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**FEMINIST COUNTERCULTURE AND RACE
IN HETTIE JONES' WRITING**

Dissertação submetida ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina para a obtenção do Grau de Mestre em Inglês: Estudos Literários.
Orientadora: Prof^a. Dr^a. Susana Bornéo Funck.

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I dedicate this work to all the especial women in my life who gave me strength and wisdom through their strong figures and examples: Maria Reinert, Catarina da luz Reinert, Malga Ionne Regis, Sonia Regis, Rosemeri Regis Koehler, Mercedes Cabirta Dortas, Susana Bornéo Funck; to all women who suffer around the world; to all the feminists, men and women, who fight tirelessly for justice.

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...there was a hint of something new downtown.
It hadn't existed before we'd staked it, and
wasn't yet called counterculture,
but it seemed as if our small,
raggedy band of claim
to new consciousness
was all at once
uncontainable...

(Hettie Jones, 1990)

RESUMO

Este estudo investiga a contracultura feminista e questões de raça na escrita de Hettie Jones, mais especificamente, em suas três coleções de poemas, *Drive*, *All Told* e *Doing 70*, e em seu livro de memórias intitulado *How I Became Hettie Jones*. É possível reconhecer as vozes ocultas nos trabalhos das mulheres da Geração *Beat*, tais como Jones, que se descobriu como escritora juntamente com o movimento, começou a escrever e continuou fiel à sua escrita de conscientização no que se refere à discriminação racial e de gênero ao longo de décadas. Branca e inserida na cultura Negra de uma Nova Iorque conservadora no pós-guerra, Jones relata suas dificuldades e esperanças, como mulher, mãe e escritora em seu livro de memórias e poemas. Atualmente discussões sobre a obra das mulheres da Geração *Beat* vêm se expandindo a fim de completar a história desse movimento e conscientizar a todos sobre a discriminação e a desigualdade social, principalmente no tocante a raça e gênero.

Palavras-chave: Feminismo. Raça. Contracultura. Hettie Jones. Geração Beat.

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates feminist counterculture and race issues in Hettie Jones' writing, more specifically in her three collections of poems, *Drive*, *All Told* and *Doing 70*, and her memoir *How I Became Hettie Jones*. It is possible to recognize hidden voices in the works of the Beat Generation women such as Jones, who began finding herself as a writer along with the movement and remained true to her writing which sought to spread awareness in relation to racial and gender discrimination throughout the decades that followed the post-war era. Being white and embedded in the African-American culture of a conservative New York, Jones chronicles her hardships and hopes as a woman, a mother, and a writer in the pages of her memoir and poems. Nowadays, discussions about the work of the Beat Generation women are being expanded in order to fill the gap in the history of the movement and to make everyone aware of discrimination and social inequality, especially in relation to race and gender.

Keywords: Feminism. Race. Counterculture. Hettie Jones. Beat Generation.

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INTRODUCTION

Once, in 2014, I entered a bookstore near Trafalgar square in London and asked if they had any books of the Beat women writers. The answer I got was a very shocking one for me: that there were no ‘Beat women writers’, that there was not such a thing and it was a men’s movement only. I thanked the man and left the bookstore 100% sure that this was what I wanted to (un)cover regarding my studies. My need was to bring to light some other viewpoints for whoever felt interested in knowing better the women’s contribution to historical changes and to this movement in particular. I have always felt disturbed about the inequalities involving the relevance of women and history, women and politics, women and education, women and literature, women and economics and so on, and as a lover of poetry and books I have always noticed that my readings changed me immensely in private matters, so I began wondering how these counterculture writings would affect society in broader terms. Would they be of effective social change for society in macro situations? If these readings had a great impact on me, they should most probably be related to bigger changes within society and perhaps be responsible in part for the society we live in today. Those were the reasons which first inspired me to pursue the completion of this study. Women have been undermined and silenced for too long within patriarchal society and, since the day I realized that, I see this as a key reason (and reason enough) to go after more information in the path of understanding, from hidden voices – such as those of the Beat generation women – their versions of the story, their versions of history.

In order to throw light upon the forgotten Beat Generation women writers I sought to understand the magnitude of their works, what they thought about the issue of women’s exclusion from their movement and from society as a whole, and of men’s supremacy in the literary world. Literature is not detached from daily life; on the contrary, it depicts social practices, which in turn, affect larger social structures and shape consciousness. One way of debating women’s exclusion in some social environments/practices is to bring to light the writing of women who were not allowed voice at the time. While troubled with this issue, I came about Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) and her belief that women needed private space (a room) and money in order to write. She criticized the absence of women from literary production and emphasized women’s courage by writing without expecting to be published (23), which I relate to the lack of support from

the press back then, almost a century ago. At the time of the Beat Generation Movement, decades after Woolf's concerns were spread, women declared the same objection regarding the press, saying they appreciated not being stereotypical housewives but were critical of not having time and equal opportunity to publish as compared to the men writers and artists (Cunningham, 2011). Some courageous women countered culture and faced society's criticism when they left the house to work for their independence; however, they felt the inequality of labor value and recognition when it came to being an artist and to publishing. The needs voiced by Woolf in *A room of one's own* became a reality for some women of the Beats, since they had a room of their own and some money, challenging patterns and fighting against hegemonic culture in the second half of the 20th century; however, was it really all they needed to succeed in literature and society? Apparently not.

These Beat women who countered hegemonic culture in the 1950s understood they did not fit in patriarchal roles; therefore, in order to gain freedom, they joined the Beat men who had more freedom, voice and power within the social structure. However, as already known, the society of the 1950s, the media and press did not favor these women being artists and, consequently, they faced difficulties.

The Beat Generation Movement took place mainly in New York and San Francisco. The men poets, musicians and songwriters of this counterculture movement explored the freedom to come and go on US soil; they experienced life and sexual liberation; they questioned standards and innovated in writing, bringing to light non-conformist ideas. Women, in general, were considered by the men mere companions, and not equal artists, according to their own writing, although some women were already writing professionally. Nevertheless, some of the women who were beginning to write ended up hiding their works, accepting the men's verdict on their lack of importance to the movement.

The major (male) figures who took part in the Beat Generation movement were Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Gregory Corso, Neal Cassady, Ken Kesey, Gary Snyder, Leroi Jones¹, to mention some. The women who took part in it, in spite of society's

¹ Everett Leroi Jones (1934 – 2014) was the name of the late actor, teacher, theater director, theater producer, writer, activist and poet Amiri Baraka, who had his name changed after the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, embracing the Black activist/separatist movement.

criticism and discrimination, were Joyce Johnson, Diane Di Prima, Joanne Kyger, Hettie Jones, Ruth Weiss, Brenda Frazer, Janine de Pome Vega, Anne Waldman, Elise Cowen, and others. Diane Di Prima and Joanne Kyger, according to Jennifer Love (2001), were the only ones who got to publish their work in the earlier days of the movement, while others used to hide or burn their writing because of the lack of opportunity, confidence or trust from their male counterparts.

Bearing in mind Woolf's concern regarding the lack of women's productions on the shelves of libraries back in 1929, we see this scenario beginning to change after the 1950s counterculture, the 1960s women's liberation movement and especially after the 1970s, since women incessantly fought for space, voice and recognition in the media, in the press and within other social structures. Consequently, around the 1960s and 1970s, the amount of written production came to an astonishing rise, as if all women wanted to scream out their truth, their versions of the past told by men (Mlakar, 2007). The productions of the Beat women were among these rising voices and, in order to assess their importance for women's rights, this study includes a discussion about some social issues found in the words of a Beat writer.

To reflect upon the Beat women's voice, I began searching through many sites and academic platforms for works which analyzed the writing of the Beat women and, more specifically, Hettie Jones' works. To my good surprise, I found some of the Beat women analyzed, being many of the works comparisons among their memoirs in order to gather a collective history. Furthermore, I realized that there is a vast field within the Beat women's works for counterculture and feminist studies still sitting to be (re)interpreted in the light of contemporary perspectives. In my search about Hettie Jones, I have found very few specific studies; therefore, my focus was set on her productions within the historical context in which she was inserted, before and by the time she began writing.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH AND OBJECTIVES

Rosana Kamita (2005, 11), in her book *Resgates e ressonâncias: Mariana Coelho*, affirmed that retrieving women's writing from the 19th or 20th century makes contemporary intellectual women bridge gaps in the history told by men and also helps assemble a corpus of women's literature, which explains the value of the present work. In a way, Hettie Jones, who began writing from the Beat Movement on, in the US, felt this sacred men's territory hard on her and,

after writing her views of those conservative times, kept her words hidden under a mattress, to later, burn them, letting only a few survive to tell the world about this silencing women suffered.

If we think about women and literature, as Virginia Woolf did, we may find that the lack of women in literature had to do not only with the lack of money and a room. Hettie Jones, for instance, had some money and worked to earn her independence in the 1950s, but in fact, she lacked freedom, motivation and respectability to believe in herself and, consequently, burned many of her thoughts to ashes.

Works such as these, if revisited and rescued, could help us to (re)construct history, repair injustice, and comprehend our own times. The examples I cite here are meant to be read as hope, since I believe they should be spread for women to find conviction to continue seeking effective social change. In addition to that, it is also my hope that this study ignites future feminist and counterculture studies within PGI at UFSC, considering that this is the beginning of the discussions referring the Beat Generation women, especially in Brazil.

The general objective of this study is to bring to light the silenced voice of Hettie Jones as representative of the work and lives of the women of the Beat Generation and to discuss the importance of her writing decades later for feminist studies. The specific objectives are:

- To discuss central themes and topics in Hettie Jones' diaries, regarding counterculture and feminist studies, including gender, race/ethnicity;
- To analyze Hettie Jones' poetry in relation to the political concerns voiced in her prose;
- To think of Hettie Jones' work as an example of the feminist counterculture of postwar women writers living within a supremacist capitalist patriarchal society, juxtaposing with today's concerns.

In terms of the objectives, I intend to answer the following questions: (1) What major feminist countercultural issues can we find in Hettie Jones' work as a writer/poet? (2) How did the subaltern social position of women affect the life and work of Hettie Jones and how much of her work shows this debate? (3) How did race and racism impact her thoughts, feelings and her writing?

PROCEDURES/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Hooks (1994, 203) raises the issue of individual versus collective concerns when she talks about the lack of consideration of white feminist women when representing different voices in their claims. Do white feminist women ponder about how they represent other women in a collective way? Are non-whites really represented?

Nowadays, feminist studies have given more attention to subjectivities and marginalized voices more than the hegemonic feminist study which initiated the movement. Although recognizing other forms of feminisms, my focus is on the instances found in Hettie Jones' works and what can be considered her feminist concerns in prose and poetry which includes race and ethnicity. Therefore, I dedicate two chapters to the racial/ethnic concerns which inform much of Hettie Jones' work and life; thus, the analysis of her memoir *How I Became Hettie Jones* and of selected poems from her books *Doing 70*, *Drive* and *All Told*, in the light of feminist and racial criticism, was fundamental for the findings.

The critical literature includes concepts of feminism defined by bell hooks (2000), for whom feminism "is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (1; 11; 47), which I correlate to Silvyia Walby's (1990) and Adrienne Rich's (1986) definition of patriarchy, i.e., the social system in which men dominate and where women's oppression, exploitation and gender inequality occur. Added to this discussion are Monique Wittig's (1980) claims that women should fight for the individual issue instead of trying to embrace the patriarchal social class "women," thus stressing the importance of women's subjectivities. Betty Friedan's concepts helped guiding parts of the discussions surrounding patriarchy, women and society, sexuality, women's roles and nonconformity. Carlos Moore (2011), Chris Weedon (1999), W.E.B. Dubois (1903), bell hooks (2000), Adrienne Rich (1986), Gloria Anzaldúa (2005), and Deepika Bahri (2013) contributed to the reflections regarding race that appear in Jones works. Having race and gender inequalities in mind, it is possible to think about the culture we are inserted in and the countercultural efforts to change it by looking into different angles of the same historical event. To begin with, let us understand the historical context of the Beat women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the historical context of the Beat women it seems relevant to reflect upon the position of women in the 1950s in

U.S. society and the beginning of a change of consciousness during the Feminist movement of the 1960s as well as some reasons why this change began to take place. By understanding the sequence of these historical events, we may assess more profoundly the revolutionary character of the Beat women's writing. Though it was a counterculture movement in the U.S., its impact went beyond historical and geographic boundaries. In the present discussion, I will focus on issues of the life and work of the Beat writer Hettie Jones, entering the specific analysis of her memoir and poems. This study was carried out taking into consideration that by memoir I mean a period in a writer's life, a fragment of a history in an autobiographical writing. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2001) define, autobiographical writing is "a historical situated practice of self-representation" (14), and therefore, "the lived lives of such autobiographical narrators, the political and cultural contexts of the historical past become vivid and memorable (11). Autobiography for Smith and Watson presents "memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency" (3), a view which was adopted in the analysis of Hettie Jones' narrative.

1 Women in the 1950s

During World War II women had to fill the jobs left by the men when they went to war, but in the postwar era, the US needed these women to take care of the men returning home; therefore, women had to go back to their roles of caring mothers and housewives/heads of households, even and especially those who could secure their jobs outside the house. The media and the press played a very influential role by advertising the perfect American family with devoted happy mothers in their brand new kitchens, holding brand new gadgets produced by an industry that no longer had to produce for the war. Women were being pushed back into supporting wives for the *heroes* who came back from the war (Love, 2001). Women who denied these roles faced society's discrimination and discontent, because they were denying old and unquestionable patriarchal beliefs regarding female roles within this traditional society (Betty Friedan 1963; Monique Wittig 1980; Sylvia Walby 1990; bell hooks 2000).

Adrienne Rich, in her text "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," discusses some of the "unquestionable" patriarchal beliefs toward women's roles in society which are: the denial of female sexuality, the imposition of heterosexuality upon all, the control and exploitation of women in business, the segregation of women and

idealization of their romantic life and of their bodies (feminization), the control of abortion, the denial of children for lesbian mothers, the confinement of women's bodies, the objectification of women, the obligation of women to be subservient to husbands, the withholding of knowledge and culture from them (Rich, 1986, 207-08). According to her, in patriarchy, women are "emotional and sexual property of men and the autonomy and equality of women threaten family, religion and state" (204), and all of this shapes consciousness regarding women's existence and practices.

These are perhaps some of the reasons why women acted numbly for a long time. According to Stuart Hall (1992), people go through an "internalization" of the exterior to later "externalize" the interior toward the outside world which corresponds to the building of the individual identity through interaction with this social world (21). Contrasting this interactional experience to women's position in societies, we may realize that women have impregnated their interior with patriarchal ideologies and found themselves in chains, i.e., the proportion of this interaction was not a balanced one and women are more bounded than free because of what they end up accepting as real regarding their identity.

Women, unless aware and critical of their own context and patriarchal ideologies, had learned to be quiet, listen, pretend to fit in social roles and to exist numbly and blindly, since that was what they were raised for: conformity. On the contrary, men were educated to speak their minds, had all the money of the household and freedom to accomplish their goals; also, for a long time, and still nowadays, men have advantages because of these inequalities regarding gender and the compulsory heterosexual way of life (Rich 1986; Butler 2015). Therefore, women's counterculture was highly relevant for a change of consciousness and politics, and still is, since we do not live in a world where full gender equality has been achieved; on the contrary, we still live in a patriarchal, supremacist and capitalist system which undermines women's existence and does not acknowledge women as valued subjects.

Bearing this in mind, it becomes relevant for the advances in the feminist studies and in women's emancipation that scholars continue uncovering silenced voices and writing different versions of the history told by men, always in an effort to grasp other perspectives in order to recognize our own singularities in the world. But unfortunately not all women writers had or have time and opportunity to write and publish without denying some patriarchal roles and facing problems by doing it.

Those who did deny some roles found, along with discrimination, time and space for creativity and artistic life, such as the Beat women writers Diane Di Prima and Joanne Kyger, who published along with the men of the movement, as mentioned before (Love, 2001).

2 Feminisms

The Feminist movement concerns the hope of women's release from the bondage of patriarchy (hooks, 2000). In the 1950s, in the US, as we have seen, women were told to go back to some traditional roles, but once they began working outside the house and were, in many cases, the sole wage earner of the family, they began denying some old roles and fighting for their subjectivities, gender equality and freedom.

Weedon (1999) avows that after the 2nd wave feminism in the late 1960s many were the minority groups that claimed for recognition within capitalist society. This recognition would lead to power, and power was what had and has been denied to marginal groups for so long a time. The feminist movement of the 1960s was responsible for bringing to light these different groups nowadays known as *Feminisms*. It has representatives of the multicultural world in which we live in, and all the diversity regarding gender, race, class, sexuality, peace, animal rights and environmental rights under the light of post-structuralist and post-modern theories.

The Feminist movement has fought for legal rights in favor of gender equality and not for the same power men always had in a patriarchal system. The agents involved in the feminist movement have been women activists who have fought for justice and equality in terms of social work and civil rights in regards to gender and race, political rights, domestic rights, etc.

Weedon also reminds us that these transformations tended to be related to the concept of post-modernity and global capitalism. After the new capitalist system was installed, many groups felt the need of understanding their own subjectivities within this new society, since now, a unified identity was no longer accepted by the people. As Hall (1992) corroborates, identities became fragmented and multiple in post-modernity, comprising multiculturalist claims around the globe. Along with this new consciousness in regards to subjectivities came the rising of the marginalized voices and other than hegemonic (male, white, upper class, etc) groups began opening spaces along with protests for rights, new meanings and new perspectives in order to gain more power

within society. Relations of power began being questioned and being part of the political shifts which in turn changed people's social status.

In the 1970s, most of the activists were privileged middle-class white women, but soon more groups joined the cause in contemporary feminism enveloping, thus, all concerns about the fight for a change of consciousness and social political rights for all.

Hooks (2000) says that feminism is for everybody since it ends sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression, and this is a relevant reason to go about spreading the consciousness of feminist concerns, since all men would be freed as well as all women from some roles within society, regardless of the minority group they might belong to – all should be free from standards.

For reasons of form, structure and organization in the sequence of this study gender and race issues were dealt separately in the analysis; however, it is understood they affect each other in an intersectional way, according to the efforts and beliefs of feminist movements in a post-colonialist and post-modern thinking in regards to diversities and multiculturalism.

3 The Beat Generation Movement

In the 1950-60s, in a conservative society, some men who took part in the Beat Generation could travel, rebel, speak with bravery and fearlessness, leave their marks on those years with letters, poetry, spontaneous prose (as Kerouac did) and life stories. As political and sharpened intellectuals, they printed their discomfort about life and the system that surrounded them. They were talented men making history with the help of the men in the press and some behind-the-scene women. This was the avant-garde and counter-cultural movement called Beat Generation, which took place in the postwar era, in the US. It is broadly believed it was a men's movement and that, from it, only men writers emerged. The men who emerged were writers such as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Neal Cassady, William Burroughs, Leroi Jones, etc, as mentioned previously. However, some researchers have uncovered, in the last two decades, some of the women's works that emerged from the Beat era. Such women began writing at the time of the movement, but did not have equal opportunity in the press, coming to publish many years later. Once they began publishing, many memoirs and poems began to appear in the media and, since then, some scholars have been analyzing, debating and spreading these women's contributions to the Beat Generation movement and to feminist studies. Nevertheless, the

road of discoveries goes on, and we still have much work ahead, for this movement, known worldwide as a men's movement, is only partially uncovered.

4 Women of the Beat Generation

Feminist concerns began before the women's liberation movement of the 1960s. They were triggered by individual feelings of injustice and inequalities. The avant-garde times, for instance, counted on many intellectual women behind the scenes. However, the Beat women did not get recognition for their deeds; some wrote for fun, some to survive, some hid their writing and came to publish later, but some learned and shared experiences as supporters of their male counterparts, following the internalization of patriarchal beliefs (cf. Hall 1992.) Some were breadwinners, housewives and mothers, fitting into many roles at the same time. Some were activists; some wrote silently, but they were all there countering the postwar era rules and roles for a freer future. Women such as Hettie Jones, Joyce Johnson, Diane Di Prima, Brenda Frazer and others wrote memoirs, letters, and poems; and were very critical of their own times.

According to Cunningham (2011), critics, scholars and researchers need to "listen to the voices calling to complete the Beat history and consciousness" (26) and give voice to the ones once silenced. She says that it is most shocking that even after decades of Feminist Criticism little is known about the women writers who emerged from the Beat Generation. Many of their works have not received due attention, especially from a contemporary perspective. Nowadays, with the help of feminist studies, we may look back and rethink all the stories that history-told-by-men shared with the world, always excluding or diminishing women's contributions. Through writing, men were building their world according to their will and also through writing women have begun to share their versions about their own selves. Sooner or later, women's stories would have to appear in order to change patriarchal fairy tales into fair-tales and finally say no to the waiting of a savior or a dictator in their lives. Such discussions may help people appreciate women's history and strength through their own perspectives, and reflect upon how these women challenged patriarchal culture in order to get rid of traditional feminine roles even before the contemporary women's liberation movement of the 1960s.

In order to understand the Beat women it is necessary to understand who they were, how they lived and to what historical context

they belonged. Jennifer Love (2001), in her article “No Girls Allowed: Women Poets and the Beat Generation” tried to answer who the Beat women were and how and why they became attached to the movement (2), by looking briefly into American culture in the 1950’s and the Beat movement, and comparing stories among the memoirs *How I became Hettie Jones* by Hettie Jones, *Memoirs of a Beatnik* by Diane Di Prima, *Minor Characters* by Joyce Johnson and Joanne Kyger’s *Going On: Selected Poems*. She emphasizes that in order to understand the Beat women writers we need, firstly, to consider culture in the 1950’s and, then, the women’s response to this culture. In this track, to understand and organize effective changes in our culture nowadays, we need to recognize the efforts of the counterculture movement made by women.

