Resisting Containment: Transgressive Movement and Alternative Space among Women Writers of the Beat Generation

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ABSTRACT

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By examining the texts of female Beat generation writers Joyce Johnson and Hettie Jones, this project explores space and movement as potential avenues for reaction against a society for whom conformity is a virtue. Johnson’s Minor Characters as well as Jones’s How I Became Hettie Jones arise out of a culture of containment—the domestic repercussions of US-America’s efforts during the Cold War to quell communism. Through literal movement and the recodification of space, Johnson and Jones engage in resistance to physical and ideological containment that is experienced both spatially and psychically.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Containment Culture

In *Minor Characters: A Beat Memoir*, Joyce Johnson chronicles her coming-of-age in the post-World War II United States. Beginning her account in 1945, Johnson quickly places herself alongside the budding Beat Generation as it takes root near the campus of Columbia University—not far from her Upper West Side childhood home. The author terms the parallels between her life and the emerging subculture “simultanities” (8), as she alternates between a narrative of her life as a young woman and concurring accounts of such countercultural icons as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and William Burroughs. The “simultanities” Johnson identifies with these subterraneans help to align the author with the movement of which she will later be a part. However, the Beat culture is not the only simultaneous circumstance shaping Johnson. She writes:

> It was after the war, in the 1950s, that fear would envelop America—fear of the Bomb, fear of the Communists, fear of falling from grace or of any change in the status quo, fear of deviation or difference. The American nuclear family closed in upon itself and tried to shut out the world. It was a time of national mean-spiritedness and, for young people like me, of oppressive blandness. There was the sense of having missed out on something, of having been born too late. What had been taken from us was the energy and courage of youth. (xxxiii)

That this female Beat operates within the Cold War happenings of the U.S. is pivotal to the unfolding of her life’s events. Her attention to the Cold War attitudes
pervasive in mainstream America makes disaffection a clear reaction to what Alan Nadel terms “containment culture.” According to Cold War scholar Alan Nadel, although the term “containment” specifies the U.S. foreign policy from 1948 through the mid-1960s, the various domestic actions taking place under the pretense of containing communism amount to a larger “culture of containment” (2-3). Soon, the effects of the containment policy penetrated American daily life. As Nadel explains, “Containment equated containment of communism with containment of atomic secrets, of sexual license, of gender roles, of nuclear energy, and of artistic expression” (5). Accordingly, Nadel echoes Johnson’s identification of “fear” as one significant component to the dissemination of restrictive social codes. For Nadel, the Cold War provides an example of the “power of large cultural narratives to unify, codify, and contain—perhaps intimidate is the best word—the personal narratives of its population” (4). Both Nadel and Johnson, then, bear witness to the effects of an oppressive society on the individual’s quotidian existence.

Similarly, Hettie Jones publishes *How I Became Hettie Jones* as a reflection of her time within the Beat circle. Jones recalls, “I think of us trying to laugh off the fifties, the pall of the Cold War, the nuclear fallout—right then, the papers were full of it—raining death on test sites in Nevada. I think we were trying to shake the time. Shake it off, shake it up, shake it down. A shakedown” (34). Dissatisfied with the life and prospects of the dominant culture, Jones’s desire to find an alternative demonstrates her participation in the rejection of the postwar containment ideologies in US-America. At seventeen, she describes the social codes already too stifling: “By 1951, the year we were labeled the
Silent Generation, I’d been recommended to silence often. Men had little use for an outspoken woman, I’d been warned. What I wanted, I was told, was security and upward mobility” (10). Here, *How I Became Hettie Jones* assumes the position counter to Nadel’s identified culture of containment, an atmosphere in which “‘conformity’ became a positive value in and of itself” (4). Conformity to “‘middle class’ values, to distinct gender roles and rigid courtship rituals” assumed the powerful status of “public knowledge” through “pervasive performances of and allusions to containment narratives” (Nadel 4). Information imparted on Jones at a young age regarding acceptable behaviors for women and regarding the attainment of the American Dream reflect the containment narratives of Nadel’s text: continual reiteration of the proper place for the white, middle-class, American female concretizes an understanding of cultural expectations.

