

## Social Conflict and the Struggle for Power: A Weberian Reading of Marsha Norman's Selected Plays

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### Abstract

This paper will examine the depiction of conflict within *Getting Out* (1977) and *'night, Mother* (1982) written by Marsha Norman using the ideas of Max Weber. In spite of the fact that much of the existing literature on these plays focuses on the feminist and psychoanalytic approaches, this research proposes a sociological analysis of the works and will show how the conflict becomes entrenched within the structure of social relations.

The study is based on a qualitative interpretative method that relies on textual analysis. Certain scenes of the plays will be chosen to reveal the nature of the conflict and its social causes. These will be defined according to the basic categories of Weber's sociology, such as class, status, power, domination, and legitimation.

It is clear that conflicts in both plays emerge on different levels including interpersonal, family, and societal and have much to do with structural inequality. While *Getting Out* focuses on conflict as an outside phenomenon when the protagonist tries to gain autonomy and be reintegrated into society amidst resistance, *'night, Mother* features a conflict on an internal level, resulting in self-destruction because of the lack of agency and social repression. As shown from the findings, conflict is an inseparable part of social life but can result in either success or tragedy based on whether people can resist and have adequate resources.

As can be seen, the study makes a valuable contribution to literature studies through introducing a Weberian theoretical analysis of Norman's plays which creates a connection between sociology and literary studies.

**Keywords:** Social Conflict, Max Weber, Marsha Norman, *Getting Out*, *Night, Mother*, Power, Status, Domination, Authority, Sociological Criticism.

### 1. Introduction

The present study attempts to analyze the depiction of social conflicts in two plays written by Marsha Norman titled "*Getting Out*" (1977) and *'Night, Mother*' (1982). The dramatist's works highlight the theme of social marginalization involving particularly women who face discrimination in society. It should be noted that the conflicts discussed in the dramas arise within the context of oppression by social institutions, dysfunction in families, and struggle for independence and control over one's life.

From the perspective of Max Weber's sociological theory, particularly his approaches towards class, status, and power, the current research will examine the formation of conflict as an essential feature of any social relationship. According to Weber, conflict is regarded as a form of social interaction, during which people attempt to dominate each other even when faced with resistance (Weber, 1978, p. 38).

In "*Getting Out*", the character Arlene tries to rebuild her identity in response to her experiences while locked up in prison and fights against the forces that try to trap her in her past. Conversely, in "*'night, Mother*", Jessie emerges as a character who is incapable of breaking free from her social and psychological shackles and ends up with self-destruction as the only way to assert herself. Both these characters thus represent two extremes, demonstrating the consequences of conflict as discussed by Weber, according to whom, conflict is an inescapable part of social life (Weber, 1978, p. 38).

The following research paper thus aims at doing a detailed Weberian analysis of the conflict in Norman's plays.

### 1.1 Problem Statement:

Even though *Getting Out* and "*'night, Mother*" have received considerable literary criticism using the feminist and psychoanalytical theories, it becomes clear that the use of conflict theory from the Weberian point of view has not been considered before. Most of the previous literary studies have concentrated on gender oppression, identity construction, and psychological damage caused by various experiences, neglecting sociological aspects of the issue.

Weber defines social inequality as one based on unequal access to class, status, and power, resulting in social conflict (Weber, 1978, p. 926). Nevertheless, no research work has addressed how these mechanisms affect characters in Norman's works, creating conflicts between them.

Furthermore, there exists no thorough analysis of another feature of conflict – its potential for both constructive and destructive results in regard to the two plays mentioned above. Arlene's story implies transformation and resistance; however, the case with Jessie involves negative consequences of social conflict.

Thus, it can be stated that the current research aims at analyzing sociological characteristics of conflict in Norman's works, exploring its constructive and destructive sides as well as mechanisms through which power and authority play their role.

### 1.2 Research Objectives:

The objectives of this research are to:

1. Study the manifestations of social conflict in *Getting Out* and '*'night, Mother* based on the theories of conflict by Max Weber.
2. Study the part played by class, status, and power in determining the characters' experience and actions.