5 Hettie Jones as a Beat Writer

Hettie Jones is a white Jewish-American woman who, when young, moved to New York (Greenwich Village), began working as an editor, met the men of the Beat Generation and got along with them in experiencing life. While being a part of the group she got married to Leroi Jones – an interracial marriage on October 13, 1958 in a conservative New York. Leroi Jones was a Beat poet with whom she had two African-American² daughters. Together, for eight years, they published the Beat Generation productions in the Magazine *Yugen* (*Yugen Beat Journal*), which they founded during those years, and opposed, through literature and activism, the white, supremacist and capitalist culture of their times. Nowadays Jones is a professor at the 92nd Street Y Unterberg Poetry Center and in the Graduate Writing Program of The New School in New York, US.

In her memoir, originally published in 1990, she describes, in a mature voice, the years she spent married to Leroi Jones. In a conversational, empathetic and inviting manner, she relates passages of her life where she suffered the consequences of being a woman who

² Some Americans prefer to be called Nigerian-American or Jamaican-American, depending on their countries of origin. Other people prefer the term black, which seems to include everyone, regardless of nationality. For this dissertation, Negroes may be mentioned inside a specific historical context; if not specified context and period, I will make use of the term African-American or descendant, considering the 2003-04 last shifts from Black-Americans to Afro/African-American term. The New York Times, 'African-American' Becomes a Term for Debate by Rachel L. Swarns, 2004.

made her own way in regards to traditional culture. She seems proud for being independent; however, she states the difficulties to reach this independence while being a woman, a mother, a worker, a wife, a Beat – even though she came to writing much later. She also seems consciously free of any guilt for trying to trace a new path for the women back then, as we may read through her letters to Helene, a friend, and also by analyzing her routine with Leroi Jones, the kids (Kellie and Lisa Jones), neighbors, friends, and at work. She may not let it stamped on her words she is a feminist, and she does not wish to be labeled only as a Beat writer either, but surely this movement was important for her own maturity, critical views and especially her future writing which contains hints and sometimes irony in regards to women's existence in the immediate postwar society and beyond; therefore, despite labels, she is a figure who did counterculture through writing, as did all the Beat writers. After reading Hettie Jones' words and considering contemporary women's roles in society, we may share her concerns which are still troubling many women and limiting their freedom all around the world.

Being a woman, many times undermined by the presence of Leroi Jones as the famous writer, and for whom she dedicated so much of her time, neglecting her own time, was not the only concern of Hettie Jones' years of marriage. Since interracial marriage was not welcome in the conservative society of the 1950s, the Joneses faced much discrimination everywhere they went as a couple. After the kids came, Jones felt even more social prejudice and exclusion, and in her memoir she mentions race and racism bitterly in passages where she would want to go back and fight for her loved ones and against all this being pushed to the margins they had to endure on a daily basis. She had to teach the girls, since a very early age, how the white, patriarchal and supremacist society worked and how the girls should defend themselves and be strong in it, i.e., they, as an interracial family, had to build their own approach or line of attack to break through an established culture of exclusion and take their ground by opposing principles.

Jones emerged as a writer much later than the 1950s movement because of her lack of time, money and freedom back then; however, she was able to publish and share her versions of the story from the 1970s on. When analyzing Jones' memoir, Love (2001) says that "Jones offers a slightly bitter view of the assumed and encouraged silence on the part of women" (11), but she brings the whole scenario women had to go through in order to support their counterpart male writers, fit into social roles and take care of their own lives and children. The author

mentions that Jones found voice and passion working in the magazine *Yugen* while editing, publishing and distributing the Beat writing and that her help was crucial for the spreading of the Beat words in the early days (19).

Ten years later, Katelyn Cunningham (2011), in her study entitled “From backburner to forefront: Critical recollection and commitment to literary community in women beat memoirs,” investigated the reasons why women were not present in the movement in full participation, publishing, and why they were often only mentioned in the writing of their male counterparts as minor characters. This is a relevant study to reflect upon the exclusion of women from Beat men’s works. In her memoir, Jones talks about this exclusion. When working at *Yugen Beat Journal*, she was critical of the men who received all the credit for the journal for which she was the main responsible.

On the whole, Cunningham’s study brings to light the disappointment of four women, not always free, but paradoxically, being part of a movement for freedom. It illustrates the similarities in their stories and some resentment regarding their silence. It also shows us that scholars are still trying to undo the gender barrier and bring Beat literature by women to the Beat canon, which so far has remained male centered, thus continuing to reinforce the exclusion decades later.

Heike Mlakar (2007), in her dissertation entitled “Merely being there is not enough: Women’s roles in autobiographical texts by female Beat writers” shares Cunningham’s view on the issue of women’s exclusion when she states that “the media and male Beats presented female Beats in a pejorative way” (16) and this might have affected the women’s confidence and identity. In the article “Self-Narratives and Editorial Marks: Inventing Hettie Jones,” Chelsea Schlievert (2011) investigates how Jones understood her identity and assumed control over it. She avows that Jones questions the traditional, patriarchal and dominant culture, challenging society’s standards. This should offer “women a break from traditional gender roles” (1092), but it is noteworthy that those patriarchal standards could still limit the “acknowledgement of women like Jones as participants in the production of this art” (1093). In regards to identity issues, Mlakar (2007) lays emphasis on how Jones’ identity was shaped by her Jewish influences and by her own choice of approaching African-American people, marrying Leroi Jones, enjoying jazz music and using counterculture in spite of what society demanded of her (15).

Through a rereading of the representations and positioning of women in the past, we may be able to better locate ourselves in the present and appreciate our identities as women of the 21st century, recognizing that our positions are what they are because other women such as Jones already stepped out for some rights and some freedom. The known studies of the Beat women are, so far, mainly of memoirs in order to illustrate the collective and common history of women present in them; nevertheless, they are still limited. Many other perspectives should be included in the studies of the Beat women's literature. By bringing the study into a more narrowed debate, it is possible to understand the importance of Jones' efforts in stepping out of standards as a representative of all women of her generation and on. If some journeys of the Beats have ended, women are still on the road.

CHAPTER I

FEMINIST CONCERNS IN *HOW I BECAME HETTIE JONES*

We all remember Eve and Adam's story. Let's imagine the scene of Eve biting the apple in the wish of gaining power and knowledge and make an analogy to women throughout history biting the wronged lure of patriarchy which spreads the Law of the Father and punishes women who want the same power as men. In this Law of the Father system, women are sexualized, sensualized, pure, innocent, submissive and powerless; and women, therefore, struggle to be all that in the name of tradition. Eve bites the apple and pays for it for all eternity, according to this fictional story; women in history also "bite" the bait and swallow the misleading stories men have created in order to keep them under control and in a fearful state, exactly the same that happens in a religion that may not be contradicted, believing that women came from Adam's rib and believing their inferiority is also an eternal condemnation.

In human history women have always had a minor voice, so perhaps it is time to stop biting rotten stories that make women sick and fragile in society in order to begin feeding ourselves with what is plausible for our realities. I bring this Eve and Adam's fictional world collapsed into our reality because much of our construction of identities come from these stories of fictional worlds and patriarchal beliefs and sometimes it is hard to perceive these ideologies apart from reality. Some of the considered marginal writings attempt to subvert ideologies that reinforce the subjugation of women in an eternal circle. Although it has not been an easy path, the Beat Generation women writers have created/been creating this space.

In this chapter, the focus is on the feminist counterculture that guides us in the understanding of the minor position of women through the Beat women's practices and beliefs found in Hettie Jones' memoir.

To begin with, *How I Became Hettie Jones* brings a dedication to her daughters, Kellie and Lisa along with the sentence "pat my bro / pat my sister / see we tender / women / live / on," and in the next page a homage to Berenice Hoffman, Joyce Johnson, Helene Dorn, Dorothy White and her editor Joyce Engelson, Martha King, Margaret Wolf, Cora Coleman, and Ana Lois Jones, bringing the importance of these women to her professional life and her thoughts, and focusing on women's lives and hopes, their deeds, their union and their future, and

more importantly, what they seem to be against and what does *not* represent them.

The book gives us a detailed account of the years she was married to Leroi Jones (around 1958–1966, as mentioned in the introduction of this study) and of the times of the Beat Generation emergence; however, a specific account of her early years is also given since the book is divided into five parts from her childhood, professional life, marriage, maternity, and up to her divorce, in a chronological way.

The introduction of the book does not have a title, but by the content we get to know Hettie Cohen as a child, “six years old and thirty-eight pounds” (Jones, 1990, 5), then as a teenager and as a college student before she moves to Greenwich Village and begins to work. Later, she meets the men and women who took part in the Beat movement from 1957 on. The four parts that follow are entitled: Morton Street, Twentieth Street, Fourteenth Street and Cooper Square, which are places where she has lived in New York City.

Since *How I Became Hettie Jones* is a memoir, I make no distinction between the character and the author – remembering the definition of an autobiography given by Smith and Watson (2001) introduced in the previous chapter –, referring to her as Hettie Jones, Jones or simply she, and before her marriage to Leroi Jones, as Hettie Cohen.

According to Heike Mlakar (2007), “when she marries Leroi, she on the one hand, reflects on her name that will be changed from Cohen to Jones, but on the other hand she is also aware of the fact that other transformations [would] occur” (86). Some of these transformations and the coming to awareness of her own self will be contemplated in the following sections.

1 Childhood, teenage and college years

Hettie Jones begins her memories as Hettie Cohen with an intense remembrance of her mother, depicting her as “smart and right,” a small woman who embraced her, a woman who was a volunteer in the community, but also as someone who never had a maid, and for many years the one who cooked, sewed, washed the family’s clothes by hand, even humming while ironing – Hettie would iron beside her sometimes. This is a typical description of the patriarchal figure of the mother/woman/wife. Jones also mentions many women who contributed to her development, exalting their deeds and strengths and courage in

critical moments. But she makes sure to include those she did not wish to be.

Another memory that we may read as a criticism on patriarchy is about a father who “would have fun in his life,” the one who drove the family car and the one who worked outside home, but all the same, loved her (6-8). She grew up understanding the home duties as the sole responsibility of the woman, while the father was never mentioned as responsible for anything related to the house care or child care, except some fun, dance, working and driving, but with no great details; he was the one who would come home “predictably in through the side door, petting the dog and forgetting to wipe his feet” (8). This remembrance and exaltation of the “forgetting to wipe his feet” seems to be something that marked little Hettie, in a way that shows a lack of respect toward her mother who would maintain the house running and clean. Consequently, Hettie Cohen, having these examples, in an unintentional way perhaps, inherited some of these patriarchal habits of being the sole responsible for the house from her mother; however, later, she grew conscious and critical of them.

Her mother would worry about Hettie’s marriage, giving advice such as “Marry someone who loves you more,” although the young Cohen recognized romanticism as a failure, because by analyzing her parents’ relationship she would observe fight, anger and unhappiness and would, at a very early age, question love in marriage, believing that perhaps marriage would not be fit for her. To that concern, Jones writes later that she had “never thought about marriage...she had other plans and love was all [she] wanted” (7). This love would be as free as possible regarding the social constraints of the 1950s.

According to Jennifer Love (2001), Jones’ “memoir presents what some acknowledge as *typical* woman’s narrative – the story of a woman’s life as it begins with and is situated around a man” (1100), but while this may be true, Jones also presents instances that go against it, valuing women’s experiences and their ways and strengths, rejecting her mother’s life for her, or not wishing to marry like her sister, wanting to wear pants like men and feel equal and living and admiring Bohemian life being respected for her choices.

The marriage issue is brought up again in Cohen’s life when her sister, who was “olive-skinned with flaxen hair and royal blue eyes, was told and told again how her looks would bring her a wealthy husband to change her life” (9), stressing the notion that beauty is what women need in order to *find* a husband, be happy and wealthy. This belief was common in the 1950’s, as Betty Friedan so well describes in *The*

Feminine Mystique (1963). Jones seems to give us these examples to perhaps make people glimpse at other possibilities for happiness. Very early she begins to break barriers and, with the power of art giving meaning to her life, this would later on, according to Schlievert (2011), help future generations of women to benefit from her writing and also break patterns that would not be fit for them.

Hettie Cohen began to act against imposed rules. She writes that the 1951 generation was labeled the Silent Generation, stressing that she had been silenced often since men did not like women who spoke a lot (10). In the face of this picture of restriction, Cohen hoped for a freer future for her and for women. She knew she would “*become*” something other than the model of the restricted woman shaped by patriarchy. To incorporate this other woman, a 17-year-old Hettie went to the woman’s college of the University of Virginia.

To find inspiration and positive interaction, she looked for women who might be like her. In terms of appearance she seemed sometimes proud and sometimes embarrassed of her different looks, as described along the first part of the book, as for instance “when interviewed by the school newspaper (*The Bullet*), [she] declared [herself] a ‘mutation,’ since there didn’t seem to be anyone like [her]” there (13).

Women, in Mary Washington College – where she graduated in Drama (Grace and Johnson, 2004, 155) –, were not allowed to wear pants and had also to cope with other restrictions. Because of that, she and other girls organized the first protest for rights in order to be able to wear mechanic’s overalls and avoid climbing stairs wearing skirts (13). She remembers her mother saying she had not been allowed by her father to wear pants on the train, and even hearing this restriction at home too, she felt she was right. Clothes for women are not only a matter of beauty or fashion, but a matter of movement, since wearing high heels shoes and tight skirts contributes to the fragility of women.

When she left for college her mother taught her how to cook and supplied her with some pots and pans, i.e., shaping Cohen into the woman patriarchy expects in terms of appearance, profession, love, marriage, style, children and so on. She proudly mentions later on in the memoir that she “hadn’t learned to cook” despite the gifts (pans and pots) from her mother. Nevertheless, envisioning her independence, she began to give them a certain value.

At 21, at college, Hettie Cohen met Linda, a girl who “drove a car fast” and this was something that caught her attention because it twisted the patterns once more in a way she admired. Jones had always

known women who were watchers of men's adventures, but by meeting Linda, she glimpsed at the possibility of having her own adventures. The word "fast" gives the idea of determination, certainty or ability and urgency, and it is connected to a woman which seems to empower Cohen's experiences. Also, in this first part of the book, she begins describing her sexual life in college, an initiation which happened in a natural way, a way she defends the matter should always be treated. With Linda, she got her first job as a fan seller and then as a clerk and writer. It seems that in every achievement in Jones' life a woman is a supporter, but the bosses are usually men.

Geographically, Jones gives us punctual locations she was attached to. She moved to Greenwich Village after college, a place she felt real and familiar and met and saw different people around: women in the arts, music and bohemian life, freer women, women in pants. According to what her times allowed she was stepping further into her independence.

2 Independence and the will to change

Her experience as an editor begins when she leaves college and begins working at the *Record Changer*. She was responsible for the hiring, for editing and at this time she was beginning to write. In this new phase of her life, we perceive her sharp, witty and ironic discourse taking shape in many of her thoughts, as for instance when she talks about her memory of an add.

[...] I was seeing a photographer, who had just bought a motor scooter, a hot item then. We used to go for amazingly bumpy rides on the East River Drive. All over the city there were adds for Vespa scooters: the driver was absent but the passenger was wearing a tight skirt and had been posed on the bike sidesaddle, smiling, though the smallest pothole would have bounced her off and killed her. Compared to hers my life was real and risky, with open, straddling thighs, and wild rides through the sea-laden air of the magical New York night – whoo! I regret, now, not having the tongue then to tell of it (Jones, 1990, 24).

This passage demonstrates a young Cohen concerned about how women were depicted in adds, as objects, not functional, artificial,

not real; used by capitalist adds in order to sell Vespas to the drivers (the men who were absent from the add) and using the image of a woman, sitting uncomfortably on the side of the Vespa, posing and passively waiting for a man to buy (the Vespa, the woman too?) and drive and perhaps give her some pleasure in life. Hettie Cohen, as described by Jones, seemed proud of her comfortable clothes and way of sitting on the motor scooter, i.e., the way everybody should sit in order to be safe and have fun driving it “with open straddling thighs.” She seemed to prefer living the risky moment than posing as an artificial object waiting to be used. A touch of irony by exaggeration is noticed when Jones says that the woman in that position would fall off the scooter and be killed even if the pothole was small, instead of merely saying that that was not the correct way of sitting on a scooter.

In this phase of her life she was gaining complete independence, working and paying for her expenses and experiencing her sexual life more freely, now as an adult and far from her parents’ control or judgment. She even “made a list of the men [she] had slept with, to see if [she] could shock herself. ([She] couldn’t)” (25). Shocked she got when, at an interview for a job, a stage manager attempted to “drag her to bed, and [put] her out when she refused” (25), noticing she was only getting the job in the theater if she accepted to have sex with him – she went home alone through the deserted street, but proud of herself since she had the control to choose whoever she desired to be with. Once, the woman from the market, from whom Hettie would get vegetable crates in the evenings, gave her some advice regarding the men Hettie was seeing:

She’d seen me with various men, I guess, and one evening she held me at arm’s length and gave me a long, hard stare. “Do not,” she said, “sleep with those earrings on. You’ll get pregnant” (Jones, 1990, 51).

A touch of humor is read in these lines, since we may expect some advice that tends to restrict women, such as God’s punishment, or the possibility of getting some disease, but never a superstition (or joke) like that, which empowers women regarding their bodies and ignores traditional concepts about sex and true love.

Another remarkable point is the way she describes her mother counseling her about marriage, but cold heartedly ignoring her

professional deeds which was what she somehow expected, as read in the passage below:

In May I'd brought her a copy of *Yugen*. She'd riffled through it with a vague "That's nice," and made no further comment. At dinner tonight, apropos of my birthday, she'd warned, "You're getting old – twenty-four is almost thirty." I knew what this meant: unmarried women my age were pushing their luck. But I couldn't explain Billie's blues – or the life I'd chosen – until my mother was ready for life as it was (Jones, 1990, 59).

She believed, like the song Billie sang, that love was "like a faucet (...) it turns off and on" giving the idea of multiple lovers, so Hettie did not think about marriage but more love in life, as she had chosen to live according to her own desires. Nevertheless, she seems to understand the limitations of her mother and thus prefers not to tell her anything.

Since at home she would not be understood, she appreciated having other women around her to get support from. Jones' intention of uniting women is noticeable in many passages of the memoir. For instance, when she was having trouble with her writing or professional troubles, she would turn to a friend called Ruth or to other women to help her. Ruth and Hettie agreed that writing for children "was important work – and unregarded," and following Ruth's encouragement, she did that (25).

At work, she became responsible for hiring for the magazine in 1957. She hired, then, a shipping manager called Leroi Jones, who would become her lover and husband in the times of the Beats. Cohen describes him as patient, good-humored and intelligent. In the second part of her memoir, she is the one who invites him over to her house under the pretense of sharing a watermelon. What we see here is a confident Hettie who takes the first steps in a relationship by inviting the man she wants to know more over her house and life, instead of waiting for a savior. Nowadays this is taken as common, but for 1957 she was quite courageous. Although sometimes she felt weird and different compared to others – as we can perceive when she describes Leroi Jones as "a man who knew I was weird, whose own hopes I respected, and in whose arms I wanted to be" – nevertheless, she was very intense and assertive for a woman living in those times (32).

Over and over again, we notice her struggle to really find and create herself, as in a conversation with Leroi Jones: “I was looking for you’ I admitted before I could stop myself, and then, embarrassed, looked down at the sidewalk. You were never supposed to say that to a man, least of all one you were falling in love with, but I was so glad to see him I couldn’t pretend” (32). Therefore, she did not play by the rules and chose otherwise to follow her desires going for what she wanted even if with a certain feeling of embarrassment.

Another situation of restriction presented in the memoir is the fact she wanted to sing, to be “a cantor, a *chazen*” and she even had learnt Hebrew to get to that, but girls were not allowed be a cantor until 1987 (35), and as in some other situations such as this, she had to accept restrictions.

When Hettie Cohen met Leroi Jones’ parents, she noticed on their dining room shelves another important difference of values between his father’s and mother’s deeds, as read below:

[...] he was a postman who was also a champion bowler – on the dining-room wall were shelves of trophies – and she was a social worker who’d been a runner (her own medals undisplayed, although she’d once been the second fastest woman in the world) (Jones, 1990, 40).

As a writer, many years after that visit, she would write this “simple” observation on the act of who displays what, based merely on their sex. But even if Mrs. Jones’ deeds were hidden, Hettie considered her a strong woman and admired her for being who she was even if the family did not acknowledge it. She would even recognize herself in her future mother-in-law:

[...] I would tell her, when I knew her better, that I also liked to stand, like she did, with my hands in my pockets. My own mother had cautioned me against it – you’ll stretch out your clothes, she’d said – but that was the stance, I thought, of a woman who stood her ground, a woman who’d take a stand (Jones, 1990, 40).

In addition to the notion of union and understanding among women, the narrator shows admiration for a woman’s firm position. The “hands in the pockets” also gives the idea of tranquility in spite of the

different situations and oppression they may be dealing with in their lives – the lack of consideration at home, for instance.

In another interesting passage, paradoxically, we see Hettie erasing her past and her desires in order to support the beloved husband, saying “[...] I, like few other women at the time, would first lose my past to share his, and then, with that eventually lost too, would become the person who speaks to you now” (65). Here, we may notice strength after the second loss, the loss of a man who would come first; however, with him away, she could become first in her own life. She was gradually growing conscious of her own power to take control of who she was. According to Grace and Johnson (2004, 155), Jones’ writing is didactic and involves social claims because of Jones’ approach to the civil rights and women’s movement, and those are frequent as we will see in the next section.

