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**Silent Suffering and Loud Resistance: A Comparative Feminist Analysis of Kate Chopin's "Desiree Baby" and Zora Neale Hurston's "Sweat"**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper offers a comparative feminist analysis of "Desiree Baby" and Sweat by Kate Chopin and Zora Neale Hurston, respectively, with a focus on the theme of silent suffering and loud resistance among the contexts of gender, race, and class. The analysis itself is based on the intersectional feminist theory and follows a qualitative approach, to explore the emotional and psychological response of the protagonists to oppression through the means of a thematic analysis. The paper unveils how the passive resistance exhibited by Desiree's in the story Desiree's Baby reflects the constraints of the 19th century social principles and racial bigotry, but the aggression and defiant nature of Delia in the story Sweat represents an unveiled resistance against domestic violence and a larger gender inequality. Also, the study delves into the connotations of motherhood, sexual banishment, and gender-based oppression as having an influence on how the characters feel in their agency and power. On the backdrop of these two narratives, the study sets out the complexity of relationship between gendered and racial identities, providing a deeper understanding of the ways women have developed resistance in their silent and outspoken forms under oppressive societal structures. The current paper contributes to feminist literary criticism by illuminating how women reacted to systematic degradation in various ways, emphasizing that the ability to speak up is not the only important reaction to oppression in the quest to achieve autonomy.*

**Keywords:** Feminist Literary Criticism, Intersectionality, Silent Suffering, Loud Resistance, Gender, Race, Class, Agency, Feminist Theory, Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence, Motherhood.

**Introduction**

Silent suffering concept as applied in feminist discourse reflects the difficulties in becoming a woman, which people are not always ready to verbalize, starting with everyday micro aggression and ending with an explicit expression of gender hatred and emotional burnout under the pressure

of social demands (hooks 2000; Ahmed 2017). This kind of suffering is most often neglected, underestimated or ignored, which makes the women to go through the difficulties in secret, thus creating a sort of invisibility generated resilience (Bartky 1990; Jaggar 1989). This unrecognized suffering has also contributed to feminist activism in the past since individual women reported experiences of suffering and marginalization on the one hand; on the other hand, women have lobbied collectively on behalf of these experiences (Millett 1970; Rich 1979). Whether it is inside the homes or in the workplaces, these struggles are silent and it is on these grounds that feminist takes their action (Friedan 1963; Crenshaw 1989). This silence is not necessarily a sign of passivity, but can be a strategic survival tactic to the situations where vocalizing might bring about additional violence (Scott 1990; Mahmood 2005). However, feminist theorists suggest that silence may equally contribute to oppressive regimes by preventing injustices to come to the attention of the community that may expose them (Fraser 1990; Butler 1997). It is important to acknowledge the historical existence of silent sufferings thus comprehending the extent by which gender oppression is experienced and also the emotional labour women have to put in order to suffer silently (De Beauvoir 1949; Lorde 1984). This perseverance has played an important role in the creation of solidarity among women, it gives them a common ground on which to circle their forces against institutional iniquities, even when the ground is only unspoken.

Loud resistance, unlike silent suffering, can mean the active, open, verbal opposition to oppressive structures where the feminist protest, as a means of struggle against systemic inequality on gender grounds, lies (Taylor 1999; Collins 2000). It can frequently be heard that loud protest usually becomes the result of unexpressed grief that turned personal pain into the voice of opposition (Ahmed 2017; hooks 1984). This transformation is a denial to stay in the shadow, which was instead an expression of agency using protests, literature and speeches among other public manifestations (McClintock 1995; Mohanty 2003). The aim of such resistance is not only emancipation of the patriarchal systems but also re-definition of women identities outside the confinements set by the norms of the society (Butler 1990; Fraser 2013). This can be demonstrated through feminist works of literature in which realistic characterizations show a change in a passive sufferer to active resistance. By so doing, these stories draw attention to the issues of women, and these stories also interrogate cultural narratives whereby subordination of women is accepted as the norm (Showalter 1977; hooks 2000). The loud resistance, therefore, serves as not only a personal empowerment strategy but also an agent of social change, which proves that visibility is a strong tool in the arsenal of feminists to achieve equality (Crenshaw 1991; Ahmed 2021). Occupying space in the public discourse, women and gender minorities break the established power relations, not only enacting their complaints but also claiming the right to influence the societal processes within which they live.

