

## Re(claiming) Subjectivity and Transforming the Politics of Silence through the Search for Wholeness in *Push* by Sapphire

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Post-positivist realism contends that there is a need to theorize not only identity but also agency. Identity is hence understood from the dialogic perspective of engaging the world from the vantage point of agency, facilitating wholeness, or the dialogic interaction between self and other, past and present. The search for wholeness with the aid of re-memory, double consciousness and agency becomes the trigger for an active expression of Black women's subjectivity throughout the African diaspora. Women's subjectivity consists of giving emphasis to the importance of women being the owners of their destinies when they engage in the building of their identities, which are shaped by the interaction of time, community and experience, claiming that identity is performative, indeterminant and multiple. Sapphire's novel *Push* will be analyzed as a text that counteracts the politics of silence, transforming fear and difference into speech and telling, adding to the liberatory discourses of contemporary Black women writers.

Keywords: identity; agency; wholeness; re-memory; double consciousness; incest novel

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## Re(clamando) la subjetividad y transformando las políticas silenciadoras a través de la búsqueda de la unidad ontológica en la novela *Push*, de Sapphire

La teoría del realismo post-positivista crítico defiende la necesidad de teorizar no sólo el concepto de la identidad sino también el de la agencialidad. Así pues, la identidad es entendida desde la perspectiva dialógica que nos proporciona una visión del mundo desde el ventajoso punto de vista de la agencialidad, facilitando una aproximación al concepto de la unidad ontológica, interpretada como la interacción dialógica entre el sujeto y el otro, el pasado y el presente. La búsqueda de la unidad, con la ayuda del recuerdo, la doble conciencia y la agencialidad, supone un punto de partida para la expresión activa de la subjetividad de la mujer negra en la diáspora africana. Esto conlleva enfatizar la importancia de las mujeres como dueñas de sus destinos en la tarea de la construcción de sus identidades, cuyo proceso se nutre de la interacción entre el tiempo, la comunidad y la experiencia, defendiendo que la identidad es indeterminada y múltiple. La novela de Sapphire titulada *Push* y publicada en 1996 se analizará como un texto que, teniendo como eje principal el incesto, contrarresta las políticas silenciadoras, transformando el miedo y la diferencia en lenguaje y discurso, aportando matices a los discursos liberadores de las escritoras afro-americanas contemporáneas.

Palabras clave: identidad; agencialidad; unidad ontológica; recuerdo; doble conciencia; novela de incesto

Every Black woman in America lives her life somewhere  
along a wide curve of ancient and unexpressed angers.

AUDRE LORDE

## 1. INTRODUCING THE POST-POSITIVIST REALIST THEORY OF IDENTITY AND THE DIALOGICS OF AGENCY IN AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Audre Lorde's call to consciousness considering desire as a flux, as a site where the origin of the self is constantly renewed as an actual path in our search for wholeness, pushes our quest for personal freedom from cultural determinations and factors such as time and space, gender and race, which constitute the matrix of the subject's identity.<sup>1</sup> This paper explores the ways in which the post-positivist realist theory of identity helps explain how we can distinguish legitimate identities from false ones. As Mohanty (2000) proposes, one's identity may be constructed but it is not arbitrary: we can strive for better and more accurate knowledge of ourselves and of our world and this is done through our agency. Furthermore, the post-positivist realist theory accounts for cultural decolonization, which involves an interrogation of the epistemic and affective consequences of our social location, of historically learned habits of thinking and feeling (2000, 63). Given the situation of "internal colonization" that, as Michelle Wallace contends (1990, 2), affects the African American individual in contemporary US society and culture, the present paper introduces post-positivist realism, with its focus on identity, agency and cultural decolonization, as an effective tool to analyze the literary expressions of Black Americans and by extension also those produced by members of the African diaspora. Since the nineteenth century, writers of the African diaspora have given expression to an African self that functions in Western civilization as simultaneously a "colonized" other and an assertive "self." Due to the continuing ordeal of the African diaspora, this self is caught between the binaries proposed by the material and the spiritual world, seeking the balance where the person can become whole.

According to Johnella E. Butler (2006), provost of Spelman College in Atlanta and a leading scholar in US higher education, African American literature is a discipline in search of a theory, which would be in dialogue with the complexity of African American social and cultural reality. Thus, the need arises to approach the reading of African American literature in ways that allow the African American experience to be part of a theory that accounts for the epistemic dimensions of identity.

