

**Political Oppression and Social  
Exploitation in Some Plays  
by Harold Pinter**

**Dr. Omar Abdullah Bagabas**  
Head of the Department of European Languages  
Faculty of Arts and Humanities  
King Abdulaziz University



### ***Thesis statement***

This paper looks at the way political oppression and social victimization are exercised over a certain category of people in a capitalist society. Though it pays close attention to the domestic scene in a number of plays by Harold Pinter, it shows that the playwright's portrayal of this internal scene cannot keep itself sealed off or divorced from the external contemporary socio-political milieu. In fact, the paper argues that Pinter's plays cannot be understood in the absence of the socio-political circumstances that determine what goes on in the domestic scene. Moreover, the paper demonstrates how the following plays: *The Room* (1957), *The Birthday Party* (1958), *The Caretaker* (1960), and *The Dumb Waiter* (1960) dramatize the tension between two groups of society mainly the one that wields political power and exercises hegemony on the one hand and the other which is the recipient of political oppression and social exploitation represented by the downtrodden and the victimized members of society. Since the paper situates Pinter's plays within a socio-political context, the cultural and political backgrounds against which these plays were written are explored. The paper therefore shows that Pinter's early plays, mainly *The Room* and *The Caretaker* express the prevalent spirit of intolerance, hostility and racial discrimination against political refugees and alien laborers particularly during the era that followed the decline of British imperialism.

However, the victimization of the working class and the marginalization of ethnic minorities during the late 50s and the early 60s, which coincide with the period of time during which Pinter's plays were written show that though British imperialism had come to an end, Pinter's plays reflect British culture and outlooks toward the working class and ethnic minorities who poured into the country in search for jobs or as refugees in the post-colonial era. The fact that foreign laborers and refugees were still perceived in the same negative and biased way as the colonized people were proves that London - regarded as the imperial metropolis-continued its imperial-colonial manipulation and exploitation of a certain category of society at a time when "colonial violence, physical and psychological, was reproduced in

Britain" and felt most vehemently against the working people (Sinfield: 125). Hence the paper explores one aspect of colonialism around which most of Pinter's plays revolve, namely the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed, the master and the servant since the examination of this basic relationship between power and powerlessness explains the actions of Pinter's characters and accounts for their alienation from the outside world. While the paper focuses on the way language in some of Pinter's plays becomes the vehicle through which the character's isolation and fragmentation is reinforced, it concludes that Pinter participates in the perpetuation of a dominant social order that imposes its standards on non-conformists and dissenters whose chances for resistance against totalitarian regimes are almost non-existent.

### *A domestic scene not immune to external threats*

- 2 Perhaps it is appropriate to point out right at the start that the settings of the four plays chosen for this study share one common characteristic, and that is, their description of a domestic scene in which family members are engaged in trivial talk related to food, events in daily newspapers and the weather. The fact that Pinter's protagonists limit themselves to these topics shows the impact of the materialistic lives that they lead where it is inconceivable for them to go beyond the doors of their living rooms that almost shut them off and deprive them of the possibility of exploring other interesting aspects of their existence. Moreover, they intensify their feeling of suffocation, as they remain limited in their mundane conceptions. A quick look at the opening scene in these plays therefore reveals that they are centered around the living room in any British home where family members normally gather in the morning and in the evening. Hence the living room acts as the sanctuary that provides them with warmth and protection. However, what Pinter shows in these plays is that the home, which is supposed to be the shelter for its residents, is not immune to the external forces that threaten its stability and direct a blow at its very foundations. In other words, Pinter shows that the domestic scene is not sealed off from the socio-political one that

infringes on its borders in spite of its apparent exclusion from it. Hence Pinter's plays are primarily concerned with the presentation of socio-political issues whose impact is felt immediately at the domestic scene. More specifically, Pinter portrays the workings of politics as a repressive force that tightens its hold on the individual and deprives him of his freedom as it resorts to various methods to propagate its ideological principles and as it recruits personnel to further the interests of totalitarian regimes. In fact, the environment in which Pinter was brought up "in the East London of the 1930s and the 1940s" where it would have been inconceivable for 'a Jewish boy' to isolate himself from the contemporary political scene played a vital role in developing his 'political consciousness' to the extent that it reflected in the kind of drama that he wrote. (Brater & Cohn: 129). Moreover, it was an environment characterized by violence and tension that accounted for the feeling of insecurity and fear experienced by its overwhelming majority of aliens. Martin Esslin sheds light on this very fact as he states that

The East End where Pinter grew up as a child of the nineteen-thirties was a political battlefield. A large Jewish population mainly refugees from the great Russian programs of 1905, but swelled by newer arrivals after the First World War and later, the victims of Hitler, was battling for a foothold and a livelihood among cockneys, Chinese, Negroes and Irish (Esslin: 32-33).

One of these political refugees is certainly Rose in *The Room* whose name is probably suggestive of the better future life that she desires for herself away from the vigilant eye of the agents of the fascist regime. The fact that she is in her sixties when the name Rose is symbolic of youth is an indication that it is not late for her to start a fresh and peaceful life in a more stable present. However, since she is one of the victims of political oppression who cannot wipe out her historical past, her continuous references to the cold weather and the hostile environment reveal the tremendous depth of her psychological anxiety and fear for her own safety. Though she seems to be enjoying peace of mind as

she attends to routine household chores; she is perturbed that her private room may be intruded upon. It is after all her only secure shelter that she fears exclusion from. Hence she is currently satisfied with her warm room that keeps the cold out. For Rose, the room is her sanctuary that keeps social coldness and indifference out; the coldness brought about by patriarchal dominance and capitalistic exploitation. For this reason, Rose persists in keeping herself to herself in the room and she seeks to disconnect herself from anything that may link her to her roots or past that she has been striving to bury. Thus she tells Mr. and Mrs. Sands: "We are very quiet. We keep ourselves to ourselves. I never interfere. I mean, why should I? We've got our room. We don't bother anyone else. That's the way it should be" (*The Room*: 115). Later on, Rose repeats the same words to the landlord, Mr. Kidd as she says to him: "We're quiet here. We 've just moved into this district" (121). Thus Rose seeks to keep the distance between her private internal world within the boundaries of her room on the one hand and the public external world that she fears and tries to shut herself from on the other.

In fact, Rose's introductory speech draws a contrast between two polar opposites: the extremely cold weather outside their room and the warmth and coziness within; the comfortable room in which she resides with Bert and the damp basement that she is obsessed to know who its residents are and the sense of security that their room provides for Bert and the fear of his being exposed to danger outside it. While Rose fails to elicit any emotional response from Bert who remains detached from her throughout her conversation with him, Bert's aloofness, taciturnity and coldness define the nature of relationship between the couple. In other words, Rose's and Bert's failure to establish any means of constructive communication sets the pace for what is to come when evasive rather than direct responses to questions tell us a great deal about the characters and what they are trying to hide from each other. As an example, when Mr. Kidd comes into Rose's room under the pretense that he is checking some pipes, the conversation turns to family matters that Mr. Kidd is rather cautious not to disclose to Rose out of desire to keep them personal and confidential and probably out of fear that he may be

connected with a persecuted background. Hence he prefers not to impart information related to his dead sister as a security measure that his family history is not traced down. For the same reason, he only assumes that "his mum was a Jewess" (109). But when the conversation gets too personal and Rose delves into family history, he changes the topic and brings her to the present moment that confines Rose once more within the territory of her safe haven. Thus when Rose asks him: "What did she (i.e., Mr. Kidd's sister) die of?", he responds first in a way that shows absent-mindedness: "Who?". But when Rose repeats the question and reminds him that she asked him about his sister, he chooses not to answer the question of past tense by using the perfect tense in the following statement: "I've made ends meet" (109). While the audience may wonder if some sort of resemblance links Rose to Mr. Kidd's sister, the shift to the present moment intensifies Rose's fear of a possible intrusion of something unpredictable into her apparently secure shelter.