3. Study the dynamics of domination, authority, and legitimation in family and social relations in the dramas.
4. Study the effects of conflict especially the difference between constructive and destructive effects in both plays.

### 1.3 Research Questions:

Questions to be answered in this research include the following:

1. How is social conflict portrayed in the two films *Getting Out* and *'night, Mother*?
2. In what ways can the concepts of class, status, and power influence the production of social conflict among the film characters?
3. How does the concept of domination and authority develop through the dynamics in the films?
4. Are the results of conflict in line with Weber's view that social conflict is inevitable?

## 2. Literature Review

This section provides a critical review of existing literature on the plays of Marsha Norman, namely "*Getting Out*" and "*'night, Mother*," focusing especially on the major critical approaches and their drawbacks. Though some scholars have analyzed the plays from the perspectives of feminism, psychoanalysis, and sociology, there is still considerable absence of research that employs Max Weber's conflict theory in the interpretation of these plays.

### 2.1 Dominant Critical Approaches to Marsha Norman's Drama:

However, critical studies of the two works of Norman have been guided by feminist approaches, which analyze the hardships of female protagonists in the patriarchal environment. Criticizing the way in which both *Getting Out* and *'night, Mother* depict the challenges of women trapped in social conventions, Hetal J. Mehta notes that in the plays' settings, female identities become the result of confrontation with the dominant gender (Mehta, 2012, p. 64). In a similar vein, Khuloud Mohammed Ameen identifies two types of Norman's female characters: those who accept social roles and those who resist them (Ameen, 2015, p. 112).

In this context, the suicide of Jessie in *'Night, Mother* has been interpreted not simply as a desperate step of an oppressed character but as her liberation from the constraints of patriarchy. As noted by Shelley R. Terry, Jessie chooses to destroy herself as a protest against the dominating male power, turning her own death into a means for asserting personal freedom (Terry, 2008, p. 89). Likewise, Harshita Dwivedi believes that the two female protagonists – Jessie and Arlene – rebel against imposed social constraints (Dwivedi, 2016, p. 134).

Besides the feminist readings, psychoanalytical criticism became an important interpretative trend. Applying theories of Freud and Lacan, researchers have been investigating the psychological aspects of characters in Norman's plays. Thus, Thomas W. Blake discusses the effect of family relationships

on Jessie and identifies maternal factor as the determinant for her suicidal choice due to unresolved conflicts (Blake, 1999, p. 57). Likewise, Alieyh Alsadat Jafari interprets the character in a Lacanian way as a person trapped in the symbolic and forced into existential crises because of her lack of freedom (Jafari, 2014, p. 203).

Furthermore, some sociological and social constructivist approaches were developed, though, again, they are not very popular and limited in scope. Lori Guimond considers the consequences of social labeling for Arlene in *Getting Out* in terms of its influence on the heroine's identity formation through her behavior (Guimond, 2001, p. 76). In turn, Rebwar Zainadin Muhammad and Kawan Othman Arif consider the play *Getting Out* as an example of social oppression of women (Muhammad & Arif, 2017, p. 58).

Nevertheless, sociological readings still lack theoretical basis and structure in their approach to sociological conflict theory that sees social conflicts as an integral element of society.

Moreover, thematic analysis has examined particular motifs such as loss, starvation, and domesticity. According to Linda Ginter Brown, the use of imagery involving food is an allegory of psychological impoverishment and emotional starvation in 'night, Mother (Brown, 1987, p. 41). In a similar manner, Dipa Janardanan considers 'night, Mother as part of a larger genre of "loss narratives" marked by emotional or existential loss (Janardanan, 2010, p. 92).

In spite of the significance of these analyses, they tend to focus on certain aspects at the expense of the overall conflict structure of the plays.

## 2.2 Gaps in Weberian Sociological Criticism of Norman's Works:

In spite of the various scholarly works, there is no systematic analysis of the theory of conflict developed by Weber with respect to the plays by Norman. Although social inequality and power relations are mentioned by several scholars, Weberian concepts of class, status, and power as a source of conflict have not been considered in any significant detail (Weber, 1978, p. 926).