3 Meeting the Beats

In a coffeehouse called Jazz on the Wagon, a “small provocative literary group” would meet every now and then, and it was there Hettie Jones met the group called the “Beats.” Sometime later, Jack Kerouac and John Clellon Holmes came up with the name “Beat generation,” explained later by Holmes as “pushed up against the wall of oneself” (Jones, 45). The Beat women were there too, getting freed from the “fragile nylon stockings,” wearing instead the “dirt-defying, indestructible tights (...) made only for dancers then and only in black” which seemed to make them stronger in every sense (46). For Hettie, they looked fine and she felt good with them, but it seemed that with her own writing she was not on good terms.

At this period she was trying to write more, but she was ashamed of what she wrote, as read in the memoir passage below:

Beside my desk at *Partisan* I kept a big green metal waste can, where most of my lunchtime attempts to write got filed. I was too ashamed to show them. I didn’t like my tone of voice, the twist of my tongue. At open readings, where anyone could stand up, I remained in the cheering audience. Roi was so much better; everyone else was so much better (Jones, 1990, 48).

We see Jones comparing her work to Leroi Jones' writing and others', and we may wonder about her not having any woman writer to compare to or identify with, or yet, of not getting motivation to go on writing since the men would cheer up their own works and publish what they found more appealing to their reality. Since the position of a woman was not for men's understanding and appreciation at the time, it was kept out of the circle, and women writers, such as Jones, felt this exclusion.

Cunningham (2011) says that women Beat writers were critical of the fact they did not have time and equal opportunity to publish as compared to the men writers and artists. However, Hettie insisted on her own ideas and feelings no matter how big the impact of the Beat men's life style had had on her; her life, she knew, was something else attached to other responsibilities and desires. For instance, when she reads *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac, she says:

I've just finished reading the new, hot book *On the Road*. I love Jack Kerouac's footloose heroes, who've been upset complacent America simply by driving through it! I don't know whether Roi and I are among "the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved," but I know I don't want to go on the road right now, not while New York is the best place in the world (Jones, 1990, 42).

Despite the hit of the moment and the admiration for the Beat attitudes, she stood her ground and analyzed her context, trying to stick to her opinion and not simply complying with what others said was best. She seemed not to go for "mad ones," "mad to live," "mad to talk;" she simply had to be whatever she was, to cope with her times although at times it became difficult and she did not feel independent at all. Therefore, she would question her own education at Mary Washington College, thinking that perhaps it was an "illusion of independence from the men who called the shot" (44). This happened because she met men who would usually tell their stories and their views of the cultural and political situation, believing that she should know all this – but she questioned then about her own cultural and political position: "where was [her] life in all these pages? [She] felt, as always, that [she] had no precedent" (44).

However, she opened up to this movement. To the Beats' meetings, Hettie and Leroi would open their house, transforming it into a place for the bohemian life and poetry; the poems, according to her, were their lives, even though she would not publish hers. For her, not only poems were her life; she had a house, a family, children to care for and restrictions to cope with (or to break through), but it was certainly much more than that.

She felt satisfied when a minor change presented itself before her eyes, as for instance when she noticed, to her surprise, that Max Finstein was the only man she had ever seen ironing his own shirts. In her writing, she emphasizes this in order to mark a change in the activity for so long regarded as women's responsibility (73). Women, then, were bohemians and writers, but also supporters of the men artists around them, mothers, devoted wives, housekeepers, and workers too, although not many gave them credit for all this.

Later, though, Jones records these encounters with the Beats and the differences she noticed among them; even though she was not a cook herself, she had to cope with cooking since the men did not step on kitchen grounds:

With all those mouths to feed I get lots of instruction. The mysterious kitchen has been more or less revealed. I own a seasoned iron pot and a wooden salad bowl I rub with garlic, and I've mastered the rudiments, mostly of other people's ethnic dishes – though I've yet to shape a matzoh ball, I can make gumbo with okra and also spaghetti for a hundred [...] Spoon in hand I glance at my husband the host, who doesn't cook (Jones, 1990, 75-76).

In the passage above we see a woman who takes great responsibility in the background of the scene in order to let the artists be, create or have fun, while she works for them and unfairly, for many times she feels excluded from the scene and the opportunities regarding writing, let alone get valued for her writing.

By seeing the men act in this manner toward her, she began valuing the women artists around, perhaps more than the men. Hettie dedicates many of her words to Joyce Johnson and seems to identify with her as we read below:

I liked Joyce because like me she took her independence for granted. Both of us were paying the rent. Neither of us had ever considered wanting a man to support us. And having sex hadn't made us *bad*. [...] She thought I was lucky to be with Roy. But she was writing – a novel, already under a contract – and that was her good fortune I thought.” [...] “We lived outside, as if. As if we were men? As if we were newer, freer versions of ourselves? There have always been women like us. Poverty, and self-support, is enough dominion (Jones, 1990, 81).

Mlakar (2007, 94), on this issue, states that “They shared what was most important to them as young independent women: Common assumptions about their uncommon lives.” By being poor, and without the men’s support, they felt brave enough to take control of their lives and they were confident in themselves – but they were only just beginning to find their peers.

Love (2001, 11), as mentioned in the introduction of this study, corroborates the idea of bitterness in the writing of Jones when she writes that “Jones offers a slightly bitter view of the assumed and encouraged silence on the part of women,” and later on, Jones seems to write to encourage what she sees is lacking in women: the will to speak out – the will to change.

When her name appears on a poem, she is thankful to Leroi for arranging the publication, though she seems hurt by having her first name hidden from the authorship.

He gave me a new name that year – H. Cohen-Jones – and surprised me with it on the last *Yugen* masthead. I liked it – it was funny to have the least aristocratic hyphenated name in America, although the up-front initial, H, somehow left out the woman whose mouth I was trying to open... (Jones, 1990, 168).

According to Cunningham (2011), as discussed, this is another sort of silence, for when Jones finally got published, her first name was left out and, consequently, the woman’s identity behind it was erased and her female voice diminished (10).

Mlakar (2007, 87) states that “Hettie Cohen is only fully Hettie Jones after writing her autobiography” and that it “does not happen by simply marrying Leroi, but it is rather a question of resolving authorship and marriage [...]” She also avows that by giving back her single name after their separation, Leroi may have wanted to return Hettie’s identity to her, since he believed she may have lost it when she married him (87). But precisely in opposition to that, she seemed to be actually finding and creating her new self departing from the years of marriage, so she did not want to go back to Cohen. According to Mlakar (2007), “Cohen transforms into Jones due to the numerous Beat artists, writers, musicians who are her friends, due to the Greenwich Village Beat scene she is part of, and due to the interracial family that strengthens her self” (87). Therefore, marrying Leroi Jones may have been part of her beginning to change. Meeting the Beats, men and women, did have a great impact on Jones’ life, but being the bread winner of the house, a mother, and a supporter of other artists also helped her to grow.

4 Married life and motherhood

She was different – she had an interracial marriage when it was prohibited³, confronting laws, and she had never thought about being a mother. When she learned she was pregnant, she did not feel prepared to embrace it; going against the belief that all women dream of being mothers, she did not. When she decided to accept it, Roi (as she called him) blamed her and only her:

I’d given no thought at all to having a child, never dreamed of babies – I wasn’t yet done bringing up myself. There was no way in the world I could have this baby. That it would be an “interracial” child was only secondary, though this surely was there too. Roi seemed hurt and angry when we talked. Although he never clearly said so, I was sure he thought it was only *his* kid I didn’t want, and that ultimately I wasn’t the “wife” of his poems. But the decision as well as the fault, I felt, was mine (Jones, 1990, 52).

³ According to the article “Anti-Miscegenation Laws in the U.S.” by James R. Browning Jr (1951) in the 1950s there were twenty-nine states that prohibited and criminalized interracial marriage in the United States. In the 1960s and 70s, some states began repelling the law.

In Roi's mind the right to be hurt and to be angry seemed to be his while she was to be held responsible for the pregnancy alone, a double-standard that persists until today, with the men abandoning the women in many cases. In Jones' case, Roi did abandon her for periods of times, leaving her solely responsible for the children, the house and the bills.

Jones did not mind house work, according to her own words in *How I became Hettie Jones*, but she just did not see how she could "do a damn thing with it." After taking care of the husband's mess, children and house cleaning she would certainly lack inspiration to write and feel tired. Thus, she avows:

Took myself and children over to Jersey, to and fro on the bus, the fro trip complicated by Lisa throwing up all over... Got them to bed by 9:30, cleaned up mess made by Roi alone in the house all day, made twelve bucks [three hours] checking a Random House book by old *Partisan Review*... And now, having come up from under the vomit and *Education for Modern Man*, in from the chilly kitchen to this warm papery room, I feel good... But where to go, after all that? Certainly not to writing that makes any further demands on feeling, which requires strength as well as time (Jones, 1990, 182).

Incredibly conscious of the time she had to spend providing for the house/family needs, she ends up only recording the events of the day into a diary, feeling that she could not go further.

Her life had certainly changed. She was changing, in and out – Hettie Cohen traded for Hettie Jones, single to married, daughter to wife, a girl to a mother – all consciously followed by her own sense of criticism. The only thing she remembered later was the promise to remain cheerful (62). Grace and Johnson (2004) brilliantly approach the discussion of Jones' changing from domestic issues to the outer world, as a response to her restrictions detailed in many passages of *How I Became Hettie Jones* as read below:

This narrative insistently entwines discourses of the domestic and the hipster, the home and the scene, the interracial bohemian community and

the larger civil rights movement, into a metadiscursive account of the protagonist's growth into the hipster subject Hettie Jones, a self-configured as woman (the single Hettie Cohen) and as hipster (Cohen married to Jones). This outcome brings the domestic into Beat movement writing; it shows the domestic to be Beat per se. Reterritorializing the women Beats' memoirs as Beat literature recognizes that Beat writing is not merely anti domestic, which much of it is, but that paradoxically it is also focused on and indebted to domestic or everyday arrangements. The women's memoirs justify the conclusion that Beat literature can derive from the domestic, not merely oppose it, which permits a far more nuanced description of Beat generation culture and writing (Johnson; Grace, 2004, 36).

She became Hettie Jones as a consequence of those experiences. The difficulties made her stand for strategic positions toward change and awareness. Her parents were not supportive of the marriage and the pregnancy, the Jew community did not approve of them either, and even Leroi Jones did not like the idea at first,

[...] he also wrote that I was pregnant with *my* child, which hurt. I didn't understand that most men have such feelings, while their women alone know what's swinging between the suspenders (Jones, 1990, 85).

In this passage, Jones openly criticizes the way men place the responsibility of a pregnancy on the woman, leaving her to deal with it alone, as if they, the men, did not take any part in the act.

Despite all this, Hettie Jones kept the firm decision of having the baby and keeping the surname Jones. Once, her father demanded that she have an abortion in Mexico and get a divorce; however, she knew what she wanted and, in spite of rules or other impositions, she went after what she felt was right. She was living her life first of all: "although I always know it's there, I don't *think* about the baby much, most of the time I'm just living my life with it in me" (73). Thinking about past and present, she observed that in a way, women became ready to bear children through practices along their lives; she used to

think about those moments and wonder why the female body was a mystery, even to the women themselves.

...diaphragmatic breathing ... I remembered the day I'd learned the breathing, the sunny room, the hardwood floor, the classful of women taught by a woman, who had simply called it 'a relaxation technique.' Never hinted at - *why?* – was this possibility for its future use...It seemed as if the very life of our bodies was hidden. *By whom?* (Jones, 1990, 83).

And,

Everyone is talking about me,' he said. 'And my wife' he added, which I was sure he'd only said to temper me. I knew he'd been at the Cedar, where I couldn't be then, not while I was fat and tired and had to be home in bed. I suddenly saw how his life would be so different from mine from now on, and in an agony of regret I moved away from him, and turned my face to the wall. He got up and went to the typewriter (Jones, 1990, 86).

Having to discover her own body and her own self alone, she seemed critical of the fact she had to cope with mothering all alone with no help from him. For him life had not changed, but she was then realizing how it had and it would, from now on, impact hers. While he went to the typewriter, she had to withstand the tiredness, sadness of being alone and conform to the pain away from writing, a situation which discouraged her to believe in her writing and even want to write. Even decades later, she would believe in the power of other Beat writers as representational of the Beat Generation movement and, according to Mlakar (2007, 92), "the power of these artists' words seem[ed] to her greater than her own." More than once we read her noticing the freedom of her husband regarding housework, which in turn imprisoned her:

If he came home after work, he'd invariably go out again...Roi was free of the slough of domesticity...So I wasn't surprised to learn that he and Diane Di Prima were lovers... You were supposed to hold your man and I hadn't. It took

me a while to gather my wits, to think about *me*.
Me! Me! Me! (Jones, 1990, 98).

Because of this freedom he even had time to get a lover. Although Jones apparently blamed herself for that, for not *holding* her man, as common sense and patriarchal belief dictate, when she admitted that she gathered her wits and began thinking about her, she demonstrated the balance to realize what was important for her – not placing him in the center as she had always done. The repetition of the word “me” implies anger or exhaustion of being put second all the time. She avows that:

The *job* of being Mom – the involvement, time, goo, stuff – was astonishing... the baby crying down the hall. ‘Shouldn’t you wake her,’ a male voice questioned. Would I wake at all? Would I ever fail? Then Rena said, in her quiet, throaty, confident tones: ‘Oh, she’ll wake up herself, she’ll hear the baby (Jones, 1990, 93).

In regards to this passage, Mlakar (2007) states that “Rena was an extremely important influence on Hettie Jones, because she was self-confident, and becoming an artist’s wife had not stopped her own career” (93). Jones seemed to be afraid of losing references of what independence might look like while busy being a mother, thus, she kept women artist and writers close, such as Rena and Johnson.

When she compared her situation with that of the men, she normally would get frustrated, understanding her life was not simple, clear and sweet as that of the men around, as for example in the passages below:

[...] at home I nursed her openly, in the park you had to use the neglected, filthy public toilet. I didn’t know whether to turn around or keep going. In a fit of quandariness, I stopped. Kellie, deprived of motion, screamed. My nipples itched and tingled. I would have screamed too [...] (Jones, 1990, 95).

And,

'Hey baby, we're in the outhouse,' ... at which point I burst into tears, a flood I couldn't stop that wet her soft black curls as I rocked us both back and forth, back and forth, trying not to be overheard. Because mothering her I'd neglected the self to whom I'd always been just as kind... And nothing in my life was as clear and sweet and simple as Fee, with a beer in his hand [...] (Jones, 1990, 96).

Jones was no longer feeling kind, perhaps because the mothering experience had been too tough on her, without the help of the father. She did not feel free anymore. Once again, she valued the freedom she saw in men's lives and bitterly talks about it. Mothering went along with working and taking care of husband and house and she felt, to worsen her situation, the prejudice against mothers when trying to get a job while nursing.

Once a week I stand in the unemployment line, hoping my breasts won't leak and give me away (nursing mothers are not considered 'available')... All at once the isolation nearly sends me to my knees... I grabbed the baby and started for Washington Square, where I knew a few mothers to talk to (Jones, 1990, 94).

As a common feature of Jones' writing, we notice that when she needs support in the middle of difficult situations, she turns to a woman for help. In this case, she went after "Washington Square, where [she] knew a few mothers to talk to" and by identifying and sharing views and advice she could get back on her feet and continue fighting to pull her life together after the baby. The fact that mothers would be pushed to the margins becomes a topic for Jones in later writings, when she acknowledges that Leroi's needs would come before her own; when both were unemployed she would be the one to take action and get a job first to guarantee freedom to the writer: "...I'd rather work...to one of us a job is a slave, to the other is a guarantee of freedom..." (123).

After being also uncared for by her husband in terms of sexual life, she went again for her own experiences, and there she felt herself again:

[...] sex was easy to come by. First I tried it straight. I sat down next to a curly-haired painter I liked. We said hello. After that he said, 'I'd like to take you home' I said, 'Sure.' ...we left and hit the sack. It was terrific. 'You won't tell your husband?' he said, hailing me a cab home later... Lover or wife my skills didn't change [...] (Jones, 1990, 102).

She did not play the victim or feel guilty for living and having sex – something that used to be a male prerogative. Even in the 1950s, she was courageous to stand up for what she wanted despite any kind of discrimination she could have faced. Furthermore, she made use of her skills as a woman to have pleasure the way she wished, for rather than seeing herself as a betrayed wife and a mother, she felt as a woman. Love (2001) mentions that Hettie Jones “indicates that women as well as men found some satisfaction in the sexual relationships... [however,] the relationships continued to subordinate the women as writers and individuals. The artist's long-suffering but devoted girlfriend became a stereotype of the time” (10), and Hettie was included in this stereotype for a period of time.

When Leroi discovered about Hettie's lover, he became “enraged and *offended*,” calling her a “Whore! Bitch! Dumb! Woman!” And when the opposite took place, even before Hettie's lover appeared in the story, we see Hettie's reaction to Leroi's lover quite the opposite, since she did not make a fuss, asked him to leave home or the lover. She did not seem enraged by it, but he seemed to believe he had more of a right to feel cheated than she did; and so he went for her:

'Go ahead, hit me, go ahead,' I dared, not thinking he would. But to my surprise (and his own) he did, and his slap forced my head against the wall... he grabbed me and we 'stood holding each other for about thirty minutes'... Look at us there, two twenty-five-year-old kids with a kid, in the middle of a lot of commotion (Jones, 1990, 104).

Her identity seemed to be shaped back then through Leroi's deeds (or being), and she registers the events in the memoir as a criticism on her lack of independence. Once she mentions her mother and her aunt visiting them and remarks that only after Leroi appeared “suited and necktied, (...) there was any kind of emotional resolution, as though only

now could they see me – through him. It hadn't only to do with the way he looked, but what he did" (125), and this is apparently written with resentment, since she felt she was in his shadow.

While married to Roi, some women friends made Hettie feel important for whom she was. During the years of marriage, Hettie made friends with Helene, and in her book, she makes remarkable comments on the way she saw the friendship and Helene's ways of living, but she was also critical of the boundaries in the lives of women around her; for instance, she says that "Helene wanted to paint, but in the forties lucky girls married early" (129), thus reproducing a traditional thought of patriarchy. The touch of irony here is noticeable if we take into consideration that Hettie herself valued work since an early age and as a teenager did not think of marrying.

She seems proud of "having made acquaintance *through work* rather than simply *as wife*"⁴ (129). She seems to be thankful to Helene for giving up the sewing machine and beginning writing, as we read in: "...I owe it to Dear Helene, my fellow tailor (and eventual sculptor), that I ever left the Singer and took up the pen" (131). Therefore, we see, over and over, other women motivating Jones to write and to be freer. And in her memoir we notice clearly the concerns of the limited position of women as wives and mothers, having their professional skills and intelligence usually overlooked. According to Mlakar (2007), Hettie Jones knew that "being a working mother in the 1960s was rather unusual" (89).

On her second pregnancy, Hettie Jones got upset: "I was angry most of the time... larger but feeling as if I were shrinking" (137). She apparently felt the repression of society, perhaps over her ways of living, working, being a mother, marrying interracially, etc. And by this time, Roi, with all the freedom men are allowed, was with a new girl: "she was smiling at him, the way everyone did; he had nothing but admiration and love from all sides. But all he ever had for me was a frown: I'd cheated him again... I didn't have to watch him perform" (137). Seeing him with another woman, while she was pregnant of him, was enormous disrespect for her. On the other hand, there are other passages where she compares him to a child she also has to take care of:

Like the kids, he was a bundle of jumpy good humor, demanding instant gratification. Yesterday evening, while I was bathing Kellie, he'd come

⁴ Italics in the original.

dashing into the bathroom with a poem. ‘Look at this! Read this!’ he cried. I dried my hands and grabbed it – why not? (Jones, 1990, 147).

This passage demonstrates how, as Mlakar (2007) remarked, Jones let go of her own poetical ambition in order to support “Roi’s career and the well being of their two daughters,” getting “more and more frustrated with her role as a mere housewife” (95). She played the role of a tutor, or at least of the mature person who would have to approve or not the achievements of her husband.

However, during the narrative we perceive softness in words and joy when the writer talks about her husband, showing no hard feelings toward him. Mlakar (2007) says that “in her portrayal of her husband, she is extremely reserved, seemingly not wanting to hurt him in retrospect. In her account, Leroi is presented as an extremely successful poet...” (97).

Although the Beat women wanted to be writers and artists, lots of them, such as Hettie Jones, according to Schlievert (2011), “were generally considered unable to produce this art, and were relegated to the periphery. They were also associated with the domestic sphere.” In spite of having acquired some independence, women remained strongly connected to house care, motherhood and marriage, which propelled them to rebel against patriarchal culture (1095).

This peripheral placement regarded, especially, intellectual activities, what for Hettie Jones was one of the things she outwardly most despised in society. She wanted, since before marriage, to be regarded and considered for her intellectual deeds. One of the passages that serve as evidence of this resentment is about their TV interview, where she feels like “an embarrassed actress with no lines,” as we read in the example below:

Roi and I were positioned one day for an interview with BBC-TV. Once begun, the questioning proceeded without a break; I wasn’t asked a word. Inside and out, people collected to watch my husband speak his mind while I sat mute, an embarrassed actress with no lines. This had never happened before. Was it the babe on my lap? Were mothers automatically overlooked? (Jones, 1990, 97).

