



Class Conflict with its Causes & Effects in *The Kitchen* by Arnold Wesker

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ABSTRACT

The Kitchen by Arnold Wesker is one of the remarkable plays of the post-war period in England. This paper will analyse the class conflict with its causes and effects in this play in the light of Marxist literary criticism to point out that the socio-economic conditions of the post-war period do not promise a good future to the lower class with developed living and working circumstances. The working class characters, the personnel of the Tivoli Restaurant, are observed to work heavily under harsh conditions, because of which they always have the possibility of injuring themselves. Apart from their fast tempo, their hardwork is never appreciated. Thus, their labour-power is commodified by the owner of the restaurant, Mr. Marango, and they are alienated from their work along with the food they cook. What is more, their hard working and living circumstances result in a moral decline in the lower class characters. In consequence, they cannot change their viewpoints to improve their conditions and they continue living in a vicious circle. They just work under the tension of being rebuked or humiliated by Mr Marango, whose life is his restaurant.

KEYWORDS

class conflict, alienation, moral decline, commodification of labour power

Arnold Wesker is one of the outstanding playwrights of the post-war period as one of the founder members of “the ‘new wave’ of British Theatre running from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s” (Bull 171). Wesker was brought up in a politically active and “culturally rich, thriving environment” (Pattie 91). In his long career, he wrote more than forty plays (Bull 171). *The Kitchen* is the first one of his major and well-known plays. He was “a socialist, and his experiences in the 1950s honed and shaped his politics, as they honed and shaped his writing” (Pattie 93). Wesker’s being a socialist playwright can be observed in his plays and characters in the post-war period. Before starting his writing career, he worked in different areas and the most famous one of them is cooking in various kitchens in London and Paris. His experiences and observations in this field provided him a considerably useful material for his works. In his first play *The Kitchen*, written in 1957, he kneads his experiences “as successively a kitchen porter, a pastry cook and a chef” and observations in the kitchen with his creativity (Bull 171-172). In this respect, Wesker successfully composes his first play and “depicts a single day in the kitchen of a somewhat second-rate London restaurant” (172). *The Kitchen* is one of his most significant plays and from its setting to characters Wesker recreated a context of the 1950s in England.

— 88 — A kitchen is one of the most significant places in not only houses but also restaurants as there is an important kind of production there. Especially, the kitchen in Wesker’s play is a kind of microcosm of the country as a production area with its staff members and the boss representing their contradictory relationship in the capitalist system of the post-war period. As Christopher Innes observes, “The characters are all types, one from each European nation. The setting is explicitly a microcosm, with Wesker’s introductory note that ‘The world might have been a stage for Shakespeare but for me it is a kitchen’ indicating the seriousness attached to a speech like ‘This stinking kitchen is like the world – you know what I mean?’” (110). The kitchen also provides the playwright “to broaden the focus of the action to include a greater range of characters” (Lacey 106). Likewise, there are members of two different classes in the play, including the working class personnel and their boss Mr. Marango, belonging to the middle class. As David Ian Rabey argues, “*The Kitchen* ... present[s] intensified critical images of British society: hierarchical, compartmentalised and dehumanising through purposeful narrowness of focus” (37). Thus, Wesker produced the kitchen as a discourse where he reshaped the working class, their living and working conditions along with the relationship of the lower class with the middle class in the play.

According to Marxist literary criticism, literature has a particular background as its writer

¹ This article has been adapted from the author’s unpublished Ph.D. thesis, named “Theatre as a Product and a Mirror of Socio-Economic Structure in English Society”. This part is between the pages 85-107.

cannot be independent of the period when s/he lives as the base, the economic system, and the superstructure, institutions of the state, influence everyone in society. When the content of literary works is analysed in respect of the class constructs, agents of the superstructure and other impacts of the economic system, it is possible to discover if the work of art supports or subverts the dominant ideology of the period. In this sense, literary works can raise awareness of the reader and encourage him/her to struggle so as to change things around him/her. Literature, thus, is a mirror, which has power to change the dominant ideology. Literature does not reflect the reality as it is, but it puts a broken mirror to society while it shows some socio-economic features of the historical period when it is written. Meanwhile, it is affected by the ideology and other circumstances of the period, so it is also a product of that period. When *The Kitchen* is evaluated with a Marxist lens today, it is unfortunately seen that the working class still has a lot of troubles resulting from the oppression of the capitalist system. They experience alienation, commodification of labour power and degeneration of their moral values as a consequence of being exposed to harsh living and working conditions at the bottom of society. Additionally, climate crisis emerging from the consumerist system based on the cycle of production and consumption bring about more problems today which cause people to question the economic system of the world. In that regard, the crises the capitalist system constantly cause, which bring us on the edge of the end of the world today, have motivated me to return back to the immediate post-war period, in which after such a big war, a new system could potentially be established for the whole world. However, what I have found is the reality that the lower class that had suffered for centuries before World War II in the middle of poverty in English society continued to have similar agonies after the war. What is more, the negative impacts of the economic crisis that the country went through brought about worse living and working conditions resulting in more problems in their lives, like alienation and degeneration of moral values. Hence, this study aims to analyse the class conflict that the lower class characters have to suffer from in English society after the Second World War in order to demonstrate with a Marxist point of view *The Kitchen* that indicates the socio-economic circumstances of the post-war period do not promise to the lower class a better life in which they can be glad with their products in a working area which is designed according to their needs and in which their labour power is appreciated by the boss.

