

MODERN LONDON RESTAURANT LABOUR AS A METAPHOR OF  
A WORLDWIDE DEHUMANIZATION OF THE WORKING  
CLASS IN ARNOLD WESKER'S *THE KITCHEN*

Paméssou WALLA  
Université de Lomé, Togo  
[wallapamessou@yahoo.fr](mailto:wallapamessou@yahoo.fr)

**Abstract:** This paper highlights the hardships and questions the dehumanization and alienation of the working class in kitchen work in London restaurant settings, whereby an industrial and capitalistic world requires massive production, intensive and extensive services to cater for the needs of a growing modern society in terms of food and drink supply. The work advocates the humanistic yearning of the playwright Arnold Wesker through his play *The Kitchen* in a modern world, victim of commercialism and robotization of the workforce. Conducted with Marxist and psychoanalytic literary perspectives, the study has come to the finding that kitchen work in London restaurant settings, stands as a major threat to human welfare because of denying the working class society of their human qualities and moral values of acceptance, respect, care, charity, compassion, cooperation, forgiveness, generosity and love due to the pressure and the stress of the kitchen load of work in big modern restaurants. Consequently, the study denounces the exploitation of the working classes across the world and contributes to the promotion of their social welfare and psychological fulfilment.

**Keywords:** working class, restaurant work, dehumanization, moral values, social welfare.

LE TRAVAIL DE RESTAURANT DANS LONDRES MODERNE COMME LA  
MÉTAPHORE D'UNE DÉSHUMANISATION MONDIALE DE LA CLASSE  
OUVRIÈRE DANS *THE KITCHEN* D'ARNOLD WESKER

**Résumé:** Cet article met en évidence les difficultés et dénonce la déshumanisation et l'aliénation de la classe ouvrière dans le travail de cuisine dans les restaurants londoniens, où un monde industriel et capitaliste nécessite une production massive, des services intensifs et étendus pour répondre aux besoins d'une société moderne en pleine croissance, en termes d'approvisionnement en nourriture et en boissons. Cette œuvre met en lumière l'aspiration humaniste du dramaturge Arnold Wesker à travers sa pièce *The Kitchen* dans un monde moderne, victime du mercantilisme et de la robotisation de la main-d'œuvre. Menée avec des perspectives littéraires marxistes et psychanalytiques, l'étude est parvenue à la conclusion que le travail de cuisine dans les restaurants de Londres, constitue une menace majeure pour le bien-être humain en privant la classe ouvrière de ses qualités humaines et ses valeurs morales d'acceptation, de respect, de soins, de charité, de compassion, de coopération, de pardon, de générosité et d'amour en raison de la pression et du stress que provoque le poids du travail de cuisine dans les grands restaurants modernes. Dès lors, l'étude dénonce l'exploitation des classes ouvrières à travers le monde et contribue à la promotion de leur bien-être social et épanouissement psychologique.

**Mots-clés :** classe ouvrière, travail de restaurant, déshumanisation, valeurs morales, bien-être social.

## Introduction

The 19<sup>th</sup> century Industrial Revolution has brought about many changes in many domains including social amenities, class structure, professional and economic activities. As a matter of fact, capitalism and city life rise from socioeconomic and technological changes that transform drastically the organization of modern society. Capitalism which implies mass production, requires an important working force, manpower which mostly come from rural areas creating the phenomenon known as rural exodus. People flock to the cities and town in search of modern job opportunities and the most available ones are restaurant services such as cooking, attendance, waiting, cleaning and so on. So to speak, working in big and busy restaurants is much stressful in the sense that people work nonstop the whole day, from morning to night according to the whims of customers, chefs and restaurant managers who care less about the working class social welfare and psychological fulfilment, but more about their personal gains and the upper class satisfaction. In this vein, this work equates the poor plight of the London restaurant working class with that of the worldwide working class of our modern world. The dramatist himself made the statement that “The world might:

[...] have been a stage for Shakespeare, but to me, it is a kitchen where 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.” (Arnold Wesker, *The Kitchen*). The theatrical environment in the kitchen is of a large London restaurant, conceived as the “microcosm” of the industrial capitalistic society – oppressive, inhumane, mad, indifferent and omnipresent. Wesker who himself worked for four years in kitchen as a cook, knows well the milieu and recreates it with abundance of documentary details of kitchen routine. This kitchen is just like the “stokehole” of O’Neill’s play *The Hairy Ape*. Its area is limited and the persons who work here