Furthermore, there is a tendency to emphasize either one or the other perspective—either gender or psychology—in the analysis of conflict in the play at the expense of examining conflict through the prism of power relations and social hierarchy. Thus, while the feminist interpretation emphasizes the role of patriarchy in defining Jessie's state, psychoanalysis looks at her conflicts on an individual basis.

Moreover, another research gap includes a comparative analysis of the two plays under consideration in regard to the conflict outcomes. While the main characters of the plays are exposed to oppressive conditions, they react in different ways to the challenges they face. Arlene is focused on transformation and reincorporation into society, while Jessie decides to destroy herself. The mentioned differences have not been explored enough in academic sources in the context of one theoretical approach.

In addition, the problem of authority and legitimation, which is important for Weber's theory, needs

to be elaborated in the context of the literary texts by Norman. According to Weber, domination becomes established when its legitimacy is accepted by those who experience domination (Weber, 1978, p. 213). Such an issue can be discussed with respect to the family relationships described in the plays.

Therefore, there is a lack of the mentioned theoretical perspective in studying conflict in Norman's drama.

### 2.3 Theoretical and Methodological Innovations:

This study proposes a sociological approach based on Weberian theories as an innovative way of examining Norman's works. The previous researches have been centered around specific components of each play; in contrast, this study applies Weber's concept of conflict, class, status, power, domination, and authority to the analysis of Norman's drama.

Theoretically, the sociological perspective contributes to literary criticism in its integration of sociological theories into the examination of dramatic literature. Specifically, the theory of conflict developed by Weber states that it is a process of imposing one's will against opposition (Weber, 1978, p. 38). This theoretical framework makes it possible to analyze the dynamics of character interactions from the point of view of sociological relations between people.

Methodologically, this study applies comparative textual analysis by applying the chosen theoretical framework to both texts and comparing them based on the selected themes. Therefore, the comparison of the representation of conflict will become possible. Based on the concepts of power distribution and authority legitimization, it will be possible to examine the plays from the point of view of sociology.

Furthermore, the paper helps to fill the gap that exists between literary and sociological approaches. It moves beyond the usual approach based on themes or psychological analysis and looks at the issue from a wider perspective, involving the effects of structures on individual freedom.

### 2.4 Bridging the Gap:

Using Weber's concept of conflict in the analysis of the plays by Norman, the current study aims to fill the gaps highlighted above. It offers a multidimensional approach that covers social, psychological, and literary aspects of the problem.

Firstly, it has been established that the concept of conflict in the two plays goes beyond being an issue of an individual and/or psychological nature. On the contrary, conflict is an inherently structural issue that results from the disparity between status, power, and authority. Characters respond differently to these structures.

Secondly, by employing a comparative framework, this study shows that conflict is double-sided and, therefore, confirms Weber's statement according to which conflict is an inherent phenomenon of social life (Weber, 1978, p. 38). Whereas the story of Arlene implies the presence of hope to overcome

the conflict, the story of Jessie stresses the destructive potential of conflict.

In sum, this study has not only managed to fill an important theoretical and empirical gap in the literature but has also proven itself useful to the field of literary studies as well, showing the importance of using sociological approaches to the analysis of texts.

### 3. Methodology

This section provides details on the research design, methodology, analysis strategy, and theories used in this research. The research has been designed using the interpretive approach which is based on the sociological literary criticism theory of Max Weber. The objective of this research is to examine the construction and representation of social conflict in the plays *Getting Out* and 'night, Mother by Marsha Norman.

#### 3.1 Research Design:

The research method chosen for this study is qualitative research due to the interpretation of textual data. As noted by Creswell & Creswell, qualitative research provides the opportunity to explore the meanings and themes contained in literary texts (2018, p. 183). Therefore, such an approach is well suited for the analysis of literary works.

At the same time, more precisely, the research is conducted using the descriptive-analytical and interpretive methods since the study allows systematically analyzing conflict through character, dialogues, and plot lines in literary texts. The chosen approach can be regarded as sociological literary criticism that involves viewing literary works as social realities.

Another specific feature of the research is its comparative nature because there is an analysis of conflict depicted in two literary works to compare their features. It allows revealing the similarities and differences in the manifestation of conflict and its resolution under different social circumstances and power relations.

