

## Socio – Political Specifity in Pinter's Plays

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### ABSTRACT

The present study tries to describe and analyze the socio-political specifity in plays of Harold Pinter such as *Ashes To Ashes*, *Mountain language*, *Birthday Party*, *Betrayal*, *The Dwarfs*, *No Man's Land*, *The lover*, *A Slight Ache* and *Party Time*. Rather than showing that the personal is political by dissolving the personal into political, Pinter has effectively dramatized the converse that the political is the personal among other social issues. In spite of limited development of individual character, Pinter has demonstrated the complex issues of interactions in the more overtly political plays mentioned above. In fact, through some images involving domestic violence, territorial struggles, linguistic conflict and general metaphors, Pinter creates situations that they need to be considered as socio-political representation of power.

**KEYWORDS:** Pinter, social, political, local, modern, post-modern.

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### INTRODUCTION

One of the most important characteristics of Pinter's plays is his attempt to transfer the exploration of complex local social interactions to the realm of political situation. In fact, through the procedures Pinter presents political imperatives which can be enumerated as the causes to reduce individuality to enmity. In the resistance of individuality to such reduction, the personal is not so much equated with the political as reinstated as a form of resistance to it. But Pinter's refusal to situate plays like *"One for the Road"* and *"Mountain language"* in specific historical locale has led criticism to such controversy that without such specifity we do not know what to be for and against.

What interests Pinter is exploration of modes of presupposition and self-justification that enable; such things as torture, murder and rape to be done in the name of or on behalf of citizens and government who might publicly or sincerely condemn them. What is dramatized is not these things but the process of self-justification that they promote and the differing consequences for the oppressors and the oppressed.

### DISCUSSION

In *"One for the Road"*, Nicolas as an interrogator, drives some of his sense of legitimacy and authority from his conviction that he speaks for a national consensus. Nicolas is a symbol of a unified group against a lone dissenter, and the existence of this unified group converts the dissenter into a traitor: "We are all patriots, we are as one, we share a common heritage. Except you, apparently. Pause. I feel a link, a bond. I share a commonwealth of interest. I am not alone. I am not alone (Pinter, 1986:51-52). The passage shows the social bond of fellowship that reinforces Nicola's conviction that what he is doing is justified. Similarly, the very bond excludes Victor not only from society but also from civil rights of which its members might otherwise enjoy. Here, the voice of exclusion seeks to derive its legitimacy from the voice of inclusion.

In *"Mountain language"*, the old woman justifies her unwillingness to speak. When the guard declares the new authority's rule, she remains still:

Prisoner

Mother, you can speak.

Pause.

Mother, I am speaking to you. You see? We can speak.

You can speak to me in our own language.

She is still.

You can speak.

Pause

Do you hear me?

Pause.

It's our language.

Pause.

Can't you hear me? Do you hear me?

She does not respond.( 21-22 )

Nicolas like many other characters of Pinter's plays is illuminated by some description of inherited cultural codes and ideological commitments. In fact, at the edge of civilized world, inhuman acts are justified by individuals who invoke general social bonds as a justification for abandoning them in the case of dissenting individuals. Here, Pinter conveys enough of the personal in social and political contexts through short details of individual characters who represent individuality rather than preceding and supplanting it .

"One for the Road" also suggests a new political emphasis on the use and abuse of power. The political ambiguity of this play is revealed through the use of cricket metaphors by the way Nicolas uses. This suggests English contexts of totalitarian regime in relation to the torture being afflicted to the up risers of North Ireland. Referring to political specificity, Pinter confirms this by commenting in an interview: "Militarily, this country (i.e. Britain) is as much a satellite of America as Czechoslovakia in Russia. Now the terms are not quite the same but the structures are the same. The relationships aren't quite the same, but so what ..." (Pinter, 1985:7-8).

In a similar pattern, "Mountain language" addresses the suppression of ethnic minorities particularly in their language, a play advertised as a parable about the torture and the fate of many minorities in different parts of the world. At a time, the young woman complains to the officer about her hand bitten and her waiting to see the family, the officer stepping towards her points out: "Now hear this. You are mountain people. You hear me? Your language is dead. It is forbidden . It is not permitted to speak your mountain language in this place . You cannot speak your language to your men. It is not permitted. Do you understand? You may not speak it. It is outlawed. You may only speak the language of capital. This is the only language permitted in this place. You will be badly punished if you attempt to speak mountain language in this place. This is a military decree (Pinter, 2001:10).