Facing this treatment over and over again, silencing, having to cope with injustice toward their own lives and skills, many women lost courage and their self-esteem went to a rapid downfall. To those who, somehow, got strength to overcome this suppression and continued believing they had something intelligent to say and could contribute a lot, they would, according to Schlievert (2011), “write when time allowed – during lunch breaks at work, at kitchen tables in the evening after children had been put to bed... and many generally lacked the support and self-confidence to establish themselves as artists on the same playing field as men” (1096). Schlievert also states that “the (men) Beats had expectations of women, but writing was not one of them” (1096), what for Hettie was something to overcome, since she had much to say. On this same topic, Partoens (2014, 5) emphasizes that “by and large, it is fair to say that the voice of the female Beat has been censored by publishers, historians, scholars and indeed the male Beat, perhaps to serve the larger goal of phallogocentrism”.

5 Back to Independence

After their separation Hettie began finding more time for herself, according to her own words. She began scavenging for influences in books and she could only find men, because they were basically the only ones who got published. However, she avows that “the books [she] worked on were all by men or about them, with women seen from their viewpoint. But the groups of women [she] knew – in classes, clinics, at the park – were not as men described them” (193). Noticing the gap, she began inventing and reinventing herself based on the new experiences of Bohemian life to avoid those other experiences described by men which somehow oppressed her life.

Jones summoned her strength after seeing Roi with a girl and, drenched in tears, screamed he was the one responsible for her unhappiness, not wanting to accept or being mute anymore standing by old patriarchal rules of subordination. And she declares: “I note something I’d never imagined, a hierarchy of light: women work in the dark heart of Time, while men have windows onto the weather” (205). Feeling disempowered at home and at work, she states:

[...] he was making me unhappy and ought to check himself out, because having all these women was *thingamatz*ing him, couldn’t he see? A day later, unburdened, I felt better. But he’d

decided to move out. He told me in the kitchen, after I came home from work. It was all arranged... 'So you won't be unhappy,' he said. I was amazed, devastated. In the middle of cooking (Jones, 1990, 138).

However sorry she was for the situation, she seemed to cope with all the domestic duties imposed on her solely as when we read Hettie dealing with a commotion and hard feelings and the cooking at the same time. She resented his freedom and her imprisonment in domestic life. However, she progressively becomes more aware and critical about the situation. If she was responsible for the cooking, in her life she was beginning to change the ingredients.

One of the events she describes illustrates well the lack of support women faced. As she is carrying the new baby and minding her cart of clothes, a woman comes to help:

"...suddenly – [the] hands of an elderly woman appear... She is dismissing my thanks [...] there's something bitter on her mind. 'The men, they don't know about this,' she says. 'They don't know and they don't care to know, them with their lives, their damned lives.' And then she's gone" (Jones, 1990, 146).

This illustrates the feeling of a shared suffering. It gives the idea of repetition since this bitter voice comes from an elderly woman who has lived longer and perhaps demonstrates more authority in the matter.

When she writes that "Life as wife and mother was fine because of other pleasures – the unemployment insurance in my pocket, the promise, from friends in publishing, of free-lance editorial work" (148), we perceive a hopeful tone, as if mothering and being a wife is tolerable because she has these other ways to feel complete. For Jones, "the process of writing became a transformative experience: a journey for self-reflection, self-growth, and self-definition" (Schlievert, 2011, 1097)

Self-definition and the finding or creating of an identity go hand-in-hand, and this is implicitly revealed in Jones' work. For instance, she seems understanding toward a woman called Elsene, a neighbor who left the husband Gil apparently for not finding her own identity:

Elsene stayed home with her daughter and son. She never spoke of ambitions. Was she lonely? Was she doing what she'd expected to do? Was it difficult, living in that cramped place, quieting two little kids so Gil could write? (Jones, 1990, 152).

However, in her memoir, when Gil asks Hettie about why Elsene had left home, Hettie writes that her “sympathies lay with the closest victim.” In spite of rubbing his shoulder and telling him she did not know why Elsene had left, her previous words demonstrate that she understands the subservient position the woman was inserted in, and, in fact, she had the answer to why Elsene had left home. Perhaps with irony she describes the way a woman pushes herself to oblivion in order to favor the man – erasing her own identity and neglecting her desires. This story is somewhat close to her own, since Hettie, too, had restrained herself professionally to favor the man and the children for some time.

The finding of an identity is evident in both Jones’ memoir and in her interviews to Schlievert (2011) between 2002 and 2006. Furthermore, Schlievert affirms that Jones’ divorce, which takes place at the end of the memoir, did not represent an end but rather a new beginning, “a renewal that makes room for the emergence of Jones’ artistic self, free to operate of her own choice” (1100). Thus, it may be said that her process of *becoming* the writer Hettie Jones involved putting an end to the devotion to her husband and focusing on herself and her future deeds.

In regards to this devotion to the men in her life, Jones affirms: “Both these men, Cohen and Jones, first loved me for myself, and then discarded me when that self no longer fit their daughter/wife image. If I hadn’t been myself all along I might have been left next to nothing” (216). In this passage we see how common it was for men to abandon women when they no longer needed them. Women had, then, to be confident in themselves, and to count on each other to share feelings and fears in order to grow.

After the separation, she began counting on herself more than ever and tried “to stick to what [she] expected of this new, third, self, Mrs. Hettie Jones” (232). Besides being bureaucratic and expensive to change back to Cohen, she did not recognize that Hettie Cohen anymore and, since her daughters’ surnames were Jones too, she kept her name and assumed this third, new identity: “[...] suddenly hearing it, a veil

lifts, I realize I've married...*myself!*" (232). She became, after all, Hettie Jones forever, understanding who she was from now on.

Cunningham refers to these passages of Jones' memoir to emphasize how much Jones had to give up in her life in order to strive for recognition, how much the feeling of exclusion and desire for freedom was at scale, and the impressive way in which she addresses all women by the use of a third person to show these feelings: "Without a *him* in the house, there was more space/time for *her*, and I tried to redefine a way a woman may use it" (Jones 233-34), or "Whereas I, like few other women at that time, would first lose my past to share his, with that eventually lost too, would become the person who speaks to you now" (Jones 65, qtd. in Cunningham 2011, 21-22).

She felt freedom closer since now she began facing the art world all by herself, avowing that "without Roi, [hers] seemed less than ever the male-dominated art world" (234). But, with resentment, she mentions that still,

([she] never foresaw how this move would erase [her]. In the 1983 *Dictionary of Literary Biography* volume on the Beats, Hettie Jones, the author by then of a dozen books for children, would appear once again as his [Leroi Jones'] white wife, Hettie Cohen) (Jones, 1990, 234).

However, after divorcing, she entered the literary world for good, exalting the lives of women, shared feelings, dealing with issues of gender and race in her prose and poems, encouraging other to step on to their freedom, putting themselves and their careers first. "At once I was dead sure I'd never marry again. [...] Great joy in the morning! I was thirty-five years old and no longer needed what women were taught to live for!" (236). And she seemed happier than ever saying that "[she] also [didn't] regret [her] independence" (238).

Jones mentions many Beat women names in her memoir and, in regards to that, Mlakar (2007, 95) says that this "makes the presence of women visible. In a more common Beat accounts, these names remain unrecognized." On this thought, Schlievert exalts that "many of the writers that Jones cites as influences acknowledged their writing as a celebration of independent creativity and non-conforming, and as a way to incite social change. Acknowledging art as an agent of change" (1097). Jones seems to be promoting and hoping for changes in the visibility of women writers and therefore changes in the women's roles

within society. By the way, “wasn’t art about change...?” (Jones, 1990, 29).

CHAPTER II

FEMINIST CONCERNS IN HETTIE JONES' POEMS

As discussed in the introduction of this study, by feminist counterculture in literature we understand the claims for social and political justice for women, such as the ones we find in the three books of Jones' poems selected for this analysis. Especially in *Drive* (1998), we find evidence of distress with injustice against women and their imposed subordinate position in society.

As for the analytical process, we endorse the view that "our understanding of any poem's theme depends on our experience – both our literary experience and our experience in living" (Diyanni, 1987, 18). Therefore, our analysis may involve different perspectives, always trying to bring meaning to the poem and beyond it, by problematizing the issues and their relevance to life.

The book *Drive* has 104 pages and is divided into four parts entitled: "The Woman in the Green Car," "Welcome to our Crowd," "The Semipermanent Gate List" and "Having Been Her." Published in 1998, it brings analogies between driving a car and women having control of their lives, or yet, the freedom women have been conquering from the mid of the 20th century up to now. Most of the poems in this book were written either for women or about women, taking into consideration backgrounds, ethnicity, social class, age, appearance, manners and so on. That is to say, the poems talk about rules in patriarchy which are imposed on women whether they like it or not; however, Jones gives the rules a twist, empowering women characters and giving them voice.

On page 22 of *Drive*, we come across the poem "Ruby My Dear," in which the persona observes a woman in control of her freedom and the joy of having it, directing the reader to the understanding of the narrow paths of women's destiny and ways to change it, as we read below:

Ruby My Dear

The woman in the red car has a hand
on the wheel and a hand in the air

She's keeping time to the music
of her future

she wants to know it
 she wants nothing to do with it
 maybe she'll drive fast enough
 to pass it, right pass

the narrow walls of her destiny,
 knocking them flat with one blow
 and driving over them clear into
 paradise

the woman in the red car
 is thinking of living forever
 while thinking of not thinking of it

her hand's on the wheel, her hand's
 in the air
 (JONES, 1998, 22)

The voice conveyed implies that freedom is there for women to take it – it motivates women to take control of their wheels (or cars, metaphorically lives). The woman described is driving and feeling the air on her hand in the first two lines, i.e., she seems to be living a moment of peace and liberty. It is optimistic to think about the future of this woman even though she does not give the impression of concerns about it, as we read in the second stanza. She is depicted as the woman who knows her ways, who feels good, listens to music and lives the moment; she wishes to live fast as if trying to recover what was lost in time. She would even drive past the future in order to live this moment of freedom. The image of her driving in this way is powerful and can even knock “the narrow walls of her destiny” flat, destroy the narrow future, destroy the narrow possibilities for her and just then, by leaving this obstacle behind, she would get to her paradise, as the persona mentions in the third stanza. This paradise, then, means getting rid of woman's destiny (a destiny of restriction). She wants the freedom she is feeling at the moment she is driving her ruby car. The color ruby also gives the idea of something intense attached to her emotions and perhaps the blood that runs in her veins, giving meaning to her life: a passion for freedom. In the fourth stanza, the persona describes the woman “...thinking of living forever while thinking of not thinking of it,” which reinforces the thought of living the moment and living in this way: free from the narrow walls that surround the woman's life. She wants to live forever because she feels hope in getting unchained from a

system that holds her back; challenging the system, she now drives a car, fast and free.

Furthermore, we can consider the car as a tool for freedom and control, although patriarchy has taught us that that is a tool for men, who have always had the chance to feel such emotions and good vibrations from driving wherever they wanted. In this poem, the “boy’s toy” gives pleasure and freedom to a woman. In patriarchal culture we see cars being desired by and designed for men, and since an early age this is the toy boys are directed to. Jones goes against this when she presents the car as dear to a woman – a tool this woman is in control of. “Ruby my Dear” offers the notion that not only men can have passion for cars, conflicting, thus, with patriarchal beliefs. When a child plays with a car, that playing may promote thoughts of freedom, adventure, etc; and toys such as dolls, designed for girls, may imprison women within notions of motherhood and the desires for a house, family and babies – in a larger picture, this division promotes the building of consciousness regarding gender. This poem shows evidence that proves patriarchal beliefs toward the passion and desire of men and women wrong.

Entering the next poem, which is untitled, we note that Jones brings attention to the freedom of women regarding sex. The poem conveys peace, pleasure and intense sexual desire for a woman. There is no clear evidence that the persona is also a woman, but if we consider she is, the poem could be about lesbian love. Poet and critic Adrienne Rich says that when a woman loves another woman they are resisting, since this “is not only [a] personal choice but political” – it is an “act of resistance” (Rich, 1986, 203). If we do not read it in this way and take into account heterosexual love, still, whoever makes the confession and seems to enjoy having sex with many people is a woman, breaking another patriarchal notion of women’s purity, chastity and faithfulness, in the tradition of romantic love. Rich (1986) also says that compulsory heterosexuality restrains women and undermines their existence, desires and feelings, preventing them from building their own identities as sexual beings. This untitled poem, quoted below, illustrates some of these issues.

my friend
in love
confesses

to a certain
languorous

feeling

after five hours fucking

with a giggle
she bends

who in twenty years
has never kissed
my lips

now she nestles
her head
on my shoulder
(Jones, 1998, 35)

The fact that the poem has no title invites us to consider the possibility of an ordinary everyday situation, something that happens over and over again or something that cannot be named since it is new to (or not accepted by) patriarchal standards of love. The persona, here, is talking to a lover and this lover is a woman who giggles, laughs and seems to act with no shame at all, conveying a liberation from traditional ideologies as seen in the line: “who in twenty years has never kissed my lips.” For patriarchal limitations this may sound wrong and shocking, but the poem brings exactly the nonstandard notion of love and intertwines it with happiness and laughter, i.e., it conveys a freer sexual life for a woman not commonly seen or well accepted in patriarchal society, but an experience that should be considered good and genuine, since the persona relates the images with comforting words such as “giggle,” “nestles” and “shoulder.” The form of the poem is not standard either; it moves back and forth on the page, giving the idea of the repetition of movements in an intercourse, or simply of a freer way of writing and living: sometimes there, sometimes here, but never fixed.

This love poem seems to have been written to remember and give visibility to the love of women and the freedom they should have. According to Rich, there is in patriarchal society “the denial of reality and visibility to women’s passion for women, women’s choice of women as allies, life companions, and community” (Rich, 221), and this poem seems to be raising a voice against denial. The author also says that “the lesbian, unless in disguise, faces discrimination in hiring and harassment and violence in the street” (Rich, 217), but Jones confronts

this idea, since the lovers are laughing and seem unconcerned with any discrimination they might face but simply enjoying life and sex.

Another concern that Jones brings in her book is the position of women in the professional environment as seen in the next poem: "Homage to Frank O'Hara's Personal Poem." In this poem someone, or perhaps the poet herself, is thinking about the woman at work, and perhaps concerned with her subordinate position. The title brings the name of the writer and personal friend of Jones, Frank O'Hara. She wrote poems and texts herself, edited other poets' and writers' works, and published one of her texts anonymously, not showing her own identity as a writer; back then, male writers got all the attention, space in the news and money while women were not considered eligible or good writers. This next poem contemplates this issue.

Homage to Frank O'Hara's Personal Poem

Over and over the mind returns
to the bent shoulders of the young woman
who types, over and over, the poem

until it is perfectly placed
on the page, the name

of her husband, the name
of her lover
the guilty thrill
of juxtaposition as

each gives
to the poet
what he keeps
in his pocket

in her arms she holds them

over and over
(Jones, 1998, 73)

The tone of this poem is one of unfairness regarding women as productive and successful writers. This is a traditional thought within patriarchy. If a woman writes or rewrites the text, she is adding something of her to it. No writer creates a fictional world without adding something from their reality or adjusting the text to their own views of

the world, even in marginal writings, which is the case of women writers. There is a literary tradition that imposes itself on writers, even on those who create oppositional views (Funck, 1998, 12) and that tradition in regards to this poem is the erasure of the woman's identity, here not by a man, but by the woman writer herself. The persona writes the poem over and over and she is a woman who places her husband's and lover's name on the paper; but it seems that she, on one hand, accepts the erasure of the woman's name behind the production and on the other hand, knows she is holding them, the men poets who keep the credit but not the money; she knows she is strong, even when tradition tells she is not. What Jones is creating in this poem is exactly that: opposition to the culture regarding women and their deeds and beliefs behind the veils of patriarchy, showing the system through this poem that women can write and get paid for it.

This poem talks about sacrifice and erasure in the name of a *him*, placing the woman, at least socially, in a secondary position or in non-existence, as many of the Beat writers felt and declared in many interviews and books already known to the public: as minor characters.

The persona, in the first stanza, is thinking of the "bent shoulders of a young woman" which conveys the idea of tiring work, hours of typing that even the body begins giving away the posture. She is typing "over and over, the poem" which is again an evidence of tiring repetition and also an act of creation. On the fourth and fifth lines, the persona says "until it is perfectly placed / on the page, the name" and, "the name" is what may call our attention to the unfair and ironic situation presented here. The persona writes the poem; a sacrifice for love? Or the only possible social position for her?

The second stanza, with only two lines, is written separately in the poem to exalt the importance of the written name there: the persona tells her secret. And follows with a "guilty thrill" when all is done and perfect, perhaps because by considering her the real author of the poem, spreading the name of a man, sometimes the husband's, sometimes the lover's it was exciting for her and only the poet and the men involved knew of it. What else would she be guilty of? She knows how to do it, and she does it for them – the men, who get the fame and money. The persona says that each name "gives / to the poet/ what he keeps/ in his pocket," i.e., the money after all was hers, since the writing was also her perfectly done hard work.

Nonetheless, in the two last sentences, the persona ends the poem with the lines "in her arms she holds them," and, "over and over" helps them to get their fame and her money, however, perpetuating their

names for history. She is valuable for the whole process; for she does the invisible hard work, gets no citation, is undermined or else, does not believe in the strength of her own name, and thus, gets no social recognition. The persona may think she is tricking the readers but truly she seems to be tricking herself since she is not empowering her own name, thus, becoming invisible, in spite of the money she gets to write them all.

In patriarchy, as discussed in the introduction of this study, women get used to being less valued and some even eroticized themselves in order to attain some position or recognition at work, since this behavior is implicitly expected of women in this system. Because of the desires of men, women have to cope with a second place or being used as an object. According to Rich (1986), heterosexuality in the capitalist system means that women are objects to be consumed by men. Women “occupy a structurally inferior position in the workplace” (210). The persona may be speaking her mind in the poems she writes for the men, she may hold and possess them in her private views; nevertheless she seems to be denying her own identity as the author to posterity, in a way, reconciling and accepting the invisibility of women. If in fact she wrote for colleagues as Frank O’Hara, her husband, or others, this poem, although in the voice of the persona, may be a claim for her identity as *the* poet behind the scene, and the homage may be considered an irony after all: a secret revealed.

The next poem talks about otherness and solidarity among women who know the hard paths of patriarchy and the impact it has on their lives.

Having Been Her

On the bus
from Newark to New York
the baby pukes
into the fox collar
of her only coat

She wipes the collar
and the baby’s soft face
then takes her toddler
by the hand
and heads for the subway

where the toddler

the unfair work with no rewards but apparently, since the focus seems to be this, because of the mothering and nurturing. That conveys the weight of mothering all alone, along with a lack of money. For so long this belief that mothering is natural for women made many think they are bad mothers and bad human beings, since they feel no pleasure in taking such a responsibility on their own; if it is something natural, how come some cannot stand it? How come it would be so hard on them? Is mothering really natural? Or is it taught and forced to be women's responsibility?

The poem heads toward the final lines exalting the feeling of solidarity among women, when the observer cries: "Let me always / support her / Having been her / befriend her." This reminds us that it is possible for women to be united, consequently, challenging a patriarchal belief such as the depiction of women as enemies in life, battling for better children, better jobs and better husbands, always perfect in order not to lose a great marriage or having to look like a perfect doll desired and envied by other women and, behaving like "enemies" and competitors. "Having Been Her," thus, brings women to think of joining hands and feeling for the problem of the "other" which in turn could also be theirs. Overall, the poem raises the idea of solidarity and suggests women have been treading the same roads – since we all have similar tales of injustice to tell.

Still in *Drive*, concerns with injustice towards women go beyond the United States and its culture, seeing that Hettie Jones deals with the plight of women of different religious and cultural backgrounds. The poem below talks about an Islamic mother and daughter who were killed by the men of their family because of what they were wearing – a 1995 crime from Black Sea province (Turkey).

Emine and Hamide

Ankara, Aug. 2, 1995. Emine Deniz, 40, and her daughter Hamide, 22, were slain in a Black Sea province on Monday by four members of their family for "dressing revealingly."

New York Times

I have this feeling you were beautiful,
Emine, I have this feeling you were
smart. I think you married the guy
with the power, not because he wanted you
most, but because you wanted the contest.

You pleased him at first, gave him a jewel
of a girl, Hamide. And later sons as he'd
expected.

Still he kept you out of his business, left
you mothering, had a few women.
And after the last time you wouldn't/
couldn't conceive he left you alone.

Then you became for him a stone face wrapped
in black cloth. And clothed your daughter
in your pride.

Emine, Hamide, what did you do to break out,
to explode into the universe on principle-
was it principal or an accident or
hysteria, did they find you stripped to swim
laughing and throwing water at each other

It took four members of your family to kill
the both of you. Shot you dead. Did they
stand you up against a wall, ambush you on
your way home? Was your husband/father among them?
What were you wearing, do you want
to tell me? It's been such a summer, was it
just so hot in the sun you pushed back
your headscarf? What was it your revealed?

This is to cover your graves: a blanket
of arrogant naked women, flowers
of every size and shape and shade.
(Jones, 1998, 98)

The poem starts by exalting the beauty of the two murdered women, which gives the poem a sympathetic and supportive tone toward mother and daughter. The persona imagines these two women as beautiful, in spite of not being able to see their faces behind the black cloth. "Dressing revealingly" could perhaps be taken as a glimpse of their cleverness or opposition to the Islamic beliefs in what concerned their freedom. Emine and Hamide, in attempting to challenge cultural and religious rules or something that imprisoned them, ended up shot dead by those with power and guns, their "owners" – the men. The persona wonders if Emine married the man not for the power he had

over her, but because she wanted the contest and the challenge herself. In this way, Emine would be challenging traditional structures that make them, Islamic women, have a hidden existence or no identity at all.

