

## **Harold Pinter's Theatre of Power: Studying Space as a Motif for Authority and Identity in *The Birthday Party*, *One for a Road* and *Mountain Language***

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### **ABSTRACT**

The major motif in Pinter's drama is the desire for power, coupled with the achievement of dominance. Pinter attacks the policies of oppressive regimes practicing violence and torture, and his political dramas concentrate on the struggle between the individual and the authoritative power. Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1957) examines the significance of power and identity in spaces of self and power relations. In *One for the Road* (1980) and *Mountain Language* (1988), Pinter deals with incarceration and torture, using the theatrical space of prison to highlight and examine the narratives of authoritative control and violation of human rights. Space as a motif in Pinter's plays, serves as a site for discourse and aims to mark the interaction between power and identity. In this paper, I will attempt to examine how Pinter uses the idea of space and to what extent space can be read and decoded as a site for struggle for power and identity. My aim is to show that how an ordinary physical space of a room become a site for recreation of new spaces for exercise of power and maintaining identity. However, I aim to delve into these spaces of conflict, exploitation and subjugation showing the significance of power and identity. This paper, therefore, concludes that Pinter's theatre of power constitutes a polyphony of political rhetoric within the spaces, all competing for approval or control.

*Keywords:* Approval, authority, control, identity, pinter, space, theatre of power

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Pinter is one of the greatest and the most influential of the post-war British playwrights and is considered as a successor in style to Samuel Beckett. Pinter surrounds the stage with the void and absurdity but remains a realist throughout his works. Pinter's dramas

deal with his psychological, sociological, and political views in association with the mode of consciousness of the audience. The audience is drawn to the theatre with certain expectations and an awareness that the past identities of the characters portrayed by the dramatist are mere puppets in the hands of the circumstances or obsessed anxiety. Pinter, in fact, does not allow the audience to make up its mind and keeps them in a constant state of tension by bringing its mind into a dialectical opposition to its feelings. The moment we begin to settle down with something familiar, we have the sudden invasion of the unknown which turns our world upside down. According to Joshi (2011), the characters in Pinter's dramas are real, as they feel pain, anguish, and anger. However, they become victims in private and public spaces, due to what was imposed upon them, either by tradition in society or by the rules and regulations of a system. They try hard to look for an identity so that they can express the self in the space they created to exert power for their purposes. The space that they avail as a device for meaning and survival becomes significant in their journey.

The main concerns and preoccupation in Harold Pinter's plays are the impending menace of an unknown intruder, the haunting of memories, and ceaseless desire for power. For early Pinter plays, menace was often understood as the unseen that always lurked offstage as an absent yet determining factor for each characters' identity. For instance, it is the unseen Monty in *The Birthday Party*, or the absent Wilson in *The Dub Waiter*. For

the later political works, the third presence reveals itself as the State apparatus that governs and determines the meaning of the rooms that its inhabitants occupy. Along with the dialogue of torture, incarceration and prison that pervades the spaces of Pinter's theatre of power, is a discourse with larger socio-political forces that render these neutral spaces into brutal spaces. For example, the space of the interrogation room in *One for the Road* where we do not see the family being tortured becomes a brutal space as well as the symbolism of the menacing fingers that Nicholas waves before Victor's eyes. Such discourses and voices issue forth from the dialogue of oppressor and oppressed, but underneath that dialogue is a shared connection to the third addressee of the brutal space itself. Thus, Pinter explores and experiments with spaces of violence, conflict, subjugation and victimization, which are made neutral and brutal by discourse of power that exists in his theatre.

Pinter portrays various types of characters to show how the characters are interested to maintain and protect themselves in the conflict of power equations that is closely related to the achievement of dominance. For example, one character may struggle to defend one's own territory, a father may combat his sons to assert his patriarchal position, a lover may manipulate erotic feelings for possession and identity, or an agent may exploit and control the victim that represents the abuse of the brute force of power. Pinter dramatizes his characters to be involved in the strategies of power

struggle. Almansi and Henderson (1983) commented that the strategies of power struggle were the combination of silence and pause, imagery, memory and role-playing, in which the characters bolstered their power for exploitation and domination.