The *Désirée Baby* (1893) by Kate Chopin and *The Sweat* (1926) by Zora Neale Hurston are the two interesting case studies in literature that give us a good example of the interrelation of muffled pain and vocal protest and resistance in feminist terms (Showalter 1991; Spivak 1988). The story by Chopin is located in the racially divided American South and it gives an account of the disastrous effects of racial indecision on a woman whose value is constructed socially by a patriarchal and racist vision (Toth 1999; Kolodny 1985). The silent suffering, and eventual escape into the bayou, of D Lucas Désirée is symbolic of the devastating impact of society and the racial prejudice and of how suppressed individuals may one day end up in erasing themselves (Papke 1990; Beer 1997). Conspicuously in comparison, the *Sweat* by Hurston introduces Delia Jones, a Black washerwoman

who gets subjected to domestic violence and financial neglect, and finally realizes the Sweat after being reduced to silent acceptance that is followed by an act of decisive rebellion against her abusive husband (Hemenway 1977; Plant 1988). Delia was on a journey to emphasize the empowering nature of vocal resistance and self-determination even under a system that has a systematic way of minimizing self-determination (Wall 2005; Carby 1987). The two stories display the intersection of gender and race in shaping the experiences of women indicating that the shape that resistance takes is usually influenced by the socio-cultural parameters within which they exist (Crenshaw 1991; hooks 1981). Through this contrast of stories, we can note how literature can encapsulate the entirety of feminist reactions: quiet subjugation borne of the systemic practice of being silenced and vocal defiance borne of rediscovering one and owning it.

Silent suffering and loud resistance remain an indelible part of the modern feminist thought and activism because such problems as gender-based violence, discrimination in the workplace, and systemic racism are acute today in most parts of the global community (hooks 2015; Ahmed 2021). The perseverance that Chopin and Hurston portray replicates the current plight of women where their voices are yet to be heard in the 21st century (Fraser 2013; Mohanty 2003). Simultaneously, the transformations represented by the narratives, through invisibility to defiance provide lasting paradigms of comprehending how individual agency can lead to alteration of systemic systems (Butler 1997; Lorde 1984). Feminist theory underlines the need to recognize that silent suffering and a loud protest are equally valid forms of survival and resistance that are interconnected (Bartky 1990; Scott 1990). Some might argue that silence is also a means to save those involved in a situation, and yet, opposition, both blatant and discreet, is and must be a part of opposing unjust systems (hooks 1984; Taylor 1999). By placing Chopin and Hurston works in a wider feminist context, we can appreciate both works not only as a part of literature but as a contribution to the current discussions of intersectionality, resilience, and politics of voice (Crenshaw 1989; Ahmed 2017). These narratives serve as a reminder that the struggle of gender justice is multidimensional as the knotty nature of not seeing the silent sufferers and the potential of the transformative power of the silent sufferers who decide to speak is pertinent.

