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Hettie Jones, Bonnie Bremser, and the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity: Complicating Beat Master Narratives about Women and Race

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Abstract: The Beat master narrative suggests that all Beats ignored racism; the feminist wave model suggests that there was no feminist activism between the first and second wave of feminism and no attention to the intersection of race and gender prior to the third wave. Both models discount and in the process erase the efforts by Beat writers Bonnie Bremser and Hettie Jones who challenged racism and sexism before the more visible civil rights and feminist movements of the 1960s. Employing Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity to analyze the intercultural/interracial attitudes present in Bonnie Bremser's *Troia* and Hettie Jones' *How I Became Hettie Jones* reveals how these Beat writers' attitudes regarding Otherness were problematic, but also progressive for their time.

Keywords: feminism, Beats, intercultural

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In *Troia: Mexican Memoirs*, Beat writer Bonnie Bremser¹ writes, "I know that I am as much Mexican as I am New Yorker or even spade, Negro, Veracruzana, I have undergone the metamorphosis completely and my heart is warm and happy" (2007, 39). By claiming solidarity with people of color, Bremser seeks to show that everyone is equal and should be treated thusly. In the 1950s in the United States, such an inclusive stance would have been radical, especially coming from a white person. More typical would be Bremser's sister Lucy who "grasped the essence of Spanish Colonialism" and, "unknowingly, flaunts it along with her hatred of Indians" (51). And yet, since a white woman does not face the racism a woman of color experiences, this statement is also ethnocentric and essentialist.

In *How I Became Hettie Jones*, Hettie Jones, another Beat writer, similarly missteps when she likens her Jewish heritage and having "dark skin" with living in the U.S. as a person of color. In writing, "As an outsider Jew I could have tried for white, aspired to the liberal intellectual, potentially conservative Western tradition" (1990, 14), Jones ignores the reality that the world privileges her as white. And yet Jones also acknowledges systemic racism when she writes that to call jazz "Negro music also put on it what was put on Negroes themselves, and no one wanted *that*" (21-2). Jones also defies her father's command that she terminate her pregnancy with her biracial child, calling him "crazy" (63) and thereby rejecting both his racism and his paternalism.

By way of comparison, whereas Bremser and Jones want to challenge racism, in his 1957 "The White Negro," Norman Mailer is not concerned with understanding/representing the complexity of actual African American lives, opting instead to craft the African American experience as a foil for the (white)

hipster lifestyle. As Douglas Taylor notes, “it seems more than a little ironic that the danger by which Mailer's Negro is beset (a danger Mailer contends, forces him to adopt a more authentic form of masculinity) derives from the same white men for whom this Negro has now become an object of desire” (2010, 76).

Kerouac's depiction of the Native American and African American character of Mardou Fox in *The Subterraneans* is also problematic. Based on Alene Lee, Fox is a victim of not only the male gaze but specifically the *white* male gaze. For example, Perceived comments to Mardou, “what I see in your eyes is a lifetime of affection not only from the Indian in you but because as part Negro somehow you are the first, the essential woman, and therefore the most, most originally most fully affectionate and maternal” (1958, 129). David S. Wills observes that in depicting Lee, “all Kerouac seemed to see was a girl who looked Indian and who was sexy and who was available. All he saw was the ‘black thing.’ That is, the ‘black thing’ that only existed in his mind and erotic imaginings” (2010).

And in her 1969 *Memoirs of a Beatnik*, Diane di Prima fixates on race as Other, and specifically on Ivan (a.k.a. LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka) as a hypersexual Other. Describing their first sexual encounter, di Prima perpetuates the racist stereotype that African Americans are not fully civilized, not fully human. She refers to Ivan as “the creature” (1998, 5) and speaks of “the unholy magic of Ivan's sallow flesh” (29). Even though di Prima's goal in this passage may be to challenge the taboo of an interracial sexual relationship, as well as the taboo of a woman as the sexual aggressor, she employs dehumanizing stereotypes.

Although Bremser's and Jones' memoirs at times reveal intercultural/interracial attitudes that an enlightened contemporary reader may balk at, neither is overtly racist. In fact, both writers earnestly challenge injustices perpetuated against people of color. Clearly the racist/not racist binary does not adequately capture this range of attitudes, so I will employ Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) that places specific intercultural/interracial attitudes on a sliding scale. On the ethnocentric end of the DMIS continuum are the stages of Denial (of difference), Defense (against difference), and Reversal (reifying difference). On the ethnorelative end the stages of Acceptance (of difference), Adaptation (to difference), and Integration (of difference). Mid-point is Minimization (of difference). Professing colorblindness and claiming “All Lives Matter” are contemporary examples of Minimization. Mitchell Hammer later unpacks Minimization further, noting that Minimization should be “represented as a transitional orientation between monocultural and intercultural mindsets” (2012, 119). He and Mitchell Hammer both emphasize that with exposure to difference, self-reflection, education, and empathy, one may become more interculturally/interracially sensitive. However, if one feels threatened, one may also regress.

