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Harold Pinter: The New World Order Anti-Imperialistic Attitudes towards U.S. Foreign Policy and Hegemony Worldwide

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Abstract

The objective of present study is to probe anti-imperialistic notions of the English playwright Harold Pinter against U.S. foreign policy and its imposing hegemony worldwide in one of his political plays called *The New World Order*. The play was written in 1991 and performed on July 19th of the same year at Royal court Theatre, London. The theoretical framework of the study focuses on the elements of Imperialistic doctrines such as the Extension of Power and Authority; Hierarchy and Totalitarianism; Dominance and Subservience; and Establishment and Power Brutality. The findings of this study demonstrate that United States of America acts as an intimidate figure in the international scene and politically strives to transform the weaker countries to their knees in front of American Imperialism. The major implication of the present research is to depict that the practitioners of U.S. foreign policy cunningly trace an intangible economic and political hegemony worldwide to achieve their imperialistic goals and capitalistic interests.

Key Words: Harold Pinter, the New World Order, Imperialism, Hegemony, U.S. Foreign Policy

Introduction

The political and anti-imperialistic writings of Harold Pinter have been a magnet for various scholars upon which a number of researches have made inquiries on. In an article review, Michael Karwowski (2009) attempts to praise Pinter for his dramatic influences on world literature and demonstrates his political and anti-American perspectives... and his struggle between “Pinter-the-playwright and Pinter-the-propagandist” (p.45)

According to the etymological meaning of Imperialism, the word is taken from Latin “imperare” which means to order and instruct. The word was coined in 15th century to embrace the dominance of European countries in “carrying of political, economic, and moral practices into non-European areas” notably Asia and Africa:

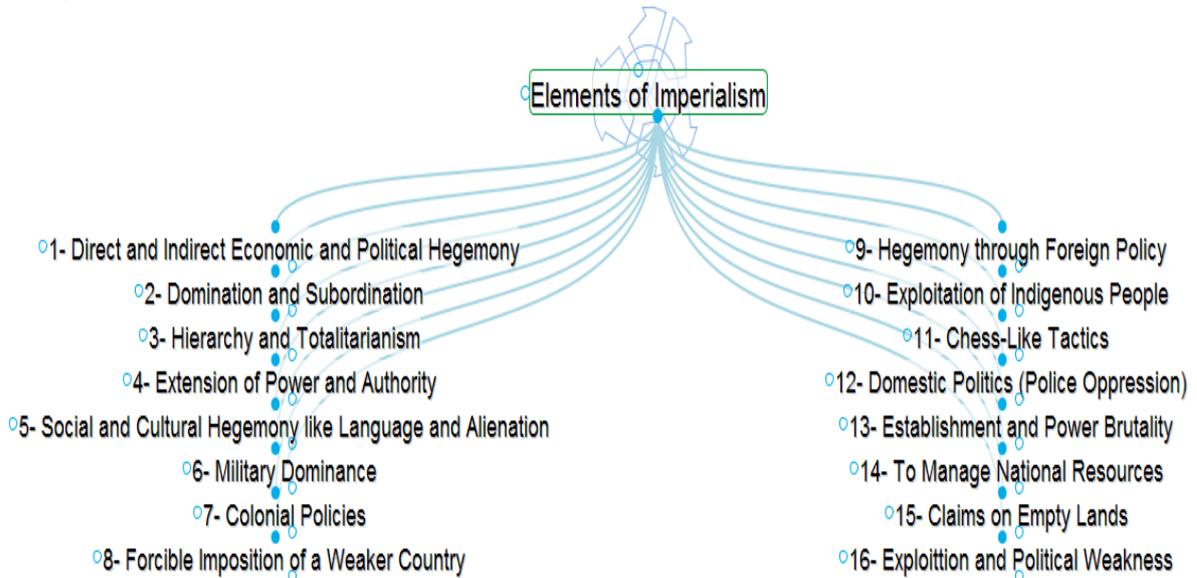
Most commonly, it refers to European expansionism in the period following the American Revolution, when Britain and France, in particular, shifted their interest from the New World and from colonies of white settlement to Asia, and, later, to Africa, to colonies already populated by yellow, brown, or black me (Americana, 1998, p. 821)

