Introduction

At the height of the Cold War, in August 1961, as the Berlin Wall realized in concrete the ideological, political and economic barriers that already separated Eastern from Western Europe, the "communist" from the "free" or "imperialist-capitalist" world (depending on point of view), Bertolt Brecht figured alternately as hero and villain of the political melodrama unfolding in its shadow. In articles published in the West German magazine *Der Monat*, which was funded, like its English equivalent *Encounter*, by the CIA-sponsored Committee for Cultural Freedom, Brecht was cast as equal to the "immediate threat of the Red Army." Anti-communist ideologues charged him with delusional attachment to Communism; even the critical theorist T. W. Adorno accused him of "glorifying the Party," or, more subtly, of "oversimplifying" artistic form in favor of political content.[1] In the other camp in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) or East Germany, the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) was stirred

[1] The equation of Brecht and the Red Army is Friedrich Tolberg's: "Soll man Brecht im Westen spielen?", *Der Monat* 14, no. 159 (1962), 56–62; reiterated by respondents in "Soll man Brecht spielen? Antworten an Friedrich Tolberg," *Der Monat* 14, no. 161 (1962), 57–64. The case for Brecht's delusional attachment to Communism was made by Herbert Lüthy in "Vom armen BB," *Der Monat* 4, no. 44 (May 1952), 115–44, reprinted in *Encounter*. The claim was reiterated, with an effort to separate Brecht's artistry from his politics, by Martin Esslin in *Bertolt Brecht: A Choice of Evils* (London: Methuen, 1962). For the more subtle critique of Brecht's assault on the autonomy of art, see T[heodor] W[iesengrund] Adorno, "Engagement" (1962) in *Noten zur Literatur* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980), trans. as "Commitment" in *Aesthetics and Politics: Debates between Brecht, Lukacs, Brecht,*

by campaigns in the West to boycott Brecht to abandon its Stalinist denunciation of his experiments as "alien to the people" to attempt after Brecht's death in 1956 to claim him and even his most experimental form, the *Lehrstück* or learning play for worker-players, as its own. Even though it had criticized Brecht while he lived, the SED used Brecht posthumously as the guarantor of the party's legitimacy as the true inheritor of the anti-fascist and anti-imperialist tradition of the German left.[2] On the basis of this claim, the SED continued until the late 1980s to cast Brecht as a "fighter against capitalist exploitation" whose work contributed to "mobilizing reason in the struggle against irrationalism, imperialism, and SDI [the United States's Strategic Defense Initiative]."[3]

In claiming Brecht as the representative of the anti-fascist legacy of the 1920s, the SED sought to shore up its own inheritance

Benjamin, Adorno (London: Verso, 1977). Although he rejects Esslin's psychodrama of the deluded artist ("Engagement," 419; "Commitment", 185), Adorno accuses Brecht of "unmediated glorification of the Party" ("Engagement" 415; "Commitment" 182) and reiterates the Cold War dichotomy between artistic autonomy and political instrumentalization, as the title of the original radio broadcast, "Engagement oder Autonomie von Kunst" (Radio Bremen, March 1962) attests. For analysis of the "crusade against Brecht," see André Müller, *Kreuzzug gegen Brecht. Die Kampagne in der Bundesrepublik 1961/62* (Darmstadt: Progressverlag, 1963); for comment in English, see John Willett, "The Changing Role of Politics," *Brecht in Context*, 2nd edn (London: Methuen, 1998), 193–238.

[2] For the attack on Brecht's alleged formalism, see Walter Ulbricht (general secretary of the SED), "Der Kampf gegen den Formalismus in der Kunst und Literatur. Für eine fortschrittliche deutsche Kultur" (1951), in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*, ed. Elimar Schubbe (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1972), 178–86, here 182; for the recovery of the anti-fascist *Lehrstück* for the GDR, see Ulbricht, "Der Weg zur Sicherung des Friedens und zur Erhöhung der materiellen und kulturellen Bedingungen des Volkes" (1959), in *Dokumente*, 540–6.