#### 3.2 Data Collection:

The main data to be collected for the study includes sample texts, in particular:

- *Getting Out* (1977).
- 'night, Mother (1982).
- Written by Marsha Norman.

These plays will become the main source of data for analysis. The choice of these texts can be explained by their theme content as they are oriented towards the problems of conflict, identity, and social inequality; thus, they are appropriate for analysis based on Weber's theory.

Collection of the data will involve close reading and textual analysis through extracting relevant fragments of the play that are linked to the problem of conflict through the following aspects:

- Class and economic situation.
- Status and identity.
- Power relations.
- Dominance and authority.
- Resistance and autonomy.

Secondary sources, including books, journal articles, and critiques of the selected texts, will be used as an additional source of data.

### 3.3 Data Analysis:

Qualitative textual analysis will be used for analysis of the selected literary pieces. Qualitative thematic analysis is a technique that consists in identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 57).

The process includes several stages:

#### 1. Reading the Texts and Familiarizing with Them:

Texts are thoroughly read in order to get familiarized with their narratives, characters, and conflicts.

#### 2. Coding Texts:

Relevant passages in texts are coded according to certain concepts, which relate to Weberian theory such as power, status, domination, etc.

#### 3. Identifying Themes:

Themes are determined from codes including the following topics:

- Social inequality and stratification.
- Struggle for power and resistance.
- Authority and legitimation of domination.
- Outcomes of conflict.

#### 4. Interpreting Themes:

Themes are interpreted based on concepts of Weberian theory of conflict.

### 3.4 Analytical Framework:

Analytical framework of this research is grounded in the conflict theory proposed by Max Weber in his work "Economy and Society." According to Weber, conflict is a social relation where an individual

attempts to assert his/her will despite resistance of other individuals (Weber, 1978, p. 38). It constitutes a theoretical basis for characterizing the interaction of characters in chosen plays.

Analytical framework highlights four main interrelated notions:

### 1. Class, Status, and Power:

Class, status, and power are viewed by Weber as three main sources of social stratification and conflict (Weber, 1978, pp. 926–927). These notions are employed in order to understand the impact of characters' social stratification on their experience and behavior.

### 2. Domination:

Domination represents the ability of people and groups to control the rest and dominate them. It is achieved in case of exercise of power within social relations (Weber, 1978, p. 942). It can be analyzed in parent-child and person-society relations.

### 3. Authority and Legitimation:

In distinguishing domination from authority, Weber makes clear that the former is stabilized when it gains legitimacy among those subjected to its control (Weber, 1978, p. 213). In this regard, the investigation explores the workings of authority through familial and social settings in the drama works.

### 4. Outcomes of Conflict:

Furthermore, the framework takes into account the possible effects of conflict, both positive and negative. This is consistent with Weber's assertion that conflict is a natural element of social life (Weber, 1978, p. 38).

Through the use of the framework, the examination presents a systematic process of analyzing the processes involved in the creation, experience, and resolution of conflicts in Norman's drama works.

## 4. Results

These findings come from the qualitative textual analysis of *Getting Out* (1977) and *'night, Mother* (1982). They have been presented based on the four components of Weberian conflict theory that include manifestations of conflict, distribution of power, dominance and authority, and consequences of conflict.

From the results, it can be seen that conflicts in the two movies are not accidental but rather structural; they arise due to the existing inequality in social interactions that include status, power, and resource distribution. This is in line with the view of Weber who states that conflicts are inherent in social interactions.

### 4.1 Manifestations of Social Conflict in the Plays:

The analysis shows that there are different layers of conflict involved in the two plays, which include

individual conflict, family conflict, and social conflict. In *Getting Out*, conflict arises mainly from the way Arlene interacts with other people. On the other hand, in 'night, Mother, conflict occurs in an internal form due to Jessie's psychological state and actions.

Conflict arises in *Getting Out* during the dialogue between Arlene and Bennie:

> "ARLENE. Arlene.

