CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

This purports to be the concluding chapter of the present study of Pinter's plays, which focussed on some of his representative plays in terms of a sociological understanding of micro-level encounters. Each of the plays discussed in the preceding chapters yields a conclusion of its own, implying the dislocation of characters from their particular social positions. The attempt in the study was to examine social dislocation in terms of its significance for the initiation of various subcultural positions, which pluralize social reality. The purpose of this study was not to describe subcultures in the selected plays, but to discover the very processes of subcultural formations, through the semiotics of the plays. The analysis of the plays in this dissertation necessitated minimization of theoretical discourse because Pinter's plays are inherently open-ended, in contrast to the 'closed' nature of theoretical discourse. Therefore, while using terms like 'dislocation' and 'subcultural', the discussion of the plays allows these terms to be defined within the contexts of the plays themselves, rather than using the terms with a narrow theoretical emphasis. The discussion in this chapter is not structured in terms of a chapterwise or playwise treatment of the subject matter of this dissertation. Instead, the conclusion focusses on the emerging pattern of subcultural processes in the plays. As a result, only the most relevant examples

from the plays have been cited here, because it would have been a repetition to discuss here each of the plays analysed in the preceding chapters.

The private everyday encounters of characters in Pinter's plays point to a social dislocation at several levels, which disrupts the homogeneity of social life and culture. Therefore, the social dislocation in the selected plays of Harold Pinter was studied in terms of subcultural processes, which segment the society. Chapter two of the dissertation evolved a broader definition of subculture, rather than its narrow connotation in the early theories of subculture. The subcultural emphasis on the social life in Pinter's plays was desirable, given the fact that each of the plays discussed in the preceding chapters, in one way or the other, signifies a break from the larger society, thereby suggesting a subcultural reality, in a variety of senses of the term 'subculture'. The plays selected for analysis were divided into four categories in terms of their subcultural representations. The four categories chosen for the discussion of social dislocation reflect different social contexts, significant from the point of view of initiating and maintaining a subcultural identity. These social contexts are: social mobility, use of official procedures, resistance to the existing social order and incorporation of categories . The actions in the plays were analysed in terms of their subcultural significance, within the given contexts of social encounters.Thus, the subcultural processes in the plays were studied not in a single framework, but in multiple social

contexts specific to the plays. The emphasis in the study of subcultural processes in the plays was on the dialectic nature of social encounters, not on locating the dominant-subordinate relationship between culture and subculture/s. The study has uncovered some of the social meanings in the plays, which were inaccessible through available perspectives on Pinter's plays. In this sense, this study has created another space for the criticism of Pinterian drama, which can accommodate many more studies along similar path. The study has also highlighted the issues involved in using the subcultural framework in empirical sociological research. Thus, the study also generates some interdisciplinary conclusions.

The most noticeable conclusion which can be drawn from the study is that the plays dramatize the ambivalence of subcultural processes in a society and thereby, the actions in the plays dislocate cultural logic, leaning towards a postmodernist impasse, where it is difficult to maintain the culture-subculture binary. This conclusion gets support from the analysis of *The Lover, The Room* and *The Homecoming.* These plays, though discussed in terms of the subcultural reality specific to each of the plays, point towards the weak social boundaries between various social groups in a society. In *The Lover,* Richard abandons his game of adultery with his own wife, because the adulterous relationship loses its appeal and at the end of the play, the two roles merge into one. This merger signifies the inseparability of subcultural practices from the mainstream culture, because of weak

differences. In *The Room*, Rose's blindness suggests the continuity of cultural features across diverse boundaries, making it difficult to define a particular subculture. The most striking depiction of the inversion of cultural logic is found in *The Homecoming*, in which the so called dominant/ subordinate binary has been completely and visibly demolished. Teddy's refined manners and accomplishments as professor of philosophy are seen as a deviation from the general tradition of the butcher's family. *The Homecoming*, thus, dramatizes the postmodern predicament of defining the deviant form of social life. The action of the play critiques the subculture theories based on deviance from the mainstream culture. In such early theories, it was possible to define subcultural life in terms of its deviation, because there was a recognizeable mainstream culture. However, in contemporary multicultural societies, where there is no single mainstream culture, it is difficult to define deviance, whose definition keeps on shifting from one social context to another. This dislocation in the process of defining deviation is suggested by the fact that Teddy, who represents outside his family the respectable mainstream culture, is defined as a deviant within his own family.