The second stanza highlights the fact that, although the first child was a beautiful girl, the husband favored the sons, agreeing with a patriarchal and archaic view that men have more value, a value they bestow on themselves in order to subjugate women. In a conversational tone, as if speaking directly to the dead woman, the third stanza goes on telling the story of what the persona imagines has happened: the sexist man relegated his wife to the condition of a second-class human being, an object, restricted to mothering while he went after other women. When she could no longer produce children for him, she was ignored, becoming “a stone face wrapped / in black cloth.” Once again, we read the description of women sacrificing themselves for men and being killed into silence and invisibility. This is the widely known part of the story.

In the next two stanzas, however, the poem becomes speculative. All that is known is that Emine and Hamide broke the dressing code. And the persona wonders about what they have done. Perhaps mother and daughter stripped themselves to play in the water, throwing water at each other, being happy and living their best; however, considering their country context and religion beliefs the scene was seen as an offense – since they were women and should have hidden their faces or hair, let alone other parts of the body. The persona seems to be wondering why Emine and Hamide would get to the point of ignoring the rules, would that have been hysteria? An accident? Or would that be only an act of going against cultural norms? A confrontation of patterns? In the 2004 interview to Grace and Johnson, Hettie Jones talks about a confrontation of patterns and the freedom she felt after doing it.

I love to mention-clothing! Young women today don't have any idea of the discomfort, and I always talk about this when I make speeches, that to take off your girdle was a radical move-first came the girdle and then came the bra-but to take off your girdle! Ah! To be able to think and walk and move without feeling blistered all the time. (Grace & Johnson, 2004, 160)

Whatever the answer may be, the next stanza focuses on the murder of the women by four members of their family, as if they were Gods and had the supremacy to take a life. The persona seems to be heartbroken wondering how their death might have taken place. Shot against a wall? Ambushed? Would father and husband have watched? She also wonders how they would have been dressed, if it was a hot summer day? Perhaps the “sin” for which they were punished was simply to have pushed back the headscarf. We, readers, wonder the same and perceive the injustice of the act against two women wishing to be freer. The “dressing revealingly” makes us also question what was so revealing to the point of causing their death. It is possible to think they were showing their hair in a hidden lake and that would be a reason to kill. Men do not have to worry about what they show or hide; if it is hot in the summer they are “allowed” (by patriarchal ideology, to say the least) to refresh themselves, but in this poem, once again, we see a picture where women are constrained and imprisoned by the rules of men.

In Western society this rule is not different since we read in the news every now and then women being killed and raped because of the way they dress or another trivial excuse, or yet, simply for being a woman as, for instance, the woman called Simoninha from Pato Branco, in Brazil, raped and killed in October 2016, or the case that took place in October 2016 in Mar del Plata of the 16-year-old Lúcia Pérez, who was raped by three men and killed after the abuse, being this crime considered one of the more brutal femicide ever recorded in Argentina, or yet, the extremely shocking case of the rape and murder of the 69-year-old Maria Conceição Pereira Cardoso from Natividade, Tocantins, Brazil that happened in November 2016; in all cases, a sense of impunity, injustice, incredulity and rage penetrate our times. We witness, desolately, that femicide exceeds any border line.

The last stanza of the poem offers a “blanket of arrogant naked women, flowers / of every size and shape and shade” to cover their bodies, in an unconcealed contrast to the black robes they had to wear while alive. The persona speaks directly to the dead, showing solidarity and understanding toward them, wishing them arrogance and beauty, since the black of their lives is gone forever.

All Told (2003) is the second poem collection analyzed in this chapter. Its 94 pages are divided into six sections entitled “In Dreams Begin Responsibilities,” “Shopping in Diversity,” “At the Miami Vice Rest Stop,” “The Real Brooklyn Dodgers Are From Queens,” “Global Warning” and “All Told,” that gives the book its title. In these poems

we may notice a claim for justice for all the diminished voices in society. The images are clear and they disclose routine, the exaltation of peace and nature, the unfairness in the marginal voices in the United States and abroad, religious beliefs, love, hope and, especially, women's problems within society. Jones deals in *All Told* with the disturbance within culture and politics with a sparkle of hope in some of the poems. In a simple and objective style, she shows the problems of a divided and cruel world, and pushes readers to reflect and seek alternate paths.

One of the poems that deal with cultural matter in regard to the restrictions in women's lives is called "Escape, Kabul." It talks about a woman, in first person, who is a doctor and has to flee from Kabul to avoid arrest for attending a luncheon, as we read below:

Escape, Kabul

*A doctor flees to avoid arrest
for attending a luncheon.*

I said darling, I said
dear. I said baby,
I said daughter
I am leaving

ask your father to tell you why

why we took photos
why we played music

ask your father
why I'm gone

I said darling I said
dear, I said baby,
I said daughter
there will be no life without you

I said baby there
will be no life, but
I have sworn to do no harm
and so I will not stay for death
(Jones, 2003, 83)

This poem casts the image of a woman from Kabul having to leave her family, more exactly, the daughter and country, in order to

live. The first stanza shows repetition in the act of calling the daughter's attention to the news the mother was about to give her. It conveys a feeling of a difficult moment, since the persona repeats four times "I said darling, I said dear, I said baby, I said daughter" before being able to really say "I am leaving" – or perhaps the message was given to four members of her family. The poem begins, thus, with a heartbreaking tone. The persona seems to be suffering in letting the daughter (or others) know what she is doing, but as the poem depicts, if she stays "there will be no life" for her. The love and concern for her daughter (or others) is evident in the first stanza where the persona says "darling," "dear" "baby," conveying caring and love. In spite of this love, though, they have to be apart so the mother can live. It is possible to consider the persona as a woman since in the next verse we read "ask your father to tell you why." If we consider the culture in Kabul regarding women's restriction, we may understand the figure of the man as the one having all the answers and power, the one who dictates the rules – patriarchal (or religious) rules. It casts the image of a woman, mother, having to escape Kabul or to stay for her death because of a rule dictated by patriarchy which prevents women, in this case, from attending a luncheon party, apparently a simple act.

We see a depiction of women without agency through many of her poems. In this matter, Grace and Johnson (2004, 157) say that "a theme repeated almost ritualistically throughout [Jones'] work is the need of a woman to claim her own agency." The persona seems not to have voice or power to change the circumstances – even being a doctor and having a professional status. She, the doctor, seems to accept her fate and complies with it, saying to the daughter "there will be no life without you;" however, there will be still a life if she flees and she needs to choose between life and death, deciding then, verse by verse, as if convincing herself, to go on and live without family. The poem infers that the father knows why the mother is leaving. Feminist theorists such as Rich (1986) and hooks (2000) say that women end up accepting submission and oppression from supremacist, capitalist and sexist patriarchy, since this seem to be the normal social agreement regarding women. To cause "no [greater] harm" she flees away from her own life, confirming, thus, the lack of agency Grace and Johnson warned about.

In a similar way, in "Lament for a Turkish Suicide Age 22," Hettie Jones tries to bring attention to a Turkish cultural issue regarding women. It deals with a suicidal girl who had been demoralized for wishing to dress in a different way.

Lament for a Turkish Suicide Age 22

What she wanted was more

school or a job, anyway
she got herself a tight skirt

She didn't want to live
hiding herself

But her father burned the skirt
and then three people
beat her bloody

She lived just long enough to write
that she wanted to die

and then she climbed some stairs
and stepped into the air

and left
the fabric of her
brief life

(Jones, 2003, 84)

The poem begins introducing the 22-year-old girl in the title, who wanted more from life. However, it has a tone of disillusion and gloom. “She wanted [...] school or a job,” meaning also that perhaps she wanted to be independent. She wanted to dress freely, getting “herself a tight skirt.” “She didn’t want to live / hiding herself.” Up to the third stanza we have, thus the depiction of a hopeful and freedom-seeking girl. However, in the fourth stanza, the figure of a father appears to show the restriction imposed on her when we read: “But the father burned the skirt / and three people / beat her bloody.” In burning her skirt, symbolically he was burning her agency, her wishes, and her will. In the Turkish culture presented in this poem, as in others, we see the same scene repeating itself, drenched with the same concerns, with a woman being undermined, beaten, not taken into consideration and/or being killed by men – directly or not – who take women as their property and dictate the rules of their existence. Realizing these heavy restrictions, the Turkish girl – through the persona’s voice in the fifth stanza – “lived just long enough to write / that she wanted to die,” never going to a

school, never getting a job and never living to tell her tale, accepting the fate of the impossibility of agency. She only left a suicidal note. And in the last stanzas we read the scene where she kills herself to get out of the men's imposition on her living, being freed by a tragic decision – “and then she climbed some stairs / and stepped into the air / and left / the fabric of her / brief life.” The act of killing herself represents the only possibility the girl saw of unchaining herself from the cultural restraints that turned her body into a prison – the female body. By using the metaphor “fabric of life” in the final verses, the persona draws attention to the issue of clothes and to the insignificant reason of her death – a fight over what *not* to wear. It seems that such moral values created by men are more valuable than a woman's life.

Jones writes many of her poems to women she wants to pay homage to and remember, women who have encouraged or inspired her, fought bravely against oppression, racism, patriarchy, and so on. To illustrate this trend, the next poem was chosen for not displaying a tragic event in a woman's life, as some poems previously discussed, but hope for change, through the social and political strength of women, union among women and solidarity. “A Nebula of Noteworthy Nellies” deals with women's existence as precious and powerful, being an inspirational poem for all women regardless of their names and surnames. Moreover, it may cast the idea of lesbian love or the strength of relationships among women.

A Nebula of Noteworthy Nellies

*for Nellie Engle and for the Nellie
character in a recent literary work*

for strength I give you

Nellie Taylor Ross, the first woman
governor. Elected by Wyoming, 1925

and for inspiration

Nellie Monk, wife of Thelonious

and though I will admit there are nervous Nellies
and fussy Nellies

Nellie, f.y.i., is a form of Helen, that beauty
who caused such havoc

and sometimes Helen is confused with *heleane*
 a word describing a planetary aura
 named by sailors for their patron saint;
 St. Elmo's fire

and when two electrical conductors meet
 the air is ionized, changed
 in a coronal discharge
 called St. Elmo's fire

So burn on burn on burn on Nellie
 (Jones, 2003, 88)

The tone of this poem promotes courage. It works almost like a list telling people about the great women called Nellie the persona knew and admired. It is, by the way, a poem in honor of Nellie Engle, who may have been an admired woman for the poet, although in a search on-line nothing was shown under the name; and to a character called Nellie in a literary work, emphasizing respect and a positive attitude toward women as characters in the field of literature.

The opening line reveals a desire to bestow strength on women, by mentioning "Nellie Taylor Ross, the first woman / governor. Elected by Wyoming, 1925." In a conversational tone, the persona gives "us" readers, the Nellies, expressing sympathy for other women, which gives the idea of union, in spite of what patriarchal beliefs stand for.

The next stanza displays the name of Nellie Monk in order to convey inspiration to other women. She was the wife of the pianist and composer Thelonious Monk. Born Nellie Smith, she was the greatest inspiration and an informal manager for the pianist's career and life, and during WWII she demonstrated her strength while working and supporting her family and some friends emotionally and financially.

Even admitting "there are nervous Nellies / and fussy Nellies," which invokes the thought of women being valuable in various non standard ways, the persona informs that the name Nellie is a form of Helen, a reference to Helen of Troy, described as a beauty that can cause destruction – perhaps meaning that these women have the power to change and destroy. She also mentions the name Heleane, which sailors use to describe a planetary aura, intended to be a good omen, their saint – St. Elmo's Fire (the weather phenomenon that creates light by a coronal discharge, such as those created by thunderstorm or a volcano

eruption). So, in the poem the persona brings Heleane, Helen or Nellie as this electrical power.

If a woman is an electrical power, the last stanza brings the possibility of the encounter of two women in “and when two electrical conductors meet / the air is ionized, changed” and she finally sends the message to the Nellie(s): “So burn on burn on burn on Nellie,” which seems to stimulate the love between women, and send courage to all women to let their electrical power run free and create their own lights in life. According to Maggie Humm (1986-10), women texts “pulsate with a rhetoric of rebellion and rupture” and in this poem we may read this rupture with patriarchy if we read the encounter of two women as the two electrical conductors meet. The poem seems, thus, to be empowering women.

Another poem that implies solidarity, friendship, understanding and comfort among women is the one entitled “Second Hand Shod,” which seems to draw attention to what women pass on to other women, in a delicate, unpredictable and warm way.

Second Hand Shod

A woman with good taste and small feet
quit Laramie, Wyoming one cold spring
leaving silver leather sandals

A half size too small, the feet of my youth
before life spreads me out – I bought them anyway
and accommodatingly, in time they became mine

That woman must have been on her slow way
east. She ditched New York at the millennium
leaving soft yellow suedes with ribbon ties
(for chilly nights when warmer feet
can better take you farther)

And now she's come and gone again –
she just abandoned red slides – her dancing shoes!
At once I put them to good use

thinking of her, restless as I
when my feet were smaller

and wherever she's stepping
 I want her to know I'm behind her
 (Jones, 2003, 89)

Playing with the expression “to put yourself in someone else’s shoes,” which means showing empathy by identifying with the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another, the persona in the poem buys the fashionable “silver leather sandals” left behind by a woman who “quit Laramie, Wyoming one cold spring.” Although they did not quite fit at the time, soon those sandals got well adjusted to her feet and she felt they belonged to her – in the literal meaning. The persona wonders about the woman’s direction and suggests that the woman walked a lot in suede shoes with ribbon ties, since they were better suited for “chilly nights.” If we think of this passage as a figure of speech, it may represent the age of the woman who is buying, i.e., the persona, who may now be an adult. The image illustrates her desire to go for adventures, for more roads of life. She wants to walk extra miles in life with beauty and strength no matter the age – no matter the holes or reparations, or despite of the suffering she might have been through.

In the fourth stanza, the woman again abandons her shoes – this time her dancing shoes, in a reference to “The Red Shoes” by Hans Christian Andersen. Figuratively, the woman is giving up her creative activities, perhaps because of her age, or change of plans; however, the persona seems to be watching the other closely and taking the next steps to continue on the road. Once again in this stanza the persona takes them to be useful as before: “At once I put them to good use,” never letting go of the thought of the woman who stepped before her – who lived life before her. Moreover the persona seems to be making her own ways, not in a slow pace as the other woman, but “restless as I / when my feet were smaller,” which means she goes on and on and never stops.

The last stanza implies that the persona is following the woman’s steps (in her way) and “wherever she’s stepping / I want her to know I’m behind her.” This goes beyond solidarity and understanding, since the persona seems to like the steps the other woman has taken and she too will step there. Such point is accentuated with the words “I’m behind her.” The poem, thus, suggests the feeling of shared experiences, tastes and admiration among women. It may symbolize the continuity of women’s paths. In following another woman’s footsteps, the persona shows both admiration and affection, emphasizing repetition as a

positive development. There is a sense of energy toward what is new, always respecting what is past.

Doing 70 is the last poem collection to be analyzed in this study and the author's third collection. Published in 2007, it has 92 pages and is divided into four sections entitled "Doing 70," "Raw Space," "True Sisters" and "Our Lady of Perpetual Scaffolding," bringing the themes of nature, love, aging, memories, beliefs, ethnicity, friendship, music and much more, intertwined with emotions of social injustice in some and beauty of life in others.

In order to continue discussing issues of the lives of women in patriarchy, the next poem selected is "Long Time Gone" which presents not flat statements regarding feelings between, seemingly, ex lovers, but images full of impact and emotion with a brokenhearted tone and a touch of mature understanding or irony.

Long Time Gone

His face like a deck of cards
to a complicated game
of attitudes

Hers on a fast track to delusion:

Here's a woman who thinks she's
getting something

more than a reason to challenge
her failure at love. And she failed

but I am forgiven
(Jones, 2007, 15)

The persona heightens the gamut of feelings and attitudes between two lovers, although differently according to their gender. In the first stanza we picture a man, perhaps after a disagreement with the woman, since the persona says that "his face [is] like a deck of cards." By reading "deck of cards," we summon a variety of expressions – a long face, angry face or yet a heavy, proud and hard face, as that of a man who is too proud to talk over something he believes is right. Additionally in this stanza, the persona mentions a "...complicated game of attitudes" meaning, perhaps, not a card game but the difficult dialog between lovers when they fight over something and neither wants to

give up their points of view. Even when one knows he or she is wrong, pride will not let them admit it – meaning that the game is the one of feelings.

However, the pride seems to apply to the man in the poem, since in the second stanza, we see the woman, not with a proud and hard face but “...on a fast track to delusion.” In the next stanza we notice that the persona is taking the side of the delusional woman when the poem says: “Here’s a woman who thinks she’s getting something.” The persona chose the word “here” and by this we notice the location at the side of the woman or perhaps she is the woman who is going through the disappointment. If we go further and compare the images, the persona seems to be sustaining the idea of a sterner character to describe the man and a pitiful one to describe the woman, despite the reason for their disagreement. The woman thinks she is getting something, but in fact, because of the word “thinks” the persona gives us the notion that she is not – except delusion and a reason to face her own failure at love. In this fourth stanza it is possible to wonder about what is considered woman’s fault, since the persona admits that “...she failed.” However, the last line as a climax, clarifies that the persona was indeed talking about herself and that she has already forgiven herself for this failure at love, as if the recovery was as fast as a short line in a poem. The poem accentuates her feeling toward a failure as a mature and calm one, in spite of the previous delusion. Additionally, it may give the idea of a continuation in love, that when one door closes another opens, because the woman seems to be ready and fine to go on without him. “Long Time Gone” may suggest that the relationship had ended long ago and perhaps the woman was only remembering an argument or a disagreement later, maybe days, months or years – but the point is that now she has forgiven herself for believing she would get something else, transmitting the idea perhaps that that man or all men cannot be expected to “give something else” other than delusion. The tone of the poem is sad, except for the end, where we read hope in the final words “I am forgiven.”

Another of Jones’ poems that leads us to wonder about how religion restricts women’s rights and brings injustice to the world is the one that tells the story of Cemse Allak⁵.

⁵ *The New York Times* – “Honor Killings’ Defy Turkish Efforts to End Them”, by Dexter Filkins – July 13, 2003.

07/13/03 Gifts

for Susan Maldovan

The first from Kamer,
a woman's group in Turkey

to Cemse Allak, who had not died
though the side of her head
had been, repeatedly, struck.

Thirty-five and single, she'd been stoned
- and then abandoned - for having sex
or being raped, same shame.

In the hospital where Cemse lay, paralyzed
and mute, the women of Kamer said,
"If you hear us, blink." For three months
they held her hands while she spoke to them
with her eyes. And then she died.

Against custom, risking their lives,
they carried her coffin to the graveyard.
Women in jeans, t-shirts, shades.

Here for them is my all-day robin
-appearing, disappearing, reappearing-

the 4th St. water tower song
the 5th St. senior citizens center song
and the song of the 6th St. tenement's
open roof door

in memory of Cemse Allak
gone like birdsong
in the blink of an eye
in the casting of the first stone
(Jones, 2007, 38-9)

The tone of the poem is one recurrent in Jones' poems: solidarity, understanding, but also sadness. Once again, she dedicates a poem to a woman, Susan Maldovan⁶, probably a woman whom the

⁶ In an online search nothing in particular could be found regarding the name of Maldovan that could be considered for a better understanding of this poem.

author admired. The title of the poem is the date that the news about Cemse Allak was published in the New York Times – 07/13/03 – and the word Gifts was attached to it perhaps considering that at the end of the news readers learned that Ms Allak had got help from the Women Association from Turkey: respect, flowers, a coffin and carriers for her funeral, so those were the gifts given. Or perhaps the gifts were the women themselves who showed up at the hospital and at Ms Allak’s funeral, in spite of the law in Turkey.

The poem begins with the image of the first woman who appeared to help, from the woman’s group, and continues stating that Cemse Allak “had not died / though the side of her head / had been, repeatedly, struck.” The second stanza illustrates the reason for the attack – sex or rape, and the persona ironically says at the end of the last verse “same shame.” What the persona seems to be doing here is exactly the opposite of this – the belief shown in this stanza is what the killers believe regarding sex and rape, blaming the woman for it – what seems to be a heritage of patriarchal culture that prevails regardless of geographical place or religious belief. In this same stanza, the persona marks out Cemse Allak’s age and marital status to emphasize, perhaps ironically, the importance of this to the Islamic cultural context. A woman is supposed to get married before thirty-five, and if she is single they believe she cannot have sex or have children (or even be raped) because it will disgrace the family honor, for it is a sin and she must be stoned to death. Furthermore, this culture does not consider human rights, women’s rights, freedom, and even create laws to restrict and control all women, perhaps as a sacrifice to their gods, however, a god that only protects the rights of men.

The next stanza shows the beaten woman, in the hospital, mute and paralyzed, and we may consider this silence in the denotative sense – since she got beaten heavily, or in the connotative sense, which may mean that out of fear and threats women remain or get silenced over and over again, paralyzed and never escaping the miserable and unbearable threats upon their lives. Still in the third stanza, a woman said to her “if you hear us, blink” – here, the persona remarks on the communication among women even during the time Ms. Allak was alive, through their eyes. If we think of what might be the message beyond this scene, we may consider the possibility of women getting united in order to fight threats of life and injustice against them. If they look at each other’s eyes, they can understand their suffering and work together for a better world. But she died. The women, however, remained together after Ms. Allak was gone despite the risks taken. This is more evidently seen in

the fourth stanza where “Against customs, risking their lives / they carried her coffin to the graveyard. / Women in jeans, t-shirts, shades,” which means that women could understand the cruelty and felt in their hearts this crime to the point of ignoring men’s rules, religious rules or government laws against their rights and walked in clothes considered not proper for them such as jeans, t-shirts and sunglasses; nevertheless, this was a defiance to the old tradition who made them, women, live for so long in prisons in their own country. They did not comply with those rulers anymore and did what was an act of victory and symbolic power to women. We see here the persona emphasizing this turn taking place, giving value to this brave act in mid of chaos, true to basic rights.