BENNIE. Arlie?" (Norman, 1988, p. 6)

The conversation highlights an identity crisis where Arlene attempts to recreate her identity, whereas Bennie clings to her old identity. As Weber (1978) states, conflict arises if one party tries to impose his or her will in opposition to other parties (p. 38). Arlene's determination to go by her new name is her agency, while Bennie's determination is her resistance based on social stigma.

The same is true for Arlene's discussion with her mother, which highlights a conflict within her family influenced by distrust and social stigma:

> "MOTHER. You ain't changed a bit." (Norman, 1988, p. 25)

This example illustrates how the past status determines Arlene's current situation, further emphasizing Weber's claim that status affects social relations and power distribution (Weber, 1978, p. 305).

In the movie 'night, Mother, conflict arises right from the outset when Jessie declares that:

> "I'm going to kill myself, Mama." (Norman, 1988, p. 13)

While Arlene's conflicts are external, those of Jessie are internal yet socially driven by illnesses, joblessness, and dependence. The ensuing dialogue brings out a continuing conflict between Jessie's yearning for independence and her mother's wish to retain control.

From the foregoing discussion, it can be inferred that conflict in the two plays does not occur in isolation but is brought about by continuous interaction within societal and familial structures.

#### 4.2 Class, Status, and Power as Sources of Conflict:

These results reveal that class, status, and power are important factors in the creation of conflict in the two plays.

In *Getting Out*, Arlene's lack of economic means and status places her in what Max Weber refers to as an unfavourable class position (Weber, 1978, p. 302). Her lack of a job and her criminal background mean that she cannot get power:

> "I'm gonna work... make somethin' of myself." (Norman, 1988, p. 21)

This is an example of her understanding the correlation between financial security and social mobility. Yet other characters hinder her plans, which further cement her disadvantaged position, hindering her from wielding any influence.

The plot of Carl trying to lure Arlene back to a life of crime illustrates how economic necessity perpetuates the cycle of violence:

> “What’s this work?” (Norman, 1988, p. 28)

Carl undervalues genuine hard work, assuming that Arlene’s social position limits her options. This is similar to Weber’s theory which asserts that one’s class position affects one’s life chances and options (Weber, 1978, p. 926).

In ‘night, Mother, Jessie’s problems emanate from lack of economic and social freedom. She suffers from epilepsy, which makes her incapable of undertaking any employment; thus:

> “I can’t do anything... I never could.” (Norman, 1988, p. 28)

In Jessie’s comment, there appears to be a perception of lack of power, defined by Weber as an individual’s capacity to have their own will prevail in spite of opposition (Weber, 1978, p. 926). Lack of power results in feelings of entrapment, hence exacerbating conflict.

From the findings, it is evident that in the two plays, lack of access to resources leads to conflict; thus validating Weber’s view that inequality causes conflict.

#### **4.3 Domination, Authority, and Legitimation:**

This study shows that domination and authority are key aspects of the conflict in both plays; such aspects tend to be internalized by the characters.

In *Getting Out*, Arlene experiences domination at the hands of several characters, namely Bennie, her mother, and Carl. The said characters seek to exert their will over Arlene, just like what Weber defines as domination: “a situation wherein the individual is forced or induced to act in accordance with the will of another or others” (Weber, 1978, p. 942).

An illustration of this is how Bennie tries to dominate Arlene:

> “I can’t go till I know you’re gonna do all right.” (Norman, 1988, p. 7)

This statement reflects a paternalistic form of control, where authority is justified as concern. However, Arlene resists this domination:

> “I kin take care of myself.” (Norman, 1988, p. 7)

Her response indicates a rejection of imposed authority, challenging its legitimacy.

In ‘night, Mother, domination operates within the mother-daughter relationship. The mother exercises control over Jessie’s daily life, assigning tasks and making decisions:

> “Jessie, put it on the list.” (Norman, 1988, p. 9)

This demonstrates the concept of traditional authority, whereby authority is recognized due to the existing roles (Weber, 1978, p. 226). The fact that Jessie agrees with everything throughout the story

shows that the traditional authority has been internalized.

On the other hand, the decision made by Jessie to take her life shows that there is a denial of this kind of authority. Through committing suicide, she escapes from the system of domination.

From the findings, it can be said that legitimacy maintains the authority in both stories since people recognize domination. Conflicts escalate when legitimacy is questioned.

