Warriors Don't Cry. A Separate Route to Girls' Self-Assertion in Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* and Sapphire's *Push*.

Natthapol Boonyaoudomsart
Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University, Thailand
Email: natthapol.boon@yahoo.com
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Abstract

Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984) and Sapphire's *Push* (1996) are regarded, among others, as staples of young adult literature. While attempts have been exhaustively made to delve into a site of oppression under which the protagonists are buried, this research departs to discuss and compare the characters' unfailing commitment to self-assertion. Through a critical lens of Black feminism, it argues that their liberatory achievements are discretely characterized by the girls' resistance and retreat that replenish their depleted sense of self-worth. Esperanza, a Latina girl in *The House on Mango Street,* seeks self-empowerment in the patriarchy-free sphere, harboring a desire to desert gloomy Mango Street. Precious, an

African-American girl in *Push*, however, exhibits resistance traits, exerting both her mental and physical power to overcome subversion. I further put forward the claim that literacy, a fundamental item in the feminist agenda, influences their shared endeavor to negate normalized discrimination. Oppressions, it is concluded, are relinquished and they triumphantly walk the path to liberation—their spirits fulfilled and... freed.

Keywords: Black feminist criticism, Interlocking oppressions, Self-assertion, patriarchy, Literacy

BLACK FOLKS AREN'T BORN EXPECTING SEGREGATION, PREPARED from day one to follow its confining rule. Nobody presents you with a handbook when you're teething and says, "Here's how you must behave as a second-class." Instead, the humiliating expectations and traditions of segregation creep over you, slowly stealing a teaspoonful of your self-esteem each day.

(Melba Pattillo Beals*, Warriors Don't Cry, 2007*)

Introduction

Segregationist thinking, as Beals recounts in her memoir *Warriors Don't Cry*, is deeply seeped in the fabric of American society that remains racially divided. The white gaze prescribes the social rules serving the institution of white supremacy to which non-whites, by default, conform at the irreparable cost of

their sense of worth. The land of freedom, as it is called, America reneges on its true course of liberation, being tainted with discriminatory norms and ideology. The color of skin, as though stamped with "a second-class" label, sorts the minority into the lower social hierarchy. Receiving national attention, the Little Rock Nine integration exemplifies the nine African-American students' effort to literally cross, if not merge, into the school with the *white only* sign intimidatingly displayed. Despite torrents of protest and violence, the fundamental brick of education galvanizes the Little Rock Nine into desegregating and lifting those "humiliating expectations" on them. Beals's memoir, revolving around the theme of education, relevantly unfolds the girls' ambition toward social justice and fittingly suggests, I believe, a departure for discussion of two classic literary texts *The House on Mango Street* (1984) and *Push* (1996), given distinct resemblances in gender, ethnic backgrounds and liberatory attempts, for example. By empowering themselves with literacy, Esperanza and Precious, like the Little Rock Nine, redraw racial boundaries and locate their self-esteem, ultimately. The oppressed protagonists emerge as warriors who do not cry, gliding instead into a new realm of self-empowerment.

Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984) and

Sapphire's *Push* (1996) narrate stories of two coming-of-age girl characters Esperanza and Precious as they, afflicted by the oppressive force in their problem-infested communities, struggle to loosen the tight grip of overbearing patriarchy and set out to seek liberation. Articulated through the authentic voices of non-white authors rooted in Latin-American and African-American backgrounds, the widely acclaimed novels present disturbing portrayals of racial segregation, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, to name a few, as stumbling blocks toward self-assertion that subtly call into question the responsibility of modern society at large. A Latina girl, Esperanza projects her economic vulnerability against the backdrop of bleak future in Mango Street. Her race, discernibly, is attributable to the exploitation that deprives her of self-control. The recurring theme of acquiring "a real house that would be ours" (p. 4) underlines a lack of necessity on the grounds of racial segregation prevalent in the society dominated by white supremacy. Esperanza realizes her desire, if fulfilled at all, for the house "that would have running water and pipes that worked" (p. 4) will morph into fertile soil from which her sense of self-actualization grows. Paradoxically an end and a beginning, the first sentence of *Push* reads: "I was left back when I was twelve because I had a baby for my fahver" (p. 3).