### **Research Gap**

Despite the fact that *Désirée Baby* by Kate Chopin and *Sweat* by Zora Neale Hurston have been frequently analyzed in feminist literary criticism, it is possible to note the absence of a significant scholarly space where the intersectional feminist approach to literature is applied to these pieces of work. Specifically, few studies have been done on how the race, class and gender intersect to influence the experiences of the main characters in light of quiet complacency as well as noisy protest. Most of the criticism that has been written has often treated the characters as isolated, and to some extent not locating the experience within the larger matrix of overlapping social hierarchies. This does not tell us how their particular specificities of culture and history mediate their access to agency, resilience, and autonomous action. Reconsideration of the silence of Desiree in the face of racial and sex oppression is one of the spheres of understudying. Her silence is most commonly understood as passivity or victimhood, but a deeper interpretation of her silence may indicate a small act of defiance or an act of self-protection in a society that systematically disappears the women with unclear racial backgrounds. In a similar manner, the active opposition of Delia in *Sweat*, which culminates in her decision not to save her abusive husband, begs consideration about what formulates feminist agency. In contrast, a comparative

approach may help to shed light on the way in which various forms of resistance covert or overt are formed by the influence of structural constraints and individual strategies of survival.

The other unexplored dimension is with respect to gendered agency and autonomy. Both the characters are working in oppressive settings that do not have many choices to make, but the context of their restraints is quite different in the Antebellum South and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century African American society. These differences may be closely investigated by using the lens of intersectional analysis to provide solid information regarding the socio-cultural specificity of the female resistance. Besides, the maternal and reproductive characters as the core of the both stories should be considered with more detail on how they shape the identity, the social vision, and personal empowerment.

Also, the texts have a lot of underutilized resources on sexual violence and gendered oppression especially as concerns the intersection of the two experiences with the acts of subversion. The chronic mistreatment of Delia and social isolation of Désirée are not only personal tragedies but are the evidence of more widespread violence that is patriarchal and racialized. The realization that resistance strategies are historically constituted by such violence may add to the feminist theoretical literature approaches concerning literary analysis. Lastly, understanding how female solidarity and empathy comes into play with regards to dealing with oppression is a topic that should be highlighted further. Although the absence of support mechanisms is highlighted in the isolation Désirée faces, Delia has a community, albeit a dysfunctional one, but still has some form of recognition that helps in her empowerment. Filling these gaps will enable a deeper, more stratified interpretation of feminist themes in both texts, to feed into further discussion about the agency, resistance, and strength of women, despite these racialized, patriarchal structures.

### **Objectives**

This study aims to:

1. Investigate the intersectional feminist aspects of race, gender, and class in both *Desiree Baby* and *Sweat*, and to assess how these elements shape the experiences of the female protagonists.
2. Analyze the theme of silent suffering in *Desiree Baby*, considering whether it signifies passive submission or an alternative form of resistance, while contrasting it with Delia's proactive resistance in *Sweat*.
3. Evaluate the agency and autonomy of the female characters in both narratives, exploring how societal structures and personal circumstances affect their capacity to exert control over their lives.
4. Explore the significance of motherhood and reproductive rights in both stories, emphasizing how these themes impact the identity, agency, and choices of the women depicted.
5. Examine the representation of sexual violence and gendered oppression, analyzing how these elements contribute to the protagonists' suffering and their responses to it.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do race, gender, and class intersect to influence the experiences, agency, and forms of resistance both silent and vocal of the female protagonists in Kate Chopin's *Désirée's Baby* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Sweat*?

2. In what ways do themes such as motherhood, reproductive rights, sexual violence, and gendered oppression shape the identities, autonomy, and strategies of resistance employed by Désirée and Delia within their distinct socio-cultural contexts?

### Literature Review

In the context of the feminist literary theory, we are now able to examine the possibility of examining how gender, power as well as the identity are reflected in the literature as well as challenged in the literature. The works by Kate Chopin, *Desiree Baby* ( 1893 ) and Zora Neale Hurston, *Sweat* ( 1926 ) show two women who have to face the results of the patriarchal world and their reaction to this oppression is rather opposite. In the story of Chopin, Désirée is a silent endurance of racial and gender oppression whereas Delia in Hurston novel eventually discovers her voice and a more effective form of struggling. In this literature review, I would examine the current studies on feminist theme in these texts concerning the ways in which gender relations, race, and their interpenetrating impact on the ways in which the lives of the protagonists are affected.