In the kitchen of the Tivoli Restaurant, the labour-power of the characters has been commodified because of the rush in their work and the attitude of the owner of the restaurant towards them. As a result, the staff members are alienated and there is a moral degeneration among some characters as a consequence of the capitalist relations of production. They sacrifice their moral values and have a kind of conformism resulting from economic difficulties they have to bear as the working class. On the other hand, there are only a few characters that are able to

reject this moral degeneration and still have some ethical values. Another negative impact of the capitalist system is the characters' inability of thinking differently. Owing to the feeling of desperateness and some effects of the ideology on the characters, they are not able to find the correct way of improving their conditions or changing their lives. They live unhappily and hopelessly in a vicious circle. In Rabey's words, "*The Kitchen* shows how pressured and hierarchically separated working conditions intensify resentments and lead workers to drop standards in ways which are apparently acceptable to industrialised consumerism" (37). What is more, the viewpoint of the bourgeoisie is indicated in the play with Mr. Marango. As he is the owner of production, he has domineering and humiliating attitudes towards the personnel. Hence, there is constant tension and a big gap between the boss and the staff. Accordingly, in *The Kitchen*, the harsh working and living conditions of the working class are depicted with a number of negative impacts of the capitalist economic system.

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The relations of people in their social lives are closely connected with "the way they produce their material life" (Eagleton 4). Their relations transform as their means of production changes. Now, these social relations have been "between the capitalist class who owns [the] means of production, and the proletarian class whose labour-power the capitalist buys for profit" (5). In the play, the kitchen of the Tivoli restaurant is the working area of the staff. However, it is not a peaceful place where they can produce and become happy. In contrast, it is the place where their labour-power has been commodified by the owner of the production, Mr. Marango. The root of 'commodification' of labour-power of the working class lies in the 'exchange' of production that turns "labour-power itself into a commodity" when it starts to be purchased by "capitalists with a view to profit" (Bidet 8). It means to buy production, as Jacques Bidet highlights, "at a lower price than the value it will produce" (8). At that moment, "relations of exchange" transform into a complex relationship among individuals as "relations of exploitation between classes" emerge and interests of upper classes become more conflicting for the working class (8). As a consequence, the upper classes having more money become wealthier and more powerful, whereas the working class becomes poorer economically, socially and psychologically with the commodified labour-power.

In the play, there is a pretty fast tempo in the kitchen where the cooks and service staff work to death and the play starts with it. As Wesker remarks, "Somehow its maniacal tone is part of the whole atmosphere of the kitchen" (11). He, thus, underlines the hard working conditions of lower class people and their negative effects on the personnel. As Stephen Lacey expounds, "One of the major political points of all three plays [*The Kitchen*, *Chips with Everything* and *the Quare Fellow*] is the way that human actions are structured by the institutional contexts in which they

are placed, a theme that is best explored when a collective is actually represented” (106). In that regard, the fast and intense work makes everyone in the staff crazy. For example, in the beginning, Peter, the “strong central character”, who is “still concerned with the situation of the larger group”, highlights how much they have to work (106):

PETER. No, I mean what restaurant you work in before?

KEVIN. Parisito, Shaftesbury Avenue.

PETER. [*rubbing his thumb and finger together*]: Good pay?

KEVIN. [*shaking his head*]: That’s why I came here.

PETER. Oh, you get good money here – but you work! [*raising his hands in despair*]... (1.24)

They earn a good amount of money, but they have to work extremely hard to deserve their salaries. What is more, they have some missing staff along with this heavy load of work. The extra work makes the kitchen ‘a mad house’ as the characters often call it. Frank and Peter, for instance, argue:

FRANK. Co-Co is off today. Someone must do the fry.

PETER. Bloody house this is. The middle of summer and we got no staff. I got six dishes. (1.25)

In this sense, the heavy work load of the kitchen makes some characters angrier and more aggressive and Peter, for instance, has a fight with Gaston, who is from Cypress and who “is inclined to go to pieces and panic and cry at everyone” while working (Wesker 11). Peter apologises for having punched Gaston and giving him a black eye, but Gaston is still furious with him and does not accept Peter’s regret. As Vandana Goyal puts it, “The workers in the kitchen are not only alienated from each other but also from their own selves, for they do not act as one expects people to act in such situations. Their normal human impulse appears to have been inoperative. Instead, they have bad tempers and are ready to fly at each other’s throat on the minutest possible excuse or provocation” (572). Similarly, Gaston wants revenge:

PETER. Hey Gaston, I’m sorry – your black eye, I’m sorry about it.

GASTON. DON’T TALK TO ME.

PETER. I say I’m sorry, that’s all.

GASTON. You sorry because half a dozen Cypriot boys make you feel sorry – but we not finished yet!

PAUL. Gaston! What’s the matter with you? A man is saying sorry – so accept!

GASTON. Accept? He gives me this [*pointing to black eye*] and I must accept?
[To PETER] We not finished yet, I'm telling you. (I.26)

All these extreme feelings emerge from the harsh working conditions and the menace they feel at any time of their working in the kitchen.