The progressions and regressions depicted in both *Troia* and *How I Became Hettie Jones* align with the DMIS and the scholarship associated with it. For example, in *How I Became Hettie Jones*, once she observes racism perpetuated against her husband, mother-in-law, and most especially her bi-racial daughters, Jones acknowledges her naivete in Minimizing the importance of race in America and advances to Acceptance. As Hammer, Bennet, and Wiseman explain, “the more ethnorelative worldviews are ways of seeking cultural difference, either by accepting its importance, by adapting perspective to take it into account, or by integrating the whole concept into a definition of identity” (2003, 426). In the 1994 “Mama's White,” co-written with daughter Lisa, Jones acknowledges her previous miscalculations in underestimating race, writing, “Not quite White isn't Black” and adding, “I've got this straight. And no way to convert” (1994). This essay reveals that beyond *How I Became Hettie Jones*, Jones continues to develop her intercultural/interracial sensitivity to progress to Adaptation and even Integration.

In *Troia*, as well, Bremser at times advances along the DMIS as a result of exposure to Mexican culture. For example, she challenges one of her johns, Ernesto Z, because he “looked down his nose at the Indians” (2007, 205). Unfortunately, though, differences in language, culture, and race prevent Bremser from fully integrating into Mexican society. Moreover, opportunities to reflect on her experiences, a crucial factor in acquiring intercultural sensitivity, are limited for Bremser who undergoes significant emotional and physical distress while in Mexico. The very fact that Bremser’s *Troia* was edited by Michael Perkins, without her input, from private letters that husband Ray had solicited for his sexual excitement, points to how the degree to which her personal agency was being compromised. (In contrast, Jones published her own text and decades after the events upon which she reflects.) Given these circumstances, it should come as no surprise that Bremser’s largely unprocessed cognitive cultural dissonance would lead her to regress in her intercultural sensitivity, at times exhibiting blatant ethnocentrism.

In her 2004 interview with Nancy M. Grace who asks Bremser how the “concept of race” affected identity in *Troia*, Bremser replies,

We lived in a community where there was a lot of mixing, even racial mixing. Hettie and LeRoi, and Elvin Jones and his wife were a mixed marriage. But what we had more of us was a togetherness with the jazz musicians, the people that were down and out, the junkies and all of that lot, and a lot of that was black culture at that time. So we felt like we were very liberal. Now whether we truly were or not, I don’t know, but it was an ideology at that time to be very liberal. But it’s more of being a woman and being a minority myself. (2004, 125)

Whereas Jones engaged in “racial mixing,” Bremser had/chose only proximity to “black culture” (2007, 125). It is not surprising, then, that she redirects attention to her own minority status in the midst of her answer about race, suggesting that her own ethnic identity remains centered and others Minimized.

These complications notwithstanding, however, we should acknowledge Bremser’s and Jones’ earnest desires to challenge racism, even when doing so meant personal sacrifice. We also must acknowledge that as problematic as Minimization of race may and should be to a contemporary audience, Bremser’s and Jones’ intercultural/interracial attitudes were progressive for their time. Moreover, the U.S. still struggles with Minimization. In a 2006 study, Jennifer Mahon administered the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) developed by Bennett and Hammer to 159 full-time elementary and secondary teachers from nine schools in midwestern U.S. The IDI measures “orientations toward cultural differences described in the DMIS” Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman 2003, 422). More than 97% of the participants in Mahon’s study fell on the ethnocentric side of the DMIS, with 60.7% of the participants revealing a Minimization worldview. Reflecting on her study’s conclusions, Mahon notes that “it is difficult to fault teachers for believing that seeing only the mind and heart of a child is best practice” (2006, 403). Mahon’s point is well taken and supports Hammer’s revision of Minimization as a transitional stage between ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism: on the one hand, Minimization may be a result of complacent ethnocentrism and/or ignorance about systemic racism, meaning there is a need for growth, but those who Minimize difference often do so in order to challenge the even more ethnocentric stages of Denial and Defense.

The intercultural/interracial attitudes of Bremser and Jones are likewise complicated, shifting, and contextual, defying a simple racist/not racist binary. As a result, they deserve a nuanced framework that allows for those complications, shifts, and contexts. The DMIS serves that purpose. With that framework in place, Bremser’s and Jones’ problematic and their progressive ethnorelative beliefs and

actions come into focus, enabling us to revise the master narrative that all Beats ignored racism, as well as the feminist wave model that suggests there was no feminist activism between the first and second wave of feminism and no attention to the intersection of race and gender, “one of the distinguishing characteristics of the third wave” (Whittier 2006, 60). Both models discount and in the process erase the efforts by Beat writers such as Bremser and Jones to challenge racism and sexism before the more visible civil rights and feminist movements of the 1960s. Bremser and Jones deserve that recognition.

Minimization of Race

Minimization of race has a long history in the U.S. In his 1782 *Letters from an American Farmer*, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur coined the term “melting pot,” noting that one “becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great *Alma Mater*. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world” (2005, 26). In addition to the problematic use of “men” to represent humans, St. John de Crèvecoeur specifies that the Americans who were going to “melt” were “once scattered all over Europe,” adding that new Americans “are a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes” (24). In truth, melting meant whitening. As Milton M. Gordon explains in *Assimilation in American Life*, “indeed, the white Protestant American is rarely conscious of the fact that he inhabits a group at all. He inhabits America. The others live in groups. One is reminded of the wryly perceptive comment that the fish never discovers water” (1964, 5).