### ***Evasive communication***

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The incident shows how incommunicability between Rose and Mr. Kidd is not attributed so much to failure of communication as much as to Mr. Kidd's unwillingness to open up his thoughts in such a way that they may be used against him. In other words, language becomes a weapon to conceal rather than reveal information about individuals and possibly used as a way to ensure domination or victimization over others. While Pinter states: "To enter someone else's life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility", he also shows that we also communicate our thoughts to others in spite of evasive communication. Hence he says: "I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is continual evasion, desperate reargued attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves" (*Between The Lines*: 25). Interestingly enough, Rose who says in response to Mr. Sand's statement: "Mrs Hudd seems to know Mr Kidd very well", "No, I wouldn't say that. As a matter of fact, I don't know him at all. We're very quiet. We keep ourselves to ourselves" (115) repeats

the last part of the quotation from Pinter's article. Victor L. Cahn rightly observes that characters use language in Pinter's plays as "a vehicle for protection rather than communication" (Cahn: 5). He also attributes "repeated questions, awkward pauses, silence, and repetitions" and reliance on "colloquialisms, professional jargon, and convoluted word patterns" to the characters' reluctance to reveal "a tidbit about themselves or their background that might create a point of vulnerability" (3). Hence they resort to the aforementioned strategies "to further shelter themselves" (3), as this is quite evident from the conversation between Rose and Mr. Kidd. However, Pinter shows that evasive communication is revealing because "So often, below the words spoken, is the thing known and unspoken" (*Between The Lines*: 25). In other words, Rose's repeated reference to her warm room is one way that reveals her fear of the external social and physical coldness. Moreover, her obsession to know who lives in the basement conceals her emotional anxiety and her fear of the disclosure of the past. Thus she desires to keep herself to herself though she cannot liberate herself even in her room.

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Moreover, Mr. Kidd's evasiveness is further observed when she asks him how many floors he has got in his house; a question that any landlord should be able to answer. However, he responds: "I don't count them now" (108). While Rose's anxious mind is revealed to us particularly as the topic of discussion touches on the prospect of having new tenants or revolves around her surroundings that she wants to ensure that they continue to be the safe shelter that keeps social coldness out, her fear and anxiety that her surroundings will betray her drive her to acquire more information about them. However, the sense of seeming security that she wants to enjoy at home is immediately shattered with the intrusion of the painful past that she escapes from and tries to hide, if not suppress all the while she has been a tenant of Mr. Kidd's room. The fact that she is a tenant or more precisely a political refugee throws her into the lot of the homeless, the victimized and the colonized who do not have a proper home of their own since they may suffer eviction once their tenancy contract expires or in case the landlord decides to let other tenants instead. After Mr. Kidd comes into her room, she meets the

young couple, Mr. & Mrs. Sands who inform her that they are "looking for a place, ..., somewhere quiet, and (they) knew this district was quiet" (117). However, Rose tells them that they "won't find any rooms vacant in this house". Rose's anxiety is obvious throughout her conversation with the young couple as she does her best to keep them away lest they take her room, the secure sanctuary that keeps her from the trauma of the past. Her conversation with the young couple may be regarded as the harbinger that deconstructs the pillars of her sanctuary. In other words, she senses that they are the new tenants who will take up her lodging and yet she is adamant to send them away even if she has to resort to lies or assume the position of the landlord, an authoritative agent of capitalism.

While the young couple rely on the authority of "the man in the basement" to establish the fact that room "Number seven" is vacant, Rose beats them at their own ground as she relies on the authority of a more powerful man who is no other than the landlord himself to prove her point and defend her argument that "he told (her) he was full up" (118). It is after all Rose's fear of eviction that explains her behaviour toward the new strangers and possible future tenants. Though the audience may wonder why Rose has acted in this manner, it is not until Mr. Kidd comes to tell her about the man who insists on seeing her that we understand Rose's fear of the intrusion of the external world or the return of past history. But it is at this moment when Mr. Kidd comes to tell her about the man "downstairs (who)'s been there the whole week-end" (120) that Rose finds the right moment to tell him about the "two people in here just now (who) said this room was going vacant". What is interesting in the following conversation between Mr. Kidd and Rose is that Rose wants the landlord to attend to an immediate business taking place in the present and having a bearing on her current circumstances while the latter hankers back to the past that Rose wants to flee from. Moreover, evasive communication describes Mr. Kidd's responses to Rose's questions as the following excerpt demonstrates:

Rose. Mr. Kidd, what did they mean about this room?  
Mr Kidd. What room?

Rose. Is this room vacant?

Mr Kidd. Vacant?

Rose. They were looking for the landlord.

Mr Kidd. Who were?

Rose. Listen, Mr Kidd, you are the landlord, aren't you? There isn't any other landlord?

Mr Kidd. What? What's that got to do with it? I don't know what you're talking about. I've got to tell you, that's all. ... (119).

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The excerpt above provides an example where language becomes a vehicle to withhold rather than impart information. In other words, through the repetition of Rose's words such as 'room' and 'vacant', Mr. Kidd uses language to preserve his privacy and keep his thoughts from disclosure. However, the unanswered questions, the pauses, the repetitions and the gaps tell us more about the characters because Pinter believes that "below the word spoken, is the thing known and unspoken" (*Between The Lines*: 25). Evasive communication therefore reveals the personality of the speaker in spite of the fact that he keeps his thoughts to himself. Hence it is obvious that Mr. Kidd chooses not to respond to Rose's questions related to the vacancy or occupancy of the room, as he has been evasive earlier on in responding to her questions related to his family history. Moreover, Mr. Kidd's mind is preoccupied with one thing, and that is, telling Rose about the man who wants to see her and therefore, he cannot focus on any other issues. Meanwhile, Rose is primarily concerned about her status and she is anxious if the new tenants are going to take up her room. The incident clearly illustrates that Rose is worried that she may lose her only secure shelter. Her fear and anxiety account for her regression or inward retreat in an attempt to escape from painful past memories. Like Mr. Kidd who is rather reticent, reserved and cautious about revealing family history and whose regression from the external world is one symptom that confirms his schizophrenia, Rose experiences the same symptoms of a split that disrupts her normal relations with her surroundings. Hence Rose's feelings of insecurity - attributed to her fear of submission to power or domination - account for her life of detachment and withdrawal.

### ***Riley's intrusion***

According to Harry Guntrip, a schizophrenic's fear of subjection to a higher authority leaves him "feeling cut off, shut off, out of touch" with the rest of the world and also feeling alienated from other people (17). This symptom applies to Rose whose alienation is apparent right from the start of the play since neither her food nor her words succeed in bridging the gap between herself and her husband or her surroundings. Moreover, as her thoughts oscillate between inside and outside, the room and the basement, the past and the present, her words are loaded with her anxiety of a possible intrusion of the past. In fact, it is her anxiety that causes her to repress the past. This is quite evident when Riley comes up to convey a message to her from her father asking her "to come home" (124). Riley's intrusion therefore evokes in Rose feelings of exile and banishment that her family suffered due to political oppression. However, before he conveys the message, Rose suspects that it infringes upon the privacy of her secure shelter that she is not willing to part with. Since she does not want to resurrect her past family history which is a constant reminder of pain and anguish to her, she behaves in a way that reveals her schizophrenia reflected in her desire to disconnect or abolish ties with the external world and rather withdraw within. Thus she says to Riley: "We're settled down here, cosy, quiet, and our landlord thinks the world of us, and we're his favourite tenants" (123). In other words, Rose's long verbal assault against Riley in which she becomes so hysterical is meant to reinforce her belonging to the world that she inhabits rather than the world that Riley wants her to leave to, that is, the world of her father or patriarchal hegemony where she is reduced to the role of the subjected daughter.