The negative effects of the bad working conditions are not limited with the points above. Dimitri highlights: "But you think it was Peter's fault? They all wanted to fight. Listen, you put a man in the plate-room all day he's got dishes to make clean, and stinking bins to take away, and floors to sweep, what else there is for him to do – he want to fight. He got to show he is a man somehow. So – blame him!" (I.20). Terrible working conditions, thus, imprison people into their work and they cannot even socialise among the staff in the kitchen. As Goyal points out, "The reason for communication gap and lack of warmth in interpersonal relationships is that they are depersonalized. It is a place where men cannot pause to know each other because most of their time they have to pass inside the kitchen, working continuously for long hours. ... The job is more important than the individuals who hold it" (571). In consequence, their psychology is really disturbed by these dehumanising conditions in the kitchen.

The existence of the boss in the restaurant is another factor that raises menace in the kitchen. Peter, an experienced cook there, draws the portrait of Mr. Marango for Kevin, the new cook responsible for fish:

KEVIN. [*to PETER*]: He seems a kind old man.

PETER. You think he is kind? He is a bastard. He talks like that because it is summer now. Not enough staff to serve all his customers, that is why he is kind. You going to stay till winter? Wait till then. You'll see. ... (I.28)

Peter warns Kevin about Mr. Marango not to suppose that he is a kind man, who Mr. Marango only pretends to be so as he needs the personnel to work more because of the missing staff members in the busy season. Nonetheless, all the staff in the kitchen are aware that Mr. Marango can be extremely rude and cruel whenever he wants. In that regard, the personnel know that they do not have any importance for the boss, but they are only like cooking or servicing robots in the kitchen. Peter summarises:

This – this madhouse it's always here. When you go, when I go, when Dimitri go – the kitchen stays. It'll go on when we die, think about that. We work here – eight hours a day, and yet – it's nothing. We take nothing. Here – the kitchen, here – you. You and the kitchen. And the kitchen don't mean nothing to you and you don't mean to the kitchen nothing. (Interlude. 48)

Accordingly, the kitchen always goes on. The staff members do not have any significance individually in the capitalist system, because the workers are nothing other than a kind of slaves. In Marxist terms, the kitchen staff have already been reduced to labour-power. Above all, their work-force has been transformed into commodity. They just come and go in order to move the kitchen on and the commodification of their work-force reduces every worker in the kitchen to an unhappy and alienated machine that always has to work more.

The personnel on this account suffer during the process of production in the kitchen. As Michael Patterson suggests, “In 1960 Wesker pioneered the first major attempt since the Second World War to involve the British working classes more fully in the cultural life enjoyed by the more expensively educated” (30). Kevin, for example, gets shocked as soon as he begins working there. He sees the staff members as bees that fly around. After working till the lunch time, he remarks:

KEVIN. Finished! I’m done! I’m boiled! You can serve me up for supper! ...

RAYMOND. It’s every day the same, my friend.

KEVIN. ... Look at me. I’m soaking. Look at this jacket. I can wring it out. That’s not sweat, no man carries that much water. ... Kevin, you’ll drop dead if you stay. I’m warning you Kevin, take a trip from a friend, hop it! Get out! You’ve got your youth Kevin, keep it! This is no place for a human being – you’ll drop dead, I’m telling you. (Interlude. 47)

Kevin is terribly exhausted due to the hard working conditions. Their work is also not appreciated by the boss. They have to eat stale and smelly food despite cooking fresh food for the customers:

GWEN. What’ve you got for us this morning?

ALFREDO. Curried cats and dogs.

GWEN. Is this cabbage from yesterday?

HANS. It’s all right, it’s all right, eat it, eat.

VIOLET. What are these?

HANS. Very good, very good. Cauliflower and white sauce.

VIOLET. White sauce? It smells.

MOLLY. Got anything good, Hans?

HANS. If you don’t like – go to Chef.

MOLLY. Got any boiled potatoes?

HANS. Not cooked yet, not ready, ach ...

[HANS *moves away in disgust leaving them to serve themselves. ...*] (I.31)

The staff are also not allowed to eat comfortably without rush as some customers continue to come and order food or the boss orders a meal while the staff are having lunch:

MOLLY. Mr. Marango wants a leg of chicken and some sauté.

FRANK. Mr. Marango can go to hell, I'm eating.

MOLLY. [*moves off*]: I'll call for it in five minutes.

FRANK. They don't give you a chance to eat here. (I.37)

In fact, it is the life of workers in general in the post-war period and Wesker stresses that aspect in his play as he "wants to capture real life" (qtd in Patterson 40). According to Patterson, "By showing us actual physical work, and giving it a point, Wesker was again being innovatory. While other writers may talk of work, Wesker actually takes us into the workplace, most notably in *The Kitchen* and later in *The Journalists*" (40). With all the details, Wesker, thus, observes that their job is both physical and psychological as they have to stand the disconcerting effects of working in the kitchen.

Apart from their harsh working conditions, the personnel also have to struggle with the opposition of their boss to them. The staff often work to death and they do not have safety during their working hours, which is just ignored by the boss. Wesker emphasises this problem with the accident Hans has had in the kitchen:

HANS. My face! My face! I burnt my face.

FRANK. What is it Hans?

HANS. Who bloody fool put a pot of hot water on steamer?

PETER. It fell on you?