In her book entitled *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler puts forth the idea that gender cannot be something that we are born with, but rather it is rather something that we play as a result of expectations that are imposed on us by society. During the antebellum south, women are symbols of worth within the norm of antebellum wives and mothers in *Desiree baby*. The thoughts of Butler make us see the silence and compliance of Désirée as a consequence of her dedication to these gendered norms. On the contrary, Delia of the film *Sweat* rebels against her usual role of abused wives. Her passive opposition and her ultimate claim of authority following the death of her husband is an indication that strict gender definitions can be broken down and reinterpreted by those who oppose the standardized concept of femininity.

The concept of intersectionality developed by Bell hooks (1981) reveals the way the race, class, and gender interact to subordinate Black women. In her book *Ain I a Woman?* Hooks notes that the particular experience of Black women is in most cases ignored by mainstream feminism as well as by society at large. It can be seen in *Desiree*, whose ambiguous race causes her to be susceptible to the discrimination of both gender and race, due to her rejection by Armand. In the same note, Delia faces the issue of being a Black woman in a world dictated by norms, however her struggle to empowerment rises against both patriarchal and racial norms. Hooks makes it important to consider the opinion of the Black woman in any argument about feminism and race, which is central to understanding the plight of Delia in relation to oppression.

*The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), written by Gilbert and Gubar, is regarded as an important source of feminist literary criticism because its authors reveal the narrow scope of the role that women usually occupy in literature. *Desiree* is the character who can be classified as the stereotypical angel, who is pure, beautiful, and submissive to male dominance that results in her sad demise. Conversely, Delia is released of the victim mentality and develops into a more complicated and rebellious character and fights against the oppressive elements in her life. Although she does not conform to the stereotypical image of a madwoman, Delia is rebellious and leads the reader to reconsider the conventional role of a submissive woman and the possibility of agency and transformation in the bound parameters of gender and gender roles.

Of great significance as a further scholarly contribution in this area is the article by Thadious M. Davis titled *Race, Gender, and the politics of resistance in Zora Neale Hurston Sweat* (1998). Davis also discusses race-gender intersection in Hurston throughout her characterization of Delia. He

claims that Hurston uses the fight against the oppression by Delia to make some remarks on the racial and gender problems of the south in the early 20th century. As demonstrated by Davis, Delia is not merely the victim; she becomes a strong and empowered woman, which reflects not only her own struggle against her abusive husband but also the overall cultural and social issues facing women, specifically African American ones, in the world during the period. The study will contribute to the discussion of Hurston and her feminist topics as it shows how the personal journey of Delia can be observed as an act of political resistance in both patriarchal and racial violence.

Both in *Desiree Baby and Sweat*, the protagonist's Desiree and Delia demonstrate the gender roles of the epoch. During the South in the 19th century, Desiree plays the role of passive suffering as she is restricted by stringent patriarchal and racial rules of the period which leads to her tragic destiny. In the meantime, Delia in *Sweat* symbolizes the change in the first part of the 20th century when women, particularly, African American women, start to make their independent choice. The evolution of her suffering to the process of stand up by herself is a reflection on the escalated empowerment of women at that time. The characters are influenced by the historical setting of the tales, as Désirée allows her passivity to sideline the detriments of gender strictness, whereas Delia displays resilience as a step towards female power and independence.

Both of the stories revolve around the female characters that have to overcome the cruel rules of power concerned with gender, race, and social status and survive various types of silent sufferings. In the story of *Desiree's Baby*, however, Desiree's seems to have a silent fight, being unable to change her fate, she is caught within the society constraints and the racial rules that are assigned to her. On a different note, Delia in *Sweat* endures all that she can without complaining but finally rebels against her oppressive state in a moment of strong survival. Although the two females are oppressed, their oppression is predetermined by their races. The suffering of Desiree is linked to racial purity of her child whereas that of Delia is given a social and economic status of being a black female that provides a detail to the quest to achieve freedom.