The word of Imperialism has been used by critics in different senses but there must be a consensus while debating the term to different postures. The most suitable definition, that I believe aptly covers all sorts of imperialistic treatments can be capsulated in three factors: Expansion of power, Dominance of economic and political expertise, and Application of military forces to control the small nations:

However applied, imperialism must involve at least three factors: the expansion of an advanced society at the expense of a society thought to be backward; the development of economic and political expertise in an area with an indigenous population, without the intent of substantial colonial settlement; and the application of the imperial nation’s force to areas well removed geographically from its base – with all the inherent problems of strategy and international diplomacy (Americana, 1998, p. 821)

The focus of the term [Imperialism] would be especially centered on the United States foreign policy that acted with imperialistic carte blanche – complete authority- throughout the world, regardless of its complicity in fostering dictatorships and humanitarian catastrophes: “We have brought torture, cluster bombs, depleted uranium, and innumerable acts of random murder, misery, degradation and death to the Iraqi people and call it ‘bringing freedom and democracy to the Middle East’”(Harold Pinter, 2005, p. 16).

The following table will show the main motifs of Imperialism. In this table, the best imperialistic tokens that properly relate to our discussion are the political and cultural dominances. In his 2005 Nobel Awarding Speech, Pinter has said a lot of imperialistic policies of United States in the world and distinguishably challenged the appalling hegemony of United States of America both in Latin America and Middle East. His reactions to dreadful genocides in Chile and Iraq are good examples in hand. (Harold Pinter, 2005)



Modern Definition of Imperialism

In modern era, the semantics of word “Imperialism” has changed and shares the new concepts such as colonialism, capitalism and harmony and disharmony of interests. Edward Said, in his book, *Culture and Imperialism (1993)*, puts the word “Imperialism” in the category of Colonialism and defines it as “an act of geographical violence” that eventually leads to full control of that territory.

If there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of imperialism, it is the primacy of the geographical element. Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control (Galtung, 1971, p. 225)

Anthony Brewer defines no specific meaning for the word “Imperialism” in his book, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism (1990)*, but he explains that the word “must be seen in the context of the whole history of capitalism on a world scale”(Brewer, 1990, p. 2).

John Galtung, in his article, *A Structural Theory of Imperialism (1971)*, specifies the word Imperialism as a system that separates the parts first and then relates them together based on the “Harmony of Interests and Disharmony of Interests” (Galtung, 1971, p. 81)

American Revolution in 18th century was a turning point in shaping the modern tokens of Imperialism. The Revolution happened within the time span of fourteen years (1763-1787) and coincides with French Revolution and instabilities.

Industrialization as an advent and breakthrough of 18th and 19th centuries made a sort of “Giant State Organizations” that never healed the debacles and problems of American people, but made a “hierarchical elitist society” whose norms and disciplines are in contradiction with equality and justice:

Reich blamed industrialization and the creation of giant state corporations (and multi—nationals?) which was responsible for the societal “ills,” and thought that the “New Deal” had never been able to touch the deeper problems of American life. Instead, he argued the “New Deal” furthered the creation of a hierarchical elitist society whose principles contrasted with those of democracy and equality (The Watergate and Iran—gate affairs clearly illustrated Reich’s contentions and apprehensions. (Ahmad, 1987, p. 88)

In his article also Ahmad (1987) depicts and quotes the elements of Cultural Imperialism as hierarchy, materialism, greed, egotism, grand design of power tentacles to subjugate the mind and harden the heart (quoted from Brecht), undermining the poor and weaker nations, and English language and Literature as a weapon in Philippine, India and Malaysia to dictate the thoughts of Imperialism:

The civilian governor of the Philippine Islands, William Howard Taft... declared before the American Senate; "One of our great hopes in elevating those people (the Philipinos) is to 'give them a common language, English, because through the English language certainly, by reading its literature, by becoming aware of the history of the English race, they will breathe in the spirit of Anglo-Saxon individualism.'" (Mattelart 1979: 26) ... During the colonial era of India, as quoted by B.D. Basu, he wrote "We must do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, opinions, words and intellect," (Sulaiman, 1979: viii). And, nearer home, in Malaysia or Malaya then, Richard Winstedt wrote in almost similar vein about the education system. He said let the Chinese be the compradors, the sons of Malay farmers be slightly better farmer than his father, and the Indian be in the estates (Ahmad, 1987, p. 90)

Dependence, mental subjugation, and cultural subversion are all performed through language and technology, and this invasion is supported by the elites of that society who are "tentacles" of this supremacy: (Ahmad, 1987, p. 91)

It is done through, as you have seen, the language, followed by technology-mass, mess media, mass or popular culture and advertisement — backed by the organic" intellectuals or elites, administrative, economic, legal and educational apparatus specially designed for the perpetuation and an indirect control of the systems — the 'tentacles.'

Discussion

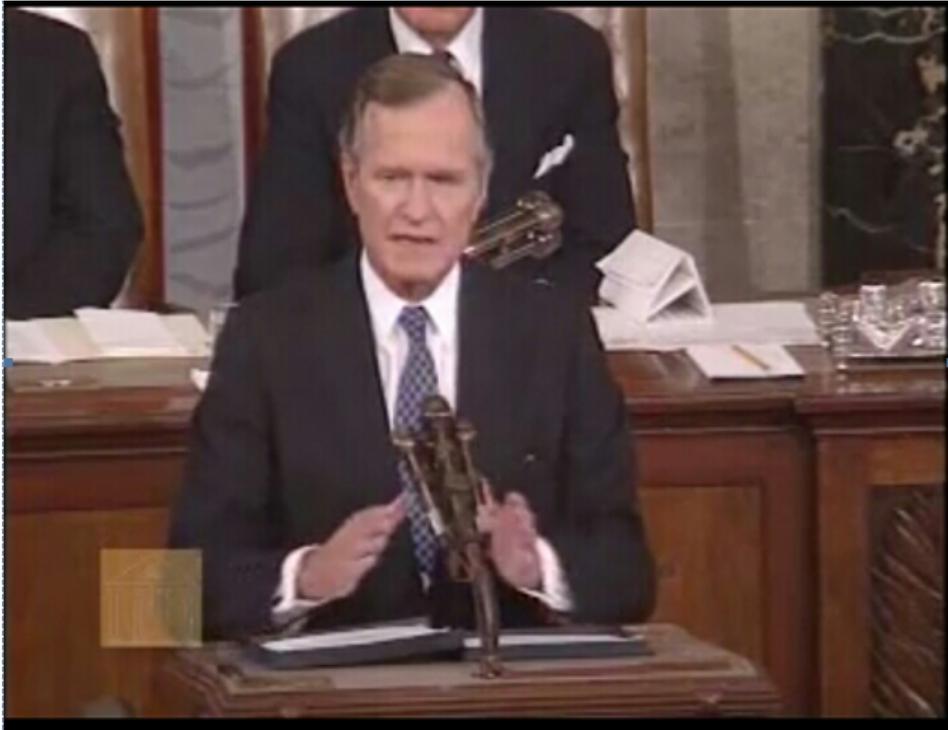
The play selected for the present research, *The New World Order*, is a political play written in 1991 and performed on July 19 of the same year at Royal court Theatre Upstairs, London. The main characters are Des, Lionel and Blindfolded Man.