Precious, bearing some resemblance to Esperanza, embodies the intersection of gender, race and class in which a repository of wound, trauma, and victimization is entrenched. She is dehumanized, marginalized and, to repeat, *left back*. Whereas race in both literary texts is often readily discussed, text explication and literary analysis of *The House on Mango* and *Push* in this study yield richer layers of interpretation. From the intersectionality standpoint, this paper critically approaches the divergent paths Esperanza and Precious trod toward self-assertion. Not only does this interrelatedness amplify the protagonists' silent voices, but it also brings into light their endeavor to establish empowerment and demolish institutionalized discrimination. Related to their effort to wreak havoc upon the deep-seated *us* and *them* binaries, I further argue, is their initiation into education. The two characters' sense of assertion blossoms through the early seed of constant academic pursuit that bears fruits of liberation. The transformative power of literacy, eventually, is a portal into the space of their own.

Review of Primary Texts

Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984) offers an intimate look at the suppressed minority of Latin-Americans through Esperanza's voice and observation of Mango Street.

The diminutive details of her life, family and neighborhood are naively rendered toward an ambitious dream of owning a house. Loosely composed in vignettes, the novel presents a breadth of such daily challenges as friendship, education, and community that the protagonist tackles in order to achieve liberatory ends. As time elapses, Esperanza's outlook on the world expands, and it begins to dawn on her that a bleak future is looming large over Mango Street, prompting the protagonist to desert the poverty-stricken ground in search of better opportunities. Whereas the interplay of gender, race, and class is at the forefront of this selected literary text, the novel is interspersed with a subtle message of self-assertion when the protagonist opposes the normalized segregation.

Unlike in fairy tales, Wissman (2006) states that beauty, object of desire, and wealth associated with female characters do not dispel patriarchy in *The House on Mango Street.* To explain, their beauty leads to marriage and thus financial stability provided by male protectors, which announces the break with oppression and thus establishment of self-assertion. However, the opposite is true for female characters in *The House on Mango Street* in which charm is dissociated from liberation but instead triggers confinement that perpetuates patriarchal thinking. Self-empowerment, it is argued, emerges

through Esperanza's cognizance of social contexts and restrictive patterns in the ethnic community. To be free means to be a writer who undoes subversion and, perhaps, unlocks marginalized women. Through a lens of Latina feminism, Wissman's study interestingly makes references to tales to expose the unfulfilled promise of self-assertion while concluding that writing destabilizes the institutionalized discrimination.

Sapphire's *Push* (1996) puts a spotlight on the coming-of-age character named Precious, depicting the life of an illiterate obese African-American girl growing up in the Harlem neighborhood. Beyond the institutionalized discrimination of gender, race, and class, Precious exemplifies a victim of domestic violence when she is raped by her own father who impregnates her—a remarkable turning point in her life. The incest leads Mary, Precious's ill-tempered and indolent mother, to increasingly and uncontrollably vent her intense hatred by throwing a tantrum and thrashing the protagonist. Although expelled from school due to her pregnancy, Precious continues to thrive intellectually at Each One Teach One, the Higher Education Alternative, under great care and guidance of Ms. Rain who arms her with literacy and a safe environment in which she can balance her roles as a student and mother.

Michlin's research (2006) *signifies*, a term used to describe the critique of other Black writers, *Push* on Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, shedding light on recurring themes of invisibility, literacy, and incest. The scholar notes the connection between literacy and self-empowerment/strength of the protagonist, but rarely discusses the role that education plays in eradicating oppression and giving rise to liberation. Besides, the conceptual framework employed to critically examine the proposed relation is rather elusive. This research, nonetheless, lays bare the relative effects that both literacy and empowerment have on the protagonist. It underlines that education which is especially discouraged for women of color constitutes a path toward attaining a sense of being and that it is secured at the core of feminist agenda, both having potential to shift the social landscape.

Despite the disparity in racial and geographical contexts, the common thread of these two novels lies in the recurring theme of segregationist ideology firmly grounded in feminist theorizing. This, therefore, permits a fine critical lens at the cemented effort toward self-assertion of girls who are subverted on equal terms. While previous studies of *The House on Mango Street* (Betz, 2012; Kuribayashi, 1998; Sánchez, 1995; Wissman ,2006) and *Push* (Michlin, 2006; Myles, 2012;

Stapleton, 2004) rendered interesting findings, to the best of my knowledge, no comparative study on both texts has been conducted. Besides unburying a site of wounds, it is my intention to delve into their liberated world where normalized segregation is wrecked and a territory of self-proclamation is instead established. A prominent feminist voice, Maya Angelou (1994), in her celebrated poem titled "Phenomenal Woman," taps into the deep souls of women, composing: "It's in the reach of my arms, / The span of my hips, / The stride of my step, / The curl of my lips." Women, the poet muses, are capable and powerful. Esperanza and Precious, although carrying remnants of wounds, seek therapeutic treatment in the feminist agenda and eventually proudly assert, in the exact words of Angelou's, "Phenomenal woman, / That's me" (p. 130).