HANS. ... Bastard house! I never worked before so bad. Never, never... [PETER *takes him away for some first aid.*]

FRANK. He'll live. [*To the crowd*] All right, it's all over, come on. (I.32)

Even pouring hot water on one of the workers' face is not significant for the boss and his representatives Chef and Frank. Work must always go on even when a worker is injured and in pain. As Lacey points out, "These institutions are not simply backdrops to the actions and interactions of characters, but are always determining presences, defining and structuring the action; no matter what is happening between characters, work must go on in the kitchen, basic training must run its course, and the deadening routines of prison life grind remorselessly on" (106). As a result, none of the staff members has any significance for the boss personally since they only exist as the work-force in the kitchen. Their duty is only to continue cooking or serving the food even if somebody gets injured or drops dead next to them. In short, the workers

are expected to be like robots that do not eat or feel anything and that only work without any pause.

In the kitchen, there are many factors bringing about alienation of the workers. According to Marxist criticism, alienation is a consequence of “a certain form of organization of society” where people are separated from “free access to the means of production” and labour (Mandel 20). In other words, products of workers’ hands and minds are extorted from them and these products “turn against their creators and come to dominate their lives” (Novack 7). As George Novack advocates, “[I]nstead of enlarging freedom, these uncontrollable powers increase human servitude” (7). Thus, alienation has been a serious problem for the working class for a long time. The routine of the work the characters of the play have to perform every day and the unpleasant atmosphere of the kitchen are the two of the reasons causing alienation. Lacey writes as follows:

The events of *The Kitchen* are contained within a single day, and are shaped by the cyclical routine of the preparation for the meal and the recovery from it; the stage directions inform us that one of the first tasks to be performed in the morning is the lighting of the ovens, which creates a noise that ‘grows from a small to a loud ferocious roar’ that will ‘stay with us to the end’, acting as a constant reminder of, and metaphoric substitute for, alienated labour. (106)

Furthermore, all of the workers are aware that they do not have any value for the boss and this awareness makes them all unhappy. In such an atmosphere, they are treated like machines that only have to produce as much and quick as possible, which leads to alienation. For example, Kevin, Gaston, Violet and the head waiter talk:

KEVIN. I’ll be taking my leave tonight by Christ.

GASTON. You’ll get used to it. It’s good money. ...

KEVIN. To hell with the money an’ all. I like me pay but not for this. It’s too big here, man, it’s high pressure all the time. An’ the food! Look at the food! I never cooked so bad since I was in the army. An’ no one is after caring much either!

VIOLET. And what about the waitresses, we’re the animals, everybody pushing everybody else out of the way. ... I can remember working in places where you had to move like a ballet dancer, weave in and out of tables with grace. There was room, it was civilized. (II.57-58)

The whole staff, thus, have been alienated from the work they do and they feel unhappy. Violet, for instance, complains about inhumane working conditions as she cannot be glad with her job in this rush and rudeness. According to Goyal, “Wesker is criticizing the meaningless and mechanical life of the contemporary working class people. It is a theatrical representation of the

experience of alienation and frustrations of working class in the capitalist society” (569-570). Until the interlude, a short break for the staff, none of the personnel can “give a thought inside their hearts and speak out their real self” (573). Hence, their feelings are dehumanised as a consequence of their work load (573).

In addition to these harsh and inhumane working conditions, the division of labour among the personnel causes them to deal with only one task in the kitchen. They either have to cook the same type of food or have to do the same task to have a perfect product. As Alex Callinicos argues, the division of labour is the first step of “the emergence of capitalist social relations of production,” including “the separation of the direct producer from the means of production, the consequent transformation of labour power into commodity, and the concentration of the means of production in the hands of the buyer of labour power, the capitalist” (15). Thus, there are several negative impacts of the division of labour on workers along with the characters in the play and alienation is one of them. As Karl-Heinz Stoll writes, “*The Kitchen* presents the hectic rush in the kitchen of a large restaurant as an image of the meaningless, enervating world of a perfectionist division of labor” (422-423). Furthermore, there is a domino effect here and alienation following the division of labour is accompanied by other negative influences. In order to escape from the realities of the present even for a short time Peter wants some of his friends to dream during the interlude. In Goyal’s words, “The dream sequence is the frustrated effort of these people to life themselves beyond their environment, to express their social being and to share their sense of being with their fellowmen. Unable to respond to each other as human beings, they escape into the world of fantasy, the only world where their alienation is temporarily muted” (573). In this respect, the cook and the service staff are in a terrible condition in the kitchen of the Tivoli restaurant because of alienation.

The workers also do not have the chance of cooking tasty food, so they cannot be glad with the food they cook. The number of people eating at the restaurant is huge, approximately two thousand people every day. That is why, the obligation of cooking a large amount of food in a great rush prevents these people from feeling the happiness of producing something. As Goyal notes,

Analyzing alienation in terms of the relation of the worker to his work, to the product of his labour, to fellow workers and to the owner of the means of production, Marx explains the way in which the objects created by man acquire an independent power and rule over him. Work becomes a kind of enslavement and, as a consequence, the worker becomes unhappy and apathetic. (570)

As a result, Kevin and other cooks feel alienated from the food they cook. As Michael and Gaston state:

MICHAEL. ...what's on the menu today? I don't know why I bother – it's always the same. Vegetable soup, minestrone, omolletteeee au jambon – ah well! One day I'll work in a place where I can create masterpieces, master bloody pieces. Beef Stroganoff, Chicken Kiev, and that king of the Greek dishes – Moussaka.