[3] Hans Joachim Hoffmann (GDR Culture Minister), Address on Brecht's ninetieth birthday, 10 February 1988, in the GDR Theatre Union journal *Theater der Zeit* (April 1988), 6–9. The initials SDI were in the original.

of the German Communist Party (KPD)'s opposition both to residual imperialism left over from the Reich under Kaiser Wilhelm in the army and police of the Weimar Republic and the ruling Socialist Party (SPD), and to the rise of the National Socialist Workers Party or Nazi Party (NSDAP).[4] The SED claimed to have cleared away Nazi remnants through systematic denazification, while blaming the Western Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) for failing to prosecute Nazi war criminals and for retaining symbols like the imperial *Deutschlandlied* ("Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles") as the national anthem.[5] Especially at a time when the GDR was recognized officially only by the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies, but not by the

[4] "Communist" (with a capital letter) and "communist" (with a small letter) are used respectively to refer to party membership and to the broader affiliation of leftists such as Brecht not only with anti-fascist politics but also with the social and cultural community afforded by the movement. Antonia Grunenberg, in *Antifaschismus – ein deutscher Mythos* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1993), 22, notes that the Communist International defined "fascism" in 1924 broadly as the "instrument of war used by the bourgeoisie against the proletariat" and thus lumped together the fascist regime of Italy with bourgeois democracies including Weimar Germany. The KPD promoted radical socialist redistribution rather than the gradualist program of the ruling SPD, which the KPD viewed as a betrayal, especially when SPD police banned KPD activities. This sense of betrayal shaped KPD hostility to the SPD as "social fascists," as well as later SED attacks on the persistence of Nazi personnel and habits in the post-war FRG. For an English-language discussion of this legacy, see Eric Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890–1990* (Princeton University Press, 1997).

[5] For the political implications of the *Deutschlandlied* as against the new GDR anthem, *Auferstanden aus Ruinen* ("Arisen from the Ruins"; music: Hanns Eisler; lyrics: Johannes R. Becher), see Maos Azaryahu, *Vom Wilhelmplatz zum Thälmannplatz: Politische Symbole im öffentlichen Leben der DDR* (Tel Aviv: Institut für deutsche Geschichte, 1991), 102–7; for the SED's representation of the GDR, through the hammer, circle and engineer's compass on the flag, as a peaceful country as against alleged Western militarism symbolized by the Prussian eagle, see Azaryahu's comments on the SED's use of these symbols, including images of the hammer smashing the eagle (112–13).

FRG, which granted automatic citizenship to refugees from the GDR, every test of legitimacy took on global proportions.[6]

Brecht was not ideally suited to the role of anti-fascist mascot since his political actions were not always consistent with his stated convictions. His plays, prose, and drama exposed the contradictions of capitalist society and bourgeois mores, yet his personal relations with his family and (especially female) collaborators have been described as exploitative. Moreover, his creative appropriation of found material contrasts with his vigilant defense of intellectual property. Although anti-communist commentators from the House Un-American Activities Commitee (HUAC) through Martin Esslin to John Fuegi have used these inconsistencies as the basis for a cold-war melodrama in which Brecht appears as a Stalinist or, more recently, sexist demon, the influence of Brecht and his collaborators – writers like Elizabeth Hauptmann, Margarete Steffin, Günter Weisenborn, Lion Feuchtwanger; designers like Caspar Neher. John Heartfield, Teo Otto, Karl von Appen; composers like Kurt Weill, Paul Hindemith, Hanns Eisler, Paul Dessau; photographer Ruth Berlau, and actors Helene Weigel (also his wife), Ernst Busch, Carola Neher, Erwin Geschonneck, Renate Lutz, Käthe Reichel, and others – remains unparalleled. While the work of these collaborators should be acknowledged, Brecht was both catalyst and director, without whom this extraordinary output would not have been possible.[7]

[6] As Hans-Siegfried Lamm and Siegfried Kupper note, in *DDR und Dritte Welt* (Munich: Oldenberg, 1976), 270–1, the GDR began trading with third world countries like Egypt and India in the 1950s but the diplomatic recognition of the GDR was hampered by competition from the FRG under its Hallstein Doctrine of a single German nation (53–63).