A Survey of Feminism and Black Feminism

The women's movements in the 1960s and 1970s are inextricably linked with the theorizing of feminist criticism. Agony over the perpetuation of oppression and inequity in gender led masses of women to collectively direct their goals toward eradication of sexism in both public and private spheres. Specifically, they demanded their rights to politics, the professional world, choices of careers, and decent wages, etc. be on a par with those of men. Influenced by social movements,

basic tenets of feminist theory emerge and hold the view that men wield greater power and value over women in the naturally patriarchal world. In literary studies, a critical gaze informed by feminist scholarship aims to unravel how each character is suppressed economically, politically, psychologically, socially, and personally (Tyson, 2006). The notion that patriarchy perpetuates the domination and authority of men in virtually every domain subjects women's roles in literature to marginalization, obscurity and victimization. While gender is generally conceptualized as the sole determinant of social constructs and standing, bell hooks (1984) counters the statement and affirms that race and class too are intrinsic to the feminist framework. Her stance is grounded in the assumption that concerns of women of color and ethnic backgrounds are equally acknowledged and that no women, regardless of race and class, will be excluded. hooks, to put it another way, shatters the conventional idea that feminist theory is largely preserved for the indignant white middle-class American women molded into loyal and obedient housewives. The entrance of non-white women into the feminist sphere is initially intended to elevate social hierarchy to the similar level of recognition and significance. To demonstrate the debilitating effect on underserved women, hooks states "privileged

feminists have largely been unable to speak to, with, and for diverse groups of women because they either do not understand fully the interrelatedness of sex, race, and class oppression or refuse to take this interrelatedness seriously" (p. 14). Although gender primarily explains patriarchal oppression for girls and women of white background, the degree of struggle intensifies for those of ethnic roots when she further observes that "occupying such a position, we bear the brunt of sexist, racist and classist oppression" (p. 14), particularly addressing women of non-white backgrounds. Consequently, from a critical perspective of interlocking oppressions, it is fitting to largely situate both selected texts within feminist underpinnings proposed by hooks while the consistent conceptual framework of other scholars, where relevant, will also be discussed.

Analysis

The House on Mango Street: A Patriarchal Sphere

Rich in Latin-American charm and authenticity, *The House on Mango Street* (1984) depicts the protagonist's quest for identity beyond the boundary of Mango Street, I argue, through escape. The story primarily charts the life of Esperanza growing up in the run-down neighborhood rife with patriarchal stereotype while illuminating how girls and women of ethnic roots become trapped, oppressed and victimized in the male-

dominated space. Regardless of her exposure to sexist, racist and classist thinking, literacy—life's powerful weapon—enables her to retreat into another world where she hopes to be married with a sense of self. In downplaying patriarchal influence, the word retreat, to elaborate, signifies Esperanza's disappearance into the unpatriarchal sphere where interlocking oppressions are negated and a sense of self-fulfillment is eventually realized. A critical lens first lends insights into the combined blow of sexual, racial and class exploitation Esperanza receives. Moving around the country and settling into dilapidated Mango Street, Esperanza and her family are accorded the status of ethnic minority as well as becoming the object of mainstream perceptions. The very first vignette casts gloom over Mango Street when a description of the house is given to the nun, rendered in disbelief. Esperanza diffidently recounts, "Papa had nailed on the windows so we wouldn't fall out. You live there? The way she said it made me feel like nothing. There. I lived there. I nodded" (p. 5). From hooks's feminist point of view, the harsh economic reasons force the protagonist and her family into the shabby dwelling and community, suggesting that economic suppression is inherently repressive for girls and people of ethnic backgrounds. In further support of the interlinking discrimination, hysteric fear is