Both Jones and Johnson, disillusioned by the lives mapped out for young women growing up in postwar US-America, exhibit similar behaviors of resistance. While the culture of containment meant restrictive ideologies, these women seemed to experience confinement in a physical sense. Consequently, their rebellion was tangible. To resist containment required them to leave the places representative of repression. For Johnson resistance involved egressing from her parents’ home, the place of her upbringing, and ingressing into “bohemia.” In the spring of 1949, at the age of thirteen, Johnson begins her quest, climbing onto a bus bound for Greenwich Village. She discovers, on the other end of her journey, Washington Square Park and the Waldorf Cafeteria, places always brimming with “artists, poets, communists and anarchists, guitar-pickers, jailbirds, scavengers” (39). For the remainder of her adolescence, Johnson spends Sunday
afternoons “moving back and forth between antithetical worlds separated by subway rides” (41). Although Johnson’s “worlds” may be mere neighborhood divisions of Manhattan, the two spheres represent distinct spaces: one representing adventure (30), camaraderie (20), and freedom (102), the other, joylessness (30), loneliness (20), and containment (92).

Jones echoes her counterpart’s desire for departure, and the young woman growing up in Laurelton, New York, reacted much in the same way as her disaffected Upper West Side compeer. Like Johnson whose desire for flight manifests at a young age, Jones begins chapter one of her memoir, “I started leaving home when I was six” (5). Accordingly—as the work’s title suggests an account of identity formation—departure from her parents’ household plays a pivotal role in Jones’s personal development. The author’s impulse was to “become—something, anything,” she explains (10). Because of its distance from the home of her youth, Jones hopes to reach this goal by relocating to Mary Washington, a college of the University of Virginia (10).

Achieving her dreams, becoming, necessitated movement “away from the usual expectations” (10). Here, Jones’s reaction to containment is literal. Like Johnson, to achieve a sense of personal liberation requires leaving the restrictive spaces of home life.

Geographies of Resistance

Understanding both Johnson and Jones’s movement within and against the containment culture requires particular attention to the spaces that they inhabit and the meanings that these spaces acquire. Space is not merely the backdrop for activity, but it “plays an important role in constituting and reproducing social relations” (Longhurst 93).
Cultures, subcultures, and the individuals existing within them, interact with their surroundings in a relationship that is distinctly political—meaning that such interconnections express a power structure. Approaching a text in this way presents the opportunity to dismantle hegemonies, challenging the traditional ways of conceiving gender, sexuality, the body, and a wider sense of identity formation, as each of these concepts relates to spatiality. Such a method provides a foundation from which to explore movement and space as expressions of resistance against containment.

*Space and Identity*

The meanings that both Johnson and Jones attached to the environments they inhabited at various points of their lives played a large role in the decision to leave home and to seek alternative spaces for the realization of freedom. The understanding of these locations as either containing or emancipating and the consequent actions undertaken by both women highlight particular components of the interaction between subjects and the spaces that they encounter. A reading of *Minor Characters* and of *How I Became Hettie Jones* requires an examination of the inscribed meaning of specific spaces. The meaning of the various settings present in the memoirs impacts the movements and relocations of Johnson and Jones. Additionally, and directly related to the attachment of meaning to space, the implication of particular spaces enlightens the connection between emotion and materiality. Finally, analyzing the relationship between Johnson and Jones and their respective placements reveals the understanding of space as an expression of identity—an interpretation of space with theoretical basis in geography. Ultimately, through this project, I aim to inform a reading of these women’s experiences through an
explication of the relationship between meaning, emotion, and identity and the significance of these three elements to physical spaces.

Breathing meaning into these places, indeed, emphasizes importance of *place* to human experience. Johnson and Jones attach internal responses to the spaces they inhabit. Central to geographical studies is the understanding of the processes involved in molding the places that people inhabit and the ways in which these places form experience and meaning (Staeheli and Martin 138). Structures—buildings, homes, apartments—and landscapes—parks, neighborhoods, boroughs—function beyond their physical presence.