The plays discussed here defy any pattern of growth of subcultural processes, which is an interesting fact, given Pinter's own position as belonging to a minority community and his being a witness to anti-Semitism. In *The Birthday Party*, Pinter's first full length play, Stanley exhibits resistance to the normative aspects of culture, by following a

bohemian life style. However, at the end of the play, the subcultural position initiated by him is subsumed within the larger culture. In a later play, *One for the Road*, where Pinter becomes more explicit than he is in *The Birthday Party*, the situation has not changed, except the two different contexts of the plays. Pinter's work shows elements of a circular development rather than a linear course of the development of subcultural rhetoric. Between *The Birthday Party* and *One for the Road*, there are some plays which exhibit a powerful impact of subcultural life. *A Slight Ache* can be cited as an example of the power of subculture. Flora's exchanging of her husband Edward with the matchseller is unequivocally an act of rejecting the mainstream culture and embracing a subculture. However, the resistance to the established culture is not carried on consistently in Pinter's plays that follow *A Slight Ache*.

The manner in which Pinter's ideas have been distributed across his plays reveals that he does not write plays with a consistent theme in mind. Consequently, the work he has produced is fragmentary in nature, though to his own advantage. It is as if Pinter initiates a theme in one play, abandons it in the next play, picking up new ideas and then returning to the old ones. Pinter's own dramatic work shows a dislocation of ideas, which goes to his advantage in the sense that this random distribution of ideas in his plays itself is a subcultural rhetoric of the playwright, because by doing so he is able to escape any pigeonholing of his plays into existing categories. Although Pinter's

plays have subtle repetitions of a given image/idea, the dramatic development of the same provides individuality to the plays. The asymmetric nature of Pinter's work is suggested by *Ashes to Ashes*, his latest play to the point of writing this dissertation. The play seems to be a misfit in the pattern of Pinter's plays, especially when in *One for the Road* he begins to deal with political themes. *Ashes to Ashes* reverses the progression of Pinter's work and takes him back to some of his older plays, through the typically Pinterian encounter between man and woman. Thus, while *One for the Road* marks the beginning of Pinter's political views, *Ashes to Ashes* revives the theme of individual memory.

One of the motivations for the emergence of subcultures is to challenge the hegemony of the dominant culture and to provide an alternative social space for a redefinition for personal empowerment of the members of different subcultural groups. However, the manifestations of subcultural life in the plays of Pinter reveal a contradiction of this function of subcultures. Pinter has subverted the very grounds on which subcultural reality arises, thereby making various subcultures merely extensions of the dominant culture, a view which is well acknowledged in the critique of subcultures. The approach of this study, in not following a particular subcultural model , is indirectly justified, because such a choice would have been futile, given the pluralistic nature of subcultural manifestations in Pinter's plays.

The study of *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Hothouse* and *Mountain Language* reveals that subcultures in Pinter's plays either lack power or are merely functional specializations, retaining the power structures of the dominant culture. Ben and Gus in *The Dumb Waiter* exemplify the oppressive nature of a subcultural group. The action of the play indicates that Ben and Gus have been dislocated from the mainstream society, by virtue of their membership of the killer gang. Their being confined in the basement reinforces the image of dislocation. However, they have not been able to acquire a more powerful identity through their membership of the gang in the play. On the contrary, they seem to be under a stricter surveillance of their bosses. Their miserable condition points to the fact that culture and subculture are indistinguishable from each other, as far as their control over individuals is concerned. *The Hothouse* also confirms the depiction in *The Dumb Water*, because the mental asylum in the play dramatizes the control of the ministry on the social life of the institution. Although the asylum in the play has been set up for the rehabilitation of people in need, the activities of the staff contradict the welfare motive of the institution , transforming it into any other institution, with its power politics and corruption. *Mountain Language* explicitly shows the elimination of subcultures through official modalities. The subcultural representations in Pinter's plays are used not as strategies of resistance, but as devices which confirm the power of the dominant culture. It is possible to say that the subcultural processes represented in Pinter's plays are camouflages to the deeper process of revitalizing