The Blindfolded man is a "lecturer in theology" who "never stopped questioning the received ideas", as Des defines, he is "a man of conviction" and "a man of Principle". Now Des address him as someone who "has got nothing to say" (p. 30). Des calls him a "Cunt" and a "Prick" at the same time. He has been a "big shot" and "never stopped shooting his mouth off" but, as Des states, he has stopped all that because "he is apprehensive about what's about to happen to him" (p. 30). And finally Des and Lionel shake hands and feel pure because they think their job is "keeping the world clean for democracy" (p. 31). Des looks at the Blindfolded Man and looks at his watch and says "in about thirty five minutes" the world will be clean for democracy.

Extension of Power and Authority

Pinter directed this play, himself, on July 19, 1991 at the Royal Court Upstairs, London. Before dealing with the context of the play, as a citizen, we must know the link of this play with the foreign policies of United States and some European countries in the end of twentieth century. The term *New World Order* is a political strategy that began with the official address of George H. W. Bush (the father) to U.S. congress at 11, September 1990

We stand today at a unique and extraordinary moment. The crisis in the Persian Gulf, as grave as it is, also offers a rare opportunity to move toward an historic period of cooperation. Out of these troubled times; our fifth objective -- a new world order -- can emerge: a new era -- freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace (Bush, 1990)



In the same speech, H.W. Bush addresses the congress that their work is not done and they have to continue :

I also want to thank the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Powell; the Chiefs here tonight; our commander in the Persian Gulf, General Schwarzkopf; and the men and women of the Department of Defense. What a magnificent job you all are doing. And thank you very, very much from a grateful people. I wish I could say that their work is done. But we all know it's not (Bush, 1990)

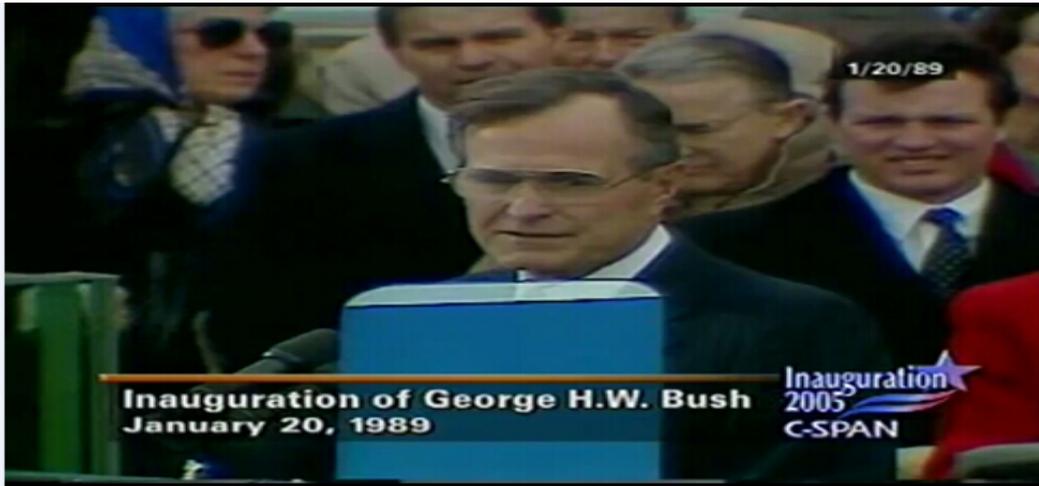
These lines are a direct reference to what two torturers, Des and Lionel, are saying to each other in *The New World Order*, while a blindfolded victim is seated there. They were talking about, as Bush did, a new world order that is on the way and has not been begun yet:

LIONEL: That's right. We haven't finished with him. We haven't even begun. And we haven't finished with his wife either.

DES: We haven't even begun.

Hierarchy and Totalitarianism

George H. W. Bush also in his Inaugural Speech at 20 January 1989, asks all American People to pray and bow in front of Almighty God and ask Him to give them more power “not to advance [American] purposes, nor to make a great show in the world, nor a name,...[but] to help people and to serve people”(Bush, 1989).