One hundred years later, even among feminists whose awareness of gender inequity should make them more alert to injustice against other marginalized groups, race is minimized. Lisa Tetrault notes in her analysis of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony’s 1881 *History of Women’s Suffrage*, “there is little awareness in the volume of the ways in which womanhood is marked as white. . . . To the contrary, Stanton and Anthony present themselves as—and surely believed themselves to be—the ‘true’ representatives of meaningful inclusion” (2014, 134). The women of color in the suffragette movement, including Sojourner Truth, Anna Cooper, and Amanda Berry Smith, disagreed, observing that unless both women *and* people of color were granted suffrage, women of color were going to be excluded, placed, as bell hooks notes, “in a double bind” (2015, 3). Despite being more ethnorelative than Defense, believing that race doesn’t matter only serves those whose own race is privileged (i.e. white people).

In *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*, Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith observe that even in the 1970s, women’s studies courses “focused almost exclusively upon the lives of white women. Black studies, which was much too often male-dominated, also ignored Black women” (1982, xx). In fact, in *Ain’t I a Woman*, bell hooks recalls a women’s studies course in which her primarily white, female, and privileged classmates agreed that when a baby is born, gender is of primary importance to the parents. hooks disagreed, arguing instead that “when the child of two black parents is coming out of the womb the factor that is considered first is skin color, then gender, because race and gender will determine that child’s fate” (2015, xiii). The white students had projected their white reality onto non-white women, emphasizing the importance of gender but minimizing/ignoring the importance of race, probably because whereas they had experienced sexism, they had not experienced racism.

Tellingly, in her 1999 Preface to *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler writes, “If I were to rewrite this book under present circumstances, I would include . . . a discussion of racialized sexuality and, in

particular, how taboos against miscegenation (and the romanticization of cross-racial sexual exchange) are essential to the naturalized and denaturalized form that gender takes" (1999, xxvii). And in her 1993 *Bodies That Matter*, Butler elaborates, acknowledging that "some feminist positions, including my own, have problematically prioritized gender as the identificatory site of political mobilization at the expense of race or sexuality or class or geopolitical positioning/displacement" (1993, 78). Thus, even Judith Butler admits to Minimizing race.

The Minimization of race is also evident in the scholarship about women Beats. Understandably, many scholars have opted to foreground the misogyny that white female Beat writers encountered, leaving race and racism largely unexplored. In "The Archaeology of Gender in the Beat Movement," for example, Helen McNeil argues that "the Beats have never been seen as a movement engaging with women or responsive to feminist critique; even revisionist literary history has had little to say about gender and the Beats. To put it bluntly, everyone knows they were sexist, so why bother" (1996, 178). Likewise, in "Gender Performance in the Literature of Female Beats," Gillian Thomson writes, "In a way, the voice of the female Beat has been censored by historians, scholars and indeed the male Beat, perhaps to serve the larger goal of phallogocentrism" (2011). And in "Self-Narratives and Editorial Marks: Inventing Hettie Jones," when Chelsea D. Schlievert notes that "sexism, chauvinism, misogyny, and the exploitation of women frequently pervaded 1950s' bohemia" (2011, 1092-3) in which Jones lived and wrote, anti-Semitism and racism should be included in this list, especially since Jones discusses how both impact her life.

In her 2012 "Beat Transnationalism under Gender: Brenda Frazer's *Troia: Mexican Memoirs*," Ronna C. Johnson's focus is also on gender as she argues that "in *Troia*'s border crossings, gender problematizes male Beats' legends of transnationalism and stymies transnational fluidity as they had conceived it" (64). Indeed, Johnson makes the excellent point that Bremser's "sexuality and maternity tangle with and tangle up in the road's border-crossing myths and juridical procedures," making "conspicuous the unrecognized gendered premises of Beat transnationalism" (52). Case in point is the complicated authorship of *Troia*, a text Johnson observes was "edited into a sequential narrative, titled and published as a book outside Frazer's aegis by two male poets [Ray Bremser and Michael Perkins] skeptical of her literary acumen but intrigued by her confessions of sexual hazard" (52).

Although Johnson's focus in the article is on gender, she does broach the subject of race, writing of the passage "I know that I am as much Mexican as I am New Yorker or even spade, Negro, Veracruzana, I have undergone the metamorphosis completely" (39) that Bremser's "broken 'inhibitions' signify borderlessness, a 'metamorphosis' out of gender homogeneity to simultaneity of female subjectivities. The intercultural border zone of Bonnie's 'metamorphosis,' like the Nuevo Laredo/Laredo cusp, disperses binaries" (63). While I acknowledge that Bremser's expression of solidarity with women, including women of color, reflects a progressive step given the racism of her time, Bremser oversteps by claiming to actually be a woman of color. Similarly, although U.S. citizens may Minimize the significance of the Mexico/U.S. border, the white perspective is a privileged one, a limited one. Describing the Laredo/Nuevo Laredo border, at first it seems that Bremser includes herself in her observation, "I see persecution as I never knew existed. My citizenship is questioned every time I cross the bridge," but she adds that the border guards are "well-trained to recognize the difference between flavor and true nationality, they are better trained to offend and I put them on at every turning" (2007, 81). In other words, Bremser decenters her perspective and thereby avoids Minimizing the difference in the experiences that a Mexican would face when crossing the border.