#### **4.4 Outcomes of Conflict: Constructive vs. Destructive:**

There is a clear difference in the way conflict resolves itself in each play and the results obtained in each situation, with both positive and negative consequences presented.

In the play "*Getting Out*," conflict brings about a positive resolution. In spite of the opposition encountered by Arlene, she shows her ability to adapt and assert herself. Choosing to oppose Carl and Bennie reflects:

> "Arlie is dead... Arlene is out." (Norman, 1988, p. 54)

The symbolic repudiation of her past represents her redefinition of identity and an effort to transcend the constraints of structural barriers. Although her future is uncertain at present, the play suggests that confrontation may result in change.

On the other hand, "*Night, Mother*" shows a destructive resolution for conflict. Suicide by Jessie can be seen as a means of asserting herself in the face of society and withdrawing from life altogether. This is because

> "This is how I take control." (Norman, 1988, p. 72)

Jessie's behavior validates the opinion of Weber that conflict is not synonymous with positive development and may continue or escalate (Weber, 1978, p. 38).

The above comparison shows that even though conflict is a common occurrence, the results achieved through such conflict are dependent on the individual's capacity to secure resources and redefine his/her role in society.

### **5. Discussion**

This section analyzes the results from section four by using the theoretical framework proposed by Max Weber and placing them in context to previous researches on the plays of Marsha Norman titled *Getting Out* and "*Night, Mother*." Whereas previous scholars have discussed the aspects of gender, psychology, and identity, the current discussion argues that these aspects cannot be separated from larger frameworks of power and status relations and hence show that the characters' decisions emerge from these larger conflicts.

#### **5.1 Reinterpreting Conflict Beyond Psychological and Feminist Readings:**

In light of the above findings, it becomes clear that critical analyses that interpret Norman's works in

terms of psychology or feminist theories are somewhat one-sided and inadequate because these analyses focus too much on the individual's experience without considering the larger structural aspects of conflict. Indeed, feminist critics such as Hetal J. Mehta maintain that women characters in Norman's plays resist patriarchal oppression as a major cause of conflict in the play, stating that gender oppression is "the major source of the conflicts" in Norman's plays (Mehta, 2012, p. 64).

At the same time, there have been many psychoanalytical interpretations of Jessie's dilemma in 'night, Mother, where it has been suggested that the protagonist experiences unresolved family or psychological conflict (e.g., Blake, 1999, p. 57). It should be noted, however, that, according to the above analysis, these explanations do not account for the structural aspect of Jessie's conflict and must be supplemented with considerations of socio-economic and status factors.

According to Weber, who defines conflict as a struggle for limited resources and power, such issues are an inevitable part of social life (Weber, 1978, p. 38).

### **5.2 Class, Status, and Power as Structural Determinants of Agency:**

These findings prove that class, status, and power are key factors that determine the level of an individual's agency in each play. The research findings support Weber's idea that life chances depend on one's place within various stratification systems (Weber, 1978, pp. 926–927).

In the case of *Getting Out*, the author demonstrates the influence of Arlene's disadvantaged social position (she used to be a convict). For instance, Arlene finds herself deprived of freedom even during her talks with Bennie, her mother, and Carl because she suffers from the impact of a stigmatizing label imposed by society.

The statement is consistent with Guimond's opinion on the role of social perception in identity development (Guimond, 2001, p. 76). However, in the given case, social perception works through a system of stratification rather than influencing identity development per se.

Likewise, Jesse's inability to be economically independent in *'night, Mother* is likely to weaken her ability to take actions within the framework of social acceptability. Jesse's epilepsy and unemployment make her a dependent person, furthering her marginality. In this respect, her ultimate act does not result from unlimited freedom, but is the outcome of constrained agency.

Therefore, the above analysis makes it clear that agency in the plays by Norman cannot be seen as being unlimited and individualistic as predicted by Max Weber.

### **5.3 Domination, Authority, and the Internalization of Power:**

One of the main contributions of this study can be seen in the analysis of domination and authority and in particular the internalization of domination by the characters. Weber makes the distinction between domination and authority where the former refers to the imposition of will while the latter refers to legitimate domination.