cultural hegemony. Thus, the use of subcultural themes in Pinter's plays is rhetorical rather than revolutionary, in the sense that by depicting different types of subcultural processes, the playwright reveals the impossibility of maintaining a well demarcated subcultural boundary.

The social dislocation in the plays is due to the unpredictable nature of relationship between culture and its subcultures. The discussion of *A Night Out* and *No Man's Land* points to the alogical nature of cultural dynamics in Pinter's plays. In *A Night Out*, Albert as an agent of a subcultural process, represented by his resistance to the tradition of his family, seems to be powerful in the beginning. However, his encounter with the members of other social groups, such as the sports team and his colleagues, weakens the force of his resistance. At the end of the play, when the prostitute starts behaving with him in a dominating manner like that of his mother, Albert's position as a rebel is nullified, because he finds himself amidst a similar pressure which he experienced in his interactions with his mother and his colleagues. Towards the end of the play, Albert's mother asserts her supremacy over him, though through the strategy of enticement, saying that she has forgiven him. The subcultural position initiated by Albert does not reach its logical culmination, in the stabilization of a deviant youth culture. He returns to the dominant culture, represented by his family tradition, not out of choice, but by a pure accident. The sudden reversal of a new social position signifies that the society in Pinter's plays does

not follow a logical path in its cultural dialectic. The path to be taken is contingent upon new situations, arising from time to time.

The situation in *No Man's Land* also confirms the above argument about the shifting dialectic of culture in modern societies. The action of the play uses a subcultural setting, involving poets and artists. However, by the end of the play, the subcultural reality of the play has been disrupted by the presence of elements from other social spheres. The reference to financial advisor in the play dislocates the artistic elements and neutralizes the subcultural focus of the play. Spooner, who begins his discourse as a dedicated poet, deviates into begging for a comfortable employment as the secretary to Hirst. The merger of a subcultural position into the general culture suggests the loss of cultural logic in contemporary societies, which has serious implications for the emergence of new subcultures. The situation in *No Man's Land* points to the loss of foregrounding strategies of subcultures and suggests the impossibility of maintaining a subcultural identity in the present scenario of inevitable cultural diffusion, which fragments the theme involved in the formation of a particular subculture. This situation acts as a double edged sword. On one hand, such a situation can lead to the formation of newer subcultures, by further subdividing the existing subcultures. On the other, the fragmentation of subcultural reality thwarts the stabilization of subcultures in pluralistic societies.

By disrupting the hegemony of the established culture, subcultures seek to bring about social change. However, the subcultural processes in Pinter's plays do not promise a social change and the *status quo* is maintained. Even in a subculturally powerful play like *A Slight Ache*, Flora's choice of the matchseller is retrogade, in the sense that she chooses him not because of his newness, but because she associates him with someone whom she knew in the past. The matchseller's being old also suggests the choice of a primitive element rather than a modern/new element. The action in the play indicates a backward movement, in terms of the choice of an alternative social system, defeating the possibility of a positive social change. *The Homecoming* is perhaps the most outrageous of Pinter's plays, in inverting the concept of morality and family relationships. In this sense, the play obviously has a subcultural tone. There is a subtext to the overt subcultural representation in the play. The action of the play resists social change and strives to maintain a particular family tradition. Teddy has gone away from his family culture and has redefined himself as an intellectual. However, his family is successful in retrieving his wife Ruth and cajoling her into becoming a sophisticated prostitute, subtly continuing the family tradition. The deeper socio-cultural implication of Ruth's staying back with Teddy's family is not a cultural shock, but resistance to change. Pinter has, thus, adapted the concept of subculture to dramatize his own predilection for *status quo* and cultural hegemony , despite belonging to a minority community .