As research psychiatrist Mindy Fullilove explains: “Places […] are not simply bricks and mortar that provide us shelter. […] Each of these places becomes imbued with sounds, smells, noises, and feelings of those moments and how we lived them” (10). Thus, the subjective value inscribed upon specific spaces works to shape both behavior and experience (Kelly and Muñoz-Laboy 359). The need both women feel to seek new places reflects the social significance, the cultural connotations, of home and of alternative retreats.

Subjectivity, *felt* response, should not be seen as incompatible to understandings of the material world. For forerunners of feminist geography Joyce Davidson and Liz Bondi explain, “[Emotions] are embodied and mindful phenomena that partially shape, and are shaped by our interactions with people, places and politics that make up our unique, personal geographies” (“Spatialising” 473). The interplay of external and internal experience that surfaces throughout both *Minor Characters* and *How I Became Hettie Jones* reflects the reciprocal relationship between people, their culture, and their worlds.
Consequently, when Johnson’s home in the Upper West Side becomes a place that stifles her maturation, she seeks a space for full self-expression elsewhere. Jones’s disconnect from her life in Laurelton (8), and alienation among the Southern “goyim” (11), suggest that behind her eventual move to Greenwich Village is a desire to belong.

While it is easy to neglect the physical nature of the desire to belong, this very emotional phenomenon, nonetheless, possesses a distinctly material dimension, as well. Indeed, identity—central to a sense of belonging—entails social, discursive dimensions, but also involves physical, embodied constructs (Atkinson, et. al. 89). The Cartesian model that divides the internal, intangible mind or essence and the external, material body becomes problematic.1 “To be,” Davidson and Bondi explain, “is to be somewhere” (“Troubling” 338). Identity, then, intrinsically implies spatiality. Moreover, because of the multiple influences that shape space, identity, thereby, submits to variability. The economic, political, and social structures in which spaces and places are formed interact with the subjects that inhabit them. In a reciprocal relationship space shapes subject and subject fashions space. And the importance a person places on a specific location—and an understood historical significance of this location—factors into the formation of identity. This act of attaching value to a space, identifying a space and identifying with a space, reflects the relationship between meaning, emotion, identity and materiality.

1 Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* is particularly useful in assessing the limitations of the Cartesian mind/body dualism. His attention to the spatial character of the human body gives rise to the understanding of perception as a consequence of the overlapping acts of sensing and interpreting. Psychological and physiological factors combine and engage in mutual influence while comprising and affecting consciousness.
From Squaresville to Washington Square: Female Beats Find Home

For both women, the parental household is a space that concretizes restraint—four walls and a roof symbolic of the larger containment permeating the culture outside. To continue to live within this environment, for these women, seemed to require subscription to the ideology of the dominant culture. Conversely, relocating to another space offered the opportunity to explore alternative lifestyles and ways of thinking. The world outside the place of upbringing would presumably foster personal identity formation. This perceived relationship between identity and setting reflects a larger correlation between ideology and location.

Engaging in this type of discourse on ideology relies on the foundation established by Karl Marx, whose understanding of the division of labor offers insight into the relationship between the material world and social practices. As Marx and Engels write in The German Ideology, “The ruling ideas are nothing more than the expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas” (64). Louis Althusser responds to Marx, exploring his interpretation of ideology, explaining that the term refers to the “lived relation” between people and their world (233). Interestingly, for Althusser, rather than expressing a reality, ideology “expresses a will […], a hope or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality” (234). Just as Marx identifies that the ideas of the dominant class “are the ruling ideas of the epoch” (64-5),