[7] Esslin, *Bertolt Brecht: A Choice of Evils*, and John Fuegi, *Brecht and Company* (New York: Grove Press, 1994). Despite its enthusiastic reception by the Western media, Fuegi's argument that Brecht's collaborators were exploited (1994) is not new; similar arguments have been advanced by German writers from Peter Weiss, in *Aesthetik der Widerstand* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1971), at once a novel and a treatise on the politics of art, to Fritz Raddatz, "Bertolt Brecht," in his *Männerängste in der Kunst* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1993), and the subject

Although he moved from an anarchic anti-bourgeois attitude in the early 1920s to an affiliation by the late 1920s with Communists such as film maker Slatan Dudow and composer Hanns Eisler, with whom he produced the controversial *Lehrstück*/chorale *Die Massnahme* (Measures Taken, or The Expedient, 1930) and the film *Kuhle Wampe, oder Wem gehört die Welt?* (Kuhle Wampe, or to whom does the world belong?, 1932), Brecht was never a Communist Party member. Conversely, although he spent the Second World War in the United States, his commitments were leftist enough to provoke HUAC's investigation in 1947 and the subsequent refusal of visas for travel to West Germany under US control. Brecht received support for his theatre in East Germany but he expressed private reservations about SED policy, especially after the workers' uprising on 17 June 1953 challenged the party's claim to lead a "workers' and peasants' state."[8] The SED's attempt to subordinate Brecht and the legacy of experimental leftist performance (pioneered by KPD members like Eisler and Busch, who returned to the GDR, or director Erwin Piscator, who went to West Berlin) to Soviet norms of orthodox "socialist realism" promulgated by Stalin's Minister of Propaganda, Andrei Zhdanov, remained at best incomplete. The contradictory claims of this orthodoxy were to be undermined by critical heirs of Brecht, especially Heiner Müller, whose work from the 1950s to his death in 1995 invoked the legacy of the Weimar left to challenge the SED's exclusive

has since received serious critical treatment from Sabine Kebir, *Ich fragte nicht nach meinem Anteil: Elisabeth Hauptmanns Arbeit mit Brecht* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1997) and *Ein akzeptabler Mann?*, 2nd edn (Berlin: Aufbau, 1998), and Paula Hanssen, *Elisabeth Hauptmann: Brecht's Silent Collaborator* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1995), among others.

[8] Brecht's letter to Ulbricht included a reflection on the workers" "revolutionary impatience" as well as his own support for the SED. Only the latter sentiment was published in the SED journal *Neues Deutschland* (see Werner Hecht, *Brecht-Chronik 1898–1956* (Frankfurt a.M: Suhrkamp, 1997)). Privately, Brecht noted that "17 June has estranged existence itself": see Brecht, *Werke: Große kommentierete Ausgabe* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1988–98), 27: 346 (hereafter *Werke*).

claim to represent anti-fascism and anti-imperialism in Germany and beyond.

Far from the Berlin Wall but still caught up in the Cold War melodrama, the newly declared Republic of South Africa attempted after its abrupt departure from the British Commonwealth in May 1961 to establish its credentials as a "young country" representing "Western civilization" on the African frontier. Among other institutions borrowed from Europe, the Afrikaner Nationalist government founded and subsidized Performing Arts Councils to display its Western aspirations. Although Brecht had been boycotted in West Germany – a key model for South African cultural policy – *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* opened in 1963, the inaugural year of the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT), albeit without Brecht's controversial prologue of 1951, in which Soviet peasants discuss land redistribution. Alongside Shakespeare and patriotic Afrikaans drama, this production appeared as evidence of the "European" aspirations of white South Africa as a loyal ally of the West in the battle against Communism, which had been banned in South Africa in 1950.[9] In contrast, in 1964, the not-yet-famous playwright Athol Fugard staged a South African interpretation of the play with the Serpent Players, a group of black performers with whom he went on to create theatre that deployed Brechtian techniques in the critical representation of South African reality, from *The Coat* (1966) to *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* and *The Island* (1972).