The discussion of subcultural processes in the plays reveals the loss of rhetoric devices available for the foregrounding of subcultural identities. This crisis is hinted at very explicitly in the action of *One for the Road*. As has been discussed earlier, the play dramatizes the incorporation of new categories into existing categories. However, during the process of incorporation of Victor into the majority ideology, Nicolas has initiated a subcultural process, in his personal adaptation of the method of interrogation. Thus, *One for the Road* depicts a shift in the site of origin of a subcultural process from a less privileged group to a more privileged group. This shift in the origin of subcultural life suggests the appropriation of subcultures by the dominant culture, because of lack of a well defined theme. The analysis of *One for the Road* indicates that the plays of Pinter depict the failure of subcultural processes due to lack of distinct themes. The failure of subcultural rhetoric causes social dislocation, because individuals cannot have stable identities, due to the ambivalent position of the social group of which they are a part.

An important feature of the image of dislocation in the plays discussed here is that it is an attempt towards restoring any social change/deviation. In the *The Birthday Party*, Stanley is physically displaced from his comfortable lodging in the boarding house. However, the dislocation seeks to relocate him in a more privileged position vis-à-vis his condition in the boarding house, though to the loss of his identity. In *One for the Road* Victor is also relocated,

through his dislocation from his chosen position, as part of the general tradition and the majority group. The apparent dislocation of characters in most of the plays discussed here is an attempt to relocate them, in terms of the established power structure, implying the loss of their identity.

One of the reasons for the ambivalent depiction of subcultural identities in the plays analysed in this dissertation is that Pinter has failed to create different subcultural levels of discourse in his plays. Except for sporadic hints of language specific to a cultural group, for example , in *The Homecoming* and *A Night Out*, the discourse in the plays manifests typically Pinterian features, in terms of silences, pauses and repetitive utterances. It is paradoxical to note that although it has been acknowledged by Pinter's critics that the language in his plays is akin to real speech, the plays fail to represent subcultural differences in the discourse of the plays. The lack of appropriate subcultural markers of discourse forms a representational failure in the plays, because the plays do not achieve the unequivocal representation of diverse subcultural groups in terms of the use of language. Thus, the plays manifest a discontinuity between language and theme, by not evolving appropriate discourse types. However, this lack of discursive boundaries is not altogether an artistic failure, because the lack of different types of discourses coincides with the general loss of *difference* among various social groups and therefore, Pinter's

predictable language is complementary to his depiction of the failure

of subcultural processes.

The discussion in this chapter reveals that social dislocation in Pinter's plays forms an exercise in disrupting the process of subcultural formations. Although some of the plays, like *A Slight Ache,* depict a powerful initiation of a subculture, other plays seek to curb plurality and restore homogeneity in the society. Pinter has demonstrated the weak force of subcultural life, by foregrounding its superficial differences from the mainstream culture. Moreover, *One for the Road* illustrates that a subcultural identity cannot be maintained because of political power. The apparent subcultural representations in the plays discussed here are an attempt to dramatize the hegemony of the dominant culture and to expose the deeper weaknesses and inconsistencies of subcultural modes of social life. Thus, in conclusion of this dissertation, it can be argued that the depiction of subcultural processes in Pinter's plays has the rhetoric function of asserting the hegemony of the dominant culture. The study reveals that the presence of subcultural elements in a society leads to the activation of the dominant culture. The study yields the observation that subcultures cannot uproot the dominant culture, which is asserted by the very presence of subcultures. Pinter's plays serve to demystify the appeal of subcultural life, by showing its inseparability from the larger culture. The plays dramatize the inadequacies of the concept of subculture as a framework in the discourse on social plurality and segmentation.