In his plays, Pinter is concerned with local and with irreducible multiplicity of things local. The important element in that is the re-emergence of social analysis, the individual, who is neither readily dismissible as a pawn in an ideological system, nor susceptible to being dismantled into a variety of social codes. The individual is an agent who functions at the site at which different forms of cultural and multicultural conflicts converge and require accommodation. In such terms, postmodern is as much concerned with emergent as with residual forms of social and cultural practice. It is certainly concerned with renewal of personal responsibility, individual creativity and social engagement, but it does so primarily in local social contexts. The main purpose of postmodernism is to enlarge the local and make it heterogeneous, so that an acceptance of irreducible multiplicity does not degenerate into the passive acquiescence of radical relativism. Thus, something larger is needed that can sustain the social bonds without aspiring to attain universality or threatening to be intolerant, exclusionary and oppressive.

As a postmodernist, Pinter depicts characters who struggle to come to terms with social complexity but they do not strive much to eliminate it. They are, in fact, unable or unwilling to attribute their individual problems to large abstract forces such as social, political, psychological and economical origin. In the same manner , they do not pursue solutions and only play out the local hand that has been dealt and that, too, with varying degree of imagination, enthusiasm, determination and intellect. Their collective recognition of irreducible difference does not precipitate a resign indifference (Chin, Interculturalism, Postmodernism, Pluralism, Performing Arts Journal ,Vol.33-34:79-82). In "No Man's Land", Spooner announces with pride his rejection of expectation, deploys the announcement strategically to promote hopes he is prepared to acknowledge neither to himself nor to others (Pinter, 1981:80 ).

When the political becomes overt in Pinter's plays, it tends to be one component of situations of larger social complexity. These political problems emerge from no clearly defined institutions and their resolution does not depend on any particular program. For Pinter's audiences, political thinking does not mean to have commitment to left or right political spectrum, but a requirement to explore the complexities of local social exchange in terms of local social contracts which arises from both the characters and their interactions. In the play "The lover", Sarah resists Richard's attempts to introduce afternoon games into their evening life by unsuccessfully stressing upon their formal satuts: "You've no right to question me. ... It was our arrangement . No questions of this kind" (1977:12) . Ruth in "The Homecoming" adjusts to challenge her proffered role with Teddy's family and demands: "All aspects of the agreement and conditions of employment would have to be clarified to our mutual satisfaction before we finalize the contract- a contract which would, of course, require signatures in the presence of witnesses (1978:93) . Len in " The Dwarfs" describes his relationship with the dwarfs in contractual

terms: "They do not stop work until the job in hand is finished, one way or another. They never run on a job. Oh, no. They're true professionals. Real professionals (1977:102).

In "The Caretaker", the relationship between Aston, Davies and Mick focuses upon the right of Davies and his responsibilities as a caretaker. Both Mick and Aston as brothers and putative owners, and Aston as a decorator, demonstrate the level of contractual generality and social commitments that consequently re-emerges conflict between the limited status of such contracts and the character's needs, hopes and expectations. Davies repeatedly tries to shore up his position with appeals to official papers left in Sidcup and to employee's rights asserted in conversations with previous employers: "I got my right. ... I might have been on the road but nobody's got more rights than I have. let's have a bit of fair play (19). James in "The Collection" tries to clarify his spousal claims on Stella in the light of Bill's strategic invocation of a stereotype that there is even contract above the level which ever regulates: "Every woman is bound to have an outburst of ... wild sensuality at one time or another. That's the way I look at it, any way. It's part of their nature"(151). The excerpts above help us understand Pinter's retroactive political claim that is voiced out through Petey: Stan, don't let them tell you what to do! (1991:86)

Social contracts emerge from social interaction and they are rarely explicit or exhaustive. Thus, they require continuous checking and renegotiation. Pinter's plays demonstrate the processes in actions. His plays not only deal with comparative simplicities of larger social governance that lead directly to political policies but also with the proliferating complexities of local community organization and reorganization. The important issue is relationship at micro-context level which determines the abstract relationship between the governing and the governed. The plays like "Mountain language", "One for the Road", and "Party Time" show the sources of brutal behaviour of the government agent against the individuals in small social and family contexts whose rights have been violated. In "A Slight Ache", "The Homecoming", "Tea Party" and "The lover", the strength of family bonds and in "The Collection", "Betrayal" and "No Man's Land" the strength of personal bonds exemplify the expectations, hopes and needs encountered in the local forms of interaction which provide a model for political context. By the way, when the characters do register such hopes and expectations, they flounder helplessly like James in "The collection" and Deeley in "Old Times". Sometimes, the characters sustain their hopes only through an intermittently indulged nostalgia for a former way of life, like "Hirst" in "No Man's Land", who first invokes it in his album and then dismisses it with: "We can't be expected to live like that (1981:108).