South African engagement with international anti-fascist culture began well before Fugard, however. Over the course of the 1920s and 1930s the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) became the

[9] For South Africa's aspirations to "Western civilization" in the arts, see *Performing Arts in South Africa: Cultural Aspirations of a Young Country* (Pretoria: Dept of Information, 1969), 1. The Afrikaner National Party, which ruled South Africa from 1948 to 1994, passed the Suppression of Communism Act in 1950, which suppressed not only the Communist Party, but also persons deemed, in the broadest terms, to further the interests of communism worldwide. The program for PACT's production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (STC/JPL) indicates that the performance began with scene 2 in the Abashvili palace.

most integrated political organization in the country and supported anti-fascist cultural activism, albeit on a much smaller scale than the communist and socialist movements encountered by Brecht in Berlin. To be sure, Fugard and the Serpent Players stimulated the growth of anti-apartheid theatre that drew on Brecht's example to produce the distinctively South African genre of the workshopped testimonial play, from Workshop '71's *Survival* (1976) to the collective creations of the Market Theatre, such as *Born in the RSA* (1985), and the Junction Avenue Theatre Company, best known for *Sophiatown* (1986). But, two generations before the leftist revival of the 1970s and one generation before the National Party banned the CPSA and any remotely related organization in the 1950s, associations with implicit or explicit socialist programs, from the CPSA through the socialist but non-communist Garment Workers' Union to the African National Theatre, promoted anti-segregationist and anti-fascist cultural, political, and social programs from the 1920s to the 1940s.[10] In forms from May Day parades and agit-prop skits on picket lines to formal performances of written drama for mixed (union/non-union, black/white) audiences, cultural production addressed not only the travails of local actors but also, as the Bantu Peoples' Theatre put it in 1940, "economic disintegration, the breakdown of tribal economy, and the impoverishment

[10] From its transformation from a white labor party in 1919 to a black-majority party by the late 1920s until its banning in 1950, the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) was the most integrated political organization in the country. The role of party intellectuals and union organizers in the broader liberation movement has been noted not only by the CPSA and its successor, the underground South African Communist Party (SACP; 1950–94), but also by independent leftists. For the party line, see *South African Communists Speak: Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party, 1915–1980* (London: Inkululeko Publications, 1981); for comments by a critical former member, see Edward Roux, *Time Longer than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), and by members of the party in exile, Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba, *Comrades against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile* (London: James Curry, 1992).

of Europeans, the massing of classes in their trade unions and employer organizations," as well as the "emotional complications of race and colour."[11] Personal and institutional links between South African activists and international socialist movements were forged, for instance, by CPSA members in Moscow from the 1920s, and by visitors to South Africa, such as André van Gyseghem, author of a book on Soviet theatre and animator of local events such as the Bantu Peoples' Theatre's adaptation of Eugene O'Neill's *Hairy Ape*, or by emigrés such as Kurt Joachim Baum, whose Johannesburg Art Theatre influenced unionist Guy Routh. Over and above these links, the iconographic and performance forms of international socialism, from the Red Flag to the raised fist whose origin historian Eric Weitz traces to the KPD in 1926 and the agit-prop performance honed by workers' groups not only in the Soviet Union and Germany, but across the world from the United States to Japan, permeated South African activism in this period, until the banning of the CPSA in 1950, and of most other mass organizations including the African National Congress (ANC) in the early 1960s, drove this legacy underground. From the 1970s, with the revival of mass opposition to apartheid, this legacy resurfaced in the form of anti-apartheid performance as well as of posters and publications of the movement.[12]

The juxtaposition of these different inheritances of international socialism in performance – the official anti-fascism of the GDR as against the anti-apartheid activism of the outlawed CPSA and ANC and internal opposition to apartheid – might seem tendentious, were it not for the concrete historical links between the GDR and liberation

[11] Bantu Peoples' Theatre, *Drama Festival Program* (25–27 July 1940), 10 (STC/JPL).