Billington (2007) explained that Pinter's reputation had come through his two voices: first, as a writer and, second, as a citizen-activist. His Nobel lecture, in 2008, served to prove how the best of his dramaturgy of two seemingly separate halves of his canon were artistically connected. Gordon (2013) pointed that although Pinter distanced himself from his earlier works, which were dramas that focused on ambiguous anxieties, metaphoric and existential, his later plays were the extensions of his political mindset, which maintained the texture and tonality of his earlier work overtly.

In the center of Pinter's dramatic plays, language serves as a strategic tool to reveal the hidden spaces which are present off the stage. These hidden spaces which referred to as the third addressee underneath the plays are revealed through different discourse of power. Pinter's main dramatic landscape was always about language and the spaces of his stage. The rhetoric of his work can essentially be comprehended as the meaning of the spaces that the characters inhabit. These spaces were consequently engaged with the crisis of identity and location. In this regard, Santriojprapai (2009) explained that the rooms of Pinter's early plays were innocuous spaces that gradually developed into political spaces in the early eighties. These seemingly harmless rooms were, thus, transformed

into political spaces of interrogation, torture, and violence. However, these brutal spaces were never seen by audiences and their atrocious connotations were figuratively depicted. He made elaborate use of space as an important instrument of the power struggle between individuals and society. Space in Pinter's plays, whether physical or virtual, indicates the representation of the character's thoughts, fears, dreams, conflicts, and power struggles that they negotiate through language.

In this paper, I aim to examine how Pinter uses the idea of space and to what extent space can be read and decoded as a site for struggle of power and identity. I argue that spaces of authority, control and approval are symbolic of the struggle for power and identity. However, Pinter's plays can be read as plays about power equations, where he sets the conflict to show how discourse is produced within various kinds of spaces. Pinter dramatizes space as an important tool for power control and domination. In order to arrive to this point, one can see that the plays exhibit themes of intrusion and oppression, and in different situations, characters intrude and impinge upon spaces of the past, the present, and the future. Further, Pinter's political plays are various discourses between the dialogues of oppressor and oppressed. The third addressee underneath the political plays reveals itself as the State power that governs and determines the meaning of these discourses. However, a study of these plays aims to show how identity depends upon the space that is assigned to the entity.

## POWER AND SPACE FROM THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Issacharoff (1981, p. 211) in his article *Space and Reference in Drama*, said, "Dramatic tension is often contingent on the antinomy between visible space represented and invisible space described". Thus, this is the main trait of modern drama that results in providing thought provoking space, especially off the stage. To classify the types of dramatic space and their mode of operation, Issacharoff first drew our attention to the script, as it was the language itself that created space. Space is, then, mediated by language as Issacharoff (1981) observed that language took two forms: auditory (discourse) and non-auditory (meta-discourse). Both modes of discourse refer to dramatic space. The function of meta-discourse is related only to what is visible. The function of discourse, on the other hand, is related to what is visible and what is not. However, in modern theatre, dramatic tension stems from the interplay between mimetic and diegetic space. Further, he added that in the theatre, mimetic space was related to what was visible to an audience and a stage, and diegetic space, on the other hand, was described by the characters. "Mimetic space is transmitted directly, while diegetic space is mediated through the discourse of the characters, and thus, communicated verbally and not visually" (Issacharoff, 1981, p. 215).

In the centre of Pinter's dramatic plays, language or the space of speech serves as a tool to reveal the hidden spaces that are present on the stage and almost

constructed in the diegetic field. Hanna Scolcinov discussed theatrical space and made a distinction between the visible acting area and the unseen theatrical space. She suggested "Every performance defines its own boundaries in relation to its own space-time structure" (Scolcinov, 1994, p. 11). The space in a play can be delimited through the characters' language, movements, and gestures, with the aid of props, scenery, lighting, and acoustics. For Scolcinov, unseen space expands beyond the limits of the visible acting area where the differences between the visible and the unseen is the differences between perceived space and conceived space (Scolcinov, 1994).