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2 Henri Lefebvre’s negotiation of mental space and real space underpins his explorations of everyday environments—the home, the urban landscape—in his work The Production of Space. His attention to social space reiterates the influence of social forces in the production of space and its imbued meanings.
in the postwar U.S. culture, the ideology of those in political power becomes the
dominant belief system of the time. Rather than a reality, the 1950s domestic ideal has
more in common with the will, hope, or nostalgia that Althusser identifies. Raymond
Williams extends this idea in *The Sociology of Culture*. For Williams, then, the dominant
social group determines the ideology that is favored, “between the formal and conscious
beliefs of a class or other group and the cultural production associated with it” (27).
Through cultural production, what becomes considered simply a “way of life” Williams
unmasks as the perpetuation of “false generalities” (29). Thus, in his discussion of
containment culture, Nadel explains, “The more pervasive, cultural narratives are echoed
and reiterated—in the forms of national narratives, religious dogma, class signifiers,
courtship rituals” (3-4). Containment becomes a way of life sustained through cultural
productions.

Peter Jackson points out, nonetheless, that along with dominant ideologies,
subordinate ideologies arise (52). Often, these subordinate ideologies challenge the
beliefs of those in power, using cultural or symbolic strategies of resistance (Jackson
54). According to Jackson, “resistance often takes specifically territorial form” (62).
Accordingly, “symbols of ‘community’, provide a relatively autonomous social space in

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3 Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci treats the contestation of hegemonies by those from
subordinate classes. According to Gramsci, the dominant class often attempts to contain
the subordinate class, but never with complete success. Jackson’s offers insight into
Gramsci’s work, explaining, “Members of the elite regularly condemn popular culture for
its alleged vulgarity, seeking to establish their hegemony by suppressing anything they
choose to define as cultural insubordination” (53). Both Gramsci’s cultural writings and
Jackson’s critical analysis have interesting implications regarding the inscription of
restrictive social codes within the culture of containment. Parallels can be drawn between
the political elite and Gramsci’s dominant classes who seek to stifle defiance and censure
popular or alternative cultural expression.
which to seek respite” from the oppressive dominant ideologies (62). Thus, for Johnson and Jones, the effort to locate a space away from the dominant ideology reflects the sort of resistance to oppression frequent in the struggle between those in power and their subordinate classes.

Throughout the lives of the authors, various locations acted for Johnson and Jones as distinct representations of unfavorable or desirable ways of life and thinking; however, such an understanding of the division of geographic spaces has precedence in the analysis of other urban settings. In the mid-twentieth century, for example, the efforts of urban sociologist Robert Park reinforce the attachment of certain ideologies to specific areas. Park’s analysis of Chicago involved the partitioning of the city into “natural areas” distinct in their “peculiar traditions, customs, conventions, standards of decency and propriety, and if not a language of its own, at least a universe of discourse, in which words and acts have a meaning which is appreciably different for each local community” (201). What Park seems to describe in the particularities of a specific space is a certain identity placed upon the area. A subject relating to the identity inscribed onto that location seeks relocation there in her own journey of identity formation.

For Johnson and Jones—young women embarking upon a quest for community and identity formation—one location, specifically, seemed to offer respite from the alienating culture of containment permeating New York’s other communities. Like Park’s examination of Chicago, the neighborhoods of New York City possess particular legacies. Of especial concern is the symbolic construction of the Village. Not only the destination for Johnson and Jones in their journey, the Village itself holds special
significance for many members of the Beat movement. In Ross Wetzsteon’s *Republic of Dreams: Greenwich Village, the American Bohemia, 1910-1960*, a description of the area is telling of the Beat response to the Village:

The Village has held such a mythic place in the American imagination that it has often served as kind of iconographic shorthand. A novelist only needed to write ‘then she moved to the Village’ to evoke an entire set of assumptions—she’s a bit rebellious, artistically inclined, sexually emancipated, and eager to be on her own. The mythology of the place has been created in large part by those who moved there from elsewhere. […] It is the community where irresponsibility, naïveté, and self-indulgence are transformed into virtues. It is the magnet that attracts young men and women from all across America to assert their independence. It is the refuge for social misfits. It is the home of poseurs, eccentrics, and drifters, and a romantic alternative to mainstream society. It is a metaphor for iniquity. (x)