The persona hints at the idea that she is there too, in thoughts and feelings, by sending her “all-day robin,”⁷ which may mean sending her sorrow in regards to the color gray and love in regards to the color red – the colors of the bird. Thus, in the sixth stanza, we picture songs all around the persona, who sends good thoughts to the dead woman. The sounds are so intense that she opens the roof door as if opening up a space for Cemse Allak to enter heaven as an angel, the roof door being the door to the skies. This religious reference may be challenging and opposing the idea of the Islamic religion regarding a dead “criminal” soul; since Cemse Allak is considered a criminal and cannot enter “their” heaven, she may enter another’s as an angel. However, in the last sentence we can picture and listen to all the songs being sung in memory of Ms Allak who is “gone like a birdsong / like a blink of an eye / in the casting of the first stone,” showing once more the injustice of an act that could end a life as fast as the blink of an eye, the casting of a stone so powerful that prevented those songs from being sung – putting all to silence. The hope of this poem is the unity of the women who got the power to subvert rules and confront laws that hold them back in life. The persona ends the poem with the imagery of the 4th St. water tower song, the 5th St. senior citizens center song and the song of the 6th St. tenement’s open roof door as homage to Cemse Allak as an act of her feelings and solidarity.

This claim for women union can be also observed in the poem below called “Women in Black.”

⁷ “All-day robin” according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary is a North American bird with grayish back and reddish breast. It is also a birdsong.

Women in Black

A vigil at sundown, Beijing, 1995

Patterns in the dust of
 different kinds of shoe soles
 Black on black
 we sway like grain, like the woman
 beside me, the scar of the burning
 she escaped

 When she turns to me,
 smiling, the scar is a path, slick
 in the gathering dark Half the world
 is ours to take
 (Jones, 2007, 65)

In 1995, in Beijing, there was the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women which was an act for the equality of gender and the empowerment of women. Since this poem brings a note, right after the title, that says “a vigil at sundown, Beijing, 1995,” it is possible to relate it to this important event in Beijing. The discussion included women’s education, training programs for women, women in the media and the importance of their decision-making, the promotion of a balanced and non-stereotypical portrayal of women and many others. Taking this into consideration, this poem reveals hope for an equal future to all women and the strength of the union among them.

The first line – “Patterns in the dust of / different kinds of shoes soles” – implies that women from different places, everywhere, have shared the same or similar experiences in life and were left with the same traces of a past, similar dust as marks of what they have been through. The lines following may give the idea of women of color, since it says “Black on Black.” Would this black be the skin color that has black clothes on? Or perhaps the black shoes that the women are wearing on their black feet, covered with dust from the roads of life? The title of the poem is “Women in black” which indicates they are wearing black clothes and perhaps because they are mourning something or even their past suffering. The poem, thus, begins heavy and gloomy. At first, there is the perspective of an outsider taking into consideration the title “women” – they, but later the persona includes herself in the group of women, saying “we sway like grain / like the woman / beside me, the scar of the burning / she escaped.” We see the

persona as a woman noticing another woman with a scar – which means she has been through suffering – that of a burning. The woman “beside” gives the idea of sameness, equality, side by side, as they are at the same level and the persona understands that. The use of the word “escaped” suggests that this woman had been in prison somehow before this encounter between them, that she escaped from somewhere or somebody. However, they sway, they had power – a synonym of “to sway” is “to affect,” therefore, the persona may be hinting at the idea of the impact they may have against formal institutions. The use of the word “we” conveys the idea of union, that they were not alone, therefore they sway, like particles that get together in order to get strength. This message may be against hegemonic powers that act upon women’s lives.

In the second stanza we see a change: the woman who once suffered and kept the scar looked at the persona smiling, which conveys tranquility and perhaps hope for the future over the past. But the scar seems to be a path, a road taken before in which they can slip again, slip in suffering and regret – perhaps a dangerous path that may get them to lose hope in the dark. However, “in the gathering dark” may mean they can both hide and conquer what they want far from the world’s eyes, or may mean that the darkness may shut their clear view of their reality making them stop fighting for their rights. The persona seems to respond to this gathering, though, in a positive manner since she ends the stanza stating that “Half the world / is ours to take.” Here, she, once more, includes herself in this gathering and in the quest of “taking the world.” In a figurative sense this may mean that women have to take, not the world literally, but action to gain the power and respect they deserve, as human beings, after all they have been through, all the burnings, the long roads filled with dust, and the scars they bring with them. Behind the message lies the implication of the socially and politically undermined position of women all around the world which is a distress to the persona who is one of them. The tone of the poem is one of courage and motivation, presenting a structure with some lines that depart from the pattern, perhaps to instigate through the poem that people, other women, take different ways in life.

To conclude this chapter of analysis, another relevant poem in regard to women from *Doing 70* is “Naming Hettie Slocum.” It deals with adjusting what has been put to rest, purposely hidden or unfairly forgotten: the name of a woman and her deeds.

Naming Hettie Slocum

Hettie Slocum once went
halfway around the world and back
in a sailboat. Then she gave up
the nautical life for good
and took off to farm

leaving her husband, Captain Joshua,
the well-known navigator-storyteller,
to the heave and swell of that vast
and wily mother, the sea.

Hettie was a pretty seamstress,
twenty-four and fresh from Nova Scotia;
Slocum, a cousin, forty-two and lonely.
His first wife, love of his life, mother
of his sons, had died. It was 1886.

Hettie was game; she sewed Slocum's sails
cruised with him and the boys
to Rio, bought a tall hat, survived
an epidemic. He wrote a book
about their adventures, called her

his wife, called her "brave enough to face
the worst storms" – but never once mentioned
her name. Let us then remember her: Hettie!
Hettie Slocum!

Now all is said and done.
(Jones, 2007, 66)

The tone of "Naming Hettie Slocum" is that of boldness toward what belongs to women and has been taken away. For the persona, this past of injustice and oblivion has to be brought back to view and discussion, since she (assuming the persona is a woman) is not comfortable with the forgetting of a brave woman's name. The persona, thus, seems to make her point through retelling or remembering Hettie Slocum's deeds. The name of the woman must be remembered for what she was and for what she did, not seen through a father, a husband, a brother. The poem talks about a husband who wrote a book about his adventures, without naming his wife, who took part in it. This reminds us of what Rich says and may hint at the idea that men are afraid of the

power women might get if given the right value, that once in patriarchy, women are “emotional and sexual property of men and the autonomy and equality of women threaten family, religion and state” (Rich, 1986, 204). This seems to be a recurrent theme in poetry by women. Because of the wish for power, visibility and freedom only for them, men may ignore women’s deeds trying to erase their names from history, denying their creations⁸.

The first two stanzas show Hettie Slocum taking steps to fulfill her life, traveling half of the world in a sailboat and then deciding to go farming. In other words, the possibility of changes in a woman’s life is implied and admired by the persona. The fact that she leaves her husband, “Captain Joshua / the well-known navigator-storyteller,” and the wide expanse of the sea in order to live her own adventures and experiences on a farm may indicate her disdain of his title and public activities, in short, of his maleness. In the next lines – “to the heave and swell of that vast / and wily mother, the sea” – we see the husband left to the sounds and forms of the sea – making the figure of a mother “vast and wily,” demonstrating the power that this figure can have. Another point made is that Captain Joshua⁹ is well-known, and if we consider the woman as the vast and wily sea, this may mean a mystery and the unknown attached to her, perhaps implying that the strength of the woman is not known (or at least not well-known) since we cannot possibly know all the powers and tricks of the vast sea.

The rest of the poem focuses on Hettie. The repetition of her name is clearly intended to mark it so it will not be forgotten again. Her beauty, age and profession are stressed in the third stanza, with the purpose of giving information about her: a young woman, “fresh from Nova Scotia” who married a cousin, Slocum, forty-two, and a lonely widower and father. The year was 1886, and Hettie Slocum seems to be out of the pattern for a 24-year-old woman, determined to live her own life embracing a new situation; she appears, implicitly, as a determined and a strong woman. The fourth stanza suggests that Hettie was seen by the cousin/husband as handy for him and the sons, since she could sew for them and keep them company. Her skills (for him) were those of a nurse and seamstress, apparently. It is worth noting that she is described as a woman who takes responsibilities in this family; she travels, buys

⁸ See, in this respect, Adrienne Rich’s poem “Planetarium”, in which she retrieves from historical oblivion the name of the astronomer Caroline Herschel.

⁹ The first solo circumnavigator of the world and writer. He was born in 1944 and died in 1909, lost at sea.

things, sews, helps them, survives an epidemic and seems to live all the experiences she wants, as seen in the line “cruised with him and the boys / to Rio, bought a tall hat” and was considered tough for having survived an epidemic.” However, when in this same line we get to know that Captain Joshua wrote a book, we expect his stories will include the names of all involved. But that is not the case. The persona makes us feel uncomfortable with the feeling that something is missing. Slocum wrote about their adventures, called her “his wife” and called her “brave enough to face / the worst storms,” but “never once mentioned / her name.” The words “her name” begin the next line and it seems that the persona wants to call our attention to this important fact: was the name purposely left out or was it forgotten? And she makes a claim in the poem for the memory of that name – “Let us then remember her: Hettie!” Opposing what has been done by the man who wrote the book, pointing out this flaw and considering it unfair, the persona corrects this story by naming her deeds with her name “Hettie Slocum!” The persona’s response to this issue is to use exclamation and repeat Hettie Slocum’s name. The poem ends with the line “Now all is said and done,” suggesting that this was a gap that was finally filled and now justice was done to this strong woman who deserved to be remembered for what she had done. Nevertheless, we may seek for more in the vast sea of forgotten names.

There is in patriarchy a long tradition that hides the name of women. In literature, sometimes, books written by women were published with a man’s name instead of their own. The message seems to be: let’s remember them for what they wrote and for who they were.

The most reasonable way to break the rules imposed on women within patriarchy is to establish new positions, new places of existence, and new representations of subjectivity in order to change the established social idealization of women within society, continually claiming for rights. Women, such as Hettie Jones, create places to oppose patriarchal ideology.

Most of Hettie Jones’ poems are narrative. The use of free verse is a pattern, since she hardly uses rhyme. She also uses the technique of enjambment, which correlates one line with the next without the use of punctuation. Her sentences are not complicated, although she uses metaphors and irony, and usually leaves the reader with something (an issue) to consider at the end of the poem. All of this shapes consciousness. If women are not talked about, not remembered, they become superfluous to society for certain social changes or identification among women. I believe that with a new consciousness

regarding women the reform in society will eventually take place, since hegemonic discourse will finally get to its recognition of failure.

CHAPTER III

RACE AND RACISM IN *HOW I BECAME HETTIE JONES*

1 Race and Racism in History

Carlos Moore, in his book *Racismo e Sociedade*¹⁰ presents historical events which have led to the rise of racism as we know nowadays. His historical approach encompasses the first inhabitants of Africa, the conquest of new lands toward the North by these people, the struggles between melanoderms (dark-skinned) and leukoderms (white and yellow skinned), and it also breaks certain assumptions about the origins of the enslavement of black people. Moore says that enslavement began with the Greeks, Romans and Arabs, and explains how this enslavement created racism against the forth-coming dark-skinned civilizations among whites and how it changed their social status for centuries to come.

In 2007, in archeology, geneticists identified the gene (SLC24A5) responsible for the appearance of white skin in Europe, dated between 6 and 12 thousand years ago, defending the hypothesis that the origin of humanity is due exclusively to melanoderms, dated in about 3 million years (Moore, 2011, 48). In the endeavor of exploring new lands, melanoderms began to leave Africa and occupy less sunny, colder and snowy territories, and over times they began turning into leukoderms, due to climatic conditions, mainly. These people formed different groups that fought among themselves. Those were not cases of racism because the battles were over lands, food, and tools. According to Moore, the concern with skin color began to emerge with the Greeks, and then religion spread the belief of superiority among people due to phenotypic traits. Thereafter, enslavement began. Moore criticizes the determinism of certain evolutionary theories which contributed to confusing the discussions about social conflicts due to phenotypic differences; he also denounces Christianity for spreading white and Western superiority theories. However, awareness rose slowly. Africans have traveled across lands; long have been the battles where they have fought in order to be able to live a life of fairness, inclusion, freedom and equality. But this is a process which is still transforming society.

Jones' literature may help in this consciousness building. For her, African-descendants were never alone in this fight; many people,

¹⁰ Racism and Society. (My translation)

such as Hettie Jones herself, joined hands with them and helped fight discrimination. It is not only a matter of representing them, but being harmonious and considerate with what they went/go through in society. With the help of theories about otherness,¹¹ people may begin to value diversity, as well as their own particularities. Jones says that she had “come to see those times and the psychological advances of the Black Power movement – as a necessary phase in African-American, and ultimately American, history” in order to begin to dismantle racism (238).

Despite the contemporary general belief in racial democracy, Moore points out that this discourse is intended to maintain the privileges of the upper class and the white race, classifying racial democracy as myth-ideology (Moore, 2011, 23). Many of the situations of precariousness and social injustice against African descendants are due to beliefs created from ancient civilizations and such beliefs are and should be discussed and transgressed or subverted in order to guarantee rights to all citizens regardless of phenotypic differences. While reflecting upon the academic discourse about a widespread miscegenation, Moore says it is only a case of hegemonic discourse that trivializes the efforts against racism in order to maintain the *status quo*, i.e., the white power. Departing from these reflections, the author believes it is possible to create a new epistemological basis to think of racism. For him, racism is “an eminently historical phenomenon linked to actual conflicts in the history of peoples” (38).

When we read women such as Hettie Jones, who had an interracial marriage and two African-American daughters, we feel the weight of the past on those lives, and worry about the future, since racism has disturbed and created inequality for so many lives. According to Grace & Johnson, Jones “employs the form to reveal anger, ambivalence, love, recognition, or redemption hidden in the daily lives of individuals living on the color line” (2004, 156-57).

Jones vehemently claims against racism and she seems proud of being socially active. She seems to have lived for a long time dealing with a multiple view of her social and political position, as white and Jew, mother and bread-winner, worker and bohemian, and keeping track of the prejudice against her African-American daughters, husband and husband’s family within society. This multiple senses of belonging

¹¹ “A condition of ‘otherness’, ‘alterity’, is defined as “the state of being other or different.” The Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory by Michael Ryan, 2011.

shows, to a certain degree, what Hettie Jones was going through while recognizing the racism of white society, being herself white, and recognizing injustices against friends and later, against her own family, on a daily basis. Jones recognized that the white men ruled and oppressed the “different,” as avows Weedon (1999, 5) in the introduction of her book saying that only white, middle or upper class, heterosexuals and western men defined meaning and had the power, thus leaving the “different” (women, non western people, poor people and people of color) without power or recognition. As for race, Jones declares in the interview of 2004 that her writing shows a lot of the matter, as read below:

Nobody had ever gone through it as far as I knew. Nobody, nobody wrote about the experience of [being white and] having black children. But racial issues were political, and nobody was writing any kinds of self-help books on what it was like to [be white and] raise black children-or a primer for crossing race lines (Grace & Johnson, 2004, 171).

Hettie Jones, then, understanding close the prejudice toward her family, found as well the necessity of understanding and discussing white society and racism from the point of view of her family, at the same time looking at herself and her African-American family through the eyes of the white society and its prejudice to get better prepared for a struggling situation as the one mentioned above. Adapting and readapting herself while fighting for her place within society seemed to be a strategy of survival in the face of all the impositions and demands of the white, supremacist and, patriarchal society.

2 Hettie Jones, Race and Racism

Through Jones’ writing we perceive her fragmented identity and different claims. It is possible to affirm that because of her multiple identities she knew the functioning of the white, Jewish and black communities and understood her roles (even if to counter the culture) in many spheres of her private and public life. Regarding race, according to Jones’ memoir, her concerns began in her adolescence, when a 17 year-old Jones went to Mary Washington College, a woman’s College of the University of Virginia and could not help noticing the students

were all white. Also there, she met an African-American woman “who worked as a maid and sometimes picked up extra money ironing” (Jones, 12); to show solidarity and respect for her, we read young Jones (Hettie Cohen¹²) saying that she used to iron beside this woman, not to leave her alone and undermine her position. Apart from that, she met no other African-American people there. The fact of exalting these scenes of the teenage Jones shows the side she picked in the fight for respect and equality for all. After graduation and while heading to New York, she and her blonde friend, Linda, met two African-American women and Jones kept in her memory a conversation about the women’s skin, demonstrating innocence and surprise toward the subject of race.

There were two black women in the back we’d just met, and now she and they are talking about their skin. “Heh, heh, heh.” Laughs hillbilly Linda, “Millie, have you really got a tan?” To which Millie, laughing herself, replies, “My friends don’t even recognize my face!” And then the *three of them*¹³ fall out in giggles, as if the concept of blackness itself were vastly comedic. And there, now, as she turns to include me, is the sparkle in Linda’s eyes. It’s a strange, excited shine, a dirty secret. I don’t know it. What is it? Skin. (Jones, 1990, 13)

She was unconcerned, and yet innocent, about this skin differentiation her friend was pointing out, so she got shocked when these moments were revealed to her. That is the reason Jones does not laugh at what they assume to be funny and does not share the pride to be white, as Linda does. The blonde friend goes to Jones for support; however, she refuses to be part of it, and thinks this to be a strange emotion to share and a dirty secret, as stated.

Another relevant scene occurs when Jones tells about the first time she held an African-American person’s hand when she was selling fans out on streets; she felt sweetness and then pondered about race as she writes:

¹² In this section I will mention Jones’ last name as Cohen when the event date was before her marriage.

¹³ My emphasis.

Out of some tall grass at the road side a little black girl appeared, seven or eight years old, barefoot..., “Oh, come to *my* house”¹⁴, she said dramatically, and with that thrust her hand into mine. I looked down. I’d never held a black person’s hand. It was dry, dusty, sweet, and so fragile, and the dark I was from that southern sun it wasn’t that different from mine. Skin, I thought, remembering Linda. (Jones, 1990, 14)

This corroborates Moore’s affirmation that if we are exposed to similar climate conditions for long periods of time, the skin color changes, naturally; Jones spent a short time exposed to the sun light and noticed it on her own skin. Nevertheless she did not judge or feel any difference when holding the girls’ hand. On the contrary, with the girls’ invitation “come to *my* house” she embraced blackness. She went back and forth in thoughts regarding race and mentions that, while a young adult, she did not realize the magnitude of what that holding hands may have meant. It was her first step into a life of solicitude, care, friendship, respect and anxiety for African-Americans and race equality. When she joined hands with that little girl, she symbolically joined hands with black history and marked her sympathy towards African-American culture and community that were to enter her life so joyfully sometimes, but painfully at others.

She was critical of her own position and ethnic situation as white, as she considered herself an outsider Jew – American-Jew, since she had the feeling of not quite belonging, as we read in the passage: “I went to a meeting of the Jewish group Hillel, but all I saw there were people unlike me.” And she avows she “could have tried for white,... But never was [she] drawn to that history, and with so little specific to call [her] own, [she] felt free to choose” (14). Whites, as well, made her uneasy and displaced; this can be read when, after meeting her boss at the *Record Changer* (her first job in a magazine as editor) and a director of a Jazz program, she says, “He and Dick were the first white men I met who didn’t make me feel uneasy” (23). Jones did not only join hands, but embraced counterculture against hegemonic white society, despite of what society demanded of her to choose and wrote vehemently about racial issues, as we read in her own words below.

¹⁴ Original emphasis.

I'm more interested in telling morality tales and adventure stories that deal a lot more with race. I seem not to deal with race in my poems, and I don't know why that difference occurs. Gender issues find their way into poems but not race. But I do deal with it in my stories. Perhaps because I'm angrier and therefore less immediately articulate about race issues and I need the space that prose offers to tell the stories that race imposes. I don't know whether it's Beat or not, although it certainly grew out of a separation from American fiction in general. Also, I think my writing is political when it deals with subjects that touch on our political lives - race, class, gender issues (qtd. in Grace & Johnson, 2004, 165).

By the time Hettie Jones began working at the *Record Changer*, she was entering the literary world and connecting with writers and their production; in her memoir she mentions that all the “essayists were white” (21), a critical consciousness that is stamped in her words very often. It was at the *Changer* that she met her future husband Leroi Jones, the new shipping manager, by then. When talking about their first meeting, Hettie Jones does not mention the color of his skin, but his intelligence, humor, serious working and patience, i.e., the person came first, as equality and impartiality apropos of race requires. After meeting him, race and racism became for her an even stronger concern. Leroi Jones was the one who one day, for some unidentified reason, recommended her a book that had just come out called *The Black Bourgeoisie*, by E. Franklin Frazier, at what she nodded seriously but assumed she knew nothing of the matter. However, after learning about her concerns with race since her teenage years in her memoir, we may assume that even before reading about the issue of race and racism she was already opposing white supremacist culture in her own way and noticing the skin distinction within that society.