Perhaps it may be appropriate at this junction to draw attention to the contrast between Rose and Bert as far as their reactions to Riley's intrusion is concerned. While she rages in a way that reveals her uncontrolled feminine anger, Bert resorts to an act of violence rather than words to show that the masculine world that relies heavily on action is so different from the

feminine one. Hence Rose wants to send the message across that she is perfectly satisfied with the here-and-now of her post-imperial room that structures everything for her, which implies that she is dissatisfied with the long distanced time-space of her father's home. No wonder that she repudiates or defies the father's home at the present moment because of its association with the past primarily the war and the holocaust that she wants to wipe out from her memory. However, we observe a change in the way Rose treats Riley as her initial verbal assault - her only weapon to defend herself against the intrusion of the past - gives way to tender feelings reflected in touching "his eyes, the back of his head and his temples with her hands" (125) just before Bert's return. It is at this critical moment when Riley has succeeded in triggering off Rose's memory of her connection to her family that she is torn between a desire to respond to his call on the one hand and her desire to turn her back to the past to ensure that she continues to enjoy the feeling of security in the present. But apart from that moment of conflicting emotions, she has been suppressing the past because of its association with painful memories for her.

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Like Pinter whose "childhood was disturbed by the war as he experienced the insecurity of evacuation from his familiar surroundings into alien environment" (Peacock: 15), Rose's recollection of her unsettled past accounts for her wish that she would never return home. Thus when Riley repeats his statement that her father wants her to come home, she responds frantically: "Home? Go now. Come on. It's late. It's late (124). Now that Rose is primarily concerned with her present situation, she wants to forget anything that takes her to the past. Moreover, when Riley calls her by her original name, Sal, he discloses the family secret that she has been repressing all along and causing her anxiety and fear. While Rose wants Riley to understand her present situation and see the impossibility of her return, he also wants her to see that she cannot liberate herself from the painful past. Moreover, her room does not secure her isolation from the reproduction of a patriarchal hegemony in the figure of Bert particularly that he commits an act of murder in it at the end of the play.

### *Riley's murder*

The fact that Bert's murder of Riley takes place in Rose's room is not without implications. First of all, when Bert inflicts the act of violence against Riley, he seeks to wipe out anything that connects him and his wife to the past in his final attempt to increase his sense of present security and also ascertain his sense of belonging to the present and the place that he lives in. In other words, the violent physical act is a masculine deed that aims at severing any ties or connections with the painful past. Moreover, Riley represents the subaltern or the marginalized in a post-imperial capitalistic society whose blindness, color, Irish name and race categorize him under the powerless, the victimized and the exploited. In fact, Riley whose name begins with an R like Rose connects Rose to her past and the two characters share many things in common particularly the same history of victimization that brings them emotionally together. But this brief emotional tie is immediately undone once Bert returns. Hence his act of violence against Riley as he is struck, "knocked down and kicked on the "head against the gas-stove several times" and also referred to as the "NEGRO" (126) shows that Bert carries out the function of the patriarchal and the colonial oppressor of the weak and the under-privileged groups of society. While Pinter's inclusion of people of diverse races and different backgrounds such as the Jews, the blacks and the Irish in his plays widen their appeal to an international audience; he also wants to show that these people irrespective of their origin are the victims of social injustices and oppressive political practices. In *The Room*, Riley is certainly one of these victims.

After Bert tells Rose that he "bumped" one car which would not move on his way home, he repeats the same act of violence against Rose's father's messenger who is regarded as "lice" (126), a derogatory term that reveals Bert's utter contempt and sheer bias against a blind black man. While Rose stands at the end "clutching her eyes" and repeating the words: "Can't see", we are left wondering if she has come to the realization that her father's home that she has been repudiating is in fact transferred to her own room as her husband assumes the patriarchal role that confirms his

exploitation and victimization of the oppressed and the weak. In other words, what Pinter shows in *The Room* is that the political oppression that Rose fears and her repudiation of the patriarchal hegemony occurs in the presumably safe sanctuary that she believes it to be since she is in fact victimized, colonized and dominated by another patriarchal figure, namely Bert. It is therefore obvious that *The Room* is a play that dramatizes the struggle for domination in a capitalistic society.

### *Davies as victim of a capitalist society*

12 This theme is further explored in *The Caretaker*, "a play about two brothers and a tramp in a room" in the words of John Russell Taylor (Wagner: xiv). However, this tramp named Davies is another victim of the capitalist society that discards the individual when he is no longer useful like any other commodity that has been used up and then thrown away. According to Herbert Marcuse, the "consumer economy and the politics of corporate capitalism have created a second nature of man which ties him libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form (and where) the market has always been one of exploitation and thereby of domination" (Marcuse: 11). Moreover, Davies is representative of the thousand homeless or displaced individuals or colored immigrants living in East London who have suffered discrimination and ill treatment in a hostile post-war London that re-imported the imperial/colonial exploitation and manipulation as it has been implemented in the colonized countries. In fact, he was in the service of empire "overseas" where he had "spent half (his) life there (i.e., "in the colonies)" as he tells Mick and confirms later on that he "was over there. (He) was one of the first over there" (*The Caretaker*: 59-60). Hence Davies's youth has been wasted away in furthering the cause of imperialism that has certainly benefited from his life-long service and yet when he is no longer useful or when his youth has passed away since he is not "young any more" (18), he is left to suffer homelessness and wander about in search for shelter. Pinter is therefore critical of imperialistic expansions that have neglected domestic concerns and failed to provide adequate housing and proper care for

thousands of youths like Davies. In other words, imperialism has a bearing on the exploitation of the working class in particular. In the words of Althusser:

Imperialism tore off the 'peaceful mask of the old capitalism. The concentration of industrial monopolies, their subordination to financial monopolies, had increased the exploitation of the workers and of the colonies (Althusser: 95).

This is exactly what we see in *The Caretaker* that shows how the working class is being exploited and victimized by being seduced into cheap labour. In fact, the play demonstrates how Davies who represents the homeless is ironically driven out and excluded from his home country though he is invited to "sit down" as the play begins. In other words, when Aston invites him to sit down, the invitation carries a symbolic meaning, as it is an indication that Davies is cared for. However, it is ironic that Aston extends the invitation when there is not a chair about in the shabby and disorganized room for Davies to sit on. It is only when Aston realizes this fact that he "looks around for a chair, sees one lying on its side by the rolled carpet at the fireplace, and starts to get it out" for his guest (16). Now that Davies has been offered a proper chair, he begins to pour out his grievances since he has not "had a proper sit down" (16) for so long and as he has been on the run though he has not "been so well lately. (He has) had a few attacks" (18). The first impression that we therefore get of Davies is that of a worn out and embattled individual who "couldn't find a seat, not one" because all the other seats - which is certainly a reference to a proper home and shelter - have been taken by, "Poles, Greeks, Blacks, the lot of them, all them aliens had it. And they had me working there ... they had me working ..." (17).