Almost conjuring images of both Johnson and Jones in his description of the meaning of a move to the Village, Wetzsteon’s portrayal speaks to all of the characteristics Johnson and Jones sought in a new community. For Johnson and Jones, as well as many other Beats, the Village becomes a site of resistance. There, liberation is claimed—an “alternative to mainstream society,” the Village emerges as a space through which to counter the hegemony. According to cultural geographer Peter Jackson in his discussion of culture and ideology within a larger framework of “maps of meaning,”
hegemonic power entails the persuasion of “subordinate classes” to act in accordance with dominant “moral, political and cultural values,” accepting them as the “natural” state (53). Such pressure to conform certainly echoes the Beat encounter with the larger culture. As a result, “resistance often takes a specifically territorial form” (Jackson 62). In addition to the identification of certain territories as spaces for rebellion, the appropriation of certain rituals of resistance becomes stylistic markers of a particular subculture. The material appropriation of symbols, Jackson continues, “take on new, sometimes threatening meanings” (Jackson 61). As such, material forms of resistance—territory or other—are symbolic.

Returning to Wetzsteon, the use of the word “mythic” to describe the nature of the Village reveals the illusiveness some see in the inscription of such meaning on places. Echoing Althusser, Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, for example, consider an ideological connection to place an “‘imaginary relation’ to the real conditions of their existence” (33). Certainly, symbolic resistance has “imaginary” properties, as their political undertones are expressed through cultural, or countercultural, means (Jackson 64). Other scholars describe the alternative spaces for the realization of a counterculture as “utopian.” Inevitably, as a space meant for resistance to the mainstream, a utopian ideal is constructed in opposition to the disagreeable present reality.4 As Jackson asserts,

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4 In Mark Richardson’s article “Peasant Dreams: Reading On the Road,” the author positions Kerouac’s text as a utopic vision of America, an “impossible dream […] that exists nowhere beyond the border of this fiction” (237). Rachel Adams’s article “Hipsters and jipitecas: Literary Countercultures on Both Sides of the Border,” places the Beat utopia in much more tangible terms. For her, the Beat counterculture attempts to establish an alternative space for the resistance of the dominant culture, in a sort of utopian manner.
“Notwithstanding the ‘imaginary’ or ‘magical’ qualities of symbolic protest, it is also possible to analyze resistance in very practical terms via the actual symbols employed, most of which assume an immediate, tangible form” (64). In the texts of Johnson and Jones, the spaces that the authors inhabit and their various movements and relocations symbolize a resistance against the dominant culture.

The symbolic significance of the Village arises in both Minor Characters and How I Became Hettie Jones as each author ultimately relocates to the Village in order to construct a home environment. As a result of these relocations, the new space comes to represent a recreation of home. Johnson and Jones alike experience estrangement and exile from the households of their upbringings. Thus, the Village provides a sense of security and belonging for each woman. Accordingly, Jeanne Moore’s analysis in the article “Placing Home in Context” explains, “Home is viewed as a symbol of the self [providing] psychological comfort, social needs as well as physiological needs” (210). Thus, the sense of belonging attached to the home space arises from the home as a site symbolic of self.5 Ultimately, the move to the Village represents a critical step in the journey toward identity formation. Because the women of the Beat generation were historically unable to engage in the same peripatetic lifestyle as their male counterparts, “stability, or rather immobility, also offered possibilities of resistance” to various aspects

5 Gaston Bachelard’s The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places situates “home” as imbued with symbolic meaning, existing in the material and dream realms. For Bachelard, the subject and his or her home engage in a relationship of mutual belonging, and the subject is deeply affected by the physicalities of home space and the memories and emotions attached to it.
of the containment culture (McDowell 414). Both Johnson and Jones reshape and move among home spaces, positioning the traditional domestic arena as a site for opposition.
CHAPTER 2: JOYCE JOHNSON’S MINOR CHARACTERS