exhibited toward the non-white people in Esperanza's words, "Those who don't know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we're dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives" (p. 28). Esperanza, as an ethnic girl growing up in the Latino community, in hooks's precise words, is to "bear the brunt of sexist, racist and classist oppression," being reduced to an object of threat and danger to be avoided. This line of argument, as a result, heightens the association between ethnic minority and suppression. Considering that a strain of feminist thinking overwhelmingly reveals portrayal of physical and sexual abuse and sexuality in female characters, Esperanza is no exception when she is sexually assaulted toward the end of the novel. Accusing Sally, her friend, of lying and colluding with the boys, Esperanza laments, "Then the colors began to whirl. Sky tipped. Their high black gym shoes ran. Sally, you lied, you lied. He wouldn't let me go. He said I love you, I love you, Spanish girl" (p. 100). Although the misconduct is slight, the power imbalance between women and men in which Esperanza is submitting to boys' superior physical strength is seemingly struck. Indisputably, the scene is in line with feminist thought in that the misdeed perpetuates the conceptualization of men as oppressors and women as the oppressed, respectively.

Esperanza's Escape

Despite the rampant existence of sexist, racist and classist biases in *The House on Mango Street* (1984), Esperanza, yearning for self-liberation, attempts flight from her community, retreating into the unpatriarchal space where sexism, racism and classism will pose no risk and obstacle to realizing her own sense of being. Closing, she predicts, "One day I will pack my bags of books and paper. One day I will say goodbye to Mango. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever. One day I will go away" (p. 110). While her conceived escape is often in question and a fledgling stage, I argue that education serves as a bridge toward her self-fulfillment, for it convinces the protagonist that integration may occur beyond the borderline of Mango Street. It is helpful, at this point, to mention that the limitation of education emerges as a debatable topic among women and hence merits a constant discussion in the realm of feminist criticism, especially the fact that women are prevented from their right to literacy and intellectual capability in the professional arena. Labeled as "feminist agenda," hooks underlines the significance of educating girls and women to better prepare them for future challenges and provide them with an exit from the affliction of oppressive force in patriarchal world. In support of the aforementioned statement, she

comments, “As a group, women have been denied (via sex, race, and class exploitation and oppression) the right and privilege to develop intellectually. Most women are deprived of access to modes of thought that promote the kind of critical and analytical understanding necessary for liberation struggle” (1984, p. 113). This emphatically demonstrates her concern over women’s lack of education that will potentially hamper their liberation struggle. As for Esperanza, nonetheless, school and education evidently play a vital role in deepening the protagonist’s passion for learning and thus instilling in her a sense of empowerment to challenge social stereotypes and thus flee into another social space. Literacy, in other words, enlightens and reformulates her thoughts that Mango Street represents the entrapped site shackling her from reaching liberation. In the middle of the novel, Esperanza pledges her determination in education, “I needed money. The Catholic high school cost a lot, and Papa said nobody went to public school unless you wanted to turn out bad” (p. 53). Her admission, coupled with her mother’s words of encouragement “Esperanza, you go to school. Study hard.” (p. 91), sufficiently indicates that the protagonist, against the patriarchal patterns, is empowered through her years in school that pave the way for her temporary, if not permanent, retreat into another space—

one free from oppression and full of future prospects. White supremacy, hooks states, is so deeply woven into social fabric that when at home she "was forced to someone else's image of who and what I should be." At school, however, the feminist can "forget that self and, through ideas, reinvent [herself]" (p. 3). Esperanza's home on Mango Street, automatically imprints a set of norms on her psyche that forces her to subscribe to segregationist ideology. She, through somebody's eyes, is an ethnic girl whose sense of self is trampled and buried. Nonetheless, rays of hope glimmer at her school where the defining power of education helps efface the "controlling images" (Collins, 2000, p. 72) and enables her to demarcate her own boundary. Collins, on common ground, specifies that "fewer possibilities" (p. 93) are provided for Black women. Not surprisingly, in literary works, she further observes that "Black women's attempts to escape from a world predicated upon derogated images of Black womanhood" (p. 94) signify pursuit of liberation. She cites Pecola, the protagonist in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, as an example that replicates the image of whiteness because such an effort constitutes the only exit from racial, physical, psychological and social wounds inflicted upon her. Likewise, Esperanza's retreat from Mango Street endows her with the ability to renew self-esteem. Her entrance into

another world, to reiterate, releases her into the path to freedom. I have recently written elsewhere that homeplace, similarly informed by Black feminist framework, represents the resistance struggles of the oppressed (Boonyaoudomsart, 2017). It is the site where the marginalized are replenished with restorative power and sheltered against patriarchal treatments. Esperanza's house on Mango Street, on the contrary, is symbolized as a terrain where suppression prevails.