Goyal (2014, p.570)

consider that life inside it is not in any way different from life outside this area. The working conditions prevailing in London restaurant settings are the same as many professions across the busy modern world. Thus, Arnold Wesker tries to compare the restaurant work to that of many businesses in the world such as shops, shopping malls, supermarkets, factories, textiles, industries whereby people work like machines to yield huge profits to their bosses and employers on the expenses of their own emancipation as workers. According to Wesker, the conditions and hardships of working in a restaurant are quite similar to those of other modern works at large. For the playwright, living in the modern world is a big challenge; people have to toil, hustle and bustle every day for their survival; every hour and every minute stand as a challenge for survival. But, what is most painful with the modern man’s plight is his loss of humanity, which this work terms dehumanization. Because of the hardships he faces in the working place, the modern man displays a bad human nature made up of many psychosomatic disorders, abnormalities, bad habits and irregularities in behavioural and existential patterns which this work seeks to discuss. Eventually, this article underscores the hardships and questions the dehumanization and alienation of the working class in kitchen work in London restaurant settings, whereby an industrial and capitalistic world demands massive production, intensive and

extensive services to provide for the needs of a growing modern society in terms of food and drink supply. The work advocates the humanistic perspective of Arnold Wesker in his play *The Kitchen* sets in a modern world, victim of commercialism and robotization of the workforce. The Marxist and psychoanalytic literary approaches are used to emphasize the affective and cognitive disorders of the characters in the play provoked by the socioeconomic exploitation of the poor class by the rich class in modern London restaurant settings. Thus, this work will answer the following questions. How is Wesker's play *The Kitchen* the Metaphor of Today's Capitalistic Society? What is dehumanization in Wesker play *The Kitchen*?

### I. Wesker's Play as a Metaphor of Today's Capitalistic Society

The following statement has been made by Wesker himself in the play: "The world might have been a stage for Shakespeare, but to me, it is a kitchen where 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." Goyal (2014, p. 570) William Shakespeare said in his play *As You Like It* (Act 2, Scene 7, lines 139-142) that all the world is a stage, and all the men and women are merely players: They have their exits and their entrances. In fact, through these lines Shakespeare as a playwright, compares the whole world to the stage in theatre and drama. The same way, Arnold Wesker compares the whole world to a kitchen where people go to work and leave at their whims as the character of Dimitri argues in the play: "DIMITRI Hey, Irishman, what you grumbling about this place for? Is different anywhere else? People come and people go, big excitement, big noise. [*Makes noise, gesticulates.*]" (*Wesker's Social Plays, The Kitchen: Interlude*, p. 56). Thus, the kitchen refers symbolically to the world around. Just like people come to the world through birth process and leave it through death process, when people who work in the kitchen leave it or die, the kitchen remains. In the same vein, the character of Peter argues: "Peter: Like this place, this house – this too, it's always be here. That's a thought for you, Irishman: when you go, when I go, when Dimitri go – this kitchen stays. When we die, it stays, think about that." (*The Kitchen: Interlude*, p. 57) Connecting to the stressful life of the modern man in restaurant work that causes him psychological disorders and leads him to silly habits, mistaken identity of facts and aggressive reactions, Peter calls the kitchen, sometimes the madhouse, sometimes the bastard house and Marango the owner, is known as the bastard man who cares only about money. The kitchen and the world are equally money-grabbing and careless about the working class emancipation.

The theatrical environment in the kitchen is of a large London restaurant, conceived as the "microcosm" of the industrial capitalistic society – oppressive, inhumane, mad, indifferent and omnipresent. Wesker who himself worked for four years in Kitchen as a cook, knows the milieu and recreates it with abundance of documentary details of kitchen routine. This kitchen is just like the "stokehole" of O'Neill's play *The Hairy Ape*. Its area is limited and the persons who work here [...]

Goyal (2014, p. 570)

Thus life inside the kitchen is not different in any way from life outside it. Arguing along the line as far as the symbolism of the Kitchen is concerned, Goyal has this to say:

*The Kitchen* written earlier but performed in 1959 is a 'tour de force' as Wesker demonstrates the working of a kitchen of a large restaurant catering to some two thousand customers at a time. The activity of the chefs, the waitresses build up into "a complex image of a man as a working animal" Hayman (1970: 16) Arnold Wesker's earliest play *The Kitchen* (1959) is also a documentary on the lives of the working-class people. In this play, 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 the working class in the capitalistic society. [...] Through the use of overwhelming metaphors and characterization, the play captures certain aspects of the problem which have been emphasized in the Marxian analysis of alienation. Marx traces forms of alienation under capitalism, to the nature of the working process, to the conditions of private ownership under which work ceases to be the expression of the creative power of the worker. 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.

