliberately creating a "distancing" between the narrative and the spectator, these works compel the audience to confront social and political realities with reason

rather than instinctive sorrow. In my view, when emotions are harnessed as instruments for systemic criticism rather than mere vehicles for pity, theatre begins to fulfill its highest humanitarian mandate: the awakening of the collective consciousness.

➤ Humanitarian and Political Resonances: The Dialectics of Struggle

My investigation into landmark productions such as *Emiye Bertewa/Mother Courage* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* has led to a redefined understanding of humanity within the performing arts. In Brecht's philosophical framework-and as mirrored in these Ethiopian presentations-true humanity is not found in weeping for the victim, but in investigating the systemic causes of their victimization. This "Crude Thinking" (*plumpes Denken*) forces us to strip away obfuscating philosophical jargon and focus on fundamental human requirements: sustenance, security, and justice. On the Ethiopian stage, this translates to a theatre that prioritizes the material realities of the people over abstract aestheticism

➤ The Stage as a present, a Societal Laboratory: Concluding Thoughts

Ultimately, my assessment of Brecht's enduring contribution to Ethiopian theatre is encapsulated by his own maxim: "Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it". The directing praxis of Manyazewal Endeshaw has proven that the stages of Hager Fikir and the National Theatre can serve as much more than venues for escapism; they are laboratories for social evolution. Through the strategic use of narrative interruptions, social gestus, and minimalist staging, we are not merely recounting tales. Instead, we are extending a formal invitation to our citizens to investigate the root causes of their challenges. We aim to empower them to realize that their current reality is not an inevitable destiny, but a construct that they possess the agency to dismantle and rebuild.

This ongoing cultural dialogue between Germany and Ethiopia represents a milestone in our artistic history. It ensures that theatre remains an indispensable instrument for societal progress, critical self-reflection, and the relentless pursuit of justice

11. Conclusion

The culmination of this research, "*Beyond the Stage: A Critical Analysis of Emotion and Meaning in Brecht's Masterpieces*," reaffirms that the integration of Bertolt Brecht's revolutionary aesthetics into the Ethiopian theatrical landscape is not a mere act of cultural borrowing, but a profound socio-aesthetic synthesis. This inquiry has traced the trajectory from Brecht's historical biography of exile and resistance to the contemporary directorial praxis of Manyazewal Endeshaw, uncovering a theatre that functions as a living laboratory for justice and human dignity. By aligning the *Verfremdungseffekt* (Alienation Effect)

with indigenous modes of storytelling, Ethiopian practitioners successfully dismantled the traditional "theatre of illusion," replacing passive emotional catharsis with a rigorous model of intellectual inquiry. Central to this synthesis is the physicalized dialectic observed through the application of Social Gestus in productions at the National Theatre and Hager Fikir. Manyazewal Endeshaw's minimalist staging serves as a critical pedagogical tool, stripping away "culinary" or decorative distractions to reveal the raw socioeconomic friction inherent in modern Ethiopian reality. Whether manifested in the spatial hierarchy of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* or the weary, rhythmic trek of *Emiy Bertewa* (*Mother Courage*), these physical markers transform the performer's body into a site of resistance. This methodology ensures that the representation of humanity on stage is never merely decorative but is always tethered to an urgent pedagogical purpose, forcing the spectator to move beyond raw sympathy toward a structural understanding of the forces that determine the human condition.

Furthermore, the research confirms that the "literarization" and translation of Brechtian scripts by giants such as Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin and Debebe Seifu were essential political acts. By embedding subversive critiques within a localized vernacular, they ensured that the "Epic" structure survived as a tool for social analysis even under periods of restricted expression. Ultimately, the Ethiopian stage has utilized Brecht to create a unique aesthetic of reason, where emotion is not eliminated but redirected toward a demand for social change. In this arena, the stage is no longer a passive mirror of human suffering but a "hammer" used to forge a more humane social reality, asserting that the humanitarian and political connections found in these adaptations are essential to the broader understanding of African studies, media, and culture.

Ultimately, my reflections as a practitioner and scholar conclude that this cultural exchange between Germany and Ethiopia represents a milestone in our cultural history. It positions Ethiopian theatre not as a peripheral recipient of Western theory, but as a sophisticated center of innovation where revolutionary art meets ancient tradition to foster a collective national consciousness. As we move "Beyond the Stage," we recognize that theatre remains Ethiopia's most resilient medium for negotiating the complexities of power, justice, and the quest for human dignity, proving that art can indeed function as a powerful instrument for ongoing socio-political transformation.

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