Push: Interlocking Oppressions

Retaining the distinct voice in African-American literature, *Push* (1996) captures the life of the young girl Precious with a great emphasis on incest, rape, dependency, and most importantly, hope. Against the setting of African-American community where the intersection of gender, race, and class merits investigation, Precious, like Esperanza, encounters patriarchal expectations on a daily basis but, through her act of resistance, values education that serves as a catalyst for self-liberation. In relative contrast to *The House on Mango Street* (1984) in its implicit scenes of mild sexual abuse, *Push* opens with the intense and explicit portrayal of sexual exploitation. Precious, recounting her physical and psychological wounds, relates "It why my father ack like he do. He has forgot he is the Original Man! So he fuck me, fuck me, beat me, have a chile

by me" (p. 38). Consistent with feminist theory, the incestuous rape by Carl Jones renders visible the fact that girls and women are conceptualized as the *sex object*. A defenseless girl like Precious realizes that, in order to do away with pain, submission is the only way to survive. Noteworthily, while one of the chief goals of past women's movements was to eradicate sexual exploitation among white middle-class women, the African-American girls like the protagonist are placed in greater jeopardy. It is hence justifiable, according to hooks (1984), to promote the wider inclusion of ethnic minority into the current practice of feminist criticism. She explains "there is much evidence substantiating the reality that race and class identity creates differences in quality of life, social status, and lifestyle that take precedence over the common experience women share—differences which are rarely transcended" (p. 4). The comprehensive feminist perspective contextually reveals that Precious's life has been gravely affected and ruined by the mere fact that she is an African-American girl nurtured in the black community that is usually home to an array of social issues. Her unexpected pregnancy and discontinuation of school are a few examples of segregationist ideology, characterized by interlocking oppressions, that undermine her attempt at self-assertion. Another basic tenet of feminist theory is primarily

concerned with how the girls and women are discriminated against in the domestic realm when they are confined to the household domain and tortured by domestic violence. To delineate, while it is common to confer the role of an oppressor on men, Precious's mother Mary exhibits masculine control over the protagonist and hurls at her equally abusive power. Precious clearly remembers, "Then she pick up cast-iron skillet, thank god it was no hot grease in it, and she hit me so hard on back I fall on floor. Then she kick me in ribs. Then she say, 'Thank you Miz Claireece Precious Jones for fucking my husband you nasty little slut!'" (p. 21). The protagonist, thus, is portrayed as susceptible to violence that undermines her fight for self-assertion. Moreover, the depiction of Precious's dependency on Mary and welfare for sustenance also strengthens the connection among the livelihood of African-American girls in the ethnic community, rampant poverty and domestic violence inherently seeped in her familiar surroundings. This, in a similar vein, results in her inability to cultivate a sense of independence and leaves little room for escape.

Precious's Resistance

Expecting a child, Precious is prohibited from continuing her education, but her gesture of resistance begins to play a role

in granting her greater control over social expectations. She combats the patriarchal ideology and oppressive force imposed on her by consenting to enroll in an alternative school, Each One Teach One. There she is introduced to Ms. Rain who ignites her passion for reading and writing. Against Mary's will to cease her education and instead resort to public assistance, Precious turns her mother down, engaging herself with foundational literacy and friends with diverse troubling backgrounds. Her connection with education is firmly established when she proudly asserts, "I like the routine of school, the dream of school" (p. 117). At Each One Teach One where girls' education is of paramount importance, students are always encouraged to express themselves through writing and among others Precious makes impressive learning progress in her class. This is evidenced through Ms. Rain's words of compliment directed toward the protagonist, "A good reader is like a detective, she say, looking for clues in the text. A good reader is like you Precious, she say. Passionate! Passionately involved with whut they are reading" (p. 118). Ms. Rain pours the learning spirit into Precious as she, every day, matures into a better learner. It is worth highlighting that education of women historically constituted one of the greatest challenges among the feminist goals of past women's movements to