Further, Scolcinov (1994) explained how Pinter delimited the visual and theatrical space into a room. She believed that Pinter regarded a room as a basic unit of space within which structural situations could be developed. In actuality, a particular physical space is first needed for the construction of ideology to create opportunity for the creation of hidden spaces outside that physical space. This space serves as a room where characters exert power over one another for different social purposes, which thereby leads to new spaces.

An example that illustrates the political relationships within Pinter's dramatic rhetoric can be drawn from Tzvetan Todorov's *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*. Todorov performs an analysis of Bakhtin's reflections in articulating the dialogic moment of creation, where the object cannot do anything without the 'other'. Thus, the object turns into its essence by revealing itself to another. However,

identity is missing between both the object and the subject if the 'other' remains absent. An example would be in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* where the expectations of Vladimir and Estragon to meet a certain figure remain unfulfilled. It is obvious that there is no other choice for the characters, but to accept this implied role. This is understood as 'third' by Bakhtin, where he explains this position by imagining a higher instance of responsive understanding that can recede in various directions. He says, "Every dialogue takes place, then, in a way, against the responsive understanding of a present but invisible third entity" (as cited in Todorov, 1984, p. 96-111). The invisible 'third entity' is understood as the State power that determines and controls the meaning of the dialogues. Therefore, the 'third' is related to a State power that governs the meaning of discourse between the subject and object. The existence of this third presence is felt throughout the canvas of Pinter's stage. For example, the unseen element of menace that is found in Pinter's theatre can be understood as a 'third' presence. For example, we never see Monty in *The Birthday Party*, but we acknowledge the omnipresent figure signified.

Pinter's dramatic oeuvre was always focused on language and the spaces of his stage. The rhetoric of his work can be essentially comprehended by the meaning and dynamics of the spaces that the characters inhabit. Una Chaudhuri articulates the effect that the rhetorical moment has as an interaction within the spaces of the contemporary drama, which

have consequently engaged with the crisis of identity and location. She argues that such spaces of modern dramas are turned into a site for struggle. Chaudhuri coined this as 'geopathology', where such rhetorical moments in theatre become "an incessant dialogue between belonging and exile, home and homelessness" (Chaudhuri, 1995, p. 15). Her preoccupation, which seems appropriate and apt, is with the dialogue between identity and space, as she proves her analysis is applied to Pinter's theatre. She sees such spaces in harmony with Pinter's thematic concerns, as they are enclosed by visible stage boundaries. To quote her, "The structure of the room as a bounded space, capable of keeping out as well as keeping in, allows it to function as a referent for such thematic as danger versus safety, infantile sexuality versus Oedipal threat, political passivity versus active resistance" (Chaudhuri, 1995, p. 91). Although the settings of Pinter's drama have primarily been harmless, Chaudhuri referred to their signifying role, to the extent that the room maintained a form of theatrical agency, "The rooms surrounding Pinter's character are as equivocal as the characters themselves. The mode of their contribution to the plays' meanings is not symbolic but performative, as Bert States said, 'that rooms like all theatre images must eventually justify their presence; they must inhabit the people who inhabit them'" (Chaudhuri, 1995, p. 94).

Although Pinter's political plays do not enter into Chaudhuri's analysis of home and homeless, his latter body of work maintains

the same discourse of identity and space. The Pinteresque room in his political plays performs a level of agency through the impact that these spaces have on the characters. Harmless rooms are transformed into brutal spaces of interrogation and torture chambers by the rhetoric of the State. The theatrical homelessness that Chaudhari outlined is articulated in Pinter's spaces to fragment and destroy the bonds of family. For instance, in *One for the Road* and *Mountain Language* the definition of a family and language of mountain people respectively are subsumed by the State. The audiences never see the brutal actions performed, but the narration by the interrogator and the sergeant transform the chambers into the location where these atrocities are figuratively performed.