Jones had to be courageous in the postwar society and stand-up for what she was fighting for, even not realizing the importance of the whole attitude sometimes. Many were the instances where she had to answer publicly that her husband was a Negro, or to defend their daughters against public offenses. When, in a survey interview, she was asked about the race of her husband, she felt in her heart that at that moment she was making a decision that would always, from that moment on, have to go solid in her heart; despite the assumption of the

woman about her husband's race, Hettie Jones answered back, firmly, "Negro," and there, she knew her ground with great conviction. At their daughter Kellie Jones' birth, they would have registered the baby as part-white, after they had discovered that "part-*Hawaiian*" was eligible, but in the hospital record the baby was simply listed as "Negro female," despite the couple's choice. Although she accepted the power of the institution, this event was mentioned in her memoir many years later, showing it had not been washed from her memory. When this matter-of-fact white imposition came directly on Kellie, Jones began experiencing rage; she could stand prejudice on herself, but not on her little girl, and she mentions one episode on a train where she wished to kill the man who was staring at Kellie in a self-assured and angry look as if she was really faulty for her skin color. In another moment, when Kellie was with her nanny at a playground in Stuyvesant Town, where there were predominantly white children, the nanny was asked to take her kid and leave, even if other African-American nannies were taking care of white children, but Kellie was the only African-American kid, and the whites did not accept that, which contributed to Jones' resentment, distress and outrage.

Both Hettie and Leroi Jones felt displacement regarding race. Before Kellie was born, Leroi was usually the only African-American in friends' gatherings in New York and among family, while in Newark Hettie occupied this position as the only white; but in New York, she says "racist thought was in all things, even in language; racism was, as it would come to be described, institutionalized, and it seemed that now [she] could see it everywhere" (108). For instance, when Hettie Jones needed to rent another place for the family and told the landlord she had a black family, she was turned down. She also noticed this institutionalized racism when she mentions the whites-only museum. She has noticed racism in many situations; however, Leroi Jones saw it also where she did not even imagine: between them. Once at home, free of the children for some time, Hettie Jones, enjoying the freedom, says to her husband "Oh, look at us, look at us!" to which he understood "Look at us, look at black and white;" after discovering what he had thought she meant, they once again had a bitter discussion about race and prejudice and she confesses that those moments made her incredibly sad (204). Even inside their private life race became sometimes a dangerous ground to step on. Many were the moments of her consciousness rising toward racial prejudice, since race had become part of her life in an intense and touching manner.

Both of them, Hettie and Leroi Jones, felt as outsiders; she, as a Jew and he, as an African-American, and this, in the beginning, was what attracted them to each other. According to Mckoy (2014), both communities, blacks and Jews, were struggling to be accepted in white middle class American society, and this at first had united the couple (4). According to McKoy, in her memoir, Jones speaks of the racial conflict within their private life in reporting her husband's words "I began to see her as white!" – an awareness which caused disturbance to his public image as a member of the Separatist group of Black Nationalists (3). The more he got involved in politics, the more discomfort he felt in married life. Hettie Jones' mother once told her she "would suffer and pay every minute of her life..., for the kind of life she had chosen" especially because her parents did not approve of her interracial marriage (Jones, 190). In her memoir, according to Mlakar (2007, 90), "she tells the reader that nothing is wrong about having a biracial family, that giving birth to black children even though she is white is nothing to worry about." Despite the first years of happiness, race issues were emphasized because after the children came she felt that her personal life had become a matter of public opinion. For instance, she avows she had to endure looks and mean words while walking with the girls; passing a construction worker peering over his hammer she heard: "Those are sure pretty babies, but they sure don't look like you" to what she smoothly replied: "And they sure don't look like *you*¹⁵" (190), as if everyone around her were suddenly entitled to discharge their opinion about her private life and choices on her, whether she wanted or not. Whites looked at them as "interracial freaks" but she kept smiling (97). Another memory she shares with bitterness about this issue of interracial family as a public matter is that she had become so serious about it that she began perceiving every stare of suburban commuters and they jolted her. Notwithstanding the public opinion, she considered her disregard for appearances a countercultural act and she seemed proud to have given examples on how to be freer. She and other girls dared to leave home, hang out with the boys, be part of bohemian life, and be artists and dress differently, rejecting doll-like manners of dressing or media propaganda of the perfect women. Dorothy White, a friend of hers, who, in 1959, "had a hairstyle not yet called 'natural' and a decade from being called Afro" proudly kept her hair like a "soft round hat" (173); and Hettie Jones in her work, mentions that her "self-esteem had freed her to act on her feelings,"

¹⁵ Italics in the original.

sharing and paying tribute to this strong attitude of the African-American woman who stepped out of the patterns of white society, even in what concerned appearances. White appearances were never questioned.

Mckoy also says that "Hettie Jones confirmed that, in 1964, her husband would not let her travel with him because she was white" (3). When viewed or mentioned by the African-American friends of Leroi Jones, Hettie Jones was called "the white woman," "the white wife" or "she-devil" which caused her much suffering (3). One passage on this issue says that "some people were beginning to say that hypocritical Roi talked black but married white. Others, more directly, said he was laying (sic) with the Devil" (Jones, 218). Even though she had been, along with her African-American family, through many social difficulties, when these issues became public, after he became a public figure and an activist, it really got to their marriage in full strength, and she seemed sorry for it, saying that he'd shattered her life, but understood that he thought his duty was to get away due to the growing "black rage" and activism, and she knew one day this rage could turn on her (218).

On the day he refused to take her along on a trip, she wrote that all she could remember was "the open door behind his back" (218). This is very suggestive if we think that, as the famous public person he was becoming by being a Beat writer and an activist, a hero for a few black students and a "new Negro writer" seen as a phenomenon (as Hettie Jones seems ironically to write in her memoir), he would have the freedom to leave her and live his new life embracing his new young African-American woman, enjoying his life with much more freedom than her, who in turn, would stay for a while expecting Leroi Jones to return, taking care of Kellie and Lisa all by herself. Before he left, she asked why he was going to watch the performance of his own play *Dutchman*¹⁶, at Howard University, a special night, without her. His answer came upon her "like an awful tide:" "because you are white" (218). She felt bitter about the way their private life suddenly was being displayed, discussed and compared to Leroi Jones' play *The Slave*¹⁷

¹⁶ A play by Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones at the time); premiered in March 1964. In a train ride a white woman and a black man have a conversation and the play is full of civil rights ideals and the white as enemy.

¹⁷ A one-act play which shows the tension between African-Americans and Whites, emphasizing the African-American low status which victimize and slave them; published in 1964.

where she was depicted as the white *ex-wife*¹⁸ who dies by a bomb. Reviewers did not help and sprang the notion that this was about “the interracial crisis they were undergoing” (219). But these were times in which freedom could not wait, according to Malcolm X,¹⁹ and the African-American people were uniting forces among them, with determination and much anger toward white society, no matter what. The word of the 1964 summer was *Freedom*²⁰ and her “interracial ‘family’ was a sign [of freedom], but not always welcome” (211), so perhaps the real freedom, as she understood it, had not come for her yet. These were times of protests everywhere, the murder of John F. Kennedy, Luther King and Malcolm X; times of Women’s Liberation Movement, times of the Black Panther Movement and Civil Rights Movement; Hettie and Leroi Jones were trying their own way to guarantee their rights wherever they felt they belonged to. “In July [1964], President Johnson passed the Civil Rights Act Kennedy had initiated, but unenforced it made little difference..., we felt marooned among white middle-class” (212) and their freedom began to faint. However, Negroes (as they were called by the whites), now wished to be called Blacks and embraced blackness even steadier; Leroi Jones changed his name to Imamu Amiri Baraka, defending his principles, thus, countering white culture. In her memoir, Hettie Jones shows her support and concern when she bitterly brings to her readers many cases of injustice and cruelty. She relates that four weeks had passed since Martin Luther King’s speech “I have a dream” and four black teenage girls were killed in Birmingham by dynamite thrown in their school classroom, and since then, some people began saying that dreams could not be substitute for freedom. Her weapon at these difficult times was to observe white society, notice the difficulties in fitting in, write whatever she could (although she burned many of her manuscripts), and later tell the world the untold version of history.

She was considerate of the socially complex moment and recognized times were changing; and, in order to conquer something far greater than her own feelings, she favored the fight against racism even if it pained her deeply in the most private way. She confesses:

¹⁸ Italics in the original.

¹⁹ Minister to New York’s Muslims; founder of a Black Separatist Group – Organization of Afro-American Unity; human rights activist; promoter of the Black supremacy. Born in 1925 - Died in 1965.

²⁰ Italics in the original.

I couldn't bear his *guilt*²¹ at being with me, which seemed so shocking when with me he hadn't abandoned but emphasized – and taught – his culture. But I viewed as crucial the collective release of black anger; I wanted that to happen even if my own awkward position continued... And I couldn't get out of my mind the image of Kellie, sobbing, "He called me dirty." (Jones, 1990, 223)

She developed more and more a fragmented identity regarding her own position in the margins of society because of racism, sexism, her ethnic background and ways of life, but especially after the marriage she felt more injustice toward the position of her husband and daughters within white supremacist society; for that reason she could understand Leroi Jones' decisions in regards to the radical separatist movements as they were unfolding before her. Hettie Jones was not only minding her own feelings, but a possibility of macro consciousness changing.

In the early years of marriage, the couple made efforts into social life because they wanted social changes to occur, and as Leroi Jones wrote once in his autobiography, he was "going for that, for the difference it made" when they got to be a couple; astonishingly, these exact words were what headed their separation, since he began questioning himself for marrying a white woman, since now he was a separatist spreading a more radical view regarding their races.

Since childhood Jones had seen and dealt with differences in her life, for instance when she was at school and had to sing "I am an American – Shout wherever you may be!" she knew the Jews were alive only there (in American territory), but she did not feel like any of them (35) – neither American, nor Jew. Difference and confrontation with the outside world and her inner self seem to have always been part of her life. It did not seem to matter what society demanded of her or what the norm was; she went for the difference and for what she felt was right. The norms in white society are clear, as Weedon mentions:

Indeed, the negative qualities consistently attributed to sexual and racial difference from a white, middle-class, male norm by institutions of science, medicine, philosophy and the law made it

²¹ Italics in the original.

very difficult to see questions of difference in positive terms (Weedon, 1999, 9).

This negative aspect of the difference imposed by white culture is felt by the couple in the times of the Beats. The couple knew they were in the midst of a painful process of transformation within 1950-60s conservative society and, from the beginning, they knew it would not be easy to face the hegemonic power and consciousness of the core of capitalist, white, patriarchal and supremacist culture, and in the beginning they felt strong enough in spite of the many confrontations, the looks and reproofs they faced as parents, professional citizens and as a couple. However, after the 1960s things began to change drastically. Jones registered street looks and confrontations, as for instance when she confesses in a passage that:

For those who still don't believe it, race disappears in the house – in the bathroom, under the covers, in the bedbugs in your common mattress, in the morning sleep in your eyes. It was a joke to us, that we were anything more than just the two of us together. We called the black/white lesbians next door 'the interracial couple'..., we were walking, arm in arm. The catcalls began and continued. There weren't a half-dozen steady interracial couples in the Village... when I understood that the jeers were for us, I turned. Ready to fight or preach..., 'keep walking,' he said. 'Just keep on walking...' It was his tone that made me give in, and only later that I realized we might have been hurt, or *killed*²² (Jones, 1990, 36-7).

In an innocent tone, as she narrates in this passage, she feels embarrassed for not realizing the danger that a verbal or physical confrontation might have meant for them both, especially because in the 1950s the law had not changed yet and in the majority of states races could not be mixed; thus, in such confrontations, they would be seen as the deviants in society, not their aggressors. Hettie Jones had to learn, at

²² Italics in the original.

certain moments of real danger to lower her head as strategic defense, along with Leroi Jones. But as we also see in the passage, although overcoming her innocence, she did not accept this difference others imposed and affirms that race disappears when people simply live life; when they love, care; when they go about their routine. Under the covers, solving day-to-day housing problems, or yet, when couples go through jealousy, or fights over friends, house, food or preferences etc..., who would care or remember skin color? And she asks, after narrating a couple's fight: "Do you see race in this?" Once, in a conversation with a social worker about race, Hettie Jones says: "If you wake up and race is a given..., it's gone while you're looking for your socks" (233). Among struggling for life, the crying of the baby, jealousy, lack of money, time for writing, friends and so on, they did not have much time to worry about their skin color. That, for her private life, made no difference; in the beginning it made no difference for him either, but it changed when their lives turned targets of public opinion. She avows that "nothing can ready you for this..., I felt, sitting there, as if we were wearing a skin of public opinion" (106).

In 1960, Leroi joined the Nationalist Movement Black Alliance gaining prominence and, in the middle of this decade, he wrote his two plays, *The Slave* and *Dutchman*, mentioned before, inspired by his relationship with Hettie Jones, and in both plays the white wife is portrayed as an enemy. In the big picture, however, their first fighting for rights, during the years of marriage, allowed different future social positions and contributed to the current achievements and hopes that we have nowadays in relation to human rights and equality. In 1967 the couple divorced and Leroi Jones changed his name to Imamu Amiri Baraka (Blessed Prince), "to embrace blackness and drop the slave name" (McKoy, 2014). Hettie Jones felt that Leroi Jones could only opt to be himself, and she indeed saw racism everywhere as very shocking and painful. On their separation there was a "scandal downtown: Leroi Jones Has Left His White Wife. It fit right in with dissolving black-white political alliances, as he later wrote..." (Jones, 226). Not even her name was mentioned at the headlines. Before political confrontations from 1962 and on, she would register her anger and sadness by writing to her friend Helene, sometimes with trembling hands. This was a way she found for not silencing. In a letter to Charles Olson, she, struggling to find who she was, wrote about herself. Among personal and political matters, there is a sentence that reminds us who the Beats were fighting for with their counterculture: "for poetry and justice for all" (196); and this links together the personal and political subject. The social belief

and political confrontations directly affected the involved subjectivities, but despite the suffering on both sides, Hettie Jones stood firm in the struggle for racial equality and confesses she does not hold grudges against the black community; on the contrary, she has supported and continues supporting all the fight against racial injustice, along, mainly, with her daughter Kellie Jones, who also embraced counterculture to “expand the possibilities for life ‘as a person of color’ and reminds people at her graduation that people of color are the majority in the world (237). As a reminder of Beauvoir’s (1949) famous assertion that a woman is not born a woman but becomes one within the rules of society, Deepika Bahri (2013), when discussing feminism and post-colonialism, avows that a woman of color is not born a woman of color, but she becomes one within white society and its rules; her identity is built within a specific context of white patriarchy (and its impositions) and these “women of color” respond according to the power relations that exist within this system.

Hettie Jones has experienced instances of racial prejudice and remembers them in detail while accounting to her readers in an astonished manner occasions, such as this: after getting home from work one day while Leroi Jones was on the phone, pretending to be another person, she heard him saying, “Yes, I’m aware that he’s a Negro, but he’s been a fine employee. He hasn’t stolen anything, if that’s what you mean” (48). Or, in another occasion, she reported prejudice when discovering her parents had abandoned her because of her interracial marriage and first child and sourly recognizes that only the Joneses embraced her and offered a shared history for her daughters; or yet, when Leroi Jones and a male white friend were attacked and she had to tell Leroi’s friend’s sister about the incident, a group of the white male’s friends came pressing Hettie Cohen (Jones’ single name) to know why they were attacked in the first place, and one of them asked what type of friend was Leroi Jones who did not defend his friend who was now in the hospital; at this, one of them said “Better not to be a nigger” (64). These occasions stuck in Hettie Jones’ memory for a long time, and each of those injustices she brings to her writing with a touch of bitterness and terror.

Understanding the history of racism and especially its evolution in Western society through the words of Carlos Moore, one can assume that both Jones and Baraka were victims of an oppressive and cruel system that ignores subjectivities in order to uphold a supremacist and capitalist scheme, segregating all. This system needs superiority and inferiority displayed to continue existing, and the minorities are soldiers

in this play, i.e., the capitalist logic makes inferior the woman or black, trans, lesbians, or yellow or people from other ethnicity than whites, as long as it succeeds. With the help of mass media and corporations, human segregation is perpetuated, causing social and subjective conflicts as we have seen in Hettie Jones' memories, hampering the construction of freedom and diversity. Hettie Jones and Amiri Baraka are strong figures that make the story be told differently nowadays; besides, they make counterculture gain strength and help build hope for a better society for all. Amiri Baraka, after all the resentments of years of struggle, and tired of the weight of racial injustice on his back, returned to a soothing relation with Hettie Jones, recognizing that they both fought and sacrificed their personal life for a change in macro social awareness, recognizing their efforts, progress and limits, and valuing her as a white who joined hands with his history as her own and for their own family.

As for Hettie Jones, she has in all aspects of her life embraced the race issue, recognizing and valuing the fight, looking at life not only through her white perspective but through her friends', husband's and daughters' views and pains; experiencing them to a certain degree (as a mother), developing then her multiple identity. Hall (1992) avows that identities are fragmented and diverse comprising multicultural claims, being this, what we may recognize in Jones' memoir and poems. W.E.B. Dubois, in his time, more than a century ago, brought to discussion issues involving a double view "such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes," saying that this double life, "must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or revolt" (85) and there, it is also where we recognize culture (hegemonic views) and counterculture (marginal views), by looking into different angles of the same historical event to understand present times and consider the new perspectives in the lives of today's society. Despite knowing all the suffering caused by the white people, he did not seem angry or vindictive, but he skillfully argued and called for the white people's reasoning about the "Negro problem"²³ bringing examples of many decayed African-descendants lives because of skin prejudice. Although, he writes: "the white man, as well as the Negro, is bound and barred by the color-line (78). Since there is no way of escaping this fact of the color-line, he finds that the way for freedom is for both races really understand and feel in their hearts each other's

²³ A term used by the author in the beginning of the 19th century and adopted here considering his context and his own words.

history and importance emphasizing firmly the magnitude of the African-descendants' work, unity and cooperation for the "America" known on his days.

Hettie Jones, however, led not a life of double consciousness but multiple consciousness, by actively being culturally and socially a part of the two races, two ethnicities, a mother, wife, worker, daughter, woman of the 1950s at the same time as a bohemian writer and lover – that is, living within the 1950's culture and countering it simultaneously.

CHAPTER IV

RACE AND RACISM IN HETTIE JONES' POEMS

Despite the many instances about race and racism in her memoir, Hettie Jones, in the three poetry books selected for this study, did not work intensively on this issue. We do find, however, some poems that reflect upon race and that deserve attention. The poems will be presented in order of publication, i.e., three poems from *Drive* (1998), followed by one from *All Told* (2003) and two from *Doing 70* (2007). The book *Drive* brings mostly depictions of the freedom that women have conquered as, for instance, the freedom to drive (their cars or their lives, considering the analogy between these two ways of driving – literally and figuratively) in any direction they might desire, though other social injustices are also addressed.

The first poem selected from *Drive* is “Alphabetical Guide Against Apartheid²⁴” in which Jones writes with resentment against the injustice toward African-descendant people and the acceptance of this injustice by the rest of the world, as if nothing abnormal was happening. For her, those who had voice and power in social instances should engage in a movement of resistance to help end such discrimination. If we consider the themes she brings to light and the significant way she does it, we may infer that she has added to her work and the voice of other minority or marginalized groups and seen the strength and weakness of people before prejudice, using resistance in her writing. According to Weedon (1999, 3-25), marginalized issues and subjectivities needed to be on the political agenda to spread consciousness-raising through campaigns that would give these groups power; as an activist and writer, Hettie Jones would tell of the injustice toward these groups. As we will see later in this chapter, “Alphabetical Guide Against Apartheid” is an alphabetical listing of the unfairness and disappointments suffered by the African-descendant people because of the politics involving them. However, this concern is presented not only from the perspective of the African-Americans, who were inhabitants of her own context, but she takes this issue beyond geographical borders.

²⁴ A former social system in Africa in which African-descendant people did not have the same political and economic rights as the white and other racial groups. This segregation began in 1948 and was maintained until 1998. Merriam-Webster online dictionary. Date of access: 30/06/2016.

Jones observed a conservative New York in the decades before publishing, i.e., the 1950s, and in the 1970s she began publishing given that she found herself in moments of anger and sadness while trying to protect her two African-American daughters, Kellie and Lisa Jones, her family, friends and husband from racism. Since young, in fact, she had observed a prejudiced society and had been engaged in the defense of equality, as seen in the previous chapter, in the analysis of her memoir in regards to race. She evidently had speckled more and more pieces to put together, more and more reasons to contribute against white discrimination. She witnesses a whole alphabet of injustice and prejudice, a world where the grass is green and may represent hope but is not found in the yards of African-descendant people as we read below:

- A for the thing itself and its antithesis ANC
- B for Biko, black
- C colored, that curious division, and the children run
Out of Crossroads
- D for destruction, for death
- E the evil of it and the end of it
- F for the fight
- G the grass gone from the
- H homelands and the hate
- I – yes, I, and where do I fit in it? calling out
- J for justice for Johannesburg
- K the kraal, the K of Afrikaans, the talking of
- L land by language
- M the mothers, the miners, the music, the Mandelas
- N Nelson himself, his imprisoned life
- O how it tears at the heart's order
- P is prison, pass law, poverty in plenty
- Q the quest, the quintessential
- R righteous
- S soul of this people, struggling, the students
Struck, starved, stunted, not
- T taught but tortured, or tormented like T
- U Tutu and
- V the vast
- W world which watches these lives or

X es²⁵ them out and
 Y you and I who yes,
 Z Azania, who still A again and again allow it

(Jones, 1998 - 48)²⁶

The poem begins with A for Africans – “for the thing itself” and for the South African political party (ANC), the one which protested against the Apartheid pacifically but caused the death of 69 Africans, even before Nelson Mandela’s election. The reference to the ANC shows the poets’ concern with the rules of world politics since she writes about the actual political events happening in and outside United States. The poet shows concern about the welfare of all human beings no matter the skin color. In this alphabet, she shows her desire of justice and fight when she writes that “f” means just that: fight against “destruction,” all the “evil” and “death.” This “fight” is needed since African-descendants need their homes back, their green grass and peace, as well as a place to call home, where they may find love instead of hate. When she gets to the letter “I,” she questions herself – “Where do I fit in it?” – pondering about her own position, being critical and trying to find a way to be of use in this “fight” for justice, having, then, the consciousness of the other.