In Pinter's plays, characters make demands upon each other and appear frequently, no matter how often expectations are disappointed. It is this expectation which continues and may make the local larger, more satisfying and more durable that promotes both social bonds that links individuals to each other and the sense of violation which indicts political programs and initiative that fail to accommodate it. But such expectations are situated on a continuum of variable strength and scale as the characters struggle to reconcile competing local claims on their personal allegiances.

The conflict of personal values and political values are recurrent themes that manifest themselves in Pinter's plays as competing allegiances of various kinds on different scale that require the characters to constantly adjust themselves in complex situations. This recurring pursuit for greater and larger local relationships provides competing voices of modernism and postmodernism. Len, in the midst of such conflict between himself, Mark and Pete over divided loyalties, exclaims: "There must be somewhere else" (1977:107). The appeal is explicitly for another place, and implicitly for another kind of place, perhaps a more inclusive place. The need for a radical social transformation neither in the form of explicit expectation, nor in the course of subsequent events does the world of the dwarfs promise to be inclusive at maximum, satisfying and liberating. This kind of uncertainty about the scale of problems, the needed solutions and appropriate expectations not only provide the characters with unstable difficulties in social situations, but it also provides Pinter with important challenges and opportunities. It is in this context that Pinter does not allow the role of drama to be pre-occupied with postmodern local and with the socially particular in restricting his own exploration to merely local. The constant conflict for the characters is between the current actuality, future aspiration and nostalgic recollection which register the competing scale of co-existing postmodern and modern voices.

Pinter moves beyond the challenge for politics and politicians by linking the socially local to national and international contexts-the ones which reach beyond the normative boundaries of human experience. In his short play "Ashes to Ashe", the domestic experience of love, hatred and violence in middle-class marriage between Devlin and Rebecca manifests the catastrophic experience of millions of global victims of genocide, of related emotions and actions, and combination of small scale and large scope. "Devlin goes to her. He stands over her and looks down at her. He clenches his fist and holds it in front of her face. He puts his left hand behind her neck and grips it. He brings her head towards his fist. His fist touches her mouth. Devlin, kiss my fist. She does not move. He opens his hand and places the palm of

his hand on her mouth"( 2001:64-65). The local relationship may serve as an emblem of other social relationships, a complex means of connecting the disparate dimensions of human experience that helps us to understand the collective human weaknesses and strengths.

In an interview discussing the politics of "Ashes to Ashes", Pinter explains that he wrote this play out of the 'images and horror of man's inhumanity to man' which have haunted him since the end of the Second World War"(1998:80).What is evidently important here is the contradictions between masculinity and humanism. The script of "Ashes to Ashes" indicates that both characters Devlin and Rebecca are in their 'forties' and born after 1945. Therefore, the play dramatizes the holocaust memories with female desire, for misogynist authoritarianism nevertheless leaves political responsibility disturbingly ambiguous. There is no doubt that critical judgment of broader political implications and responsibilities of desire is further complicated by dynamic performance. There is tension of power between male and female actors which can be considered as a gendered structure or as a more temporary process in which it shifts from time to time . However , the violence of torture and exposure of authoritarian desire provide a critique of power which is explicitly dramatized in particular forms of the abuse of power in language. Thus, the structural blind-spots of these forms are most apparent in political implications which determine Pinter's drama spoken and unspoken conditions of possibility.

### Conclusion

In Pinter's plays, the explorations of discontinuous experience collectively register an ambitious effort to reach not only beyond the boundaries of local but also beyond the boundaries of human experience. Indeed, the recurring effort is to link apparently normative human experience to what would initially be perceived as lying outside that normative range. As a dramatist, Pinter challenges himself to move beyond the challenge of politics and politicians and links the socially local to the nationally and internationally larger contexts that reach beyond the normative boundaries of human experience. He approaches the local relationship as an emblem of other social relationships. Many of his plays are not only local and personal consequence but also social and political consequence. His remarkable inventive reconciliation of large scope of high modernism concerns with the smaller scale of post-modernism in its particularity which manages to extend the scope radically. What holds a society together is small community out of disparate individuals and larger society out of small communities. There are the modes of social interactions that give these institutions forums, debates, social legitimacy and function . The local site of social exchange is the one at which the claims of the individual in a small community context can most powerfully challenge or sustain, however these claims are formulated or presented in larger collective life.

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