In *Getting Out*, Arlene experiences several types of domination, though they may not necessarily be

coercive. For example, the protective actions of Bennie, which seem benevolent on the surface, actually constitute domination in itself. The legitimacy of his actions is reinforced by societal traditions that regard Bennie in such roles. Yet Arlene's resistance is an indication that the legitimacy has eroded.

The mother's authority in 'night, Mother works according to the principle of tradition as mentioned by Weber, which implies a certain stability in society (Weber, 1978, p. 226). This can be seen in Jessie's constant compliance with her demands during much of the play.

This realization challenges the previous feminist readings of the story, including those of Shelley R. Terry, which portray Jessie's last action as a wholly liberating one (Terry, 2008, p. 89). Although it is indeed a demonstration of resistance, the current analysis suggests that Jessie's decision is also a product of the limitations inherent in any form of resistance to domination.

The implication is that Jessie's death is not merely an assertion of freedom but rather a reaction to a structure where other modes of self-expression have already been denied. Thus, this analysis further supports the Weberian notion that domination occurs not only externally but internally as well.

#### **5.4 Conflict Outcomes and the Limits of Transformation:**

Comparison and contrast of the two play endings are important to gain insight into possible outcomes of conflict, showing that it can transform people while being destructive at the same time.

*Getting Out* demonstrates the transformation of Arlene as she rejects her previous identity. The fact that she says that "Arlie is dead" shows that she tries to reshape her role in society (Norman, 1988, p. 54). Such readings were provided by Dwivedi who states that Norman's characters have the potential for resistance (Dwivedi, 2016, p. 134). Nonetheless, the current paper argues that such transformation is conditional.

In contrast to this play, 'night, Mother provides an irreversible outcome of the conflict. Jessie's suicide is seen as the result of a conflict that can destroy people rather than make them better and more aware of themselves. Although some critics see her actions as an empowerment of the girl, the Weberian interpretation proves that Jessie just gave up on the existing social structure.

This is in keeping with Weber's contention that conflict is inherent in society and that it need not resolve into anything or make any progress toward anything (Weber, 1978, p. 38). Rather, it depends on how individuals are situated within the structure and what resources are available to them.

It will be seen in the end that Norman's plays do not give one idea about conflict but instead offer a wide range of possibilities in which conflict can end up, either transformed partially or even fully broken down.

## **6. Limitations**

Nonetheless, it is imperative to acknowledge the following limitations, given their bearing on how the findings of this study are perceived and what they mean for its scope.

First, as mentioned before, the current study draws upon only two plays of Marsha Norman, namely *Getting Out* and "Night, Mother." Despite their clear representation of the playwright's themes, this is too narrow a selection to generalize the findings. Norman has written other plays like *The Holdup* and *Traveler in the Dark*. In light of this, the current analysis applies only to the selected works rather than to Norman's entire corpus of plays.

Second, a single theoretical framework has been adopted in this study, namely conflict theory as advanced by Max Weber. Although the key notions of this approach—class, status, power, domination, and authority—enable an effective analysis of conflict, the study's results could differ had it been conducted through an alternative theoretical approach, including Marxism, discourse analysis, or intersectional feminism. After all, even Weber himself argues that reality is multidimensional, meaning that it cannot be interpreted using only one perspective (Weber, 1978, p. 20).

Thirdly, qualitative textual analysis serves as the research approach that is intrinsically subjective and open to various interpretations. While the analysis is methodically structured and uses thematic coding and theory application, it is still subject to the researcher's interpretation of the texts under consideration. Different researchers would focus on different aspects of the plays analyzed and give varying meanings to specific passages in the plays. This limitation is typical for any literature research where meaning is open to negotiations between authors and researchers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 187).

Fourth, the research concentrates on the dramatic text rather than the performance aspect. It must be noted that theatre is an artistic form of expression that implies a certain performance element where conflicts might be perceived differently depending on the manner in which they are presented on stage and how audiences receive them. Therefore, this aspect of theatre should be taken into account when conducting such research because it might alter the findings.