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### ***Discrimination against foreign laborers & second-class citizens***

While Davies complains that he is the target of discrimination and exploitation since he has been denied a proper seat, the above

speech expresses the spirit of intolerance, racial prejudice and hostility toward aliens in general, particularly immigrants who poured into Britain in the late 50s and early 60s from the countries that gained their independence from British imperialism such as India and the subcontinent in addition to the refugees "from the great Russian programs of 1905" and "the victims of Hitler" (Esslin: 33). In fact, those immigrants and refugees settled in east London and their overwhelming majority was classified as working classes who struggled to make two ends meet. Interestingly enough, a "family of Indians" (*The Caretaker*: 22) happen to live in the house next to Aston's and Mick's. This piece of information disclosed to Davies arouses his distrust and perhaps his contempt for "them blacks" (17) who are looked down upon as intruders into a country that is supposed to be exclusively for white subjects. Hence he asks Aston: "How many more Blacks you got around here then?" and when Aston expresses his shock at the question by saying "What?", Davies repeats the same question. However, he chooses not to respond and he changes the conversation to a topic that relates more to Davies's needs at the present moment, and that is, the issue of comfortable shoes that will fit him so that he can get his identification papers from Sideup. While Davies is considered like an alien who cannot prove his identity without the papers that he "can't move without (since) they tell who (he is)" and he is therefore "stuck without them" (29), it is unfortunate that they have been kept in possession of an unidentified man for "fifteen years", i.e., ever since "the war" (30). If he is looked at as an alien, it is ironic that he has a negative attitude toward other aliens.

Later on, when Aston asks him: "Welsh, are you?", he only gets an evasive replay: "Eh?". Then Aston repeats the question: "You Welsh" and Davies pauses for a while before he says: "Well, I been around, you know ... what I mean ... I been about ..." (34). It is therefore obvious that Davies feels embarrassed whenever the question of his ethnic origin is brought up particularly at a time when ethnic origin played a vital role in classifying or categorizing British society. In fact, some people not only at the time the play was written but also nowadays are humiliated when they are asked personal questions related to their racial and ethnic

background, an issue approached with great care and utmost sensitivity in British society in particular with its move toward the creation of a multi-cultural community where such concerns are relegated to the back scene. However, they spring up because they have been bequeathed to British society from the colonialist era when a sharp division and a system of stratification were erected between the colonizer and the colonized. Hence racial prejudice and feelings of cultural ascendancy have their origin in British imperialism. No wonder the attitudes, "feelings and behaviour of native white people (like Davies) towards the black and brown migrant workers were influenced by the knowledge that these migrants had been subject people of the British Empire" as Layton-Henry argues (1). But while Davies cannot get rid of the stereotypical perceptions of aliens who have no right to deprive him of a job opportunity, his masters who represent governmental authority still classify him as an alien himself, victimize him and exclude him too. In other words, a purely arbitrary system that relies on division, social stratification and exclusion tears British society apart and widens the gulf not only between British citizens and aliens but also among the British citizens themselves where the question of race, color and ethnic background has a bearing on social supremacy or superiority. Hence Davies feels that he is classified among the under-privileged social group that cannot claim to have the same equal rights that he is adamant to defend.

Shortly afterwards, when Mick asks him if he was "born and bred in the British isles?" he promptly answers: "I was" (42) out of a desire to ascertain his sense of belonging and also differentiate himself from the foreigners who do not stand on an equal footing with him when it comes to the question of employment and citizenship rights. But it is ironic that Davies should be treated in a way that reflects racial discrimination in Britain if his claim is true that he had been born and bred in the British Isles. Moreover, one would wonder why Davies has been "going around under an assumed name (which is) not (his) real name" (30). In fact, he informs Aston that the "name (he has) been going under (is) Jenkins. Bernard Jenkins". But he adds, "it's no good going on with that name. (He) got no rights" (29). Like Rose in *The Room* who goes under the disguise of an adopted name to

escape the persecution of the fascists and protect herself, Davies has to go under an assumed name to hide his racial origin. Hence it is a safety measure that probably keeps his family history confidential. However, it is ironic that Davies can neither represent himself by a pseudo name that he chooses to meet his existential needs nor by a real one, which is insulting to him. Thus he falls under the category of subaltern classes who live in the periphery and suffer marginalization since he must be represented by the papers in Sidcup. However, he does not express sympathy for the immigrants whom he sees as intruders though the country relies on them for its redevelopment since they take up dirty jobs shunned by native British subjects.

While most of the colored immigrants poured into Britain from former colonies, Kay and Miles hold the opinion that their legal status was subordinated to their socially signified status as they were regarded as 'colored people' (Kay & Miles: 168). It is therefore clear that the sense of racial prejudice against immigrants who were regarded as 'subordinates' who cannot stand on equal footing with British citizens was at its peak when *The Caretaker* was produced in 1960. In fact, the repeated derogatory remarks by Davies against black immigrants reflect the spirit of antagonism against them and portend the tension that exists in Britain as the society is divided between 'we' and 'them'. As an example, Davies conceives of blacks as dirty people who mess the toilet and probably pollute the country just because they happen to live in the same neighborhood with or right next door to white people. Moreover, Davies attributes the noise that Aston complains that it disturbs his sleep to black people "making noises, coming up through the walls" (32). If we think of the room as Great Britain, climbing over its walls is an obvious reference to their trespassing into the country that they bring havoc and trouble into. Hence they shoulder the responsibility for any tension, disturbance or riot occurring within its walls. By looking down on immigrants and expressing hostile attitudes toward them, Davies reflects common views of the time toward colored people seen in British eyes as nuisance. Pinter therefore draws an unfavorable picture of British society where tension will always exist between people who do not share the same cultural and ethnic backgrounds

and where the distant Other is always blamed for any domestic violence or disturbance due to the lack of harmony between the two distinct groups and the absence of tolerance that curtails hatred and racial prejudice.

*Davies is treated like other immigrants*

However, these immigrants share Davies's fate as they are invited and welcomed by the government to take up certain positions and yet they are exploited or victimized. Similarly, Davies is invited to take the position of the caretaker. But eventually he is excluded and thrown out into the street. Thus he meets the same destiny of the immigrants and refugees whom he claims to be "treating (him) like dirt" when Mick does the same to him and forces him out of the house. What Davies is not aware of at the moment he complains that the immigrants treat him like dirt is that they have been treated in the same way by imperialists. Moreover, what we see in the course of the play is that the power holders or the representatives of governmental authority, namely Mick and Aston will soon treat him like dirt. This becomes evident when Mick in particular confides in Davies that he is "thinking of taking over the running of this place ... a bit more efficiently (as he has) got a lot of ideas, a lot of plans" (59). Thus Mick is a political or bureaucratic leader who knows how to run the place or the country better. If we think of the house as Britain, then the message behind excluding inviting Davies by his masters and then excluding him is very clear. One reason that justifies looking at the room as Britain is the lengthy description of the setting that shows that the random environment of the room is in dire need of fixing, repairing, rebuilding and re-decorating just as London in the post-war and the post-imperial era was in need of development too.