recognize women's intellectual capability and uplift platform for self-liberation. The deep-seated sexist biases, as previously discussed, are stifling and counterproductive. From this perspective, magnified by Precious's insistence on academic engagement, education is arguably deemed a vital tool for empowering the suppressed girls and women troubled by the force of patriarchy. To lend support, hooks consistently claims that "encouraging women to strive for education, to develop their intellect, should be a primary goal of feminist movement" (p. 114). The obligation to promote education among girls and women is hence perceived as the solution to social entrapment. Although Precious stands in stark opposition to Esperanza in terms of support for school she receives, the two characters share the mutual ambition toward education-empowered self-liberation while, in concert, demolishing the wall of patriarchy preventing them from maximizing their full intellectual potential. Precious's powerful lines of thought, "Mama say this new school ain' shit. Say you can't learn nuffin' writing in no book. Gotta git on that computer you want some money. When they gonna teach you how to do the computer" clearly prove her mother wrong when, in fact, she emphasizes, "But Mama wrong. I is learning. I'm gonna start going to Family Literacy class on Tuesdays. Important to read to baby after it's born"

(p.73). Thus, the resistance struggle against the stereotyped notion that girls are robbed of intellectual capacity, despite great difficulties, is the bridge the protagonist crosses over and reaches her sense of self. Toni Morrison, a literary titan who passed away in August 2019, composes in her elegant yet relevant poem titled *Someone Leans Near* (2019), "Then on your skin a breath caresses, / The salt your eyes have shed, / And you remember a call clear, so clear, / 'You will never die again.'" The two stanzas invigorate, in my view, strength and revival that mend life fragmented by horrendous encounters. Precious's audacity in battling, or—specifically resisting—the intersection of gender, race, and class propels her to shed her own tormented self, sets out on the path to freedom, and repeats that she "will never die again." In one interview (Bollen, 2012), Morrison, warping and illuminating the freedom path, states, "If you took the gaze of the white male—or even the white female, but certainly the male—out of the world, it was freedom!" Like hooks, she postulates that the white gaze only breeds discrimination that impedes the struggles for equality. An outlook on the world through a white lens cannot repel the discriminatory practices; rather, it interprets true freedom as a distant possibility. Precious, however, survives the restrictive and domineering patriarchal thinking, embracing the education-

oriented resistance struggle that transfers her to the literate and free world. Pertinently, Collins (2000) further observes that "restricting Black women's literacy, then claiming that we lack the facts for sound judgment, relegates African-American women to the inferior side of the fact/ opinion binary" (p. 71). Narrowly addressing oppositional thinking in which non-white women are subjugated, the education of Black women plays a pivotal role in defining their social standing. Black women, according to the feminist scholar, not only are intellectually inferior but also socially inferior. The institutionalized segregation, however, is dismantled when, "faced with this structural injustice targeted toward the group, many women have insisted on our right to define our own reality, establish our own identities, and name our history" (p. 72). Precious's encounter with intersecting oppressions "stimulate resistance" (p. 29) that creates a space for her self-assertion. She erases those "controlling images" (p. 72) and destabilizes the social norms that force her into being a submissive Black girl. Her unfailing tenacity, typified by deep learning passion, gracefully is a jumping-off point for her sense of being.

Final Words

Black feminist criticism proves a practical analytical tool for closely examining the lives of Esperanza and Precious in

The House on Mango Street (1984) and *Push* (1996), offering critical insights into traces of patriarchal ideology interwoven into the story lines. Posited against the backdrop of ethnic communities, Black feminist theory, through the holistic consideration of gender, race and class, unravels how sexist, racist and classist biases constitute the notion of patriarchy. Despite the varying oppressive intensity in the selected texts, it is visible that the subversive force takes a toll on both characters alike, stirring their strong desire for self-liberation toward the final chapters. Esperanza's retreat into the unpatriarchal space leads the Latina girl to fulfill her sense of being and return for the ones she loves and cares—unrestrained by the need for social conformity. Precious's break with her domineering and abusive mother similarly unlocks her entrapment when she and her children can start their lives anew, uncontrolled by patriarchy that entails the interlocking systematic oppressions. Further, given the central role of women's literacy, their attainment of self-liberation can apparently be attributed to their constant commitment to education that rewards them with empowerment. Hampered by the barriers of race, gender and class, they sabotage the discriminatory wall obscuring the liberation path. Well equipped with education, Esperanza flees in pursuit of another space lined with promising prospects while

Precious resists the stereotype and settles into a nourishing setting. Education, in other words, serves as a bridge connecting these distinct dual modes of liberation, safely transporting them into the firm ground upon which they stand and exist as individuals. Regardless of the divergent routes toward self-assertion, they, clearly, with some twists and turns along the way, finally cross paths and locate their sense of worth. In fine, they are warriors who shed…no tears.

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