The poem brings origins to light when we read the “K of Afrikaans,” given that, to have a place of origin, a homeland, and a home is highly relevant to the construction of the African-descendants’ identities. How can there be people with no rights on their own lands? Jones also summons the strong figure of Mandela, who lived in prison for many years for entering this fight for equality. She brings the suffering, the “tearing” of heart and poverty, and the “tortured,” “starved,” “tormented” people to the poem i.e., the weight of the past, but also the music, the soul of a community, the passion and the strength of a people. These people are tortured but not taught, or educated as they should. Going from T to U, she mentions Desmond Tutu, a South African activist and retired Anglican bishop who heavily opposed Apartheid in the 1980s and has campaigned against racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, poverty and won many awards for promoting peace and justice. Anyway, even knowing and recognizing some names

²⁵ “es” in the original; however my reading was of x them out in the sense of erasing them.

²⁶ The structure of the poem was kept as in the original.

that fought for justice, the persona seems desolate realizing that perhaps the protection and fight is not enough, since the world watches these lives, along with the “W” and, simply ignores them next; consequently, the great issue of the poem comes around the people who “yes,” who can, but do not. The main criticism goes to those who “yes,” those who are educated and can be active in politics and social movements but simply stand still, watch and allow injustice to happen over and over again. So where does the real problem rest after all?

It is possible to make an analogy between real places and Jones’ alphabet by saying that no matter where we go, no matter which letter in the alphabet we are at, there is always a reminder of some sad circumstance regarding these marginal lives. Seemingly there is no escaping from it since it ends in a cycle. The cycle repeats itself and goes back to A, and again and again people allow the other suffering without actively interfering.

An example of active interference is given in the next poem to be analyzed, which reminds us of the tales from Georgia told by W.E.B. Dubois (1903). Atlanta was a scenario of much torture and prejudice in late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Cases of suffering and discrimination similar to the ones from Dubois’ tales did not pass smoothly through Jones’ feelings. In the poem “Atlanta Death 1981,” the persona voices the feeling of extreme sorrow felt at the murder of a dozen²⁷ young African-American boys in the city of Atlanta, the city of so much African-descendants’ blood spilled. As Jones mentions in a footnote, that year many people wore green ribbons in support to the solving and stopping of these crimes in Georgia.

This green ribbon I wear
For these our children

is really my mother’s there was

a roll of it among her sewing
things, spools of thread of
every color, pins and old,
saved elastic, thrift

²⁷ According to a search on wikipedia.com this number goes to 28 African-American murders, being those children, adolescents and some adults. It happened between 1979 and 1981 in Atlanta, Georgia, United States. Wayne Williams, 23, was arrested, convicted and sentenced to two life terms in prison. Until 2004 Williams plead innocent. Date of access 08/07/2016.

y woman she was, is
not now that, she's

senile, Mom is, so I

took her ribbon, thread

the knots
the ties

to wear

her on my sleeve, to
pin her, make
her place in this

grieving

while she dies

(Jones, 1998, 78)²⁸

In this poem, the persona embraces the situation and feels the need of spreading the race concern by wearing the green ribbon. Thus Jones represents a voice that sympathizes with the suffering of others, the ones discriminated and killed, showing solidarity for the living and the dead, since the same grieving seems to rush through the woman for her own mother, senile, and for the young African-American boys. The ribbon, thus, seems to represent and bring together two grieving moments, one directly personal and the other socially oriented. When the persona writes that she takes the ribbon and mentions all the old sewing things of her mother, it is possible to think that she brings the weight of the lives, of her mother and the children, and the murdered boys onto her life as well; as if she, too, knew and felt the burden they went through, with all “the knots” and “the ties” and “spools of thread of every color” and pins – which usually hurt – of the many lives of suffering beings. She wears, thus, every color of thread, which also remind us of diversity and, with it, she seems to endure the past never forgotten. Still, hope is present in this poem, since green is the color of the ribbon, despite the black color correlation with grieving, death and

²⁸ The structure of the poem was kept as the original.

the African-American boys; hope is the main “color” throughout the poem. Despite the natural ways of life and all the injustice Jones depicts in her poem, she seems to call for hope, gratitude, love and justice by bringing such messages and pictures as described, especially because it is based on a factual event.

Returning to W.E.B. Dubois (1903), in the beginning of the twentieth century he wrote in detail about all the difficulty which black people faced after slavery in order to achieve human rights; he wrote that they were freedmen, but freedmen with no lands, no prestige, no money, and no education. It was a long path to get to their rights. This included civil war, governmental and non-governmental organizations, the Bureau, Mr T. Washington etc. Hettie Jones, almost 70 years later, felt the inequality and suffering of those times of Dubois’ tales and joined in this “battle” for equality with clever criticism, using the weapon she knew of: her writing, her literature. *Drive* is immensely concerned with freedom and human rights for many marginalized groups of her society, and since women did not have great opportunities to publish in her early years, Jones waited some decades to begin publishing. She saw through her literature a possibility to continuously point out discrimination.

The third poem from *Drive* to be discussed is part 2 of the poem “From Four Hetties.” In this poem, by exalting the women deeds and wishes, Hettie Jones pays homage to four Hetties she has personally met or knew from books and somehow made an impression on her. Each of the four parts of the poem is dedicated to each strong Hettie she knew in order never to forget who they were and what they accomplished. The second part was selected since it deals more directly with the theme of this chapter – race – although gender is also addressed.

This is for Hettie September²⁹, a
charter member of the Federation
of South African Women

²⁹ Hettie September is also mentioned as a comrade who was once married to Reginald September, “a trade unionist and leader in the Coloured Peoples Congress” (239) in the autobiography *A Life for Freedom: the Mission to End Racial Injustice in South Africa* by Denis Goldberg and published by UP of Kentucky, 2016. Denis Goldberg was one of the accused antiapartheid activists, tried at South Africa’s Pretoria Supreme Court, found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment, along with Nelson Mandela. Goldberg was one of the founders of the Congress of Democrats and worked for the ANC in South Africa.

formed in nineteen hundred
 fifty-four, its objective
 the unity
 “of all women
 in common action
 for the removal
 of all political,
 legal, economic
 and social
 disabilities”

Oh Hettie it hasn't happened

But you, resembling
 My sister, sat for
 your photo in such
 hopeful attention
 to the speaker
 who was a black
 woman beside a white
 woman and all before

a banner that cried out:

GREETINGS TO WOMEN OF ALL LANDS

Hettie we bear this name
 Forty years later I send the same

(Jones, 1998, 94)³⁰

In a sorrowful tone of frustration for non accomplished ideals – “the unity of all women in common action for the removal of all political, legal, economic and social disabilities” – the poem addresses a South-African woman, Hettie September, who did not achieve her goals. Hettie September is described as being in full attention “to the speaker who was black” beside a white woman and the message claims for unity

³⁰ The structure of the poem was kept as the original.

in the banner sentence of welcoming: “Greetings to women of all lands.” Hooks (2000, 57-8) says that women need to “put in place a concrete politics of solidarity that would make genuine sisterhood possible.” The persona, who clearly names herself as the speaker, avows that she is in this same fight for the unity of all women of all lands when she says: “Forty years later I send the same” – greetings to all women of all lands, endorsing the need to surpass race barriers in the fight for women’s rights. Hooks declares that white women need to involve the discussion of race and class into their debates, mind and hearts.

When women of color critiqued the racism within the society as a whole and called attention to the ways that racism had shaped and informed feminist theory and practice, many white women simply turned their backs on the vision of sisterhood, closing their minds and their hearts. (Hooks, 2000, 16)

By reading Jones’ work we may notice the same urgency in her production, since she seems not to fail including these issues into her writing, mind and heart.

The next poem to be analyzed comes from a book that brings a great variety of themes regarding social and private lives, including race. In *All Told*, Jones’ 2003 poetry book, she depicts life in many forms and ways by bringing themes as friendship, memories of journeys, family, motherhood, sex, freedom, religion, politics, war, injustice with minorities and so on. It is a book that seeks social and political justice, despite the sad depictions of life in society. It is divided into six parts and is 94 pages long. The diversity of themes in *All Told* is great and perhaps this is why race is depicted in only one poem entitled “Phone Sex for Race and Gender.”

In a conversational, calm and joyous tone, the persona in the poem depicts a phone conversation with a friend or a lover. In this short phone conversation the subject of race is conveyed in a light, cheerful and fun way, as we may notice by paying close attention to the poet’s word choice and the touch of playfulness. *All Told* creates a warm mood for the reader which softens the theme that is usually stern and unyielding. The poem goes as follows:

Hello, she says.
Hello, he says, there is a wandering colored person
under your window shouting, and no one

has heard.
 Oh sorry, she says. And this person, uh, just what color
 is it?
 Black, he replies fiercely. A black *man*.³¹
 Really, she says, you never will fix your glasses. He is
 much more colorful to me. Can't you see his blues,
 his greens, the long white arc of his multicontinental
 semen?
 Oh come off it, he says (idiomatically).
 I'd be happy to, she answers.
 Cocksucker, he says (familiarily).
 Just throw me the key.

(Jones, 2003, 50)

In this poem, the poet's concern with race appears in a playful tone, without the burden and suffering that are tirelessly depicted in race texts; here the woman sees only the good and "colorful" human being who waits for her, ignoring the weight of the "black man" used by him. I read the poem imagining the persona being white (since Hettie Jones is white and was married to Leroi Jones); however, the poem can be read from the perspective of an African-descendant couple, since there seem to be no evidence of the other person's skin color. He seems to be only a friend or a lover to her who is on the other side of the line and they seem to be, both, anxious to meet each other. However, the use of "fiercely" before his reply "a black man" shows a man proud to be himself, the color he is. The woman seems to know the man intimately, considering the use of colors to describe, perhaps, his moods, such as greens and blues, which denote that they spend more time together than just that call, and they seem to have a good and easygoing relationship. The playfulness is perceived in "and this person, uh, just what color is it?" and "you never will fix you glasses," bringing harmony to a poem connected to race. The use of the black vernacular "cocksucker (...) Just throw me the key" gives the reader a natural, playful and light-hearted feeling toward this poem. It seems that Jones wants to enlighten only the good feelings of this union of races and, if this was the case, in "Phone Sex for Race and Gender" she has absolutely succeeded.

Such poem makes us think and see interracial relationships in a different light, since it shows the possibility of a peaceful relationship among races. This approach could function just as well with inequalities

³¹ Italics in the original.

of gender, ethnicity, or social class, etc. Dubois (1903) said that we all need to cope, live in the same world and understand the world and system we live in, in order to survive. It is important for African-descendant people to reinvent or redefine concepts, as Cardoso points out in her article (2014), so they can create their own identity in order to change the so far white-imposed identity. According to Hall (1992), much of what continuously shapes our identities is summoned from the outside world; although identities are not fixed, the outside world has an enormous impact on what people tend to believe is true. People may, then, feel they do not fit into the world of white preferences and impositions and end up considering this feeling of not fitting as their fault. The problem is how to dose the “intake” from the outside world without abandoning who they (or we all) really want to be. In this sense, literature provides an important tool of resistance by valuing a particular history, questioning taken for granted values, and giving voice to those groups whose race, ethnicity, gender or social class render them “minor.” By raising such issues, Jones contributed to resistance in the form of art.

Another instance where resistance can be perceived is the poem “About Face,” included in *Doing 70*, published in 2007. “About Face,” subtitled 8/6/02, appears in the second section of the book, which presents historical facts subversively, that is, seen from another angle than a white supremacist one.

In Ghana, in August, in
the Golden Tulip’s
Demba Lounge

Nat Cole sings
“Merry Christmas”

as lone white men
on cell phones listen,
some with evident
nostalgia, to a black man
singing of home

(Jones, 2007, 41)

In this poem the roles are exchanged to demonstrate the feelings of white men when they are the ones far away from their homes, ironically in an African country, singing and longing to be at home

again. Here, Jones brings white men far from home feeling what once the slaves felt: longing and nostalgia. The feelings are depicted as real, from a real place, triggered by a black singer; however, the conditions of the white men longing for home are not the same as those who were once slaves. The poem is short and simple to picture, perhaps, an ordinary nostalgia. The persona creates a positive mood with the sentimental and nostalgic state, but at the same time it transmits melancholy and, to a certain degree, a resentful sensation for the disturbance in emotions that once white men caused.

Still in *Doing 70* Hettie Jones registers her concern with racism in the poem “Starting Here, What Do You Want to Remember?” This poem discusses the fragile position of “black” women (as she writes) and how the skin color dictated and “allowed” injustice to happen. This poem is the last of the section “True Sisters” and it is divided in three parts. I have selected part two to bring to light the race (and feminist) issue brought in it. It goes as follows:

(...)

I want to remember the rape
of the already mutilated
circumcised Darfur women

raped by custom, raped
to control, raped to death

oh, if I could, in the same breath
reveal their pain and
relieve them of it

Saida Abdulkarim was working
in her vegetable garden when
three men seized her, saying
“You’re black, so we can,”
then raped her and beat her
with sticks and guns

though she was eight months
pregnant

At first too hurt to walk
two weeks later she had

not, so far,
miscarried

I want to remember
her unending withstanding
this endless miscarriage
of justice

(...)

(Jones, 2007, 67-8)³²

The persona began by wishing to remember the injustice; she wants to remember the rape of a woman who could not even feel any sexual pleasure, since she had been circumcised. The criticism begins at this point when the persona depicts the social practice of mutilation of the female body. The persona, then, stressed the wronged white social assumptions that if the body is black it can be raped, “by custom,” “to control” or “to death,” ignoring them as human beings, and thus, erasing their identities and existence. The persona then shows her own suffering along with the victims by stating that she wished “in the same breath, reveal their pain and relieve them of it,” again having the consciousness of the burden and, therefore, trying to bring consciousness to others. The woman, named Saida Abdulkarim in the poem, miscarries after this violence and humiliation and, as in the Alphabetical poem, a claim for justice seems to be accentuated by Jones. These events must not be forgotten, so the persona wants to remember the “endless miscarriage of justice,” insistently fighting for respect for the black skin color and for women of all places.

Having in mind the discussion about how the identities of minorities are erased in the white, supremacist, patriarchal and capitalist system, as also avows bell hooks (2000), we may read this poem with a mood of suffering, since everything for so long debated is brought up over and over again (as Jones alphabetical poem). The persona began this poem by questioning “Starting here, What Do You Want to Remember?” Then, for this answer the persona neither goes for soft words, nor creates a positive mood or good humor tone, since she wants to be direct and grave, minding particularly the burden and the suffering it brings along. This makes people ponder about the white oppressor’s actions in the views of the oppressed. Jones shows her readers that

³² All spaces were kept as in the original.

solidarity is not all and that this consciousness needs to be reshaped over and over again in order to guarantee the same political, economic and social rights for all in regards to race and gender.

FINAL REMARKS

In terms of the main objective of this study, I have proposed three questions in order to better understand the work of the Beat writer Hettie Jones. The questions that guided the discussions were the following: (1) What major feminist countercultural issue can we find in Hettie Jones' work as a writer/poet? (2) How did the subaltern social position of women affect the life and work of Hettie Jones and how much of her work shows this debate? (3) How did race and racism impact her thoughts, feelings and her writing?

In regards to question 1, Jones seems to persistently question the power of patriarchy that tends to hide the actions and achievements of women and racism. Over and over again, the poems and memoir show us images of injustice toward women of different social classes, races, ages, and cultures, and the writer seems to desire justice for all. In the poems presented in this study, Jones seems extremely concerned with issues that involve the lives of women not only in the Western and American society but across the world. The growing of consciousness regarding these issues seems to be urgent everywhere, taking into consideration the cases of repression and political disadvantage we see every day in the news. Through this art that imitates life called poetry and through her memoir she tries to open paths. These pages and many others by Hettie Jones still demand analysis and understanding.

In regards to question 2, we may consider her answers during an interview she gave in 2004, when she is asked about her reasons for writing and why she talks about "setting the record straight," as read below:

N G: In what way were you trying to set the record straight?

H J: First of all, about the situation of women. A lot of young women at the time had no concept of the fact that prior to the women's movement there were any women who had removed themselves from general cultural expectations, during the fifties especially. I really wanted to show that we had started the whole process; that not enough attention had been paid to the fact that we were here and we had made changes in women's lives. (Grace & Johnson, 2004, 159).

It is possible to recognize political and social involvement in the Civil Rights Era in Jones' production and the way she felt so many injustice toward her personal and artistic life. According to McKoy (2014, 2) this involvement is noticeable in all the Beat women's production. Fortunately, through literature some concerns are more exposed to debate and solution, since, according to Caldas-Coulthard (1994, 299-302), fictional texts do not need to attend to neutrality as factual texts do. Moreover, literature gives freedom to the writer to really expose the most relevant and intriguing concerns toward their own society without disguising intents, whether by being direct or making use of metaphors and irony, but more importantly, conveying the main concerns. Memoirs and poetry may help people subvert rules and create space for critical discourse and social change; furthermore, literature analysis can provide awareness of both social and political problems as well as with identity understanding and private sphere issues. However, Jones did not wait to see changes only through her writing; she was also an activist, and when asked how she and her group contributed to the women's movement she declared:

NG: How did your group contribute to the women's movement at that time?

HJ: By physically taking a stand, rather than intellectually or through any particular writing. Simply by saying, "Ok, I'm going to love on my own. I'm going to acknowledge that I am a sexual being, I'm going to have sex, and I'm going to practice birth control. I'm going to be a responsible person comparable to a man-I'm going to live what is generally regarded as a man's life. I'm going to have my own apartment, I'm going to have a job, and I'm going to be self-supporting." Even among the young women that I knew who were slightly younger than I, all this was really considered an accomplishment. It was! You just weren't supposed to leave home until you got married and lived under another man's hand. (Grace & Johnson, 2004, 160)

Today the movement has the participation of women of all classes, races and ethnicities and feminisms try to discuss their differences, but it was in the 1950s and 60s that the movement was able to force itself through countercultural attitudes and show the

dissatisfaction of women and blacks, opening doors to the feminisms we know today. Among the many names that emerged from this fight, some were the writers of the Beat Generation who denied old traditions and created prospects through their stories. This counter-current initiated with the help of the Beat women and came to Brazil around the 1970s, influencing young people to fight for gender, race and class equality, freedom of expression, freedom from social, cultural and economic constraints.

Another interesting point that I came across in Hettie Jones' memoir and poetry was the issue of ethnicity and her displacement regarding her "Jewishness" and the way she had to deal with the African-American culture being part of the white American culture facing the denial of support from her Jewish people, feeling displaced. However I leave this issue as a suggestion for further studies. Hettie Jones is clearly a representative of the work and lives of the women of the Beat Generation and can contribute immensely to further feminist studies.

In the theoretical framework of this study I wondered, along with bell hooks, if white feminist women pondered about how they represented other women in a collective way and if they were really represented (hooks, 1994, 203). Taking hooks's concern into view, we see after reading the findings of this research that Hettie Jones, despite being white, works on the representation of different voices in her claims, African-Americans, Muslims and so on, opening up the grounds of representation and bringing up voices that were not heard before. And as hooks (2000) puts it, feminist studies help to upraise these voices:

Imagine living in a world where there is no domination, where females and males are not alike or even always equal, but where a vision of mutuality is the ethos shaping our interaction. Imagine living in a world where we can all be who we are, a world of peace and possibility. Feminist revolution alone will not create such a world; we need to end racism, class elitism, imperialism. But it will make it possible for us to be fully self-actualized females and males able to create beloved community, to live together, realizing our dreams of freedom and justice, living the truth that we are all "created equal." Come closer. See how feminism can touch and change your life and all our lives. Come closer and know

firsthand what feminist movement is all about. Come closer and you will see: feminism is for everybody. (hooks, 2000, 7)

Through a rereading of the representations and positioning of women in the past under the light of feminist studies, we may be able to better locate ourselves in the present and better appreciate our identity as African-American women, white women, lesbian, trans women (and so on) of the 21st century, recognizing that our positions are what they are because micro and macro social movements and historical events were left as a legacy for our generations. Regarding question 3, Jones recognized the social struggles of the black community and since she lived among African-Americans as part of her family she felt as duty to bring race and racism concerns to debate and help people to reflect upon it, treating the matter seriously and ardently, to perhaps create a new consciousness regarding race, using her writing as a bridge to it.

It is thus valuable and enlightening to learn from what they have done before. It is far from an end, but some of our rights were conquered because some strong women were there fighting before us. The Beat Generation contributed greatly to our current generation. Rights and freedom are still to be triumphed over and we know that the counterculture is a great ally in the path to overcome social and ideological conflicts. One way to do it is to write our own history. The known studies of the women of the Beats are mainly memoirs, to illustrate the collective and common history of women present therein; however, many perspectives should be included in the women's literature of the Beats. By bringing to study a more specific view of the participation of women in this movement, people can understand the importance of Jones' efforts to get out of the patterns as representative of all women of her generation and beyond. If for some writers the Beat trips have ended, women are certainly still on the road, howling.

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