Bremser even uses her white privilege and her sexuality to turn the tables and make the guards uncomfortable. Thus, although the Nuevo Laredo/Laredo “cusp” may blur the cultures on both sides of the border, even generate Anzaldúan *Nepantla*, the existence of racism and xenophobia means that we cannot pretend that all races are interchangeable. Doing so is appropriation. In *Borderlands*, Gloria Anzaldúa is clear on this point as she instructs the Chicana people “to say to white society: We need you to accept the fact that Chicanos are different, to acknowledge your rejection and negation of us. We need you to own the fact that you looked upon us as less than human, that you stole our lands, our personhood, our self-respect” (1987, 86). Importantly, Ronna C. Johnson criticizes Sal from Kerouac’s *On the Road* of for precisely this mistake, noting his “wishful and transient appropriation of Mexicaness,” which is “gratuitous and superficial” (63). Unfortunately, the same accusation can be leveled against Bremser at specific moments in *Troia*, and if we critique male Beats for failing to acknowledge their gendered privilege, we must also critique white Beats, Bremser included, for failing to acknowledge their racial privilege and ethnocentrism.

Just such a critique is evident in *Women Writers of the Beat Era: Autobiography and Intertextuality* as Mary Paniccia Carden notes Hettie Jones’ denial when it comes to racism. Carden writes of Jones’ marriage to Jones/Baraka that Jones “recognizes tensions in their relationship but, until Roi begins to view their marriage through a black/white lens, does not attribute it to race” (2018, 173). At this point, as Jones herself admits, her exposure to racism (as opposed to antisemitism) is limited, which allows her Minimization of race to remain unchallenged. In fact, Jones/Baraka also chooses to overlook the significance of race early on in his bi-racial marriage, likewise wanting to believe that by refusing to give credence to the importance of race, the couple can avoid racism. As Hettie Jones observes, “we were trying to shake the time. Shake it off, shake it up, shake it down” (1990, 34). The wording here is telling: the couple is *trying* to escape the racism of their time, but, of course, they cannot.

Later Jones will realize that instead of shaking it off, she needs to collaborate with and learn from others—her mother-in-law, the African American women at the hair salon, and her own daughters—in order to understand racism and become an ally in challenging it. Jones moves beyond Minimization, ultimately reaching not only the stages of Acceptance and Adaptation on the DMIS, but Integration. She writes, “What’s missing is critical: the way I now felt in whites-only groups. In a midtown office by himself, Roi could only be himself. In a similar situation, without him or the children, I felt misrepresented, minus a crucial dimension, and seeing race prejudice everywhere, shocking and painful” (1990, 202).

Jones’ competencies align with those Merry Merryfield designates in “The Difference a Global Educator Can Make” as crucial to intercultural/global competence: confront stereotypes and “exotica”; resist the simplification of other cultures; view the world from multiple perspectives; and become aware of “power, discrimination, and injustice” (2002, 18-21). In other words, invite intercultural difference into your life and do not feel threatened by it. Bremser does try to embrace Mexican culture and to some extent she succeeds. However, because she lacks opportunities to form deep connections with the Mexican people and given the stressors of her life as a prostitute in a foreign country, Bremser at times reverts to the more ethnocentric stage of Defense.

The parallel between Bremser’s and Jones’ experience and second- and third-wave feminists is noteworthy. Bremser expresses that she purposefully published her story in order to be “revolutionary”: “I felt righteous about being a prostitute. I felt like what I was doing was more honest than free love. I was . . . I was conscious of that. I thought it was something that needed to be done. I thought prostitutes needed a spokesperson” (Frazer 2004, 130). However, like the second-wave feminists, Bremser errs by presuming

that because women are universally oppressed, their oppression is universal. In other words, she Minimizes difference. In contrast, Jones and third-wave feminists do not presume that the needs of white women are identical to those of women of color; instead, they Accept and Adapt to difference, recognizing how difference complicates and intensifies sexism.

Hettie Jones' *How I Became Hettie Jones*

Describing her early relationship with LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Hettie Jones writes in *How I Became Hettie Jones*, “We stand there, under the arc of a new moon, joking and laughing and liberated, we assume, from all that has gone before us” (1990, 29). Both are hopeful that by transcending their own racial differences, they can also escape the racism around them. Their Minimization of difference can thus be read as fairly ethnorelative, stemming from a rejection of discriminatory societal norms. As Babbitt, Toosie, and Sommers observe, “in some cases, White people who are egalitarian (i.e., lower in social dominance orientation) are actually more likely to endorse racial color-blindness, which suggests they have good intentions in doing so” (2016, 55).

Milton Bennett recognizes that the motives for Minimization can be complicated, noting that Minimization is generally manifested as “physical universalism” and/or “transcendent universalism” (1986, 184). Physical universalists believe all humans exhibit the same “basic human patterns of behavior,” meaning people need not acquire knowledge of specific cultural patterns. Carden finds, for example, that Hettie Jones “argues both implicitly and explicitly that what she and Roi had in common was more authentic than the racial considerations that prompted Roi to leave her and their Beat community. She attempts to establish that they are more alike than different by illustrating their like-mindedness” (2018, 172).