However, space as a motif in Pinter's plays, the focus of this study, has always been marked by the interaction between power and identity. Space in Pinter's play serves always as a site for discourse. The image of a room or home as a place to redefine the self becomes a pervading motif in Pinter's plays and he seeks to portray the meaning of such space as an element of maintaining of identity. An enclosed space serves as a level of agency through the impact made upon the characters and the level of meaning and power of these spaces is made through the elements of power games and rhetoric. Space is a complex phenomenon and its analysis decodes several unseen areas in the play as well as in the intention of a dramatist. Space in drama is multidimensional, thus it

is in close association with what a dramatist has in mind to encode and convey, and in contrast what the audience perceives in decoding the message. Pinter considers a room as a basic unit of space within which the structures can be constructed, developed and deconstructed. In actuality, a particular physical space is first needed for the construction of ideology which gives the opportunity for hidden spaces to emerge outside that physical space. The space of the room in which characters exert power over one another for different social purposes leads to the emergence of new spaces.

#### **PINTER'S *THE BIRTHDAY PARTY* AS DRAMA OF INTRUSION AND INVASION**

Pinter, in *The Birthday Party* (1957), used the idea of space socially, culturally, and psychologically to examine how space could turn into a site of struggle for power and identity (Pinter, 1990). All characters in the play entered these spaces to impose their power over one another. Michael Billington described the play as a political play about the imperative need for resistance (Billington, 2007).

For Stanley, it is unclear whether a jealous rival in a fixed conspiracy betrayed him, or if it was an order of authority in power that pursued him. However, his identity is taken away and his space is violated. Thus, in lieu of such space and position, he validates his new position in the domestic space of a boarding house, where its inhabitants are a mother-mistress figure, Meg, and her husband, Petey. The

boarding house is like a metaphoric womb, which is positive to Stanley as he develops his space and protects himself from the menace outside. But, as the plot continues, his space is occupied and his identity fades away. Meg transmuted the lodge into a safe womb-like place for Stanley to nurture and protect him. This metaphorical space serves as an arbitrary state of mind that brings ease and peace to Stanley and shields him from the threatening outside world. By the presence of the intruders, Goldberg and McCann, this sanctuary turns into a more brutal space of power exertion due to the ideological support the intruders get from the unseen character; Monty. They perform the role of the interrogators torturing Stanley to deconstruct and reconstruct his identity, according to unknown Monty's desire. Pinter deploys the positioning of absent authority in a diegetic or unseen space. Such authoritative figures, like 'Monty' and 'Wilson' in Pinter's plays, are never physically presented; instead, they refer to an invisible figure off the scene.

Goldberg and McCann, with the power of authority, determine the space for the impoverished Stanley. In a struggle for power and battle of rapid verbal language, they are victorious over him and mold him according to their desire. They shape him to a fixed and defined space and they imposed the desired identity assigned by the institution upon the victim. Stanley had his own desired identity as a pianist earlier, but due to external forces, he retreated from society. Ultimately, the intruders forced him to accept the identity they wished to give

him. Goldberg said to Stanley that, "you are dead. You can't live, you can't think, you can't love. You are dead. You're a plague gone bad. There's no juice in you" (Pinter, 1990, p. 62).

In Dukore's words (1970), they (Goldberg and McCann) 'convey an ambience of conformity' (as cited in Scott, 1986, p. 87) as the representatives of the System who have authority to adjust people in the society. In fact, they are the makers of space and builders of identity. Clearly, in the process where they interrogate and brainwash Stanley, they are able to give him a new identity. Goldberg and McCann accuse him of killing his wife, while they also immediately call him celibate. They accuse him of being a traitor to the country. This leads Stanley to the state of being inarticulate, which is accompanied by a mental breakdown. The sessions of interrogation serve to clarify the nature of the power struggle between the three men. Mark Taylor-Batty puts it as, "the oppressive forces of conformism" (Taylor-Batty, 2014, p. 94). They want to bring Stanley out of himself and re-assimilate him into the desired system from which he has escaped.