For this demanding task, the two brothers would like to hire the slave-service of someone like Davies who will do all the "dirty job" for "a few bob" (28) just as the Indians and the Pakistanis are paid very low wages for very tiring and time-consuming jobs that the British citizens regard as being beneath them socially. Hence cheap labour offered by immigrants contributed to the

development of the city just as Davies is hired to take care of Aston's and Mick's house. It is therefore clear that Davies and the immigrants have a lot in common. But he still expresses prevalent antagonistic attitudes towards them since he "espouses the kind of racist attitudes that accompanied the call for immigration controls (though) he is the indignant victim of racial prejudice" as Woodroffe argues (505). In other words, while negative perceptions of the Other were widespread during the colonialist era, "the prejudices and attitudes of superiority most strongly bred in the colonial situation were further disseminated among the population in Britain" in the post-imperial era (Layton-Henry: 7). Hence Davies speaks for the age when the immigrants were maltreated, called bad names such as 'Pakky' or 'Blacky' and considered as people who "have no history" (Gramsci: 294). But Davies's contemptuous attitude toward foreigners though he is asked by Mick if he is "a foreigner" himself (42) may be justifiable on economic grounds since they take up the job that he thinks that he has a better or stronger claim to fill. The fact that he has taken a number of menial positions that some British youth at the time might have felt embarrassed to do such as "clearing the floor, clearing up the tables, doing a bit of washing up" (18) shows his willingness to compete with the foreigners for the cheap labour that the country hires them for. But simultaneously he wants to defend his rights particularly his right to job opportunities that he can fill as good and efficient as the foreigners can.

In fact, he makes a reference to a certain governmental policy that aims at recruiting British citizens in place of foreigners if the former category is qualified for the task. Hence he says: "What they want to do, they're trying to do away with these foreigners, you see, in catering. They want an Englishman to pour their tea, that's what they want, that's what they're crying for. It's only common sense, en't?" (36). Davies is therefore an advocate of such a policy that favours the replacement of foreign labour by a national one, which is common sense, according to him. But though he is invited to take up the job of the caretaker, the two brothers treat him in the same way a subaltern is treated taking advantage of his present circumstances and his need of some

money to satisfy his essential needs. The two brothers therefore manipulate Davis so that he may be used cheaply and then discriminated against. But eventually the elder brother excludes him because he makes loud noises while he is asleep. The play therefore dramatizes the process of invitation and the very cold exclusion of Davies by the new British subjects who have thought of plans for their future leaving him to wonder: "What about me?" (83). While Aston will "have a workshop (and he) could do a bit of woodwork. Simple woodwork to start" (49) and Mick has "got plenty of other interests. (He has) got (his) own business to build up. .. (He) got to think about expanding ... in all directions" (83), Davies has to meet the same fate that awaits laborers in a capitalist society where his masters expect him "to do all the dirty work all up and down them stairs just so (he) can sleep in this lousy filthy hole every night... Treating (him) like a bloody animal" (76).

### *The plays as reproduction of a colonial encounter*

The play therefore shows how workers are exploited, dominated and manipulated in a capitalist society where the gap between the rich and the poor is bound to get wider than narrower. Hence Davies's story is a reproduction of capitalist exploitation and colonial encounter between the oppressor and the oppressed. In fact, the relationship between Davies and the two brothers is defined within this framework particularly when Mick says to Davies: "You remind me of my uncle's brother. He was always on the move, that man. Never without his passport" (40). But it is ironic that Davies reminds Mick of his uncle's brother when these two men stand at polar opposites. While the uncle's brother is a former imperialist who has been all over the colonies: Hong Kong, India and Jamaica, Davies has not been able to move as far as Sidcup to fetch his identification papers because he cannot find the right size shoes. Though Davies has been "in the colonies", there is nothing to suggest his enjoyment of any of the privileges that Mick's uncle's brother has enjoyed. While the former "had a penchant for nuts" (40), the latter has "eaten (his) dinner off the best of plates" (18). Hence the difference between these two men's

lifestyles is stark indeed, as British imperialism has lavished much of its wealth on the first one who cracks nuts out of pleasure and desire to try tasting something delicious and different while the second one has lived on the wealth of the wealthy. In other words, he is so impoverished that he has to pick up whatever tiny scraps the wealthy leave over to quench his hunger.

Moreover, while the uncle's brother has always been in possession of his proper identification card in the form of a passport that gives him the unlimited freedom to move about as he likes, Davies is the victim of a system of classification that strips him of his real identity and forces him to go under a false name. Hence his movement is confined on account of his lack of a proper identification card and his need of good shoes. Besides, the uncle's brother "had a marvellous stop watch" considered as a commodity when Davies lacks basic essentials of life. Later on, when Davies is appointed as the caretaker, he finds himself exploited because he does not have a "clock". Hence he complains to Aston: "I need a clock to tell the time! I mean, if you can't tell what time you're at you don't know where you are" (71). But in spite of the stark differences between the two men: Mick's uncle's brother and Davies, Mick segregates both men by calling the first one "Sid" and the second one "Jen ... kins" (71). In other words, Mick's insistence on calling Davies by the name that he goes under rather than by his real name - which parallels his calling of the uncle's brother by the name 'Sid' rather than by his real name - reinforces his segregation of Davies and his application of a system of classification and division. Furthermore, it points to his deliberate intention to marginalize him in preparation for his exploitation and victimization. Hence Mick's reference to his uncle's brother foreshadows the colonial encounter between him and Davies and repeats the imperial domination and its exercise of arbitrary authority and power over the weak.

The fact that Mick sees the two men: his uncle's brother and Davies in the same negative way as this is inferred from the following statement about the first man: "Your spitting image he was" (40) confirms that Mick does not treat Davies like a respectable human being. But rather he treats him "like dirt" and "like a bloody animal" (76). In fact, the dehumanizing images

associated with Davies who is "nothing else but a wild animal" (82) and "a barbarian" (83) in Mick's eyes prove that Davies has been robbed of the dignity that he deserves as a fellow man and shows how far Mick has gone in reducing his status and exploiting him. Not only does Mick see Davies in a bad light as "an old barbarian" (44), but also he directs other charges at him as "an old scoundrel ... an old robber (who does not) belong in a nice place like this" (44) because "Ever since (he) come into this house there's been nothing but trouble" (82). While Davies has lived all his life trying to cajole the world into providing shelter for him, he is eventually excluded since he does not belong there. We are therefore left with the impression that the British society has failed to cater for the needs of tramps who are driven into the street after they have been marginalized and exploited. It is ironic that denying them their right to feel the sense of belonging to the society that should be responsible for them entails that they are excluded and segregated.

***An encounter between a deviant artist & agents of a  
totalitarian authority***

21

If *The Caretaker* is a reproduction of a colonial encounter between the oppressor and the oppressed and if it provides an example of capitalist exploitation and imperialistic hegemony and domination, *The Birthday Party* shows how the figures of a totalitarian authority, namely Goldberg and McCann, who work for a certain political organization, use their oppressive power to force Stanley who has taken shelter in a boarding house run by Meg and her husband Petey to conform to the ideology of the organization that they represent. It should be known that Stanley is an artist, a pianist in fact who has enjoyed the freedom to play "the piano all over the world. All over the country". Moreover, he is "considering a job at the moment (at) a night club. In Berlin... Playing the piano. A fabulous salary". Then he will 'pay a flying visit' to "Constantinople. Zagreb. Vladivostock. It's around the world tour" (*The Birthday Party*: 32). But the representatives of the repressive regime seek to restrict his movement and deny him the opportunity to pursue his intellectual and creative

achievements. As he tells Meg, he "had a unique touch. Absolutely unique" (32). But "they carved (him) up. Carved (him) up" and as the story goes, when he "went down there to play (his next concert), "the hole was closed, the place was shuttered up, not even a caretaker. They'd locked it up" (33). While Stanley does not explicitly state who 'they' are, 'they' refers to the totalizing form of power that robs the artist and the intellectual of his creativity and forces him to conform to a certain mode of behaviour. In fact, M.W. Rowe who studies the play in relation to Heidegger's *Being and Time*; one of the most important documents of existentialism regards the 'they' "as a subtle, unobtrusive but utterly relentless pressure towards averageness and social conformity; it is a set of mores, a whole complex of acceptable modes of thought and behaviour which acts to bring the dissenting individual in line with the group" (Rowe: 91).