Goyal (2014, pp.569-570)

The capitalistic society in which people live today gives no chance to workers to dream of emancipating themselves through their works. Similarly, people working in Wesker's fictional kitchen in London city have almost no dream because the working environment does not give them a chance to dream of a better tomorrow. The daring working people who try to dream, their dreams are withered and shatter like a bottle in glass. Instead of dreams some workers in the play like Peter have nightmares: "PETER I ask for dreams – he gives me nightmares. PAUL So – I've dreamt. Is it my fault if it's nightmare?" (*Wesker's Social Plays, The Kitchen: Part One*, p. 63) Like Peter, many working people across the world are afraid of their future, the work they are doing offers them little chance of survival and emancipation. Like workers in the kitchen, people work hard only to get pittance as a wage or salary. Workers worldwide fear for their families, their children whom they cannot really cater for. Whenever a disease strikes a family, parents get afraid because they have no money left to use for the family healthcare. Despite the so-called health insurance, people fear for their lives whenever they fall sick because the so-called health insurance are there just to make money on poor people and not to help them. In view of this poor situation in the working places, especially in Wesker's fictional but realistic kitchen, Dimitri thinks it is better to learn a trade and operate on one's own. Thus, Dimitri dreams of becoming a repairer of radios and television sets. For Dimitri this dream is big enough because to get money from his working place to start the business is already a big problem; the wages he gets from working in the kitchen hardly helps him to survive. However, his coworkers would like him to dream bigger which is not realistic when one considers his current situation as a worker in the kitchen. The conversation goes:

**DIMITRI** That's right, a shed. With instruments, and tools, and I make lots of radios and television sets maybe, and...

**Peter** Ach no, silly boy. That's a hobby, that's not what you really want. You want more, more, Dimitri –

**DIMITRI** More?

**Peter** More! More!

**DIMITRI** (*Ironically*.) More, more, more, More...!

**Peter** Poor Dimitri! Hey, Irishman, you – dream!

**KEVIN** I told you, leave me out of your games.

**Peter** Come, a dream, a little sweet dream. You can do it. For us your friends.

**Kevin** Sleep! I dream of sleep. Most people sleep and dream, me – I dream of sleep, sweet sleep.

**Peter** What is it with you all? Hans – you, what are your dreams?

**Hans** Money! Geld, Peter. Geld! With money I'm a good man, I'm generous, I love all the world! Money, Peter, money, money, money! (*Continues singing*.)

**Peter** How can you talk of money, Hans, when you make music? (*Wesker's Social Plays, The Kitchen: Part One, p. 60*)

The reader can deduce from this conversation that the playwright is undeniably enacting the plight of workers in today's capitalistic society. The exploitation people go through in their working places today gives them little hope about tomorrow. However, the conversation above lets the audience know that dreams vary from one person to another; people do not have the same dreams because they do not have the same background even if they are doing the same job at a moment. Some people think there is possibility to achieve their dreams outside their working place; therefore, they dream big no matter what the situation is in their working place. Nevertheless, the working conditions influence people's dreams a great deal. Consequently, Dimitri dreams of becoming a repairer just to be independent and not to have to obey a master's orders all the time to the ruin of his own life. The pressure he is going through in the kitchen is too much to bear. In the kitchen there is no time to rest, you have to satisfy all the needs of the customers at the right time without thinking of your own liberty. Becoming a repairer will allow Dimitri to be free and enjoy liberty which is precious for human beings' mental and physical health and fulfilment. Kevin on his side, dreams of sleep because his work in the kitchen deprives him of the precious sleep which is necessary for psychological equilibrium and physical health. Without enough sleep, it is difficult for human beings to be psychologically sound and healthy to think of a better future. Sleep contributes a lot to the balance and equilibrium of people psychologically and physically. Sleeping enough contributes to the sanity of the mind. A mind which lacks sleep cannot work properly for the emancipation of the individual.

Hans dreams of money, meaning that his current working place does not provide him with money enough. He hopes he had a better job where he could get more money. His dream equates those of many workers across the world who would like to get a better job to earn more money. The pity is that, all these dreams of the workers are mere illusions in a capitalistic society which aims at sucking people's blood at the most to amass profits as much as possible without caring for the human resources that work to yield incomes and revenues. Let us consider Marango the owner of the kitchen who thinks he is doing enough for his workers who complain all the time: "**Marango** [*To Frank, gently appealing*.] 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?" (*The Kitchen: Part One, p. 86*)

Marango believes he is doing the right thing as a boss, but in reality he is sucking his workers' blood and ruining their lives on behalf of his sole personal gains.

The fatter he grows, the slimmer his workers become, and the richer he becomes the poorer they become. And this is the lot of many workers across the world where all the profits made by the working class go to the employers alone. A look at what happens in the world of work will come across many bosses and patrons like Marango who reason backwardly and irrationally. Marango like many bosses in the world, is hypocrite and selfish; he is only concerned with moneymaking and nothing else. The more the rich classes gather wealth for themselves the more they claim to be helping people. When their pockets are full, they mockingly think the pockets of their workers are full too, which is very wrong because if they were to share the gains with their employees they would never be very rich and their pockets would never be full. Besides, workers would not be complaining and criticizing their employers all the time if they were well treated and well paid. The proof is that the money-grubbing Marango greedily abuses his workers regularly for a little mistake they make. Let us look at the way he is raging and threatening Peter:

*Peter rises and in pain and moves off. Marango cries after him. BLOODY FOOL!*  
(...)