**Goldberg:** We'll make a man of you.

**McCann:** And a woman.

**Goldberg:** You'll be re-oriented.

**McCann:** You'll be rich.

**Goldberg:** You'll be adjusted.

**McCann:** You'll be our pride and joy.

**Goldberg:** You'll be a mensch.

**McCann:** You'll be a success.

**Goldberg:** You'll be integrated.

**McCann:** You'll give order.

**Goldberg:** You'll make decisions.

**McCann:** You'll be a magnate.

**Goldberg:** A statesman.

(Pinter, 1990, p. 93-94)

The incessant language of the intruders serves as a tool for power exertion in which they demolish Stanley's previous identity and reform it as a re-oriented man of authority. The intruders exert power through a linguistic overload and do not permit Stanley to speak a single word. Thus, they reduce and confuse him to an infantile babbling fool and he has no space within which to assert a different identity as Francis Gillen states that "What Goldberg and McCann have accomplished is to have taken away both Stanley's present and his past and left him nowhere to go except a future that they or the society they represent control" (Gillen, 1986, p. 42).

Pinter delineates room as a space that is violated by the vital external forces. Pinter's rooms are important, as they depict a kind of space or a state of mind where the characters perform their roles. The discourse of power and the ways that individuals are involved in the struggle for power is clearly exhibited in *The Birthday Party* where the two accomplices are sent by the system to abduct Stanley and reorient him, according to the system. Although Stanley is considered a victim, the hired killers also

seem uncertain and victimized by their unsure ideology. This is brought forth when Goldberg's desire has to transmute into the desire of the 'Other'. In *The Birthday Party*, the characters attempt to construct and reconstruct the self through images of the past and memories. The creation of the self through the lens of 'Other' provides various spaces in which the characters bolster their power for domination and exploitation.

At the center of *The Birthday Party*, the role of language is the most crucial ones. Language, as a weapon, is used in a series of human encounters to make spaces fruitful for power and identity. Pinter takes advantage of the inadequacies of words in order to shape the hidden desires of characters when they are involved in a play of power struggle. He dramatizes this play to show how Stanley's identity takes form and is deformed and then reformed through a series of processes and the power imposed by external forces. However, Stanley's identity is defined by the other's actions, which is reflected in his existence. Stanley's triumphant narration regarding his concert forms his identity as a subject, but it leads into an account of subjection when he refers to his father and the loss of his address.

**Stanley (to himself):** I had a unique touch. They came up to me..and said they were grateful. Champagne we had that night..My father nearly came down to hear me. Well, I dropped him a card..but I don't think he could make it. No, I—I lost the address, that was it. *(Pause)*. Yes Lower Edmonton. Then after



that, you know what they did? They carved me up. It was all arranged, it was all worked out. My next concert. Somewhere else it was. In winter. I went down there to play. Then, when I got there, the hall was closed, the place was shuttered up.. they'd locked it up.

(Pinter, 1990, p. 32-33).

Thus, Stanley's reformation is totally defined through others. Goldberg says, "You are dead. You can't live, you can't think, you can't love. You are dead" (Pinter, 1990, p. 62). His identity is shaped by the power and treatment of the others, and ultimately, in the image of Goldberg and McCann. According to Wilden (1972), the other is nothing but a principle.

In the eighties, Pinter became more vocal and assertive about his political views, and entered the political arena as a political activist. He attacked the policies of oppressive regimes practicing violence and torture. Pinter's main preoccupation was with the oppressive policies of the superpowers and dominant regimes, which had an adverse effect upon freedom of speech, social welfare, and justice.