As Mohanty points out, whether we inherit an identity—masculinity, being Black—or we actively choose one on the basis of our political predilections—radical lesbianism, Black nationalism, socialism—our identities are a way of making sense of our experiences. Identities are theoretical constructions that enable us to read the world in specific ways.

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Our access to our remotest personal feelings is dependent on social narratives, paradigms, even ideologies. We interpret our experiences through the framework provided by these social narratives as well as our past attempts to understand our experiences and lives.

Thus, within this perspective, grasping individual agency, that is, the person's socially acknowledged right to interpret and speak for himself/herself, opens up the possibility to create valid identities, to grow morally and emotionally and to achieve wholeness. Within African American scholarship the search for wholeness is understood as the process of gaining balance and harmony within one's identity, gathering an understanding of the whole as made up from the interdependence of the different parts, going beyond the binaries and into unity and dialogue (Castro 2011). Thus, achieving wholeness, a constitution of the whole self "by the mutual interaction and relation of its parts to one another" (Hames-García 2000, 103), comes from "recognizing the multiplicity of one's self and theorizing from experience" (Butler 2006, 184).

The search for wholeness links historically to the African slave's search for freedom and agency during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the processes of colonization and neo-colonization. Going beyond the dialectic binaries implied by double consciousness, and moving forward in its commitment to multiplicity in the relationship between the African self and the Western other, the search for wholeness functions as a venue where re-memory, as conceived originally by Toni Morrison (1987), becomes a link to a past which is understood as powerful and useful, once we are ready to confront it and to accept it through the wise guidance of ancestry. The search for wholeness is informed by the principle of polarity, which dictates that the different parts of a whole complement each other, once we approach them with the right frame of mind. It implies looking beyond the binary in order to create movement and change and pointing out towards the transformation of cultural oppositions which may occur on several levels of experience.

## 2. CHALLENGING THE POLITICS OF SILENCE IN SAPPHIRE'S *PUSH*

This essay offers a post-positivist realist theoretical reading of identity and its key role in the process of the search for wholeness in Sapphire's novel *Push*. Sapphire's 1996 novel, and its film adaptation of 2009, *Precious*, represent the "ancient and unexpressed angers" which Lorde claims shape the life of "every black woman in America" (1984, 145). Sapphire's first novel was very well received. The book was the winner of the Book-of-the-Month Club's Stephen Crane Award for First Fiction, the Black Caucus of the American Library Association's First Novelist Award, and in Great Britain, it received the Mind Book of the Year Award. *Push* has also enjoyed substantial appeal outside the US and the novel has been translated into thirteen languages.

Precious Jones tells her life story as a liberatory act, and it forms part of what Angelyn Mitchell calls "liberatory narrative" (2002, xii), because the possibilities for regeneration and healing start in the telling of those aspects of African American realities which are too dangerous, too shameful or too terrible to confront. It is in their recognition and their

telling that the conditions for social transformation in the Black world lie: in Sapphire's desire, to activate language in order to utter the unspeakable things which, much to our distress, are left unspoken. The politics of silence, as Doane and Hodges remind us, function "to legitimize forms of gendered inequality within the family that have been linked not only with incestuous abuse but with slavery, a white paternalistic system in which dependents are 'cared for' and also sexually and economically exploited" (2001, 32).

Within the politics of silence, the voice of the Black woman writer becomes "the expression of a desire that was silenced by the master and by patriarchal discourse," a desire which is "constitutive of a loss, a pure absence striving for an impossible completion . . . but which is also a pure production of the action that creates things, makes alliances and leads to resilience" (Van-Peteghem 2011, 24). Resilience is rooted in strength, in spiritual wholeness, in resistance and in forgiveness.

The journey of Precious Jones is intended not only to overcome the trauma of racism, and the consequent fragmentation of the self, but also to find ways of escaping the abuse coming from her own father and mother. What Precious Jones has to confront is an oppression that goes beyond the "double jeopardy" (Beale 1995, 146) the Black woman had to put up with historically, being, on the one hand, the other in a racist society and on the other, the feminine in her own community. Thus, the dynamics of double consciousness increase in complexity when gender is taken into account in its movement towards multiple consciousness, which implies the fragmentation of the self and the splitting of identity in order to account for cultural decolonization and healing from trauma and oppression. This movement or growth broadens the perspective of Blackness, as reflected in the cultural and the psychological, in its relationship with Western culture.