*Peter again tries to leave.*

What is there more?

*Peter seems about to attempt an answer – looks around at the OTHERS, shrugs, shakes his head at MARANGO as if to say 'if you don't know, I cannot explain'. And leaves. (Wesker's Social Plays, The Kitchen: Part One, p. 86)*

Just before this quotation Marango was claiming to treat his workers well despite their gossip, slander and blackmailing him. But now, look at the way he is treating Peter, a committed worker in his kitchen. Marango calls Peter a fool, yet Peter is making money for Marango to be richer and richer. Peter has a misunderstanding with Violet a female coworker, instead of Marango settling the dispute amiably as a boss, he increases Peter's tension. This scenario can be witnessed all over the world whereby employers abuse their employees who bring them wealth. Since there is no hope in workers' improvement of their working and living conditions, most of them in the kitchen dream of its disappearance. The disappearance of the kitchen means to workers the end of their exploitation by their master Marango. The same way many workers in the world today think that only the end of the world will put an end to all the injustices and miseries they are going through in their various working places. The playwright makes this sound clear through the character of Paul who argues: "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? (Pause.) You give me an answer. You give me your dream." (Wesker's Social Plays, *The Kitchen: Interlude*, p. 62)

## 2. London Restaurant Life, a Metaphor of Dehumanization in the play

Dehumanization is the process of depriving a person or a group of people of their virtues, moral values and qualities as human beings. It is also the psychological process of demonizing human beings. Dehumanization can push people to develop hatred, aggression and violence in their relationship with others. Moreover, the responsibility that one carries as part of one's job role can strain relationships and increase pressure. Therefore, this part seeks to explore the various aspects of

dehumanization in Arnold Wesker's play *The Kitchen* through the lenses of psychoanalytical and Marxist theories. Taking into account the whole range of Wesker's drama one feels that it has only one theme: how can the modern man in an industrial society fulfill himself? He is the only solitary writer who has been consistent in his search and questions. Choudhuri (1976, p.19)

Arnold Wesker declares: "The world might have been a stage for Shakespeare but to me it is a kitchen, where 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." (Arnold Wesker, *The Kitchen*) Through the statement above, Wesker compares the world to a kitchen reflecting his critical attitude towards the dehumanizing nature of the industrialized society. The kitchen, wrangling people of various nations, is a symbol of the entire society of mankind. It is a place of brief, loveless attachments, of hard unfulfilling work done by many for the benefit of the few, and of vague, hopeless dreams of escape. The kitchen, alias a factory, in which the contemporary man spends his working hours, is a place where there are too many people, where there is too much to do and too little time to do it. Consequently, there is no time and scope for human understanding. And if any sort of friendship or love germinates in the mist of the workers, it turns sour a minute later because of the high pressure of kitchen work overload. Regarding the consequences of the stressful life of the workers in the kitchen-world, Frederick Lumley argues that the conditions under which they work bring out the worst in them most of the time. There are old hands, grown inured, and young hands who will go the same way if they stay on long enough. The misunderstanding between the workers is enhanced in the play due the fact that the staff is polyglot, workers are from many nationalities because they are English, Irish, German, Jewish, and Cypriot in the cosmopolitan city of London. The work in the kitchen makes them exhausted and disillusioned with life. As the play starts, cooks, waitresses, and chefs gather around the kitchen to work and serve crowds of customers about two thousand people who want to eat at the same time. The play shows what happens in the kitchen from dawn to dusk, from daybreak to late in the night, the relationship between workers themselves, and workers and their employer. All these workers belonging to different nationalities and sociocultural backgrounds are under the pressure of the hectic work in the kitchen. Instead of giving a kind of relief and enjoyment to their lives, the kitchen crushes them and squeezes their life-blood. No worker is relieved from the dehumanizing influence of the kitchen in the mega city of London. Hans, a cook, expresses it clearly: "You know Paul you – you are a Jew and me - I'm German: we suffer together" (*The Kitchen* Part II, p. 71). The work in the kitchen does not only squeeze the physical strength of the workers, but it also distorts their fine affective human feelings and turns them into non-human entities, into machines. They quarrel with each other for a tiny problem and become peculiarly self-centered. For a triviality they are ready to commit a murder, the kitchen becomes a madhouse, a bastard house as workers call it. Let us consider this conversation which highlights a dispute born from verbal abuse due to the handling of a kitchen tool, namely a ladle:

**Magi** Well I came in at nine last night. The boys were changing and suddenly Peter comes and Gaston follows him. Gaston says Peter called him a lousy Cypro and the boys make circle round him and want to murder him! All of them... but Peter says 'No, everyone for me is the same – it makes no difference race, you misunderstand...' They all wanted to hit him! And he was scared! I've never seen him so white.

**Anne** But what was it about to begin with?

**Max** A ladle, I tell you.

**Paul** Who knows? There's always fights, who knows how they begin?

**Magi** Well, I've had enough of this ol' kitchen. I'm going before the smells get in my hair.

[...]