Pinter's political drama is a cry of awareness for the public's conscience (Taylor-Batty, 2010). He observes how the dictatorial regimes operate under the support of the superpowers and how public blindness and ignorance trigger such policies. In the sixties, in the works, such as *The Hothouse*, *The Birthday Party* and *The Dumb Waiter*, Pinter dramatizes the themes of menace and intrusion in connection to the domestic

space. But, from the eighties onwards, and in the works, such as *One for a Road*, *Mountain Language* and *Party Time*, his theme extended in the form of violence related to the larger social space of political brutality sponsored by State powers.

### **POLITICS OF BRUTALITY: SPACES IN PINTER'S *ONE FOR THE ROAD* AND *MOUNTAIN LANGUAGE***

Pinter's primary concerns were the oppressive policies of the superpowers and dominant regimes which had an adverse effect upon social welfare, freedom of speech and justice. According to Billington, one incident that motivated Pinter to engage seriously with politics was the disappearance of an Argentinean theatre colleague which was orchestrated by oppressive regimes to suppress the voice of protest (Billington, 2007). Pinter's political drama is, hence, a cry of awareness for the public's conscience. He subtly observes how the dictatorial regimes operate under the support of the superpowers coupled with public blindness and ignorance towards the same. In the 1960s and in particular the apolitical works such as *The Room*, *The Birthday Party* and *The Dumb Waiter*, Pinter dramatizes the theme of menace in connection with the domestic space. However, from the eighties onwards, this theme extends to the form of violence related to the larger social space.

*One for the Road* (1984) deals with incarceration, torture and rape (Pinter, 2006). This play also uses the institutional space of prison to highlight and examine the narratives of authoritative control. The

setting of the play is an empty room in a house with an interrogator, Nicholas, and a bruised and tortured prisoner named Victor, who is attacked and arrested along with his wife Gila and his son, Nicky. The dominant torturer, Nicholas, reveals his method of interrogation from the beginning through intimidation and verbal psychological torture. This reflects Pinter's unique mastery in exploitation of language and illustration of violence and torture on and off the stage. These brutal actions are quietly played out in the invisible space of the reader's imagination. *One for the Road* follows such models of interrogations for exerting power to penetrate the subject's mind to transform the identity into a desired one. Victor thus has no authority to engage in a conversation with the interrogator, so Nicholas knows the answers to his questions and he is continuously establishing himself as the one in authority and as the torturer who has control over speech. The ways in which the victim responds to interrogators are also significant in Pinter's dialogue. Much like Stanley, Victor is seated in silence and occasionally stares at Nicholas and in a fragmented voice asks about his son towards the end of the play. The destructive effect of physical and psychological torture makes him unable to defend himself and puts him in absolute silence against the authoritative questions. However, space of prison becomes a site of power struggle in which language of violence and torture serves as a weapon to collapse the prisoners in order to deform and then reform them to a new desired subject.

Nicholas's identity is defined by the presence of the prisoners and his power, which is given to him by the authority. However, it is the authority who speaks through him, and his identity is associated with the higher power and the victims. Nicholas, therefore, is a prisoner of the ideology, and he is obsessed with power and identity. He also seeks to confirm his position and power by the State. Nicholas desires to make an identity within the political system. Nicholas first establishes his identity through his role as an interrogator. Secondly, he refers to the higher voice of authority, which reinforces his power. As Bakhtin describes, "I cannot become myself without the other; I must find myself in the other...I receive my name from the other" (as cited in Todorov, 1984). Thus, Nicholas's identity is defined by the presence of the prisoners and the power given to him by the authority. However, it is the authority who speaks through him and his identity is in association with the higher power and the victims. Nicholas tries to identify and to equate himself and his identity with the authority and the State. He considers himself as the absolute power, as "God speaks through him" (Pinter, 2006, p. 324), and hence, he has the right to do anything.