Precious is the victim of rape by her father and abuse from her mother. This experience turns lethal, as the victim, Precious, lacks the vocabulary to understand the context of the violence and is unconscious of her own vulnerability and exposed to the disruption of Black family life.

Sapphire's story of incest is told from the perspective of the voiceless victim. The strength of the novel resides in this fact because she does not fail in her attempt to shape a silence "while breaking it" (Doane and Hodges 2001, 41).<sup>2</sup> The author refuses to present Precious as a helpless victim who lacks the instruments necessary for her physical and spiritual survival. Sapphire in this way introduces herself as the holder of a strong Black female literary tradition devoted to filling in the gaps and pushing that tradition forward towards the future. *Push* has been considered by critics such as Riché Richardson (2012) and Carme Manuel (2000) to be a neo-slave narrative, because implicit in the motif of

<sup>2</sup> This is in fact what Toni Morrison attempted to do with the character of Pecola in her novel *The Bluest Eye* when she tried to tell the violation from the point of view of the girl in the story. Interestingly, commenting on her own work in the afterword of the novel, Morrison pointed out that she had failed in her attempt due to the difficulty of the task. In Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, the actual rape of Pecola is focalized through the father, Cholly, not the daughter, which made it highly problematic for many critics.

the journey is the quest for being. Literacy becomes part of the political compromise of the text. Precious learns to read and to write, with a critical attitude, and in so doing joins literacy with identity, freedom and wholeness. According to Francis Kazemek, literacy is “an ethical endeavor that has as its goal the liberation of people for intelligent, meaningful, and humane action upon the world” (1988, 467). Besides learning to read and write, Precious is required by her teacher to also write in her diary.

In this sense, as Carme Manuel points out, “*Push* becomes a bold narrative experiment directly inspired by one of the most challenging practices in the educational setting—dialogue journal writing. This methodology certainly aids Precious Jones on her journey of self-discovery and emancipation, towards her own conscience to retrieve her role as individual and social subject” (2000, 220).

In African cosmology, it is through Nommo, the mastery of the word, that the self becomes revealed unto itself, ready to enter the transformative leap into what Paule Marshall calls “the true true” self. This is necessary, according to Marshall, because there “are so many fraudulent images of black women which have been projected in the literature” (1992, 282). As both Paul Carter Harrison (1972) and Molefi Kete Asante (1987) explain, Nommo involves the generative tensions between matter and spirit, good and evil, male and female, etc., and suggests the existence of a state in which the physical and spiritual fuse. This state corresponds to the time when gods walked the earth, when people had divine knowledge, and in African American folklore, when people could fly. Tricksters, conjurers, ancestors and the power of myths in African American tradition are all very much part of the everyday cosmology in which the spiritual world interacts with the real world.

The challenge of journal writing helps Precious deal with the frightening past, where she is a thing, a slave: her father abuses her and she bears two of his children, and her mother, besides abusing her sexually too, despises her for stealing her man, keeping her locked in the house, a de facto slave, isolated and illiterate. Precious’s first child, a daughter from her incestuous relationship with her father when she was twelve years old, has Down’s Syndrome, and the continued raping by her father results in her becoming infected with HIV. As a result of this situation, Precious feels invisible on the one hand and terribly guilty on the other. She has learnt not to expect any protection from her mother, who sent her the message “your father first, you second” (Herman and Hirschman 1977, 746).

As a consequence of this, the mother-daughter relationship is severely disrupted, and Precious recalls her mother as implacably hostile and critical of her. Susan Brownmiller, in her study of what she calls “father-rape” (qtd. in Kaye 2005, 165), stresses the coercive aspect of the situation and states that the father’s sexual approach is clearly an abuse of power and authority, and that the daughter almost understands it as such. But, unlike rape, it occurs in the context of a caring relationship. The victim feels overwhelmed by her father’s superior power and unable to resist him; she may feel disgust, loathing and shame, but at the same time she often feels that this is the only kind of love she can get, and prefers it to no love at all. The daughter, in this view, is not raped: she is seduced