**Anne** And I must get started too. [*Looks round barely populated kitchen.*] You wouldn't think this place will become a mad-house in two hours, would you now? (*The Kitchen: Part One, p. 16*)

In the conversation above, the workers go mad not necessarily because of the insult stemming from the management of the ladle, but because of the overload of kitchen work that stresses them and get them on their nerves, losing temper for something they could overlook and close eyes upon. It means that the ladle is a mere pretext to release and discharge them of their nervous and musculoskeletal systems which have accumulated stress and anger through kitchen overwork. They lose self-control because of kitchen work stress. Sometimes, workers forget their human identity and turn into something else, something like the machines they use for the cooking of food. One night, Peter and Gaston fought and as a result Gaston's one eye went black. The cook and waitress search for the exact reason of their fighting. Dimitri, another cook, expresses his own view saying: "But you think it was all 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 wants to fight. He got to show he is a man some way. So - blame him!" (*The Kitchen Part I, p. 18*) Dimitri's argument is clear that workers' regular fight is justified by the work overload in the kitchen. Kitchen workers are overwhelmed by all the duties, tasks and domestic chores they have to do not only regularly, but also on time. The kitchen gives them no joy, instead it gives them bad smells and stiffness of nerves which push them to fight to test their physical power as men because the kitchen work make them doubt of their existence as human beings. There is no tolerance in the kitchen, boys fight boys, and boys fight girls. The load of work make them crazy, the madhouse of the kitchen makes them equally mad. Their character is just stinking like the dustbins in the kitchen. As Dimitri infers, there is no happiness in the kitchen: "You think I find happiness in a factory?" (*The Kitchen Part I, p. 18*) Metaphorically, the lack of happiness in the kitchen means that there is no real happiness in the world of work today. While serving food in the afternoon, Peter quarrels with Violet, a waitress, for a little problem. There is heavy rush in the kitchen. The waitresses order foods and the cooks supply in a quick speed. The hectic rush makes them exhausted. They forget all their good human qualities like endurance, courtesy, polite behaviour, and amicable tone. The conversation between Peter and Violet highlights the inhuman pressure of the work in the kitchen:

**Violet** (*Very quietly.*) You Boche, you bloody German bastard!

*She turns to report to, presumably, MARANGO in the dining-room.*

*Peter is about to snap. Follows her.*

**Peter** What you can call me? What was it? Say it again! SAY IT AGAIN!

*His scream halts her, petrified.*

*It also turns everyone's attention on him, as on a frightened animal. He wheels around, in a frenzy, looking for something violent to do.*

*He sweeps plates off his counter. Other CHEFS run to grab and control him. He leaves them off, sees a meat-axe, reaches for it, raises it, everyone backs away, he seems about to chase VIOLET with it. (...)*

**Frank** Hold him, grab hold of him!  
**Michael** He's broken the gas lead! Someone turn off the main.  
**CHEF** Mangolis! (*Wesker's Social Plays, The Kitchen: Part One, p. 83*)

It is obvious from the conversation above that peace is absent in the kitchen, nobody cares for his fellow, everybody for himself and God for them all. The kitchen work has robbed workers of all the humanity, turning the whole place into a jungle whereby might is right. Consequently, through the lack of peace in the kitchen due to a life of a jungle, Wesker attempts to mean that the modern world is also a jungle whereby power rules and controls everything. In this modern world which claims to abide with the rule of law, there is no safety for the weak and poor. The rich predate and live on the sweat of the poor and the powerful devour the powerless. When the kitchen runs in full swing, nobody has time even to talk to the other. But in a normal condition everybody gossips, flirts and helps each other. The pattern of work in the kitchen makes everyone selfish, everyone for themselves. When Kevin, the new and inexperienced cook, gets nervous at the rush hours, Peter helps him sometimes. At another time, when the rush increases and Kevin, needing a cutting board moves to take it from Peter's bench, Peter rejects him: "Oh no, no, no, no my friend. The plate-room, the plate-room, in the plate-room, you'll find them. This is mine, I have need of it" (*The Kitchen: Part I, p.52*). Therefore, the heavy rush in the kitchen creates a communication-gap among the workers, or rather it widens the gap in human understanding. In the play, we successfully get across a lack of mutual understanding and affection between people, even between people who are constantly thrown closely together. There is a constant inner fight between the kitchen-world and the workers. Though bitterly crushed by the machine-like kitchen, Peter does not give up his earnest desire to come out of its dehumanizing effects. He wishes to marry Monique and lead a happy conjugal life somewhere far away from the kitchen-world. He says to his co-workers: "Me, I don't care, soon I'm going to get married and then whisht! [*Makes movement with his arm to signify I'm off.*]" (*The Kitchen: Part I, p.30*) For Hans the kitchen is a 'bastard house'. Frank thinks that if anyone takes the charge of the kitchen for only one day, he will turn 'mad'. Chef feels that the only way to be released from the kitchen is his retirement: "Three more years, Frank, three, that's all and then whisht! Retire, finish!" (*The Kitchen: Part I, p. 35*). Kevin expresses his resentment in a helpless cry: "Jesus is this a bloody madhouse," "Have you all gone barking-raving-bloody-mad" (*The Kitchen: Part I, p. 51*). Violet, the waitress too cannot tolerate anymore: "Oh God, God, God, I can't, I can't!" Look at it all, I can't work like this. I'm not used to this way of working" (*The Kitchen Part I, p. 50*), "we're the animals, everybody pushing everybody else out of the way" (*The Kitchen Part II, p.65*). The dissatisfaction and anger of the cooks and waitresses, however, do not turn into any active rebellion against the kitchen-world or their boss, Marango. They have no courage to do so. They cannot accuse their boss for their inhuman working conditions for fear of being sacked. Peter is distinguished for his sympathetic outlook, his sense of reality, and above all, for his undaunted courage to turn his suppressed anger into an active revolt against the cause of their mental and physical suppression. Although the kitchen employees are dissatisfied with their monotonous job, they are also afraid of losing it, as it is their only source of livelihood. They want a better life; mentally they are prepared to escape from the kitchen life, which distorts their human qualities, but in reality they do not have any possible way out. The great problem is that the gap between the poor and the rich keeps on widening over the years. The worker, the ordinary man discovers that they have been cheated, given