In the last moment of the play, Victor is dressed tidily, similar to Stanley in *The Birthday Party*. Nicholas reminds him of his survival and his impending release. He humiliates him when he learns that Victor's tongue is cut as he says, "Drink up. It'll put lead in your pencil" (Pinter, 2006, p. 336). Nicholas use of euphemism enables

him to render the intensity of torture as quotidian events in the experience of political prisoners. The ideology of torture that such a government follows is evident with Nicholas:

“We can do that, you know. We have a first-class brothel upstairs, on the sixth floor...they ‘ll suck you in and blow you out in little bubbles. All volunteers. Their daddies are in our business. Which is, I remind you, to keep the world clean for God.”

(Pinter, 2006, p. 336)

This fragment clearly reveals the ideology of dictatorship governments concerning political prisoners and the violation of human rights. The word “Their daddies” stands in for the interrogators who rape the political prisoners for the stability and security of the regime. It is their duty to clear the road for their masters. As Robert Gordon writes, *One for the Road* exposes the dishonesty endemic in any intelligence agency that justifies the use of torture in the service of state security (Gordon, 2013).

Throughout the play these rhetorical fragments reveal the political spaces in which the torturers exert power and authority for the sake of the system. Pinter draws attention to such political spaces in the world to emphasize that the world is on the verge of a disaster. Those interrogators and State’s agents like Nicholas, Goldberg and McCann are themselves prisoners of their blind ideology. They serve their governments unquestioningly, unsure of the reasoning behind their purpose and their

ideological sense of self. The despair comes when they don’t know whether their role will be acknowledged and their actions will be justified under the system they perform. Nicholas twice repeats, “I am not alone” (Pinter, 2006, p. 328), which reveals his insecurity as he wants to make a bond and to identify with the leader of the country to rationalize his actions.

These moments of despair can be defined clearly within Bakhtin’s subject of fears of the “absence of answer” from the “higher super receiver”. The dialogue comes forth between Nicholas as the authoritarian figure of the State, the prisoners as objects, and the State apparatus as super-receiver. Same pattern follows in *Mountain Language*, a play which was written four years after *One for a Road* focusing on the space of prison to shed light over the dialogue of the authoritarian state.

Like *One for the Road*, *Mountain Language* (1988) uses the theatrical space of prison to highlight the discourse of authoritarian control (Chittaranian, 2011). The play opens with a line of women, waiting in the cold, outside a detention building, to see their families. The play dramatizes two stories of an elderly woman trying to visit her son, and a young woman trying to visit her husband. The short four scenes of this play indicate the brutality that these women are subjected. In addition, the women are not allowed to speak their language, but are forced to use the language of the Capital.

In this play, Pinter dramatizes the rhetoric of state-sponsored oppression, where such totalitarian forces govern

both physical spaces of incarceration and those spaces outside the physical walls of the prison. *Mountain Language* confronts the audience with the mechanism of oppression, which is employed to highlight the individual's conformity to state authority (Gordon, 2013). The State controls their language and deprives them of their right to speak it, which leads to undermining their integrity and humanity.

Language is used as a site of manipulation and corruption to discipline and control the mountain people. In the opening scene, an elderly woman is wounded by a Doberman belonging to one of the soldiers, and the Sergeant bullies and insults the other women who have come to visit their detained men. As a tool of the State, the officer manipulates the power through language in order to deprive people of their right, saying "Your husband, your sons, your fathers, these men you have been waiting to see, are shit-holes. They are enemies of the State... Your language is dead. It is forbidden. It is not permitted to speak your mountain language in this place" (Pinter, 2006, p. 343). The corruption of the authority reaches its peak when the only woman, Sara, asserts that she does not speak the mountain language, but she lays herself open to sexual abuse by the Sergeant and officers, who treat her as a sexual object, leading to dehumanization. Much like Gila in *One for the Road*, Sara becomes a victim to be objectified and sexualised as a female 'Other' by the hands of the patriarchal authority.