### **Methodology**

The research is qualitative and comparatively feminist with the perspective on *Desiree Baby* by Kate Chopin and *Sweat* by Zora Neale Hurston. This is aimed at investigating the gendered experiences of the female protagonists and the way they respond to their oppression through the intersection of race, gender, and class in the context of their particular cultures. In an attempt to compare the two works, the paper seeks to illuminate the manner in which the themes of silent suffering and loud resistance have very distinct representations in the lives of these women.

This study mainly rely on the texts of the *Desiree Baby* and *Sweat*. Such literature pieces form the basis of understanding the emotional and psychic processes of the characters, the way they react to social and personal problems they encounter. Other sources used are feminist literary critique, historical context of the periods during which the stories were written, and articles that have to do with gender, race, and oppression in literature. Such secondary sources assist in contextualizing the discussion within feminism theories and contexts in general.

To interpret the texts, the study further use the intersectionality of feminist theory to discuss how identities of the protagonists as women, determined by their race and classes, contribute to their sufferings and resistance experiences. The reflection made on the silent suffering of Desiree in the story *Desiree s Baby* with regards to the issue of whether the silence is a passive act or a soft

resistance in the racially tween society. On the contrary, the hysterical protest of Delia in *Sweat* will be discussed as an active manner of regaining control in a controlling and abusive relationship. Thematic analysis employed to pinpoint some of the main motifs in the two tales; some of these include power, control, emotional endurance and resistance. Comparison with other feminist literature works made in the study enabling it to have a wider view of how various struggles and resistances of women are depicted in literature. Such a methodology provide a further insight into the way Chopin and Hurston portray women who are trying to survive within the oppressive systems and reveal the various types of agency that can be used by women under these circumstances.

### **Results and Discussion**

The discussion shows that *Desiree Baby* focuses on the silent suffering of the main character as an extremely intricate reaction to the oppression. Although, at the first impression, Desiree quietness can be perceived as passivity or resignation, in the frame of feminist approach, it can be viewed as a tacit kind of the resistance to a social order that strives to dominate her voice and personal identity. The rigid racial and gender lines in the Antebellum South did not provide much space to women where they could question the status quo without disastrous results, particularly in cases of women who had grey racial pedigrees. In such a setting, silence was a survival tactic, as well as the way of saving individual dignity against dehumanization. The fact that she does not verbally attack Armand or the society directly is representative of the larger historical process of silencing women, which did not judge the latter by their true worth but by their conformity to the patriarchal and racial norms. The pain and eventual dissolution of Desiree into the bayou represents the dire effects of systematic oppression and while this is true, it also betrays the instability of a social order built on a gagging and erasing of women. Her tale is a literary witness to the fact that the forces of the society make some of the resistance tactics (quiet refusal or withdrawal) not only invisible but also tragically potent. It is through this silent resistance that Desiree becomes a prototype of women whose pain is hidden but whose experiences show how systems of oppression are devastating.

Hurston, on the other hand, in *Sweat* provides a different and very vocal, resolute, and life-altering image of resistance. The life of the washerwoman Delia Jones who lived in rural Florida in the beginning of the 20th century is characterized by years of domestic violence, financial turmoil, and heartbreak mainly because of the cruelty of her husband Sykes. First, Delia is portrayed as enduring in a similar manner as Désirée quiet, calm, and stable because of the hope that her stability is maintained by her persistence. Nevertheless, the development of the story proves that it changes the perspective of perseverance to the one of active rebellion. The fact that Delia eventually rejects the opportunity to save Sykes when he is attacked by the snake that he brought into their house is one of the key moments when all of her years of frustration are condensed into a single act. This is not mere revenge: it is a reclamation of agency in itself, a symbolic disruption of the pattern of abuse and subordination. This shift is reflective within feminist theory as scholars have identified it as a move towards what they call conscious resistance where women take steps beyond survival tactics and go on to confront those who oppress them. The character of Delia highlights the message that resistance may be developed gradually and develop over time as the result of long-term pain to the point of breaking. Her experience shows that opposition does not always have to be instant and explicit, but may develop as a result of survival, which is a consequence of life and gradual accumulation of strength of character.