(Herman and Hirschman 1977, 748). This is Precious's situation at the beginning of *Push*: she feels fear, disgust and intense shame about the sexual contact, but acknowledges that she feels some degree of pleasure during the sexual act, a feeling which only increases her sense of guilt and confusion. A direct consequence of this is that Precious feels different from the other children in school, gaining too much weight and remaining distant from ordinary people. Her sense of isolation and her inability to make human contact drives her to have extremely conflicted relationships with teachers and other children, impairing her ability to learn to read, write and learn numbers, so she sits at the back of the class and pees herself. During the sexual episodes with her father, Precious tells herself that "this isn't really happening," passive resistance and dissociation of feeling seemingly the only defenses available to her. At times, she also escapes into her fantasy world, pretending she is not there, imagining herself as a pretty girl, "like a advertisement girl on commercial, 'n someone ride up here in car, someone look like the son of the guy that got kilt when he was president a long time ago or Tom Cruise . . . and I be riding like on TV" (1996, 35). At the beginning of the novel, Precious feels she deserves to be beaten, raped, neglected and used. As she states, "Then my body take me over again, like shocks after earthquake, shiver me, I come again. My body not mine, I hate it coming" (111).

This leads to intense feelings of shame, degradation, and worthlessness. She has learnt with the years to distrust her own desires and needs so much so that she does not feel entitled to care and respect. As Mohanty points out, "emotions provide evidence of the extent to which our deepest personal experiences are socially constructed," referring "outward to the world beyond the individual," thus redefining the contours of our world(s) (2000, 34). Precious's emotions—her anger—are, as Ronald de Sousa has proposed, her way of "paying attention to the world" (qtd. in Mohanty 2000, 37). Her anger comes out of her knowledge of the socio-cultural circumstances of her world, which define her sense of self. For instance, she learns she has very few choices in life as a poor, abused, black girl. Going to the alternative Each one Teach one school, she learns about the range of personal capacities she is able to "exploit and exercise" (Mohanty 2000, 36), which she does through the process of learning to trust her judgements about herself, recognizing how others like her have done the same. Thus, both emotions and experience provide Precious with knowledge about the world around her: therein lies their cognitive nature.

Dialogue journal writing creates a path for Precious to literally write herself into being,<sup>3</sup> as she learns for the first time to exteriorize and to claim her emotions, finding a venue not only for acknowledging them, but also for giving them form and expression. When Precious learns to read and write she feels that her life starts flowing. It is a way of saying to herself that she feels loved, accepted, approved. In fact, Precious admits that writing

<sup>3</sup> There is an explicit relationship between literacy and freedom in *Push* which recalls the basic structure of the nineteenth-century slave narrative genre with major representatives such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Ann Jacobs. However, Jacobs and Douglass are exceptional, because most slave narratives were written/transcribed by amanuenses not the slaves themselves. Thus, the classification of *Push* as a neo-slave narrative is accurate in this respect.

in her notebook is helping her more than talking to her social worker. This is because the journal writing establishes a relationship of confidence and trust between Precious and Ms Rain—her teacher, since Ms Rain follows non-intrusive methods of correcting, in line with Paulo Freire’s “attitude of dialogue” (Manuel 2000, 223). While Ms Rain openly says to Precious over and over that she is “intellectually alive and curious” (1996, 124), Ms Weiss, the social worker writes in her report that Precious suffers from “obvious intellectual limitations,” asserting that “she is quite capable of working as a home attendant” (1996, 124), thus relegating Precious and the thousands of women like her to “a life of slave labor” (1996, 122). Knowing that the social welfare system is not a long-term solution for the lives of these women, Ms Rain encourages Precious to continue to write in her notebook, especially at times when Precious feels discouraged by her difficult circumstances:

I don’t have nothing to write today—maybe never. . . . Feel like giant river I never cross in front me now. Ms Rain say, You not writing Precious. I say I drownin’ in river. She don’t look me like I’m crazy but say, If you sit there the river gonna rise up drown you! Writing could be the boat carry you to the other side. One time in your journal you told me you had never really told your story. I think telling your story git you over that river Precious. (1996, 197)

Within this context, according to Henze, grasping agency, that is, the “person’s socially acknowledged right to interpret and speak for her/himself” (2000, 230) is pivotal for Precious to achieve any degree of identity. Experiences do not contain meaning in themselves; it is the way that we interpret our experiences through the framework provided by the social narratives among which we live, as well as our past attempts to understand our experiences and lives that gives them meaning. This is what Precious is encouraged to do when Ms Rain tells her to write her life story in her diary in a conscious exercise of re-memory in order to lay claim to a past which is the source of Precious’ trauma,<sup>4</sup> her displacement, her fragmentation and her isolation. Dialogue writing puts Precious in touch with her past and triggers in her a desire for independent thought and action. The task of re-memory linked to the written exercise of dialogue writing point toward the uses of literacy in the building of a true wholesome self, towards the healing of both spirit and body. The achievement of a consciousness as a worthy human being, as a mother, represents for Precious a movement towards change and the acquisition of a valid language creating a liberatory discourse that enables her growth towards maturity and wholeness.