Sexual Containment: Crossing Sexual Boundaries

Outwardly, the events in Johnson’s Minor Characters represent a search for identity and belonging apart from the alienating environment of her upbringing. Yet, the deliberateness with which Johnson departs from home and the motive that the author offers for her actions establish a trajectory moving very much against the course established for young women within the 1950s conservative climate. Women, a particular target of social constraints, experienced the inscription of conservative behavioral codes, chiefly under the rubric of sexuality (Nadel 2). Thus, as Johnson explicitly links her quest to the development and expression of sexuality, her behaviors reveal a strong reaction against containment. Against the backdrop of Cold War US-America, Johnson’s assertion of sexuality emerges as transgressive and minatory to dominant culture. As Elaine Tyler May explains, “The sexual containment ideology was rooted in widely accepted gender roles that defined men as breadwinners and women as mothers. Many believed that a violation of these roles would cause sexual and familial chaos and weaken the country’s moral fiber. The center of this fear was the preoccupation with female ‘promiscuity’” (103). Under such severe social codes, a rebellious female teen becomes a wayward woman, a deviant, an outcast.

The enforcement of strict sexual standards emerges early in Johnson’s memoir. As a child of ten venturing along Riverside Drive, Johnson explains, “I was never allowed to go by myself down the stone steps into the overgrown, weedy, wilder regions of the park, which my mother […] called Down Below, just as she did an otherwise
unnamed region of my body” (7). Here, discussion of sexual anatomy is forbidden, stigmatizing sexuality in even the most technical, biological terms. However, like the off-limits area in Riverside Drive, the taboo surrounding sexuality makes it all the more appealing. Johnson tells readers, “The unparkliness of Down Below attracted me. One day I broke the rules” (8), which anticipates Johnson’s curiosity about and defiance of other tacit behavioral codes. Moreover, the direct link between sexuality and inhibited exploration and discovery immediately places Johnson’s quest outside of prescribed physical parameters. Johnson will have to test cultural limits in order to achieve a full investigation of the spaces that social codes place outside her reach.

Johnson begins to probe the boundaries guarding female sexuality during adolescence. Unintentionally pushing the limits of 1950s propriety, Johnson composes a letter to a friend that fictionalizes and exaggerates her encounter with a young man. When Johnson’s parents discover and misinterpret the letter, they react with horror at the presumed loss of their daughter’s virginity. Confrontation, accusation, and disgust comprise her parents’ response—Johnson’s father vomiting at the thought of a sexually active daughter (45). This extreme reaction acts as a revelation for Johnson: Among her parents and under their roof, any expression of her sexuality—enacted or invented on paper—would be deemed illicit. To actually engage in sex would require an exit from the home of her upbringing.

Recognizing that she must cross physical boundaries in order to continue exploration of sexual identity, Johnson begins her search for a space outside of these restrictive social codes. Leaving home becomes more than an act of teenage rebellion,
more than a need to “get away for a while.” The spaces outside her everyday life are everything that her home life is not—they represent a greater reality: “Real Life was not to be found in the streets around my house, or anywhere on the Upper West Side, for that matter” (30). Johnson elaborates:

Real Life was sexual. Or rather, it often seemed to take the form of sex. This was the area of ultimate adventure, where you would dare or not dare. It was much less a question of desire. Sex was like a forbidden castle whose name could not even be spoken around the house, so feared was its power. Only with the utmost vigilance could you avoid being sucked into its magnetic field. The alternative was to break into the castle and take its power for yourself. (30)

Just as repression is tied to a specific location, Johnson uses spatial terms to situate freedom and self-empowerment. Sex and sexuality is an “area”; it is a “forbidden castle.” Moreover, then, sexuality—and the spaces in which sexual freedom reside—becomes a locus for resistance. For Johnson, leaving home turns into a quest for identity, for agency. Seeking sexual expression serves as the author’s subversion of containment culture.