false hopes, and find themselves trapped in the iron frame of the industrial society that has a distinct bias for class and hierarchy. So, in such confused and chaotic times, writers come to the defense of the common men, the masses exploited by a few minority. According to Goyal (2014: 569), these writers raised a voice against the corrupt industrial society in post-World War-II and after.

While Peter wants to see the kitchen gone forever, Kevin is worried in his outlook. In fact, Peter is not against work but against the deadly work which turns human beings into pigs and lunatics. By hook or by crook he wants to come out of it. He accuses his co-workers for their adjustment with the kitchen-life: "We all said we wouldn't last the day, but tell me what is there a man can't get used to? Nothing! You just forget where you are and you say it's a job"

*The Kitchen* Part I, p.37).

Frank drinks steadily all day. Max, Magi and Raymond do not feel any urge to come out of the hellish kitchen. Dimitri recognizes that in the modern world a factory and a kitchen are the same, each squeezes the human spirit. Having found no way out of the machine-world, his frustration turns into a philosophical passivity: "People come and people go, big excitement, big noise.... What for? In the end who do you know? You make a friend, you going to be all your life his friend but when you go from here - pshtt! You forget! Why you grumble about this one kitchen?"

*The Kitchen* Interlude, p. 52).

The kitchen with its mechanical pattern of work has distorted the workers to such a degree, that they cannot even dream of a better human life. Instead of having 'big dreams' about a better society, they dream of trivialities and little personal comfort. Peter calls these dreams 'nightmares.' Dimitri dreams of the independent life of a radio mechanic, Kevin dreams of a happy sleep, Hans's dreams of money and Raymond dreams of a wife. According to Peter: "When a man dreams, he grows." (*The Kitchen* Interlude, p. 59). When asked about his own dream, Peter responds embarrassingly: "I can't, I can't" (*The Kitchen* Interlude, p. 63). Devoid of any concrete positive notion of a better human life, all the workers lead the life of 'animals'. The workers are not the only people exhausted in the kitchen, their boss Marango is exhausted too. His whole world is the restaurant and the money it makes him. He has gone hollow. Peter remarks: "He is a bastard! ... Half an hour after we come back, he is here again - till nine thirty, maybe ten at night. Everyday morning to night. What kind of a life is that, in a kitchen! Is that a life I ask you?" (*The Kitchen* Part I, p.30). Instead of controlling his kitchen, Marango has his own life controlled by it. The Establishment hardly bothers to look after the staff as individuals. While Hans gets injured by having got boiled water in his face, Marango remains unconcerned. The hollow remark he makes is: "He has burnt his face. It's not serious, but it might have been" (*The Kitchen* Part I, p. 34). Again, Marango's greed for wealth makes him so mean-minded and brute, that he refuses to give two cutlets to a disabled person. When Peter, neglecting his boss, gives away the cutlets, he is abused by Marango for his unauthorized charity. To him human beings are not better than machines. Marango's mental make-up is so distorted that beyond the needs for physical comfort, he does not feel the necessity of any other thing. He asks: "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?" (*The Kitchen* Part II, p.78). In view of what happens in the kitchen, Kevin has the right to say that the kitchen is no place for human beings: "KEVIN I'm soaking. 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. Get out! This is no place for a human being. You've got your youth, Kevin, keep it!" (*The Kitchen Interlude*, p. 56) The kitchen like this present world is no good place for human beings to live in because they deprive them of their human qualities and moral values making them behave like animals, but not any animal because some animals are intelligent and virtuous. In fact, the kitchen, much like our modern world, is turning workers into pigs:

Paul No, no, no! I – listen, Peter, I'm going to be honest with you. You don't mind if I'm honest? Right, I'm going to be honest with you. I don't like you. Now wait a minute – let me finish. I don't like you. I think you're a pig. You bully, you're jealous, you go mad with your work, you always quarrel. Alright! But now it's quiet, the ovens are low, the work has stopped for a little and now I'm getting to know you. I still think you're a pig, only now – not so much of a pig. So that's what I dream. I dream about friendship. You give me a rest, you give me silence, you take away this mad kitchen – so I make friends. So I think – maybe all the people I thought were pigs are not so much pigs. Peter You think people are pigs?

Wesker's Social Plays, *The Kitchen*: Part One, p. 61)

To call someone a pig is a big insult because of the implications thereto. Pigs symbolize dirtiness physical and mental; pigs stand for greediness, stubbornness and selfishness. According to western beliefs, pigs indicate ignorance, stupidity, selfishness and gluttony. All these attributes, are unattractive qualities that are unfavourable to workers of Wesker's imaginary kitchen in particular and workers in the world at large. Peter realizes the wastage of human vitality in the inhumane condition of the kitchen. He also understands that in such a hazardous condition a man cannot dream or think of a better life. He knows very well that by merely breaking down the kitchen he would not be able to change the inhuman life-style of the workers of the kitchen overnight and that the destruction of the kitchen would be merely self-destructive. Therefore, he remains silent and feels embarrassed when Dimitri asks him what his view would be if all the kitchens of the world go out. Peter protests against the mechanical life of the kitchen within the kitchen as well as against the owner of the kitchen. Though he has no definite alternative for the dehumanized life, yet he as a positive character, tries to create a fighting spirit among the workers of the kitchen. At the end of the play, by demolishing the gas-pipeline, and causing a great disarray in the kitchen, Peter compels the owner, Marango, to realize the mental condition of the workers in his hellish kitchen. In a sense, Peter is a victim of, as well as a rebel against the dehumanized life. The theory of drama, which Wesker believes in, conforms to his socialist leaning. In an interview, he says that his plays are not merely political or social arguments. But he explains that they "continue human relationships as well as arguments [about the] relationships that have gone wrong - and the pause that art gives you the opportunity to rectify those relationships or explain them." (Trussler, 1966: 192)

We agree with Goyal (2014, p. 573) that Peter, the central character, and all his associates have no vision before them. 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 there. Dimitri is a very talented guy. He has made a portable record player. But talent goes waste in this capitalistic society. Even Peter, who is more determined than others to relate himself to others around him, joins the system. We see how at the peak of activity reached during lunch time service at the close of the first part, the kitchen sucks all personal responses into itself and how everything becomes part of the brutalizing routine. During interlude, they give a thought inside their hearts and speak out their real self. At this time, Wesker has shown dramatically the humanization of their relationships outside the pressure of the kitchen. But the important point is that work in the kitchen has stopped now. So, it is apparent that their work load is responsible for dehumanization of their feelings. Paul as usual articulates the feeling when talking to the dislikable Peter, he observes: But now it's quite, the ovens are low, the work has stopped for a little and now I'm going to know you. I still think you're a pig – only now, not so much of a pig. So that's what I dream. I dream about friendship. [...] You give me a rest, you give me silence, you take away this mad kitchen - so I make friends. So I think – maybe all the people I thought were pigs are not so much pigs. (*The Kitchen: Interlude*, (p. 61). At least Peter tries during the interlude to encourage others to sit with him and dream. The dream sequence is the frustrated effort of these people to live 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. In this world, Peter says: "No one is going to laugh, we love each other, we protect each other..." Goyal (2014, p. 573)

The horror of alienation in such a society is touched by Paul who claims the horror is "that there is a wall, a big wall between me [Paul] and millions of people like him [the bus driver]." (*The Kitchen: Interlude*, p. 62) Through this statement, Paul wants to show that workers fail to unite and fight together for their rights. The bus driver is a next-door neighbor to Paul, both of them are workers who live on wages. When he went on strike for five weeks, Paul supported him by words of encouragement; but when Paul who took part in a peace march on one Sunday, he disagreed with him claiming that the peace marchers held up the traffic and the buses could not move so fast. The worst of it, the busman wished a bomb should have been dropped on a lot of the marchers to clear the way and allow the buses move normally. This pattern of reasoning shows that the busman is far away from understanding the other working people. When his lot of workers were in trouble Paul showed sympathy to them, now that Paul and other people march for peace, he dissociates from them scornfully and threateningly. Wesker infers that this lack of unity and collaboration on the part of workers across the world make them vulnerable and easy prey to the aristocrats and rich people who enjoy their exploitation because most of them are ready above all, to betray one another for their selfish and egoistic interests. Alfredo is selfish like the bus driver; the irony is that in such a capitalistic society only persons like Alfredo can boast of being in harmony with their work. He does not interfere in anybody's work nor does he like others' interference in his work. He does not question others. The only thing which fills up all the gaps on superficial level is money. Everyone consoles himself that at least they are being paid for working in the bastard and mad house as workers call the kitchen. Alfredo declares, "I'm an old man. It's finished for me. Mind you I've worked in places where I could do cooking. But it doesn't matter now. Now, I work only for the