Hence authoritarian violence alienates the talented individual as it locks up the gates that lead to his ascendancy. What is therefore left for him is only the attempt to resist repressive authority or else succumb to it. In fact, Stanley has been resisting the conformity to what Louis Althusser calls "a higher authority" (qtd. in Silverstein: 27), or the system of "dominant cultural codes" that expects individuals to assimilate themselves into the cultural mainstream that may be termed 'the Other', even before he meets Goldberg and McCann (Silverstein: 20). Right from the start of the play, we see that there is tension between submission or conformity to a dominant social order reflected in Meg's repeated attempts to control Stanley on the one hand and Stanley's resistance of Meg's attempts to bring him to heel and subject him to her dominance. Thus the initial meeting between Meg and Stanley foreshadows his subsequent meeting with Goldberg and McCann where the same tension between conformity to and resistance of a dominant cultural code or a controlling social force is repeated. Edward Said refers to this force or 'the Other' as "system of values ... (which) dominates from above without at the same time being available to everything and everyone it dominates" (9). In the light of Said's definition, Stanley has been forced to conform to a dominant social order right from the start of the play. While Meg insists on his conformity to it by saying

"please" when he asks her for "some tea" and also when she asks him to "say sorry first" for having failed to "say please" (27-28), Meg in the words of Marc Silverstein

invokes the highly coded discourse of etiquette, words and conventions strongly marked with the Other's evaluations, its judgments, its ability to sanction acceptable language and desire and withhold recognition from any mode of speech or desire failing to conform to its specifications" (21).

Though it appears that Meg is engaged in trivial and pointless talk, she also exercises some form of influence over Stanley. However, Stanley tries to get himself away from Meg's hold by his constant attacks on the type of food that she offers him such as her strong tea that he calls "gravy" (p. 28) or her cornflakes that he describes as "horrible" (p. 24) as opposed to her repeated reference to them as "nice" when she places them before Petey (19-21). Moreover, Stanley's resistance to the cultural order that Meg represents reflects his desire that she keep her distance from him. Thus he "recoils from her hand in disgust" and asks her to "get away from (him)" in an attempt to liberate himself from submission to her authority and maintain his autonomy. However, Stanley senses that Goldberg's and McCann's intrusion into the boarding house that shelters him directs an immediate threat at the autonomy that he wants to maintain. In fact, his fear of and anxiety over their intrusion is reflected in the series of questions that he asks Meg relating to their identity. Furthermore, when he says to Meg 'decisively' "They won't come" (30), he struggles to keep them out of his private life since their arrival means the inevitability of his submission to them. Hence he has to struggle against any form of domination or exploitation that will hand him over to their authority.

Stanley's emphatic statement is therefore his resistance against the practical domination of capitalist hegemony that "carves up" a deviant pianist in the eyes of the 'higher authority'. This authority or organization has recruited Goldberg and McCann to construct Stanley's identity in the light of the

acceptable terms as defined by 'the Other' or according to the dominant cultural values and codes of the society that reduces him to the role of the conformist. It is interesting that when Stanley tells Meg of his 'unique touch' and what 'they' - i.e., the agents of the organization - have done to force him to submit to their authority, that he uses the expression "They carve me up" (33). While carving attests to the creativity of the artist, carving someone up indicates that he has been turned into the inanimate objects that he creates. Hence the expression intensifies the negative consequences of succumbing to the desires of the representatives of the organization who will impoverish Stanley and drain him of the vitality and creativity that he stands for once he has been carved up, or turned into a mere lifeless monument with his conformity to the dominant cultural values of the people at 'Monty' who will eventually turn him into another Goldberg or McCann and rob him of the individuality that he has been striving to protect all along.

#### 24 *What does Monty stand for?*

In fact, the implications of submitting to a higher authority are better understood if we look more carefully at the name 'Monty' through which Pinter creates a powerful metaphor of an institution that exercises physical and mental coercion that may be equated with military conscription that similarly forces citizens into obedience to a social order that they cannot liberate themselves from. However, constructing Stanley's identity in the terms of "the Other" cannot be accomplished without deconstructing his own present identity just as the characters of Goldberg and McCann have been deconstructed so that they function as a mouthpiece for the 'Other', i.e., the repressive totalitarian regime that has employed them to force individuals such as Stanley to be shaped into their image. Though Goldberg and McCann are two agents who belong to two different ethnic groups, namely the Jewish and the Irish respectively who have suffered displacement and have been subjected to marginalization throughout history, it is ironic that they paradoxically play roles for 'the banality of evil' (Rowe: 90) as they subjugate Stanley to

the same fate that they had been exposed to in the past. In other words, since they expect Stanley to be molded as the representatives of the repressive regime desire, they also expect him to lose his own individuality just as they have been deprived of their distinct identities since they speak on behalf of the voice of the Other or more precisely for the authority that they have been working for at Monty rather than in their own voices. Moreover, the organization at Monty has come to define success for its agents in terms of their subservience to its authority and their implementation of its norms and values in a very mechanical way. Hence they derive their power from the repressive political regime that has recruited them to work on its behalf and that power is reflected in the considerable influence that they can exert over Stanley through the variety of discourses that they manipulate to bring him down on his knees, or as Stanley puts it: "They want me to crawl down on my bended knees" in complete submission to their interrogations (33). However, though they exert influence over Stanley, they are no more than puppets in the hands of their superiors who expect them to conform to their values, uphold their ideologies and never deviate from the mainstream social order as agents of the organization at Monty.

25

Just as Goldberg and McCann are under the sway of the 'Other', they attempt to subjugate Stanley to the same authoritarian power that has denied them their individuality and freedom. It is therefore obvious that submission to a higher authority threatens the maintenance of one's autonomy as one is forced to submit oneself to the dominant cultural values of the 'Other'. While Goldberg as an example tries to ascertain his individuality or more specifically his Jewishness in the speech that describes his Uncle Barney who "used to take (him) to the seaside, regular as clockwork. ... After lunch on Shabbuss (they'd go and sit in a couple of deck chairs" (37), he is torn between being ethnically specific on the one hand and on being "an all-round man" and "a cosmopolitan" (38) on the other. However, the way he expresses himself through cliches such as "It's a well-known fact. Breathe in, breathe out, take a chance, let yourself go, what can you lose?" (37) proves that he lacks the ability to speak in his own voice. In other words, by failing to express himself beyond the mainstream

social order, he shows that he lacks the autonomous voice that speaks for him. Hence he is turned into an instrument that speaks on behalf of the Other. In fact, throughout the play, Goldberg constructs his identity in the terms of the Other or the dominant cultural values of the society in which he has been brought up as in the speech in which he describes his idyllic home lifestyle when his mother - who called him "Simey" used to shout at him to come home for dinner where "the nicest piece of gefilte fish" would be placed "on a plate" for him (53).