For Precious, the cognitive task of re-memory is thus dependent on an emotional achievement, on the labor of trusting herself, her judgements and her companions (her classmates and Ms Rain). In short, re-memory is a process linked to the feeling of belonging.

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<sup>4</sup> According to Toni Morrison, re-memory involves the re-creation of the untold and unwritten interior lives of Black people and of their ancestors, and consists of the gathering of “the memories within,” as well as “the recollections of others,” engaging through the imagination in the reconstruction of the world “that these remains imply” (1987, 12).

Identity-based politics becomes a necessary first step in knowing what an oppressive social and cultural system hides. There is a shift in values which Precious needs to account for in her new experiences with the alternative school program led by Ms Rain. Precious looks up to the social model defended by Black-nationalist Louis Farrakhan, together with the homophobic image of men he supports. As Sapphire explains in an interview with Mark Marvel, Precious accepts the teachings of Farrakhan because she “needs a positive view of black men . . . . Precious doesn’t understand the ramifications of black nationalism. She doesn’t know that there’s something negative about Farrakhan. She doesn’t know that hating gay people or hating Jews or hating foreigners is detrimental to her. What’s been detrimental to her is being poor, being abused, and being illiterate” (qtd. in Manuel 2009, 157).

Precious is in fact amazed when she learns that not only the principal character of her reading class assignment, Alice Walker’s Celie in *The Color Purple*, is homosexual, but so is her own teacher and one of her classmates too:

But jus when I go to break on and go to tell class what Five Percenters ‘n Farrakhan got to say about butches, Ms Rain tell me I don’t like homosexuals she guess I don’t like her ‘cause she one. I was shocked as shit. Then I jus’ shut up. Too bad about Farrakhan. I still believe allah and stuff. I guess I still believe everything. Ms Rain say homos not who rape me, not homos who let me sit up not learn for sixteen years, not homos who sell crack fuck Harlem. It’s true. Ms Rain the one who put the chalk in my hand, make me queen of the ABCs. (1996, 81)

This discovery drives Precious towards the realization that she is entering a new community, one she can call her own, away from social narratives, paradigms and even ideologies which seem harmful now that she is awakening into consciousness and accepting her personal feelings in order to create her identity. Sapphire is clearly offering a harsh critique of homophobia, inscribing *Push* within the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual) genre and furthering the African American tradition of Black feminism. Through the character of Ms Rain, “the committed lesbian teacher” (Michlin 2006, 183), Sapphire introduces a valid model for the community that counteracts the false model provided by Louis Farrakhan.

Although incest has been dealt with by previous African American writers, such as Toni Morrison in her novel *The Bluest Eye* or Alice Walker in *The Color Purple*, it is Sapphire’s emphasis on telling the story from the point of view of the Black woman/child suffering from incest and rape that makes this novel unique: “By giving voice to the victim herself—a phenomenon virtually unheard of in Black sociological, or imaginative literature—the root causes of the incest are interrogated and the agency of this violence is spread as far as possible” (Liddell 1999, 137).

African American novels of incest, as Doane and Hodges point out, “give shape and visibility to forms of ‘unbeing’ that are gendered, racial, economic and social,” contributing to create a body of literature which successfully breaks a “culturally enforced silence”

(2001, 45). Thus, *Push* “secures a safe space for the recovery of the traumatized female self” because the telling becomes a “location used for women’s empowerment and recovery” (Myles 2012, 16).

### 3. THE TRANSFORMATION OF FEMALE DESIRE THROUGH THE SEARCH FOR WHOLENESS

The acquisition of literacy through the therapeutic method of diary journal writing, and accepted therapeutic practices such as the confrontation between daughter and mother, relieves Precious of her feeling of responsibility for the incest. In this face-to-face conversation, the mother admits to her daughter that she has been the victim of poor parenting, thus allowing Precious’s plight towards liberation to start.