However, Hettie Jones was not yet knowledgeable enough about the importance of a person of color’s racial identity and racism to dismiss the power of race in the U.S. so summarily. When her family moved to Laurelton, New York, for example, she notes that there were “no Negroes, Hispanics, Italians, only some Anglos and Irish who couldn’t afford to move away from the Jews,” adding, “I went to school with their children, but never went to their homes. There was a firm inevitability to this; you just didn’t mix, exactly the way you didn’t serve milk with meat” (1990, 8-9). This ignorance of racism allows her to underestimate the importance of race, not only to racists but to people of color who may not wish to be deracinated. Deborah Thompson observes, “Hettie sees race only as skin, an epidermal phenomenon” (2002, 88).

Although Jones may wish to ignore race, she does note that at Mary Washington University, apart from the dorm maid, she “met no other black people regularly (1990, 12), and that all of the jazz collectors and essayists, whom she calls “moldy figs” (21), were also white. At this point, her perspective is informed by the anti-Semitism she experienced growing up, as well as being “along with the goyim!” (11) in Virginia, which places her on the margins of white society.

Jones also witnesses “shacks” in the South that lead her to “refuse to link hard life with art” (1990, 23). Certainly, after spending Saturdays in Newark with LeRoi’s grandmother, Jones’ horizons are expanded “from the hilly suburban Newark” she knew as a child “to bleak, neglected urban projects” (107). The African American women she meets definitively challenge Jones’ Minimization of race: “Right away they let me know that assuming their burden was foolish: ‘Why *this*?’ they said, pinching Kellie. ‘Wasn’t being Jewish bad enough?’” (108). Differentiating between the anti-Semitism that she has

experienced and the systemic racism that the African Americans she meets have experienced is an important step for Jones, a step towards ethnorelativism as she decenters her own perspective.

Even then, as educational as such experiences are, it is by personally witnessing the racism that daughters Kellie and Lisa experience that Jones comes to understand viscerally the violence of racism and how it complicates and compounds sexism. Riding the train with Kellie, Jones is struck by the number of people who stare with disapproval at them—a white mother and a biracial daughter. Jones offers this explanation of a particular man’s “hard, angry look,” writing, “we’d swollen the ranks of those he’d have to define. I couldn’t stand his eyes—not on me but on her—*her*, my apple-cheeked, brown-limbed, loving, talkative child. My girl! I wanted to kill him! *Kill him!!*” (107). Despite her own experiences with anti-Semitism and with sexism, the extent to which her daughters’ race ignites hatred is new for Jones. The parallel here between Jones’ evolution and that of U.S. feminism is obvious: white feminists during the first and second waves recognized sexism but generally failed to consider how, as Judith Butler observes, “what counts as ‘ethnicity’ frames and eroticizes sexuality, or can itself be a sexual marking” (78). However, Black second-wave feminists such as The Combahee River Collective, Audre Lorde, and June Jordan, as well as third-wave feminists generally, acknowledge that racism does not simply co-exist with sexism, the two intersect, interact, and compound one another. Eventually Jones acknowledges this too.

Third-wave feminists also protest the fact that women of color have historically fallen into a third space—excluded in the Feminist movement by white women and excluded in the Civil Rights Movement by African American men. Jones/Baraka typifies the latter when he takes radical steps in order to protest racism that include leaving Jones and their two daughters to fend for themselves. As Greg Tate observes in *Everything But the Burden*, “when Amiri Baraka was out to purge himself of all his past associations with white people and white art movements, a certain anxiety over influence, plus anti-intellectualism and countersupremacy, surged up in ways that made white influences nearly taboo” (2003, 11). Jones/Baraka writes in his autobiography, “I had begun to see her [Nellie/Hettie] as *white!* Before, even when I thought she was white, I had never felt anything negative” (1997, 287). The fact that Jones/Baraka uses the adjective “negative” here speaks to the fact that whereas Hettie Jones believes that African American culture has much to teach her, Jones/Baraka regresses from Minimization to Defense as he shifts from Minimizing the white race to vilifying it. By succumbing to the sexism of his time and failing to check his male privilege, Jones/Baraka Minimizes gender.

In marked contrast, near the end of *How I Became Hettie Jones*, Jones notes how significantly her worldview has changed as a result of her immersion in the African American community. At the beginning of her memoir, Jones had “never held a black person’s hand” (1990, 14), and now she has escaped her own ethnocentrism, her white perspective on the non-white reality. Jones has progressed on the DMIS, well beyond Minimization and Acceptance and on to Adaptation as she is now not only able but also compelled to “include relevant constructs from other cultural worldviews” (Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman 2003, 425). Indeed, when Ann Charters asked in 1996 if Jones felt comfortable being identified as a Beat writer, Jones responded, “I’ve dealt so much more—rather than with the issues that define the Beat Generation I think, whatever those issues are—but I’ve dealt so much more with the issues of race in America and multiplicity of our race and ideas that I somehow find myself more identified as that” (2001, 618).

Even after LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka divorces her and leaves her to rear their two daughters alone, Hettie Jones acknowledges the value in his fight for racial equality, noting that to think otherwise would mean dismissing her own family’s struggle: “I’d seen enough of the South and Harlem and Newark to believe, I thought, in Malcolm’s ‘by any means necessary’” (1990, 223). Combating racism has become

not only a societal duty, but also a familial mission. Ultimately, Jones achieves Integration, the most ethnorelative stage of the DMIS, “the state in which one’s experience of self is expanded to include the movement in and out of different cultural worldviews” (Hammer, Barnett, and Wiseman 2003, 425). Jones is thus a forerunner to third-wave/third-space feminism that similarly champions diversity and the acknowledgment of intersectionality.