GASTON. Never. You'll never create a Moussaka. Chips you can make – chips with everything. (I.22)

Michael wants to create masterpieces rather than cooking the same ordinary food every day, but Gaston does not believe that Michael will have this chance, because he is conscious that not the quality but the quantity of the food is regarded in this kitchen. In this sense, they want to enjoy cooking as a job and to be glad with their product, but the system of the restaurant, the microcosm of the capitalist system, just turns them into machines producing food. As Lacey suggests, “The kitchen was perceived not only as a metonym or synecdoche for other kitchens, but also as a metaphor for society at large” (107). Hence, the characters work and live in such miserable conditions without any chance to get rid of alienation or improve themselves. The whole country and even the world are full of such places as the kitchen of the Tivoli Restaurant for the working class in the capitalist system. As Goyal points out, “[T]he kitchen stands for the industrial capitalist system and the problem of the cooks is the problem of the whole working class in the system” (575). The staff members in the kitchen are “totally dehumanized and emotionless” as a result of the influences of alienation (575).

Capitalist relations of production affect not only economy but also social relationships of people. Poverty was one of the resistant problems despite the struggles of the government to build a welfare state. The difficulties lower and working class people had for a long time in the harsh circumstances of the post-war period caused them to neglect moral values to some extent. In *The Kitchen*, they lead to deterioration in morality and it is common among the working class. As Patterson remarks, “[B]oth writers, [Osborne and Wesker], informed by a socialist viewpoint, expressed a profound dissatisfaction with the society around them” (27). For instance, there is a love affair between Peter and Monique, one of the staff members in the kitchen, for nearly three years. Yet, it cannot be a new beginning for them. Monique does not divorce her husband as he provides her with better living conditions at home:

MONIQUE. ... Twice [Peter]'s given me a baby, twice I've disappointed him. He wanted them both. Dissolve that. ...

PETER. [*moving to* MONIQUE]: I'm sorry.

MONIQUE. Not an attractive future, is it? Apologizing backwards and forwards. First you, then me ... (II.62)

Monique explains the improbability of a future for them. Even her pregnancies did not convince her to marry Peter. Additionally, she implies its economic reasons later:

PETER. Listen Monique, I love you. Please listen to me that I love you. You said you love me but you don't say to your husband this thing. ... You are not going to leave him are you? You don't really intend to?

MONIQUE. Oh Peter, please?

PETER. What do you want I should do then? ...

MONIQUE. Did I tell you Monty's going to buy me a house? (II.64)

Economic circumstances are everything for these people and determine their future plans. Goyal argues that “Even love is paralyzed by money power in this capitalist society. There is always a feeling of insecurity in workers' hearts about their love” (574). Monique does not want to leave her comfortable living conditions with her husband, so she always has vain promises for Peter. Since she knows that Peter cannot provide her a more comfortable life and buy her a house, she chooses her husband in the end after having an affair with him for a long time. Wesker proves here how the capitalist system causes people to become conformist people like Monique as a consequence of their condemnation to poverty for years. As Rabey puts it, “The war had demanded conformity for a larger purpose, but 1950s Conservatism emphasised the passive goal of ‘affluence’ – the dubious analogy between social progress and the growth of material wealth, extension of leisure and consumerist choice – rather than honourable conflict or release of energy” (30). In that regard, Wesker underlines here the realities and negative effects of the capitalist system on the characteristics of human beings. The material profits overhaul not only moral values and some character traits but also love itself. Therefore, the capitalist system works as the generator of this deterioration in the personality of people. In John Russell Brown's words, “When Wesker had said that for him ‘the world’ was ‘a kitchen’, he continued that in a kitchen: ‘people come and go and cannot stay long enough to understand each other, and friendships, loves and enmities are forgotten as quickly as they are made’” (168). Poverty creates selfish and conformist human kind. Neither emotions nor relationships have a meaning for the working class any more.

The capitalist economic system has also generated self-centredness and hatred for others in human beings. Another staff member, Paul's, experience with his neighbour is a good example for this situation. Whereas Paul supported his neighbour when he had been on strike with other bus drivers for five weeks, his neighbour wants to drop bombs on the peace march:

The next morning he comes up to me and he says ... ‘Did you go on that peace march yesterday?’ So I says Yes, I did go on that peace march yesterday. So then

he turns round to me and he says, ‘You know what? A bomb should have been dropped on the lot of them! It’s a pity,’ he says, ‘that they had children with them cos a bomb should’ve been dropped on the lot! And you know what was upsetting him? The march was holding up the traffic, the buses couldn’t move so fast!