money.” (*The Kitchen: Part II*, p.67) Moreover, even love between workers is paralyzed by money power in this capitalistic society. There is always a feeling of insecurity in worker’s hearts about their love. Peter and Monique are in love but still there is insecurity in their relationship. Monique enjoys her time-pass relationship. She always dismisses Peter’s idea of taking divorce from her husband. In her unmindful talks, she mentions happily that her husband is buying a house for her: “Monique: Did I tell you Monty is buying us a new house? / Peter (screaming): Monique! [...]

Wesker depicts not only the alienated lives of the working class people and the environment in which they live but he goes further and explores how the power holders too are alienated. Marango, the ‘boss’, whom Alfredo hates is the typical bourgeois proprietor who has made his kitchen synonymous with his existence. His life is also full of monotony and sense of alienation. He is an old man without any emotional bonding. Peter refers to him as a “restaurant” or a bastard (*The Kitchen: Part I*, p. 30) He is unwilling to understand the poor plight of the workers. 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.

Goyal (2014, p. 574)

He intervenes in workers strives just because they stop his kitchen world from working. He does not interfere to help them understand each other, but just to get them stop fighting and go back to work. When workers fight the whole kitchen is stopped, meaning making money is stopped, which is quite unbearable for Marango the boss.

When Hans’s face is burnt, Marango comes to enquire about him. Chef remarks behind him: “Chef (*To Frank*.): Much he cares. It interrupts the kitchen so he worries.” (*The Kitchen: Part I*, p. 35). Marango’s use of words like “Sabotage” shows his cunning materialistic attitude. All the cooks use different words to describe Marango’s personality. Peter refers to him as “a bastard man” (*The Kitchen: Part II*, p. 74). Kevin, the new cook mocks Marango’s behaviour: “Kevin: In thin air it goes, sudden, and his face gets worried as though today were the last day and he had to be a closing for good and he was taking a last sad glance at everything going on.” (*The Kitchen: Part II*, p. 70) So, that’s how we come to know about Marango’s capitalistic attitude and its effects upon his workers from the workers of the kitchen itself.

Goyal (2014, p. 574)

In a word, the capitalistic and mechanized environment finds it difficult to establish a wholesome human community. And the mere destruction of the existing set-up, is not enough to usher in a better human society. Nevertheless, commitment to the economic and political causes needs to be matched with the commitment to the human values and relationships.

### Conclusion

This study highlights the hardships and questions the dehumanization and alienation of the working class in kitchen work in London restaurant settings, whereby an industrial and capitalistic world requires massive production, intensive and extensive services to cater for the needs of a growing modern consumer society in terms of food and drink supply. So, through the Marxist and psychoanalytic approach to Wesker’s play *The Kitchen*, this paper has shown how stressful, alienating

and dehumanizing modern work is in today's capitalistic society whereby love between workers is paralyzed by money power. The study has shown that, Wesker's play reflects his social concern for the working-class conditions in Britain in particular and in the world as a whole. The workers in the kitchen are not only alienated from each other but also from their own selves, they do not act as one expects people to act under normal circumstances. Their normal human impulse appears to have been distorted, manipulated and inoperative due to the load of work imposed on them. Due to the high pressure of the work, they do, they have developed bad tempers and are ready to fly at each other's throat on the minutest possible excuse or provocation. Moreover, the paper demonstrates that Wesker depicts not only the alienated lives of the working-class people and the environment in which they live but he goes further and explores how the power holders too are alienated. Goyal (2014, p. 572). Finally, this work definitely shows that Wesker's chief intention in *The Kitchen*, is boosting the welfare, the fulfilment and the emancipation of the working class people through the process of sensitization and awareness-raising.

### **Bibliography**

- Choudhuri, A. D. (1976). *Contemporary British Drama: An Outsider's View*, New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann Publishers India
- Goyal, V. (2014). Alienation in Wesker's Play *The Kitchen* in M. S. Thirumalai, ed. *Language in India* (14:4), 567-576.
- Hayman, R. (1970). *Contemporary Playwrights: Arnold Wesker*, London: Heinemann.
- Trussler, S. (1966). An Interview with Arnold Wesker', *Tulane Drama Review*, XI, 2.
- Wesker, A. (2009). *Wesker's Social Plays*, London: Oberon Books Ltd.