While Goldberg's nostalgic speech describes his early childhood, it characterizes his past life in the parlance of clichés such as "quick before it gets cold" and "nicest piece ... you could ever wish to find on a plate" (53), which once more attests to his inability to express himself in terms outside the dominant mainstream culture into which he has been integrated. Hence Goldberg's discourses so thoroughly suffused with the dominant values of the mainstream culture provide evidence to his subjection to the Other. But while the name "Simey" defines Goldberg's identity more in the private sphere and more precisely within the family, he becomes furious when McCann calls him by the same name. At that point, he "seizes McCann by the throat" and says to him threateningly: "NEVER CALL ME THAT" (86). In fact, one reason he is aggravated is that at the time he and McCann are supposed to "finish the bloody thing" (86), i.e., complete the task that they have been entrusted with, he wants to repress his identity as defined within the private sphere since it runs in contradiction with his new identity defined in the public sphere as an interrogator for Monty who is expected to reconstruct Stanley in the proper image of the Other. Hence he is the vehicle that will effect Stanley's transformation. Just as he has completely succumbed to the cultural codes and values of the Other, he expects Stanley to show the same degree of conformity.

26

### *The significance of Stanley's silence*

While Goldberg and McCann allure Stanley into getting adjusted to their system and while they seek his integration into it in the brain-washing scene in Act III by promises of success and

prosperity since he will "give orders", "make decisions" and "own yachts" besides his enjoyment of numerous privileges (94), it is doubtful if their series of interrogations succeed in "reducing Stanley to a speechless, conformist clone" as Row claims (91). In fact, Stanley's answer that comes in the form of discordant sounds: "Uh-gug ... uh-gug ... eeehhh-gag ... Caahh ... caaahhh" (*The Birthday Party*: 94-95) is an indication of his resistance to the attempts of the representatives of the repressive regime to bring him down on his knees. While Stanley's language is reduced to fragments, incoherent sounds and eventually to silence, his speechlessness should not be interpreted as a sign of submission but rather defiance. As El-Khalfi rightly observes "The only means Stanley has left to preserve his self from complete destruction is his silence. The fact that he does not give in to his victimisers is reflected in his passive resistance through his silence" (134).

In fact, Stanley's silence is comparable to Michaels's silence in J. M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K* in spite of the Medical Officer's repeated endeavours to make him speak. While the Medical Officer exhorts Michaels "to make (his) voice heard, tell (his) story" (192), the only answer he gets back is the dense "silence of the kind one experiences in mine shafts, cellars, bomb shelters, airless spaces" (191). Silence in the interrogation scene in Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K* is therefore Michaels's attempt to resist the state authorities' attempts to impose their will on him. As Michael Marais comments on this scene, he sees silence as "a potent political tool through which the other escapes and challenges the conceptual constraints of imperial cultures whose programmes of conquest and annihilation are enshrined in language" (75). In the light of this commentary, Stanley's silence should not be seen as a sign of his submission to or assimilation into the values of the organization that has recruited Goldberg and McCann to bring about his transformation. Rather, it is a counter-strategy through which he can assert and preserve his ulterior status and by so doing, "interrogates the fixity of dominant power structures and positions" (75). Though the ending of the play leaves us wondering how far Stanley can resist or struggle against manipulation and victimization, we are also left with the

impression that there is no safe haven remaining for him to escape to since the people at Monty are adamant to get him no matter how hard he tries to hide himself from them. As Stanley tells Lulu in response to her question "Where could we go?" "Nowhere. There's no where to go" and therefore "it wouldn't matter" whether they stay there or move somewhere else (36) because the agents of the oppressive regime are everywhere and therefore he can never run away from them since they are determined to find him irrespective of the apparent security of the place that he chooses as shelter.

### *Ben in The Dumb Waiter as another Goldberg*

Like Goldberg and McCann who enter Meg's boarding house at the behest of Monty, Ben who works for a similar repressive organization in *The Dumb Waiter* receives orders to kill Gus. What therefore ties the two plays together is the blind subjugation of certain people to a higher authority that expects them to carry out its orders and follow its commands. Implicit in both plays is therefore a dominant social order that enters into the drama to exercise hegemony over deviant individuals such as Stanley and Gus. While the exclusion of the resister, namely Stanley, at the hands of the agents of an authoritarian organization appears to be the final solution in *The Birthday Party*, the person who "questions this authority" which is coming down from "the chap who is upstairs" confirming its lofty status and also "rebels against it" is doomed to be "squashed at the end" in *The Dumb Waiter* (qtd. in Innes: 287). In the light of Pinter's commentary, one should not ask whether Ben kills Gus at the end of the play or not, but should rather search for any justifiable reasons for Gus's extermination just as one should ask why Ben has taken for granted the authority of the dumb waiter. The answer lies partly in the difference between the personalities of the two men and their roles within the unnamed organization that observes a strict hierarchy or power structure among its agents. However, what determines superiority or subordination within this structure or paradigm is the degree of willingness on the part of any agent to serve the best interests of the organization at the expense of self-

denial. Ben is the type of man who is ready to take and carry out any orders without ever questioning their moral implications. In fact, he tells Gus: "I'm never idle. I know how to occupy my time, to its best advantage. Then when a call comes, I'm ready" (*The Dumb Waiter*: 134). It is therefore this readiness to act as he has been told that sets him apart from Gus who is always wondering and questioning if they are right or wrong in their blind subservience to the organization.

However, Ben is determined to silence Gus and put an end to his incessant wondering. At one point, he forcefully commands Gus to "stop wondering. You've got a job to do. Why don't you just do it and shut up?" (143). Early in the play, when Gus is about to start a question "I want to ask you something" (130), Ben immediately interrupts him, ignoring his curiosity and changing the topic evasively. In fact, when he asks for the tea that Gus is supposed to make for him, he shows that he can exercise some power over him as his subordinate. It therefore looks as if Ben wants to teach Gus the lesson of obedience to authority since he never hesitates to do what he has been commanded to do to the extent that he turns out to be a mere puppet in the hands of the inscrutable waiter who has complete domination over him. Similarly, the dumb waiter is nothing more than a device under the control of the organization or Wilson, employed to communicate to Ben his superiors' commands and more precisely deliver the message that the person he is required to kill "has arrived and will be coming in straight away" (164). In other words, just as the dumb waiter controls Ben who is employed to dominate and eventually get rid of the rebellious Gus, the dumb waiter is controlled by the organization that strictly abides by a hierarchical system that defines the role and status of each agent within it.

29

### ***Tension between Gus & Ben***

Hence Ben structures his life and identity around his job for which he is willing to sacrifice himself when Gus, by contrast, resists blind obedience to the organization and questions whether their actions should be considered right or wrong within a moral

or ethical framework. However, the way Ben reacts to Gus's moral dilemma whether the murder of "the last one" (i.e., the girl) [146] is justifiable or not confirms Ben's reluctance to drag in the question of morality into an issue where priority is given to the implementation of the commands of one's superiors without even raising objections against their validity. Ben therefore accepts becoming the Machiavellian who will not have second thoughts over any devious action as long as it gets the approval of his superiors. For this reason, he has to resort to repression and evasiveness as possible means not to confront the moral dimension of the issue that Gus has raised. Moreover, Ben reacts vehemently to Gus's censorious remarks by interrupting him numerous times as if he does not want him to call into question the morality of their career and also by resorting to the language of violence and threats to put an end to Gus's disconcerting questions. This is quite evident when he retorts in a way that shows that he has read Gus's mind and arrived at what he has been driving at without giving him the chance to articulate his disturbing thoughts: "What are you doing, criticizing me? ... You'll get a swipe round your earhole if you don't watch your step" (146). Not only does Ben remind Gus of his superior status but also he threatens violence to force him to come down to his subordinate position that he has stepped beyond its limits by bringing in an issue that should be relegated to the back scene since it has nothing to do with their execution of commands from above.