Bonnie Bremser’s Troia

Troia, as Bremser explains, was not “conceived as a book,” but instead was a series of letters sent to Beat writer Ray Bremser: “When I wrote *Mexican Memoirs*, I’d just sit down, smoke a joint, sit at a typewriter, and go. Put it in a pile and that was that. That was the process” (Frazer 2004, 113). As a result, *Troia* is, as Carden observes, “a fragmented and disjointed text, riddled with gaps, understatements, and contradictions,” at times “impossible to follow with any real degree of certainty” (2018, 64). The same description could be applied to the intercultural attitudes Bremser exhibits in *Troia* as they are likewise fragmented, disjointed, and full of contradictions. At times, Bremser protests discrimination against the Indigenous and Mestizx people of Mexico, a brave position for her to have taken at the time. In doing so, however, she occasionally reifies the Indigenous and Mestizx people of Mexico while vilifying Spanish Americans and white people generally. Moreover, at other times, she ignores race altogether, both her own and that of the Mexican people she encounters. Thus, her intercultural sensitivity fluctuates, shifting from Defense/Reversal to Minimization and sometimes back again, but only rarely advancing to the more ethnorelative stages of Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration that Hettie Jones achieves.

These progressions and regression along the DMIS continuum make sense given Bremser’s and Jones’ circumstances. Although both she and Jones rebelled against the racism of the time, Bremser’s circumstances were dire: she had to flee to Mexico with husband Ray Bremser and baby daughter Rachel in order to avoid Ray’s prosecution for parole violation in New Jersey, and while in Nuevo Laredo, Bremser had to engage in prostitution in order to support the family. A personal life in disarray, financial and inner resources taxed, and a language barrier—these all contributed to her being kept on the periphery of Mexican society and her ethnocentrism left undisturbed and/or reinforced. Moreover, she was also denied the time and energy needed for self-reflection. For much of *Troia*, then, Bremser’s ethnocentrism holds, until it doesn’t. Without the inner and outer resources needed to help her contextualize her experiences, her intercultural sensitivity suffers.

While both Bremser and Jones experienced cultural cognitive dissonance, Jones was doing so among people, including family, who were inviting her into the African Newark African American community. Jones’ memoir also benefits from the time and space she needed to reflect on these events and her reactions to them. As a result, whereas Jones is able to participate in the measures that Merry Merryfield designates as important to increasing intercultural sensitivity—confronting stereotypes, resisting the simplification of other cultures, acquiring multiple perspectives, and recognizing power dynamics (2002, 18-21)—Bremser struggles with all of these.

Indeed, when Bremser crosses the border into Mexico, she is thrown into a foreign culture. Not surprisingly, when describing this new experience, she uses the word “fear” five times in the first page and a half of her memoir. Nonetheless, Bremser quickly shifts to an upbeat tone, as when she describes her ability to adapt to this new culture: “Put it all in a sieve and squash your personality through into a new diversified you—the process will take about four months” (2007, 20-21). In part, she can sustain her

optimism because she oversimplifies the intercultural differences she is facing, behaving at times more like a tourist for whom Mexican culture is something to consume. For example, Bremser comments, “I admired [Pedrito’s] long black straight hair and knew that more than all the world I wanted to make some claims to Indian heritage” (2007, 191), and she is proud of “producing a standard imitation of the Veracruz girls’ evening crispness” (43). Even her use of Spanish throughout *Troia* is only the appearance of bilingualism in that she code switches rather than code meshes, which means she knows Spanish vocabulary—“mercado,” “borachero,” “brujo,” but not grammar, not the structure beneath: “same *parroquia* coffee and trolleys up and down the city round and crazy *arrista* bus goes *circumvalcion* just to spite its not-surprised passengers” (71). Bremser is in the Denial phase of the DMIS.

This lack of acknowledgment of difference is also visible in Bremser’s friendship with J, a relationship that centers on Bremser’s needs and perspective. Bremser writes,

Whatever problem I have, J understands and miraculously produces the solution. Now that is friendship; every time I go to her house a burden is lifted from my shoulders. Although I was suspicious of her motives at first, and turned down her first efforts on my behalf and thwarted her plans at last by going to Mexico City, she even understood our need for occasional extravagance and did dig us, no question. I could write her a letter right now in English or in Spanish and she would be thrilled, happy to hear from me as if none of her present life had put any distance between us and I were there in her heart still. (39-40)

The fact that J is cast as someone “thrilled” to help, even when the request is an “extravagance,” and that J is presented as having no problem with being inconvenienced and being treated with suspicion by Bremser suggests that either J is subservient to Bremser or that this is Bremser’s delusional perception. Either way, because Bremser does not acknowledge that anything is amiss, she is Denying difference. She needs to learn, as Merryfield phrases it, “about power, discrimination, and injustice” (18).