The theme of motherhood has been used in both stories, but what is unique about it is its coverage and interpretation. In *Desiree Baby*, motherhood is a primary feature in the identity of the main character and one of the major factors of her misery. The racial ambivalence of her child is placed under the spot light to be judged by society, something that turns out to be a source of happiness and fulfillment in life into an experience of shame and strangeness. Motherhood, in this case, turns out to be both the source of love and belonging on the one hand and vulnerability to increased scrutiny in a racially stratified society on the other hand. On the other hand, in *Sweat*, the role of motherhood is not as assertive, but rather, the motherly instincts of Delia, as well as her experience as a caregiver, are some of the sources of her strength. The emotional foundations and the feeling of duty, which is inherent to her position, grants her the endurance to endure years of mistreatment as well as keep laboring to save her household. Feminine literary perspective of these perceptions reveals that motherhood brings along with it power as well as vulnerability of women depending on the socio-cultural scenario. Motherhood in the patriarchal societies turns into a disputed area where women are valued by how well they fit the prescriptive norms. However, it can, as experienced in the case of Delia, provide a source of strength as well as trigger the future liberation.

The socio-cultural settings of the two writings play a crucial role in defining the types of oppression/resistance that each of the two protagonists can use in this situation. A theme of race versus gender in the broader society, as depicted by Chopin in the Antebellum South, presents a society with very strict inter-relations between race and gender where the latter has few legal outlets to openly resist conformity. The lack of structural or communal reinforcements and the intense personal costs of going against the system are reflected by her silence. The context of Hurston is in early 20th century, African American, which is still so patriarchal but allows Delia a little more leeway. The community of Black people in *Sweat*, the rural world, does not actively support her, but they create a sort of the informal system of witnesses that admits her pain. This is not the active source of intervention but rather a communal awareness that gives a backdrop on which her resistance can take place without being entirely isolated. This environment, in its turn, helps Delia eventually turn into an empowered individual- a reminder that even flawed community settings can serve as psychological support of defiant actions. In the comparison of the two cultural landscapes, the paper has pointed out how context constrains or facilitates resistance and how the structures of the society greatly determine the methods women use in their fights against oppression.

The issue of female solidarity, or the lack of it, is also an important finding in this analysis as far as it concerns the experience of the protagonists. In *Desiree Baby*, the absence of female friends makes Desiree feel even more lonely, which underlines the fact that the inability to find supportive networks can make suffering in silence all the more tragic. This shows the historical fact that other women who were oppressed based on gender and race were commonly isolated not just by the mainstream society but also by the possible sources of solidarity. In *Sweat*, though the community in which Delia lives does not openly protect her, it subtly does in that particular way: the neighbors see that Sykes is mistreating her, they share knowing glances, and through their silence manage not to support his dominance over her. This element of recognition is an undercurrent, and though it is not perfect, it helps her eventually to become decisive. Intersectional feminist views demonstrate that these differences unveil the intersection of race, gender, class and community to produce diverse experiences of oppression and resistance. Finally, both stories show that the



reaction of women to oppression is not even; it varies between a passive acceptance and an explicit rebellion depending on individual circumstances and other socio-cultural processes. The study highlights that both silence and action can become the valid and meaningful means of resistance in feminist analysis, and to understand them, one must consider the conjoined system of power that shapes the life of women.

**Limitations**

This study has a few limitations worth noting:

Firstly, the subjective nature of literary analysis can result in different interpretations of *Desiree Baby and Sweat*, as feminist readings are shaped by the researcher's own perspectives and biases. Secondly, the historical and cultural contexts of the stories compared to contemporary feminist views might influence how we perceive the characters' actions and their resistance. The evolving social landscapes of gender and race relations can also change our understanding of their experiences. Moreover, concentrating mainly on feminist theory might neglect other significant aspects, such as class and sexuality that contribute to the characters' challenges.