The fact that he ends his violent speech by the words: "A bloody liberty" reveals his attitude toward someone who is below him in the social strata and who has transgressed into the domain exclusively reserved for his superiors whose decisions must not be questioned. By closing the door to any constructive criticism related to their job within the organization, Ben is determined to repress any attempt to subject the organization or its representatives to censure or blame. It is only when Ben bars the door to further discussion of the matter related to their last victim, i.e., "that girl" by reminding him of the other duties that they have to see to and "get on with" that Gus camouflages that he has been asking a perfectly legitimate question since he "was just thinking

about that girl, that's all" (146). Hence he leaves Ben in the dark with respect to the true identity of "that girl" who can either refer to their last victim or the girl of the newspaper report who has killed the cat. It is only when Gus deliberately confuses the identities of these two girls that he may direct censure at their blind obedience to the organization's behests. It is therefore his strategy to pass judgment just as Ben resorts to another strategy so as not to reveal himself. In fact, during the entire conversation between these two men, Ben has been hiding himself behind the "black and white" of the newspaper that has become for him the only source of reliable news when in fact it acts as a screen that obstructs, if not mars, his vision of things in their true light. Gus on the other hand questions the content of the written letters, i.e., the black itself that he does not have access to though he can still see in between the lines how the reader is manipulated through what authority articulates in black and white.

*Two different readings of a newspaper story & a command from authority*

31

As an example, when the play begins, Ben relates to Gus an incident that he read in the newspaper about an old man who "crawled under a lorry" while he was crossing the road (130). While Gus's responses to what has been related to him show that he does not take the newspaper story for granted since he promptly ejaculates: "Get away", "It's unbelievable" and "incredible" (130), Ben bases his judgment on the veracity of the newspaper's account to the extent that he fails to link cause to effect. In other words, he only relates the effect or the outcome of the incident though it is disassociated from the ostensible cause. Ben therefore does not see the whole picture but seems satisfied with a fragment of it. While Gus is skeptical if newspapers ever give the reader a complete picture of any given real situation, Ben authenticates Iris story by his dogged reference to what he sees in front of him written "down here in black and white" as if he is unable to discern anything in other than the "black and white" terms when he has every right to reserve judgment or give objective opinion on a case that seems to lack sufficient data. The

incident therefore shows that Ben lacks the power to rationalize in a way that assists him arrive at an independent judgment. Moreover, it demonstrates that he derives a certain truth from his superiors irrespective of its form that can either be a newspaper that he is constantly seeking shelter behind or the head of the organization, namely Wilson, who dictates to him what his next job is. The reaction of the two men to the newspaper's account of the old man's story right at the start of the play therefore serves to bring out the stark contrast between them.

When Ben relates to Gus the next newspaper story related to the "child of eight (who) killed a cat" (131), we instantly assume that their reactions will not in any way differ from their opening responses to the story of the old man. While Gus once more doubts the veracity of the incident that has not been accurately represented since he can in no way believe that the little girl has the stamina to do it, he is ingenious enough to piece a plausible story together and eventually point to the true culprit who is no other than "her brother - aged eleven" who has blamed it "on his sister of eight" (132). By rejecting the newspaper's misrepresentation of the true story, Gus is calling upon the audience to follow suit since the way the episode is presented is so puzzling that one needs to be self-reflexive. Besides, the way Gus reads into the newspaper article shows how the powerful victimize the weak or the innocent in such a way that suspicion of their conspiracy or involvement in disgraceful and violent deeds is aroused. Moreover, the episode of the girl bears a striking similarity to the event in the play since it does not probe into the reasons behind the murder and how it has been committed just as the play never explicitly tells us how and why Ben and Gus have killed their most recent victim. Furthermore, it foreshadows what will happen by the end of the play when "one of the pair of thugs turns out to be the victim they have been hired to murder" (Innes: 286).

Though the dumb waiter keeps the identity of the next victim strictly confidential in line with the organization's policy that never imparts its secrets until the end of the play when Gus who has been divested of his organizational accessories such as "his jacket, waistcoat, tie, holster, and revolver" (165) stumbles back

into the room where Ben's revolver is levelled at him, one senses that the organization has been plotting to get rid of him right from the opening scene where it is obvious that he is not the sort of person who will toe the line as he detects the problematic in his job and directs censure at the organization that he serves and the values it upholds. This is nowhere more obvious than in the scene when Ben and Gus quarrel over the expression "light the kettle" or "put on the kettle" (141) particularly after they communicate with the figure of authority who is sending commands from upstairs through the speaking-tube. Since he has said: "Light the kettle", Ben takes it to be the correct expression or the right command that must be followed. Ben's language therefore reflects his complete identification with the man upstairs. While Ben insists on the first expression, i.e., "light the kettle", he expects Gus as his subordinate to comply with his order without the slightest hesitation. But Gus critically questions the order and insists on correct usage. Thus he tells Ben that his expression is wrong because "they say put on the kettle" rather than "light the kettle" (141). Eventually, the disagreement over correct usage is resolved through sheer force as Ben reminds Gus that he is "the senior partner" whose authority must not be questioned (142). In other words, Ben wins because of his superior position within the organization and not because he is accurate.

However, Gus keeps on questioning the improper order that he eventually mocks through the pantomime with the match and his shoes revealing a rather low opinion of the organization, which is held in high esteem by his colleague. By striking the match on his shoes to see if it will ever light and then by throwing the flattened box under the bed, Gus resists the hypocrisy of the higher authority and deliberately debases the organization and what it stands for. In turn, he is debased and exterminated. Hence in the eyes of his superiors, it serves him right that he is eventually thrown away to counterbalance his previous symbolic action of throwing the box away. But irrespective of the fairness or the harshness of its measures meted out on its dissenters, the play's ending, like the ending of *The Birthday Party* where Stanley is taken by force to Monty, shows that Pinter has drawn a rather grim authorial world vision since he participates in the

perpetuation of a dominant social order that leaves little or no room at all for resistance against any repressive regime that expects all individuals to conform to its principles and values.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the paper has looked at a number of victims of political oppression and social exploitation in a capitalist society where the Other or the dominant cultural values is/are imposed on powerless people including refugees, the homeless, the deviant artist and the rebellious agent who should be working for the best interests of the nameless organization that has recruited them. In fact, the four plays chosen for this study dramatize the tension between the oppressor and the oppressed and show that these two groups inhabit two different realms or domains. Whereas the oppressed seek shelter within the domestic scene that they think is cut off from its surroundings, the oppressor occupies the external space that exercises pressure on the walls of the domestic scene until it cannot hold out any longer. In fact, in these four plays the domestic scene provides a temporary haven for a political refugee like Rose in *The Room*, a tramp like Davies in *The Caretaker*, a deviant or non-conformist artist like Stanley in *The Birthday Party* and an agent who mocks and resists the very totalitarian authority that sends him orders from above like Gus in *The Dumb Waiter*. However, what these four characters share in common is their concern for their security within their domestic sanctuary - be it a rented room as in *The Room*, the living-room of a deserted house in a seaside town as in *The Caretaker*, a boarding house as in *The Birthday Party* or a basement room as in *The Dumb Waiter*. But this security is doomed to be shattered with the intrusion of the external world or the return of painful past history related to family persecution particularly in Rose's case. Hence the domestic scene in the above plays cannot be sealed off from the external socio-political one that determines the course of events internally.

As the paper has demonstrated, a thorough understanding of the social and political background against which the chosen plays were written is a pre-requisite for their understanding. In other words, since they were written at a period of time that witnessed



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