Unfortunately, Bremser also succumbs to Defense, as when she exclaims, “how I hate the American Spanish” (53) and “fuck you, Laredo border patrol of the streets and awful turnstile nickels and liquor tax” (113). Conversely, exhibiting Defense’s counterpart of Reversal, Bremser observes that “The Mexican has something better than law” (27) and “everybody gets sick and stays that way, except for the Indians who have some built-in resistance that had become traditional by killing off the unfit” (199). Although Bremser champions people of color, particularly the Indigenous/Mestizx people of Mexico who were colonized by Spain and the U.S., Bremser reifies Indigenous/Mestizx Mexicans and vilifies the white oppressor, a fairly common response to feeling guilt that one’s home culture is responsible for oppressing another, but it is too pat. As Engle and Engle observe, a “tendency to judge other cultures according to a culturally pre-conditioned set of values and assumptions will activate the ‘us’-‘them’ polarization” (2004, 231).

In fact, despite saying that “one Indian footstep on those hills out there was worth more than all his [Ernesto Z’s] Spanish-Mexican properties multiplied by years of tradition” (2007, 205), Bremser is largely ignorant of those traditions. Consequently, when Bremser witnesses a cleansing ritual performed on baby Rachel, she does not understand it, nor does she attempt to understand it. Instead, she reacts Defensively, labeling the tradition as evil as evidenced in Bremser’s language: “The witch mesmerized up out of a fog in my head and as we open the shutter doors a heavy cloud of what I have learned to know as copal was rising furiously out of a small burning brazier on the floor. Somehow the baby’s face floating on the incense, a bony old hag on the other side of the burning smoke gesticulates motionless the stopped moment that we came in the door, catching her in the act” (86). The use of pejorative terms such as

“witch” and “bony old hag” to refer to a *curandera* reveals Bremser’s mistranslation of a Mexican tradition. Bremser admits to as much, referring to her “paranoia against black magic” (125) and that “this suspended dance of abandon awakens a natural prejudice in me, so close to the baby” (86-7).

By simplistically casting Mexico as a positive foil for the U.S., Bremser oversimplified both cultures. As a result, when faced with a cultural tradition in Mexico with which she was unfamiliar, rather than accepting it as different or attempting to understand it, she found it not only wrong but also evil. Cultural cognitive dissonance was the result. In a 2004 interview with Nancy M. Grace, Bremser explains her response: “You don’t really know what your make-up is that way, in dealing with differences, until you’ve lived some place where you’re the minority, and then you start to think, ‘Maybe I could say everybody that had darker skin seems against me.’ I could be paranoid about my whiteness. Maybe some of that came out, I don’t know” (Frazer 2004, 124).

Even now individuals who seek out intercultural experiences may regress in their intercultural sensitivity when interacting with other cultures. Engle and Engle, for example, found that of 186 American students participating in a study abroad at the American University Center of Provence over three years, twenty-seven saw a decline in their Intercultural Development Inventory scores (2004, 231). Explaining this finding, the authors point out that “when students are protected abroad or, for some personal reason do not wish to focus on cultural difference, the desire for comfort dominate. During their time abroad, these students will reinforce worldviews of Minimization or even Denial as defined by the DMIS, thus reinforcing their ethnocentric worldview and impeding their progress along the IDI scale” (232).

Although throughout *Troia* Bremser demonstrates the ethnocentric stages of Denial and Defense, it is important to acknowledge that she also exhibits Minimization, a stage that Hammer argues can be indicative of “intercultural mindsets” (2012, 119), especially one by ignores race out of a desire to rise above racial difference and thereby eradicate racism. Unfortunately, Minimization enables a white person to deracinate people of color and to overlook one’s own whiteness and its concomitant privileges. In *Troia*, for example, Bremser comments on the beauty of her tan line, failing to acknowledge that this sharp contrast between her white skin and her dark tan marks her as white. Her beauty is thus linked to the racialized standard she protests, the standard that places white people “above” the Mestizx and Indigenous people. In fact, ignoring how brown and white bodies are valued differently resembles the way that male Beats ignored how male and female bodies are valued differently.

Like Bremser, Hettie Jones also Minimizes race, for a time, but Jones is afforded opportunities to learn about racism, including by witnessing it perpetuated against her own family members. After such exposure, Jones recognizes the naivete and arrogance of a white person dismissing the importance of race in the U.S., which also means dismissing others’ experiences with racism. While witnessing on television the 1960s lunch-counter sit-ins, for example, Jones describes an iconic scene in which African American Anne Moody has mustard, ketchup, and sugar poured on her head. Jones writes, “the girl swallowed hard, you could tell she was scared. Behind them a crowd nearly out of control mugged for the camera and tried to shout each other down” (1990, 109). Jones confesses, “I’d never imagined such risks, I’d seen her from my own perspective not from this” (109). Such a decentering of her ethnic perspective enables Jones to move past Minimization and Acceptance along to the ethnorelative stages of Adaptation and Integration.

These critiques about Bremser’s intercultural attitudes notwithstanding, in *Troia* Bremser does at times acknowledge that she and Ray are guilty of co-opting Indian/Mestizx culture. She purchases an “Indian skirt,” for example, but because she and Roy feel too self-conscious for her to wear it, Bremser chooses to hang it on the wall (24-5). And she notes, “Huautla made me know that we were no more than

tourists, really” (130). Such epiphanies reveal that Bremser was able to move past Minimization, progressing well beyond the racism of her time. But while in Mexico, Bremser remains on the periphery. Had Bremser been privy to the intercultural education and relationship that Hettie Jones was the beneficiary of, Bremser might have been able to progress further along the DMIS continuum.