Lastly, the comparative method used for these two works has its constraints due to the unique cultural, racial, and social settings they inhabit, which can complicate direct comparisons and may limit the broader applicability of the results.

**Conclusion**

This comparative feminist analysis of Kate Chopin *Desiree Baby* and Zora Neale Hurston *Sweat* will show how literature can provide enlightenment regarding the various ways that females can maneuver through oppression in socially and historically specific contexts. Feminist criticism has allowed recognizing in the given analysis that *Desiree*'s silent resistance and vocal opposition of *Delia* are not merely the differences in character but rather more intricate approaches dictated by the interaction of gender, race, and class, as well as culture. The silence of the main character in *Desiree Baby* can be symbolic because it reflects the suffocating effect of the racial and patriarchal codes of the Antebellum South which limited the abilities of women to struggle without having devastating consequences. The stigma that accompanies her pain represents the unseen dimensions of the pain that women incur when they do not belong to what is socially acceptable. In comparison, *Sweat* provides a story of change where *Delia* has gone through with her endurance to an open resistance, as the end result is a definite action wherein she takes back her freedom against an abusive husband. The implication of this description by Hurston is that even in the most limited situations, there is always the possibility of agency and therefore it is possible to get empowered through continued strength. Collectively, all of these stories support the idea that the response of women to oppression is multi-dimensional and context-specific shaped by both external limitations that the society imposes on women and internal sources of strength.

These findings give significance to the need of intersectional analysis in the interpretation of literature experiences of women. Both Chopin and Hurston introduce the protagonists whose life is not to be defined by the gender only, but by the complex effect of other factors such as race, social status, and cultural values. Intersectionality helps us to understand that the suffering of *Desiree* could not be discussed without references to racial orders and hierarchies of her era similarly to how resistance of *Delia* could not be explained without references to struggles of the early 20th-century African American life. The layered lens not only demonstrates how things in our society are constructed in a way that offers different opportunities to act, but it also explains why modes of resistance should be considered in the context of particular situations and not on

the basis of an abstract norm of empowerment. The paper also points to how the two authors utilize their main characters to break and undermine social norms. In Chopin portraying a woman, slain by the burden of social prejudice, she brings to our notice a poisonous nature of silence which is imposed by the structural oppression. By giving a counter narrative of survival and self-assertion, Hurston through her characterization of a woman who ends up doing something to get herself out of her abuse provides a counter narrative. Such portrayal goes beyond the bounds of their stories and are part of a larger literary lineage of female agency as it does not reside in complete monolith but exists in a gradient of subdued survival to outspoken rebellion. Through this, both books contribute to feminist literary discourse by providing detailed depictions that still elicit an impact in the modern gender and race studies.

The paper not only gives us more ideas about the characters in *Desiree Baby* and *Sweat* but also suggests to further academic investigating into multiple expressions of resistance and suffering in the literature of women. The fact that the agency might have various types subtle or overt can be seen as a challenge to the reductive understanding of female characters and the promotion of a broader evaluative perspective of feminist literary criticism. Future studies may broaden the parameters of study to cover other works in other cultures, geographical locations, and periods to gain an understanding of the role of historical changes, cultural constructs and development of feminist thinking in the portrayal of the ways women survive and revolt. Additionally, to gain an even more in-depth insight, comparative work with further intersectional factors, sexuality, disability, or migration, could be conducted. As more and more dynamics are studied, researchers can understand the significance of literature in defining gender justice discourses as well as creating them. In conclusion, insights provided by the current paper attest to the fact that feminist interpretations of literature can be thought of as an effective way of discovering the multifaceted nature of the lives that women lead today and in the past, reminding us of the ongoing significance of such work in discussions of resiliency, agency, and social transformation.

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