(Interlude. 51)

Paul gets shocked when he sees his neighbour’s reaction against himself and cannot understand him. Instead of support, Paul suddenly faces his neighbour’s selfishness. What is worse here is the hatred in the neighbour’s eyes against people he has never seen. Furthermore, there is the problem of losing moral values and being conformist again. In Patterson’s words, “Wesker betrays anger about the limited vision and cultural deprivation of the uneducated. In a central speech in ..., *The Kitchen*, Paul describes his disillusion about his bus-driver neighbour: ... The prominence given to him in *The Kitchen* implies that this bus-driver’s conduct is not atypical of the British worker” (32). Wesker makes an analysis here to highlight the gap among millions of people as well. Paul states: “And you should’ve seen the hate in his eyes, as if I’d murdered his child. Like an animal he looked. And the horror is this – that there’s a wall, a big wall between me and millions of people like him” (Interlude. 52). Although the working class members should support each other, the capitalist relations of production have transformed them. They have lost their humane features and become selfish individuals who just ignore others’ problems.

In spite of the negative influences of the capitalist relations of production, there are also some other characters rejecting the moral degeneration, like Paul. Peter is another one of them. Moral values are still significant for him, so he cannot ignore injustice and reacts even to Mr. Marango. For instance, Peter cannot accept the Chef’s giving only a tin of soup to Tramp, a war-disabled person who has lost his papers and who has to beg for some food. Peter first reacts to Max and he does not let Tramp drink the tin of soup, so he takes the soup and gives two meat cutlets to him. The first person to react to this attitude is the Chef, the representative of Mr. Marango’s authority:

CHEF. [*quietly*]: What’s that.

PETER. I gave him some cutlets.

CHEF. Mr. Marango told you to give him?

PETER. No but...

CHEF. You heard me say, perhaps?

PETER. No, I..

CHEF. You have authority suddenly?

PETER. [*impatiently*]: So what's a couple of cutlets, we going bankrupt or something?

CHEF. It's four and six that's what, and it's me who's Chef that's what and ...

Don't think we're too busy I can't sack you. Three years is nothing you know, you don't buy the place in three years, you hear me? You got that? Don't go thinking I won't sack you. (II.60)

The Chef not only shows off his authority in the hierarchy of the kitchen but also protects the profits of the boss although two cutlets are indeed nothing financially for the boss' budget. As Lacey puts it, "In *The Kitchen*, the distinctions between different kinds of chef, and between the chefs and the waitresses, is clear—indeed, Wesker draws attention to it in detailed explanatory notes that focus on the precise function of each character in relation to the governing hierarchy" (107). The Chef just neglects the moral values as he always protects the boss' money even though he is just a worker like others. He loves authority, so he devotes himself to the boss in the restaurant and betrays his own fellows. He is more royalist than the king in short. In that regard, he declares to Peter that he is nothing in the kitchen.

Peter, thus, is harshly reprimanded by the Chef for his moral behaviour protecting a needy person. Yet, everything becomes worse when Mr. Marango hears about the event. He accuses Peter of sabotaging his money:

MARANGO. [*softly*]: Sabotage. [*Pause.*] It's sabotage you do to me. ... It's my fortune here and you give it away. [*He moves off muttering 'sabotage'.*]

PETER. But it...

MARANGO. ... Yes, yes, I'm always wrong – of course – yes, yes. (II.61)

Mr. Marango is an extremely ambitious middle-class man only caring about his profits and his word choice reveals "his cunning materialistic attitude" (Goyal 574). As most of the working class members have lost their moral values, Mr. Marango's greedy attitudes are not surprising in the capitalist system in fact. Therefore, it is very hard for Peter to work in such a place in which there is so much injustice and moral degeneration as he still cares about moral values and lives according to them.

In the kitchen of the Tivoli Restaurant, the personnel want to change their harsh working and living conditions. Yet, they cannot change or improve their socio-economic conditions because of their class. As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels write in *The German Ideology*, "The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (42). Thus, there is a close relationship between

life and consciousness of people, but life is the one that is determinant here. As the class of the characters also determines and limits their consciousness, they cannot find a way to go out of this vicious cycle. For example, Kevin does not even have a house to go and rest comfortably after hard and exhausting work:

PETER. Hey Irishman, I thought you didn't like this place. Why don't you go home and sleep?

KEVIN. Me home is a room and a bed and a painting of the Holy Virgin. It'll always be there. (Interlude. 48)

Indeed, this condition is not only peculiar to Kevin and most of the staff share similar poor circumstances. Some of the characters have plans or intentions to change the course of their lives and develop their circumstances because of the tension they experience at work emerging from the inner conflict between what they want to be and what they are doing in the restaurant (Goyal 575). Goyal comments that "They work, work and work only. They are all dissatisfied with their work, their lives, nervous about losing their job and eager to escape the drudgery" (571). Among the staff members planning to change their job and future, there is Hans, who has been injured in the kitchen. He plans to immigrate to America and start a new life there:

HANS. I think I go to America.

KEVIN. America?

HANS. ... I been to New York already. ... When you arrive: The sky-line! The Empire State Buildings! Coney Island! And Broadway, ... Ah ... beautiful city. (I.35)

Hans knows that it is not probable to improve his life in this country, so he would like to move to another country. Moreover, Kevin wants to open a small place to cook good food and earn good money although Peter and Michael do not believe that it is easy under these circumstances:

PETER. You got to turn out food hot and quickly. Quality – pooh! No time!

KEVIN. Even in the small restaurants they're not after caring much.

MICHAEL. ... Why should they! It's this [*rubs thumb and finger together*] that counts, you know that.

KEVIN. Oh, I don't know. You'd've thought it was possible to run a small restaurant that could take pride in its food and made money too.