The fifth limitation lies in the fact that the emphasis on the structure of the conflict could limit the study in terms of other dimensions that could prove equally interesting, including such issues as emotional depth, symbolic meanings, and aesthetics. The latter two aspects are definitely present in the study, but the sociology perspective is applied to their interpretation. Thus, certain aspects of the symbolical meaning of such issues as the domestic space or the silence in 'night, Mother remain underexplored.

The final limitation of the study could lie in the selection of secondary sources. Though the literature review is well -researched, it is based only on the carefully selected sources that could reflect only some parts of the literature review of the issue.

In summary, none of the stated limitations could negatively impact the validity of the study. They just specify the limitations of its scope.

## 7. Future Research

Based on the limitations highlighted in this discussion, there is scope for numerous areas in which to explore future research avenues. For instance, scholars may choose to enlarge the sample size to include a larger selection of works by Norman, and compare them with plays by other contemporaneous American dramatists. A comparative study of works by writers like Tennessee Williams and Edward Albee could be used to show whether Weberian conflict appears in other literary genres and traditions.

Secondly, future researchers might employ multiple critical theories in their work. In particular, while studying the themes of *Getting Out* and 'Night, Mother from Weber's point of view, one may also use Marxists' ideas about economy in society or Michel Foucault's approaches to studying social power relations through discourse and surveillance. The latter is particularly important given that Weber recognized that social processes cannot be examined solely from one viewpoint (Weber, 1978, p. 20).

Thirdly, performance analysis may be considered another avenue to be explored. A performance analysis of conflicts in *Getting Out* and 'Night, Mother could provide further insight into the role of conflict in theater.

Fourthly, it seems like there is ample potential to use empirical research methodologies – such as interviewing or audience reception studies – alongside with text-based analysis. One of the options here is to find out how today's readers construe Jessie's decision in '*night, Mother*: whether it represents an act of independence, a result of despair or one of defiance. Thus, adding a sociological dimension to literary analysis, we would transcend the boundaries of the text.

Fifthly, future analysis can cover the issue of intersectional aspects of conflict, which may be considered within the framework of gender, class, health, social positioning, and many other parameters. Thus, for example, Jessie's situation should be discussed from several angles – including her position as a woman, her ill-being, and dependency from the economic standpoint.

Sixthly, longitudinal or diachronic research might help trace the evolution of critical reception of Norman's dramatic texts in terms of interpretation of conflict.

Lastly, there is the option to use the Weberian approach to other literary genres, e.g., to analyze conflict depicted in novels or films and test the relevance of sociological theory for literature.

## 8. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that social conflict in *Getting Out* and 'night, Mother by Marsha Norman has been comprehensively analyzed within the context of Max Weber's theoretical framework. The research has proven that social conflict in literature is not only a personal or psychological struggle; rather, it is a structural struggle characterized by unequal relations among different classes and statuses, as well as power differences.

The results of the study show that social conflict in the analyzed literary works exists on different levels of interpersonal, familial, and societal relations. In *Getting Out*, the social conflict experienced by Arlene suggests the potential for change, but under certain constraints. On the other hand, 'night, Mother shows that social conflict leads to a negative outcome and the destruction of a character, who is powerless to overcome such an obstacle.

It should be mentioned that according to Weber, social conflict involves a situation in which people engage in struggles to impose their will despite opposition (Weber, 1978, p. 38). Thus, character conflicts in the literary pieces have been described by the interactional nature of the process of negotiating domination and power relations.

Furthermore, this paper can be seen as another contribution to literary criticism because of the Weberian framework through which Norman's books are analyzed. Although there are many feminist and psychoanalytical studies on Norman's work, this paper demonstrates that a sociological study of conflict in the literature is just as important in terms of identifying its structural dimensions.

Nevertheless, as Weber argues, conflict does not always result in the same effects. Conflict is an inevitable characteristic of social interaction, although its effects depend on one's place within the social structure (Weber, 1978, p. 38). The case of Arlene and Jessie shows that transformational changes could occur, but it is possible for the entire system to break down at some point.

Thus, the significance of this paper lies in the attempt to fill the gaps in literary criticism by applying sociological ideas to it. This means that there must be further research combining sociological and literary theories.

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