This is another hint to the text of Pinter's play, *New World Order*. The first scene of the play begins with a Blindfolded Man sitting on a chair to whom Des and Lionel are looking at and speak about:

DES: Do you want to know something about this man?

LIONEL: What?

DES: He hasn't got any idea at all of what we're going to do to him.

(H Pinter, 2005, p. 27)

They are plotting a one way dictatorship to make dominance. This sort of dominance has been already planned secretly and the blindfolded victim is unaware of it. This scene resembles an excerpt of H.W. Bush of a New World Order when he talks about new bonds which have been commenced with Russian president. With reference to his last meeting with Russian President, Michael Gorbachev, he talks about the new relations that shape "a New Partnership of Nations"

As you know, I've just returned from a very productive meeting with Soviet President Gorbachev. And I am pleased that we are working together to build a new relationship. In Helsinki, our joint statement affirmed to the world our shared resolve to counter Iraq's threat to peace. Let me quote: "We are united in the belief that Iraq's aggression must not be tolerated. No peaceful international order is possible if larger states can devour their smaller neighbors." Clearly, no longer can a dictator count on East-West confrontation to stymie concerted United Nations action against aggression. A new partnership of nations has begun (Bush, 1990)

These lines of Bush's speech coincide with what is horribly stated by the two villains in *The New World Order*, when they talk about their secret plans and behind-the-curtain agreements to the poor blindfolded man:

DES: Do you want to know something about this man?

LIONEL: What?

DES: He hasn't got any idea at all of what we're going to do to him.

LIONEL: He hasn't, no.

DES: He hasn't, no. He hasn't got any idea at all about any one of the number of things that we might do to him,

LIONEL: That we will do to him.

DES: That we will.

Pause

DES: (cont.) Well, some of them. We'll do some of them.

LIONEL: Sometimes we do all of them.

DES: That can be counterproductive.

LIONEL: Bollocks.

They study the man. He is still.

DES: But anyway here he is, here he is sitting here, and he hasn't the faintest idea of what we might do to him,

LIONEL: Well, he probably has faintest idea.

DES: A faint idea, yes. Possibly.

DES bends over the man.

The words "counterproductive" and "bollocks" are two terms that show how their satanic desire is harmful and destructive. They intend to splinter the blindfolded man mentally by bluffing on his head and intensify the sense of terror and tension.

The setting of the play is miserable and gloomy. As an audience, we just confront with a blindfolded man who has no power to defend himself against the two torturers who have planned to mentally subjugate him. The man has no name and seems to be a university lecturer in theology. He does not speak at all and like Stanley, in *The Birthday Party*, he is a victim who is going to be mentally suppressed:(p. 27)

DES: He hasn't, no. He hasn't got any idea at all about any one of the number of things that we might do to him.

LIONEL: That we will do to him

DES: That we will.

Dominance and Subservience

The sense of dominance and subservience is being taken place among two sides. One side is a shattered man with no living alarms who is mentally and physically powerless, and the other side with two villains who are full of lust and passion for ultimate power:

All these are about power and powerlessness... the *New World Order* ... does embody a lot of concerns, in the sense that the image of one man sitting blindfold and two men about to torture him, possessing absolute power, the man blindfolded possessing no power whatsoever, sums all that up (Gussow, 1994, p. 102)

The two villains who are the dramatic manifestations of Pinter's attack to United States policy, state that they are in the beginning of their battle and have not even begun it:

DES: And we haven't even finished with him. We haven't begun.

LIONEL: No, we haven't even finished with him. We haven't even finished with him! Well, we haven't begun.

DES: And there's still his wife to come.

LIONEL: That's right. We haven't finished with him. We haven't even begun. And we haven't finished with his wife either.