Conclusion

Beat writers used to mean *male* Beat writers, the women in the Beat scene merely the men’s support system, financially and as artistic muses. Speaking in 1996, Hettie Jones even commented, “I don’t think women are ever going to be identified as the Beats” (qtd. in Charters 2001, 622). Unfortunately, Hettie Jones and Bonnie Bremser have not only been overlooked as Beats, but also as feminists. In fact, perhaps they were overlooked as feminists because of their association with the male Beats. As Carden observes, “for the most part, its deployment of ‘woman’ as qualifier of ‘Beat’ has had the opposite effect, positioning women as trespassers on male ground and discounting their contributions to the Beat movement and to the substantial social change it put in motion” (2018, xii-xiii).

But feminist they are. Jones begins *How I Became Hettie Jones*, “I started leaving home when I was six and weighed thirty-eight pounds” (1990, 5) and later notes, “I never thought about marriage. I had other plans and love was all I wanted” (7). Jones eschews her traditional role and begins to “hang out in the lunchroom with boys who talked anarchy” (10). By the time she is seventeen, having discovered that “men had little use for an outspoken woman” (10), Jones is determined to escape. She writes, “What I wanted, I was told, was security and upward mobility, which might be mine if I learned to shut my mouth. Myself, I simply expected, by force of will, to assume a new shape in the future. Unlike any woman in my family or anyone I’d ever known, I was going to *become*—something, anything whatever that meant” (10). Bremser, as well, as a woman who writes graphically about her own prostitution, challenges traditional gender scripts of domesticity, purity, and obedience.

Ronna C. Johnson acknowledges both Jones’ and Bremser’s feminist activities, declaring that these “second-generation” Beat writers crafted texts that “clarify the liminal interval in the twentieth century between first- and second-wave women’s movements” (2004, 13-4). I agree, but in contrast to *white* feminists prior to the third wave who largely failed to prioritize the rights of women of color, Jones and Bremser challenge systemic racism, Jones specifically acknowledging its intersection with sexism. As intersectional theorist Kimberle Crenshaw clarifies, “Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated” (1989, 140).

Consequently, Jones and Bremser are also proto-third-wave feminists. Jones’ expanding consciousness and compassion for people of color, especially, corresponds with Rebecca Walker’s characterization of third-wave feminists as “seeking to create identities that accommodate ambiguity and our multiple positionalities: including more than excluding, exploring more than defining, searching more than arriving” (1995, xxxiii). Although Bremser’s intercultural sensitivity slips at time into ethnocentrism, she does push against racism, classism, and xenophobia, criticizing the U.S. government for its racist policies despite her and her family’s vulnerability owing to Ray Bremser’s parole violation. Crossing the U.S./Mexico border, Bremser is literally at the government’s mercy, and yet her critiques against systemic racism on both sides persist.

The very fact, though, that Jones and Bremser cannot be easily plugged into the feminist wave model suggests a problem with the model itself. Although on the surface each wave represents a progressive step along the DMIS continuum as feminism becomes more diverse and more accepting of diversity, the reality is more complicated, with ethnorelative feminists appearing during and between all three waves. For example, although Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were ethnocentric, Sojourner Truth and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, among others, were not. In fact, Truth's "Aren't I a Woman" and Harper's "We Are All Bound Up Together" are early examples of intersectionality, theories associated with the third wave.

The unpleasant fact is that the feminist master narrative itself has been ethnocentric, irrespective of who the feminist activists actually were, which is not surprising given that ethnocentric people crafted it. Speaking of Stanton and Anthony's *History of Woman Suffrage*, Lisa Tetrault notes, "Black women do appear in the *History's* excerpted documents, because they were present and a part of the debates. But they are invisible in the *History's* larger narrative arc. They are not an integral part of the story. Where black women do appear, rather than talk for themselves, they are more often talked *about*" (2014, 133). Benita Roth makes a similar argument regarding the second wave, noting that because the assumption was that the "second-wave feminism was a white woman movement," we "missed the chance to fully map out second-wave feminist networks" (1999, 72). And as previously noted, just as Jones and Bremser were unacknowledged as Beats by male Beats because of gender bias, their progressive and blunt discussions of racism may have made them too radical for the white feminist narrative, as well.

Fortunately, though, the works of Sojourner Truth, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Belinda, and Phillis Wheatley, as well as Hettie Jones and Bonnie Bremser, are now standard reading in college classrooms. Had we heard these anti-racist voices all along, perhaps the U.S. as a whole would have made greater process along the DMIS continuum. As Bremser's and Jones' memoirs clarify even if you have a relatively progressive worldview, it can be difficult to decenter your own cultural perspective and Accept others without mentors and guides. Importantly, *How I Became Hettie Jones* reveals that once you come to respect another culture, you will not Minimize it. Acknowledging that Jones and Bremser were neither mere sidekicks to male Beats nor racist white woman is important as these two memoirs provide meaningful, hard-fought lessons on how to overcome intercultural insensitivity, lessons that are especially valuable for a nation still struggling with racism.

Notes

1. *Troia* was published under Bonnie Bremser, which is the name I use here. However, the author was born Brenda Frazer, and some scholars use that name, as well as Bonnie Frazer.

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