[12] Weitz, *Creating German Communism*, 3; André van Gyseghem, *Theatre in Soviet Russia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939). The international links can be seen in the "solidarity messages" from workers' theatre groups in Japan and Australia, as well in Europe, in *Workers Theatre* magazine, edited by German emigré and director of the New York Proletbuehne, John Bonn (New York Public Library; Performing Arts Division).

movements like the ANC and SACP. Building on ties with the Soviet Union, which dated back to individual CPSA members studying in Moscow in the mid-1920s and the Communist International's (Comintern's) promotion of a "native republic" for South Africa, the SED set up a Solidarity Committee in 1960.[13] In keeping with its memorialization of former Nazi concentration camps on GDR territory as sites commemorating the "victims of fascism . . . in *many countries*" (my emphasis), the SED promoted a foreign policy of "solidarity and support [*solidarische Unterstützung*] for the . . . liberation movements against imperialism, colonialism and neocolonialism" in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.[14] In the early 1970s, Western governments treated the ANC and SACP as little more than communist outlaws. Before the Basic Treaty between West and East Germany in December 1972 paved the way for the admission of both German states to the United Nations, the SACP and ANC delegations came to East Berlin in May to set up diplomatic missions-in-exile. This occasion, and GDR support for Southern African liberation movements more broadly, gave the government an international stage for proclaiming not merely solidarity with third world liberation, but also an "organic" link between the socialist tradition of international anti-fascism and the struggle against racism. Even though the very different experience of solidarity among exiles and solidarity among

[13] The GDR pursued trade, educational, and cultural exchanges with newly independent third world countries and liberation movements as a means to greater international recognition; see Lamm and Kupper, *DDR und Dritte Welt* and, in English, Gareth M. Winthrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 1990). On the international dimension of commemorating the "victims of fascism," see Azaryahu, *Vom Wilhelmplatz zum Thälmannplatz*, 188–97; on the link between proletarian internationalism and anti-racism, see the speech by Herman Axen (SED Central Committee Secretary) at the special anti-apartheid session of the United Nations in Berlin, 25 May 1974, *Dokumente zur Außenpolitik der DDR: 1974* (Berlin: Staastverlag der DDR, 1978), 1020–8; here 1022.

[14] Gerhard Hahn *et al.*, *Außenpolitik der DDR–für Sozialismus und Frieden* (Berlin: Staatsverlag der DDR, 1974), 139.

grassroots activists at home has led to tensions in post-apartheid South Africa, many ANC and SACP members bear witness to this link as they continue to speak the language of socialist solidarity.[15] On the cultural front, GDR solidarity took the form of guest appearances of troupes from socialist countries from Cuba to Angola, and publication, in English and other languages alongside German, of the writings of exiles banned in their home countries.

More surprisingly perhaps, this solidarity also included staging in translation the works of non-communist non-exiles such as Fugard. An admirer of Brecht, Fugard was an avowed liberal rather than a socialist. His plays spoke to GDR audiences interested not only in solidarity with the oppressed majority in South Africa, but also in the local resonances of his depiction of dissidence and oppression in the most intimate as well as the public sphere. The scale and intensity of racialized brutality perpetrated by the apartheid state far exceeded the oppressive measures of the SED, and this should alert readers against premature generalizations about undifferentiated "totalitarianism", popularized more by ideologues' manipulations of Hannah Arendt's influential concept to fit the hardened polarizations of the Cold War than by her cogent analysis, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, of the dangerously unstable totalitarian *movements* unleashed by Hitler and Stalin a generation earlier.[16] Nonetheless, the impact of Fugard in the

[15] On the ANC delegation's visit to Berlin and subsequent domicile in the GDR, see the SED communiqué in *Dokumente der Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland: Beschlüße und Erklärungen des Zentralkomitees sowie seines Politbüros und seines Sekretariats* (Berlin: Dietzverlag, 1977), 14: 234–37; on the training of cadres, see Francis Meli (Ph.D. from Leipzig's Karl-Marx University), *History of the African National Congress: South Africa Belongs to Us* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), and Ellis and Sechaba, *Comrades against Apartheid*, 88.

[16] See Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2nd edn (New York: World Publishing Company, 1958), especially part three. For critical commentary on the limits of the totalitarian concept and of the presumed equation of Nazi and Stalinist tyranny, see Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin, eds., *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).