DES: We haven't even begun.

Establishment and Power Brutality

The abuse of power and brutality of two villains are depicted in the last lines when they think, by torturing and power abuse, they are “pure” and they are establishing the true democracy on the earth.

LIONEL I feel so pure.

Pause.

DES Well, you're right. You're right to feel pure. You know why?

LIONEL Why?

DES Because you're keeping the world clean for democracy.

They look into each other's eyes.

DES (cant.) I'm going to shake you by the hand.

Des shakes Lionel's hand. He then gestures to the man in the chair with his thumb.

Pinter has depicted his firm stand as an anti-imperialist in different contexts: from the imperial role of America in Latin American countries, up to Vietnam, Kuwait, Iraq, Persian Gulf wars in recent years. He says, “I can't stop with these things”:

Pinter tries to focus his protest on areas where he feels Britain, and the west, have a direct responsibility. He says, it is certainly true that in East Timor, Central America, Latin America, Turkey, we give them money, arms, weapons of all kinds...[and] the press, individuals, organizations, political parties going to keep silence or doing something about it? ...I just can't stop with all these things (Billington, 2007, pp. 373-374)

As a Nobel Prize winner in 2005, he depicted his role as an anti-imperialist and severely condemned the military presence of United States and Britain in Iraq. He depicted their role in Iraq as “an act of blatant state terrorism” in which thousands and thousands of innocent people” were killed:

The invasion of Iraq was a bandit act, an act of blatant state terrorism, demonstrating absolute contempt for the concept of international law. The invasion was an arbitrary military action inspired by a series of lies upon lies and gross manipulation of the media and therefore of the public; an act intended to consolidate American military and economic control of the Middle East masquerading – as a last resort – all other justifications having failed to justify themselves – as liberation. A formidable assertion of military force responsible for the death and mutilation of thousands and thousands of innocent people (Harold Pinter, 2005, p. 16)

In his works, especially *The Birthday Party*, *Party Time* and *The New World Order*, Pinter vividly expressed his ideas of Anti-Imperialism that act viciously to dominate the of weaker nations or individuals. What he asserts in *The Birthday Party* is the imperial dominance of two religious monsters, Goldberg and McCann, on a victim called Stanley:

Pinter identifies with Stanley and Petey's active and passive resistance to the religious forces of Judaism and Catholicism represented by Goldberg and McCann... he himself had discarded the Jewish faith at thirteen and in Ireland had encountered the strictness of Catholic morality...in one sense, Goldberg and McCann decisively represent the two great autocratic Western religions (Billington, 2007, p. 79)

Another dramatic link of Pinter with anti-imperialistic tenets is illustrated in *A New World Order* in which the Imperialistic policies are quite tangible. The idea of New World Order was, firstly, addressed in 1990 by President Bush to the American Congress. President George H.W. Bush defined this New World as “a new era freer from the threat of terror”, something that Pinter mocks in his play and show it as a tapestry of lies:

We stand today at a unique and extraordinary moment. The crisis in the Persian Gulf, as grave as it is, also offers a rare opportunity to move toward an historic period of cooperation. Out of these troubled times; our fifth objective -- a new world order -- can emerge: a new era -- freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace (Bush, 1990)

Conclusion

This is exactly what happens by the democratic slogan of United of States of America, as a intimidate figure in the international scene, which politically strives to transform the weaker countries to their knees in front of American Imperialism. As I put it myself, if everybody thinks the same, it means nobody thinks at all: I mean, the vast cultural hegemony of United States urges international community to cope with usual affairs of everyday life and diverts their thoughts to reflect properly on important things. Therefore, an intelligent and critical capability of a nation renders and, as American Imperialism wishes for, the suffocation of thoughts happens. This is a soft political battle on the identity of nations and indigenous people in order to turn it up-site-down and consequently ruled on. Therefore, there is an everlasting struggle for power that it is embedded in the political dominance.

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