Precious is empowered by her growing ability to deal in a successful way with letters and numbers, as when she wins the literacy award and she starts writing poems. She is endowed with the power to speak out in front of her class, realizing how common incest is. By attending the incest survivor group, she gains the power to choose her destiny when she decides going through high school and college and abandoning welfare. Precious enjoys the company and care of an extended family who, although not her blood kin, truly love her and will help her to endure the difficulties the future might have in store for her. After going out with the incest survivor group to have drinks (first time in her life), Precious feels loved and delighted in the company of the girls: “I’m alive inside. A bird is my heart. Mama and Daddy is not win. I’m winning. I’m drinking hot chocolate in the village with girls—all kind who love me. How that is so I don’t know. How mama and daddy know me sixteen years and hate me, how a stranger meet me and love me. Must be what they already had in their pocket” (1996, 131).

Finally, Precious regains legal custody of both her children, Mongo—who had already been confined to an institution for retarded children, and Abdul, and finds in motherhood the best present life has for her. She proudly admires the innocence of her beautiful baby son: “Look his nose is so shiny, his eyes shiny. He my shiny brown boy. In his beauty I see my own” (1996, 140). As Sapphire suggests with her novel, no adult woman will be free until children are free, hence her emphasis on education. Like prostitution and rape, father-daughter incest will disappear only when male supremacy ends. As Paule Marshall contends in her novel *Daughters*, the true difference will be made when Black women and men push shoulder to shoulder, on equal footing to forge their destinies and their children’s destinies, to accept the fact that notwithstanding slavery and all its horrors, Black women and men “had it together, were together, stood together” (1991, 94). Stellamaris Coser adds that this is “a version of history that emphasizes the strength and determination of slaves under oppression and assigns central roles to black people” (1994, 70). In the end, Precious realizes that forgiveness has many layers, many seasons, almost one lifetime for her. For Precious forgiveness is not a gift, but rather a skill that she learns over time, gaining vitality and sensitivity as she overcomes the difficulties in her

life. She needs to learn that forgiving does not necessarily involve forgetting, but laying the emotion surrounding the memory to rest. Precious learns that “final” forgiveness is not surrender, but a conscious decision to cease to harbour resentment. Precious has two children from her father, who has died from AIDS, and she learns to accept that there has been enough payback, and in doing so she enters the path towards wholeness. Through the transformation and re-creation of female identity based on female agency, this narrative finds sustenance in the idea that the movement towards wholeness involves change. The novel’s “speakerly authenticity” (Michlin 2006, 184) joins the continuum of Black women’s writings as part of what Farah Jasmine Griffin has called “textual healing,” empowering the eye of both reader and character, transforming the “politics of silence” into speech and telling, opening to dialogue and rendering desire loose as a “resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane” (Lorde 1984, 53).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Supporting the claim that African American literature is a literature in search of a theory (Butler 2006, 171), this paper has analyzed the novel *Push*, taking into consideration the interaction among key theoretical concepts such as re-memory, double consciousness and the search for wholeness. The article has also applied the theory of post-positivist realism to the reading of *Push* to show how this theory is a possible path for the analysis of African American novels and specifically of those novels dealing with the impact of incest in the lives of young Black women and children. This theoretical approach sheds light onto several aspects of this type of literature that need to be closely observed because of their impact in the construction of identity, a conception of identity that takes experience into account, arousing consciousness about subjectivity, away from the limitations of a western colonizing discourse based on silence and abuse.

The process of re-memory enables Precious, the protagonist of *Push*, to effectively deal with the pain originated in her past as it triggers the search for wholeness which entails acquiring literacy and creating alternative liberatory discourses that allow her to obtain a certain degree of freedom to move forward in life and create a sense of a possible future.

The post-positivist realist theory of identity allows us to explore the shifting identity of individuals within a well-established ethnic group, as is the case of *Push*, on the one hand, and to claim experience, on the other, because of the many changes in which it is generated, as the source of objective knowledge. As post-positivism contends, identities are ways of coming to terms with our experiences: in them and through them we learn to define and reshape our values and our commitments, and we give texture and form to our collective futures (Mohanty 2000, 29-66). There is, therefore, a need to theorize not only about identity but also about agency as “the conscious and on-going reproduction of the terms of our existence while taking responsibility for this process” (Alexander and Mohanty 1997, xxviii). Identity, then, is understood from the dialogic perspective of engaging the world from the vantage point of agency, facilitating wholeness, or the

dialogic interaction between self and other, past and present. The search for wholeness with the aid of re-memory, double consciousness and agency becomes the trigger for an active expression of Black women's subjectivity throughout the African diaspora. This consists of giving emphasis to the importance of women as the owners of their destinies when they engage in the building of their identities, which are shaped by the interaction of time, community and experience, suggesting that identity is performative, indeterminate and multiple.

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