PETER. Of course it's possible, my friend – but you pay to eat in it. It's money. It's all money. The world chase money so you chase money too. [*Snapping his fingers in a lunatic way.*] Money! Money! Money! (I.36)

They have been working in this sector for a long time, enough to have realised that money talks everywhere, so people often only prefer to earn money. On the other hand, it is not an option Michael, Kevin and Peter would like. They would prefer to serve good food, because they want to be glad with the product they produce. They would like to repair the disrupted relationship between the producer and the product. In this way, they can also get rid of their alienation from the food they cook and they will not feel any more that their labour-force has no value or it is commodified. Hence, some of the staff still firstly aim to cook good food instead of only making more money by serving unqualified food. Nonetheless, it is not always so easy for the working class to have the chance of running after their ideals due to the conditions of the economic system based on capital. This system also draws borders around the working class and limits their actions. Even though they are ready to struggle so as to change their lives, they cannot achieve it on condition that they do not become conscious of the realities of the system and change their means of production.

The kitchen staff are not aware that they can achieve this target if only they change their circumstances with these relations of production firstly. After they become aware of the order of the economic system they live in, they will perceive the world differently, but they are not able to change their way of thinking. In other words, they have accepted defeat in life as the working class is unconscious of the system and cannot imagine having a better job and life. In Goyal's words, "Their personalities have been moulded by the environment they live in. They are also burning from inside as the burning ovens of the kitchen. All the characters seem to be unaware of their own needs. They do not want to be a part of this mad house i.e. *The Kitchen*. But still they are here" (572). For example, Dimitri warns Kevin: "Hey, Irishman, what you grumbling about this place for? Is different anywhere else? People come and people go, big excitement, big noise. ... What for? In the end who do you know?" (Interlude. 47). There is a possibility of not having the chance of finding a better place, so most of them feel an obligation to accept the negative aspects of their working places. Dimitri is experienced in this sector, but also has the knowledge and ability of making a radio. Nevertheless, his "talent goes waste in this capitalist society" and he is hopeless to find a better job in the electronic sector (Goyal 572):

RAYMOND. You made it your own? All those little wires and plugs? Tell me what are you doing here? Why you waste your time with dishes in this place? You can't get a job in a factory?

DIMITRI. A factory? You think I find happiness in a factory? What I make there? ... I tell you, in a factory a man makes a little piece till he becomes a little piece you know what I mean? (I.20)

Wesker highlights that factories also abuse people by making them work to death and make them miserable owing to the existence of the same relations of production for the working class in this economic system. Wesker criticises the system here and the only way to get rid of this vicious circle is to change these relations of production that oppress the working class. Only Paul thinks about the necessity of stopping to work for the working class for a second, but does not go on:

PAUL. And I look around me, at the kitchen, at the factories, at the enormous bloody buildings going up with all those offices and all those people in them, and I think, ... I agree with you Peter – maybe one morning we should wake up and find them all gone. But then I think: I should stop making pastries? The factory worker should stop making trains and cars? The miner should leave the coal where it is? ... (Interlude. 52)

Accordingly, the negative working conditions resulting from the relations of production imprison working class people to their harsh working conditions as they are frightened of jumping out of the frying pan into the fire. They usually cannot imagine improving their circumstances as their consciousness is shaped by the production relations of the capitalist system. It is necessary to take a step to change the relations of production in order to make a change in their lives after getting aware of the realities of the system.

Mr. Marango, whose name is enough for alerting the workers, is “the typical bourgeois proprietor who has made his kitchen synonymous with his existence” (Goyal 574). He nearly lives in his restaurant for his ambition to profit more. In this respect, the kitchen and the service staff as well as their labour-force are his commodities. He often has mechanical visits to the kitchen silently to ensure everyone works at full capacity to deserve their salary. Moreover, he checks the work and all the staff like a silent detective: “Marango walking slowly round the kitchen inspecting everything, placing his hand on the hot-plate to see if it is still working. It is a mechanical movement – sometimes he puts a hand on the cold pastry slab to see if it is still hot – it is a mechanical tour” (I.28). Everyone is aware of his unfriendly and humiliating visits, so they always need to check if Mr. Marango is coming or not. In that regard, Mr. Marango’s authority around means for the workers that they do not have freedom for anything except working and do not want to be caught by him while they are talking or enjoying. Even their little joy of playing the radio is interrupted by Mr. Marango when he enters the dining room, not the kitchen, because it is enough for them to feel his menace:

MONIQUE. Marango’s in the dining-room.

ALL. What!

MONIQUE. Marango's in the dining-room.

[*There is a scramble to restore everything to normal, work is resumed, DIMITRI vanishes into the plate-room with the radio. HANS exits.*] (I.20)

In short, to hear Mr. Marango's name makes everyone alarmed whenever he appears at the door of the kitchen. In Goyal's words, "His life is also full of monotony and sense of alienation. He is an old man without any emotional bondings. ... He is unwilling to understand the plight of the workers" (574). For example, he is extremely rude and treats the workers as if they were his commodity since he pays them:

MARANGO. ... You're the new cook?

KEVIN. [*wiping his brow again*]: Yes, sir.

MARANGO. It's hot eh, son?

KEVIN. Sure, an' a bit more.