A Queer Migration Analogy

While the conservative climate of the 1950s generated a unique set of behavioral scripts for particular target groups, the experience of sexual containment is exclusive neither to Johnson nor to the postwar US-American experience. A body of recent scholarship addresses the literature of subjects reacting to the containment of sexuality—a phenomenon that gives rise to relocation to a home outside of the place of upbringing,
away from the “original” family space. Arising from gay and lesbian literature of “self-narrative” and “self-identification” within the “coming out” genre, this reconstitution of space through the terms of one’s sexuality comprises the core focus of queer migration studies. Not only does this scholarship on queer migration provide a sizable collection of study on sexuality, identity, and the negotiation of space, but this discourse also provides terms and concepts through which to direct an analysis of such relationships.

As feminist studies expand focus to the transnational subject, the topic of migration becomes increasingly prevalent. Sara Ahmed, et al., collect several such studies in the anthology Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration. Similarly, Anne-Marie Fortier’s book Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, and Identity follows the Italian migrant experience in Britain, an analysis with identity formation placed at the center. While these texts offer additional entrances into a discussion of migration, the conversation frequently concerns subjects for whom migration is an involuntary uprooting. The global occurrence of migration also gives rise to the complication of citizenship, an issue of belonging determined within the realm of law. Resistance may occur in the home space. However, it is most often a politicized refusal of recognizing a relocated space as “home.”

Within the queer migration model, on the other hand, matters of relocation and belonging arise less frequently from forced displacement and more often within the process of realizing “true” identity. The “new” home, the relocated space, is also imbued

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6 Further definition and categorization of gay and lesbian “coming out” narratives can be found in Anne-Marie Fortier’s “Making Home: Queer Migrations and Motions of Attachment,” a chapter within Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration, edited by Sara Ahmed, et al.
with more possibility, and commonly referred to in a positive light. As Paul Monette explains in his “coming-out” narrative, *Half-way Home*, “Home is the place you get to, not the place you come from” (262). Thus, for the purposes of drawing an analogy between migration and Johnson’s experience, the queer migration model becomes ever-more beneficial. Aiding in understanding the anti-normative female sexuality of the postwar US-American subject, the queer migration model provides a process for comparison that treats, at length, transgressive sexuality and the process of identity quest and formation.7

Anne-Marie Fortier’s “‘Coming Home’: Queer Migrations and Multiple Evocations of Home,” for example, helps to establish a framework for investigations of anti-normative sexuality and the quests for identity and home. For Fortier, “‘Queer’ speaks of diversity within unity, and constitutes an all-inclusive category of subversive and anti-normative cultural and political practices of identity” (406). Similarly, according to Andrew Gorman-Murray’s article “Rethinking Queer Migration through the Body,” “queer” can be an umbrella term for those categorized as “sexual dissidents” (106). While

7 As May explains, homosexuality, even more so than female promiscuity, was the primary target of sexual containment in the postwar culture: “Harsh repression and widespread institutionalized homophobia followed quickly in the wake of wartime […] As anticommunist crusades launched investigations to root out ‘perverts’ in the government, homosexuality itself became a mark of potential subversive activity” (xxiii-xxiv). Resisting such conformism and control, rumored and confirmed homo- and bisexuality was common among many of the major male Beat icons. William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Neal Cassady, Herbert Huncke, Peter Orlovsky, and Carl Solomon are among the figures who purportedly engaged in anti-normative sexual activity. Accordingly, many of the Beat literary themes centered on homosocial and homosexual themes. For an expanded record of this subject see Scott McLemlee’s entry, “Beat Generation” in *gltiq: An Encyclopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Culture*. 
I make effort to avoid indiscriminately expropriating concepts from queer theory for a
discussion of a heterosexual lifestyle, definitions of queer such as Fortier’s and Gorman-
Murray’s that include anti-normative, subversive, and sexually dissident subjects
encompass a wider foci than the traditionally “queer” gay, lesbian, bisexual, or
transgender subject. Johnson exhibits anti-normative sexuality in the culture of postwar
US-America. It follows, then, that an analogy may be made between the queer migrant
model and Johnson’s experience. Moreover, the usefulness of appealing to both feminist
and queer theories recalls their shared traditions. In terms of geographical studies, Larry
Knopp explains, “Feminist and queer geographies, despite their multiple forms and many
tensions, share basic political commitments to social justice, equity, and the dismantling
of power structures producing injustice and inequity” (48). The queer migrant experience
and the sexually subversive female of the postwar containment culture are definitionally
aligned, and both participate in challenging hegemonic structures. The common ground
established by this mutuality helps to legitimate parallels drawn between the queer
migration model and Johnson’s experience.