The officer's choice of words is significant, as he mandates the policies of the Capital-state. The officer continues to

legislate identity by declaring to the women, "You are mountain people. You hear me?" (Pinter, 2006, p. 343). By making an effort to designate them as 'Mountain people,' the officer legislates the polarity between the State and anyone considered to be against its collective identity. The women designated as 'Other' to the singular authority of the Capital-state. To coin Bakhtin's principle, the transaction of authoritative control in *Mountain Language* depends upon a dialogue between the subject, object, and the higher super-receiver. This transaction stems from the dialogue between the figures of authority, the victims, and the state apparatus itself.

In the last scene, the Guard tells the prisoner that his mother can speak in her native language, but it is too late, as the mother is already suppressed by her inability to protect her son. Her silence comes as, perhaps, the only act she can do to prevent further abuse. When the imprisoned son is faced with his mother's silence, he falls from his chair, trembling violently. Keith Peacock describes this scene as, "like Stanley after his interrogation by Goldberg and McCann, he is deprived of speech. Both literally and metaphorically, the deprivation of language represents the abandonment of individual resistance and conformity to the will of the state" (Peacock, 1997, p. 143).

These interrogators, technocrats, and officers seek approval through linguistic expressions to justify their roles and performances under the aegis of a higher cause. This is most apparent with the Sergeants, Nicholas and Goldberg, who

use language to reflect oppression; but, on the contrary, they consider their words as a self-justifying action. For instance, in *One for the Road*, Nicholas transmutes the words and the ideology of the regime as “the soul shines through them” (Pinter, 2006, p. 323) and he asserts that he keeps “the world clean for God” (Pinter, 2006, p. 334), while in *Mountain Language*, the frustrated Sergeant says upon mother’s silence and her convulsing son, “You go out of your way to give them a helping hand and they fuck it up” (Pinter, 2006, p. 350). It is also clear in the words of Goldberg where he is hesitant and tries to placate McCann, recalls his father’s advice, “I lost my life in the service of others, he said, I’m not ashamed. Do your duty and keep your observations”, and he continues, “Follow the line, the line, McCann, and you can’t go wrong” (Pinter, 1990, p. 87-88). However, Pinter’s characters take use of space and the situation they are located in to exert power and reinforce their position. Language of authority becomes tools to reconstruct, deconstruct and reorient the divided identities.

## CONCLUSION

Pinter’s early political dramas, such as *The Birthday Party*, *Dumb Waiter* and *The Hothouse*, along with later political plays, such as *One for a Road*, *Mountain Language*, and *Party Time*, represent his political canon, which depicts the vulnerability and the gradual collapse of an individual and a system in the brutal spaces of state control, oppression, and

implementation of hypocritical policies of oppressive regimes through their agents.

Pinter’s political plays emphasize the power of vocal authorities and the technocrats, leading to brutal spaces of violence, torture, and oppression, and thereby affecting individual and national identity of the subject. Political plays of the eighties extended Pinter’s poetic perceptions in the larger context of the vast, incomprehensible world. The spaces of Pinter’s drama are the most crushing, punishing and brutal territories. He explored the machinery of the State and depicted characters in these spaces who struggle to maintain their own sense of power and identity. These spaces do not only deal with the character’s authority, but such spaces embody the struggle of the characters that occupy the rooms. Thus, there is a discourse within these rooms and those spaces are the center of the struggle over ideologies and identities.

The spaces of Pinter’s political drama constitute political dialogue for approval and control. These are theatrical spaces of violence, menace, dreams, exploitation, subjugation, and victimization, which are made pregnant and brutal and exist both on and off the stage. These spaces are produced not only from the spoken language between the oppressor and its oppressed, but also from the shared dialogue with the third addressee; the State. This third addressee, as a neutral space was the unseen menace off the stage. This was reflected in Pinter’s early works and in the later political plays, manifested as the State apparatus that

governs and determines the meaning of the rooms. However, these plays involve a radical change in the nature of space. Spaces that were once impregnable become a brutal arena of political discourse. Menace shifts from private relationships and domestic spaces to expressively political issues and brutal rooms of torture. However, space is symbolic of power, and identity and space can be read and decoded as a site of struggle for authority and approval in Pinter's theatre of power.

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