MARANGO. Never mind, I pay you well. Just work, that's all, just work well.
(I.28)

On that account, there is a big gap and so much tension between the boss and the staff because of Mr. Marango's bourgeois mindset. He has commodified not only the labour-force of the workers but also the workers themselves in this kitchen, so he cannot have a humane relationship with any one of them.

Wesker, thus, underlines the limits of bosses' ambitions in the capitalist system in his play. As Rabey points out, "Osborne and Wesker attack 'the deadening effects of prosperity' more frequently than the uncomfortable confines of poverty" (30). The workers are so unworthy for Mr. Marango that he just ignores Hans' injury with boiling water: "He's burnt his face. It's not serious. [*to CHEF*] but it might have been. [*He shakes his head sadly and moves away.*]" (I.32-33). In Goyal's words, "Right through the play, we are kept reminded of the workers' hatred for Marango the 'boss' and of the traditional conflict between workers and the system. His reactions towards any mishappening in the kitchen are very mechanical and emotionless" (574). Hence, Mr. Marango only exists for his own profits and never cares whether the workers are fine and safe or not. Peter emphasises how Mr. Marango's life is only his restaurant:

He is a man? He is a restaurant! I tell you. He goes to market at five thirty in the morning; returns here, reads the mail, goes up to the office and then comes down here to watch the service. Here he stands, sometimes he walks round touching the hot-plate, closing the hot-plate doors, then looking inside this thing and that thing. Till the last customer he stays. Then he has a sleep upstairs in his office. Half an

hour after we come back, he is here again – till nine-thirty, maybe ten at night. Every day, morning to night. What kind of a life is that, in a kitchen! Is that a life I ask you? (I.28-29)

In this sense, Mr. Marango spends his life in the restaurant. It is not dedicating his life to his restaurant, but ambition to live for earning more money. Accordingly, the staff try to avoid any interaction with Mr. Marango as much as possible and when there is an interaction, his humiliating attitudes and sentences make the possibility of the emergence of a strong conflict.

The biggest crisis explodes after Peter argues with Violet and has a nervous breakdown. Mr. Marango flows into a rage this time as all customers have left after the event. He cries at Peter and accuses him again:

You have stopped my whole world. ... Did you get permission from God? Did you? There – is – no – one – else! You know that? No ONE! ... Why does everybody sabotage me, Frank? I give work, I pay well, yes? They eat what they want, don't they? I don't know what more to give a man. He works, he eats, I give him money. This is life, isn't it? I haven't made a mistake, have I? I live in the right world, don't I? [*To PETER*] And you've stopped this world. A shnip! A boy! You've stopped it. Well why? ... [*To the kitchen*] Is there something I don't know? ... [*To PETER*] BLOODY FOOL! [*Rushes round to him.*] What more do you want? What is there more, tell me? ... [*PETER stops, turns in pain and sadness, shakes his head as if to say – 'if you don't know, I cannot explain'. ... MARANGO is left facing his staff, who stands around, almost accusingly, looking at him. And he asks again—*] What is there more? What is there more? What is there more? (II.68-69)

Mr. Marango's life is nothing more than his restaurant and money, so when it stops, his world also stops. He cannot sympathise neither with the workers nor with their feelings or their problems. He treats them as if they were all machines having been created to serve him to death. Innes writes as follows,

[T]he material reality of the kitchen [is] as questionable, replaceable, since it represents a model of industrial capitalism for which they are being asked to substitute a socialist alternative. As the restaurant owner says in response to his employees, frustrated discontent, 'This is life, isn't it?... What is there more?', to which a stage direction in the first version of the play replied 'We have seen that there must be something more'. (110-111)

After all these events, Mr. Marango still cannot understand 'What is there more?' and he cannot comprehend what kind of difficulties the workers has to stand. According to Dan Rebellato, "It is interesting to observe how these plays use theatrical devices to evade making a

direct political case. They characteristically resort to rhetorical questions to express their points, which raise questions that the plays seem unable to answer” (17). Even this crisis is not a start for Mr. Marango, who is not able to understand the workers. Here is there a clear conflict and a gap between the working class and the middle class. Wesker emphasises that there is no hope for the working class in the capitalist system where bosses are always powerful and ambitious. The capitalist system never appreciates the working class providing both the continuation of the production and the system. Thus, the middle and upper class only abuse the labour power of working class people and imprison them in their hard living conditions mercilessly.

Based upon the above analysis in the light of Marxist literary criticism, it appears that there is a conflict between the lower class and the middle class in *The Kitchen*. The staff of the Tivoli Restaurant have to work under the dehumanising conditions and their labour-power is commodified by Mr. Marango, the owner of the production. Thus, they are alienated from their work and products. Moreover, the personnel have to bear the menace emerging from the existence of their boss, who expects them to work like robots, having no needs and feelings. The hard living conditions result in the characters’ losing ethical values and being conformist and consumerist lower class people. In consequence, the lower class characters live in a vicious circle in the restaurant and in their lives due to the economic system preventing them to see beyond and make the necessary changes to have a better life. As the economic means and relations of production determine not only the order of social and economic life but also people’s consciousness, the characters of the play are not able to escape from the order constructed by the economic base and the superstructure around them. In brief, the class conflict of the lower class characters in *The Kitchen* indicates that the socio-economic conditions of the post-war England do not hold out hope for improved living and working circumstances for the lower class.

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