As Minor Characters begins to assume a narrative of forming identity, of leaving
home, and of searching for community, corresponding elements between Johnson’s
experience and the queer migration model surface. According to Gorman-Murray’s
description of queer identity quest though migration:

Psychically, the [queer identity] quest is a search for wholeness, for
physical, emotional and ontological security amidst a heterosexist world
that disciplines (and often oppresses) queer identities and behaviours. And
this psychic quest is geographically realized as spatial displacement, as a search for people, places, relationships and ways of being that bring a sense of order and security to a fractured identity enmeshed in often-hostile power structures. (112)

According to this model, the geographical expression and realization of identity and belonging signal the migration central to the queer experience. Moreover, that the move crosses from an oppressive heterosexist system to one that provides security and stability, the nature of relocation in the queer identity quest becomes liberating. In other words, a “migration-as-emancipation” model emerges, requiring a subject’s departure from his or her original home in search of a community that welcomes and fosters the anti-normative identity.

In *Minor Characters*, Johnson’s experience certainly reflects a narrative of migration-as-emancipation. She begins by leaving the home of her parents, a space in which she cannot fully realize her identity. Accordingly, as Breines explains, “To find themselves, girls had to leave their families behind” (“The ‘Other’ Fifties” 392). Describing the departure from her parents’ home as her “first freedom” (101), Johnson explains, “For me, too, freedom and life seemed equivalent” (137). For Johnson, and parallel to the queer migration model, this liberation is distinctly tied to sexuality, as well. As Gorman-Murray asserts, “Non-normative sexuality is often tantamount to spatial displacement” (105). Fortier elucidates that queer migration “rests on claims about the condition of exile and estrangement experienced by queer subjects, which locates them outside the confines of ‘home’”—where “home” ranges from the heterosexual family to
the entire nation (“Coming Home” 408). Johnson’s decision to leave home reflects the sort of exile and estrangement that accompanies subversive sexuality: “This new girl they’re dealing with is a stranger to all three of us. Uncontainable, openly reckless” (92). As Johnson begins to explore her sexuality, she becomes an alien in her own home. And, as the home of her upbringing represents the ideology held by dominant culture, Johnson’s estrangement is experienced on both small- and large-scale dimensions.

Thus, in order to find emancipation analogous to that offered by the queer model of migration, Johnson’s migration must take her to a welcoming community, one that fosters a sense of belonging. According to Knopp, queer identity quests are “journeys through space and time—material, psychic, and at a variety of scales—that are constructed internally as being about the search for an integrated wholeness as individual humans living in some kind of community” (122-3). Or, as Fortier explains, “In their refusal of home, queer migrant subjects reclaim a space to be called ‘home’” (“Coming Home” 410). Corresponding to the queer migration experience, after leaving home, Johnson describes the group to whom she turns as “members of ‘the community’” (83). Spatially manifested in the apartment of Professor Alex Greer, Johnson describes the locus of “the community”:

It was like an apartment at the bottom of a well—midnight even on a sunny day. The door was never locked. You never knew whom you’d find there. Psychologists, Dixieland jazz musicians, poets, runaway girls, a madman named Carl Solomon whom an old Columbia classmate of
Alex’s, Allen Ginsberg, had met in a psychiatric ward. I recognized it immediately as a private Waldorf. (59)

That the door is never locked suggests an open-door policy, reminiscent of the home space in which the occupant is always welcome. Moreover, as Waldorf once provided adolescent Johnson with asylum from the estrangement felt under her parents’ roof, the comparison between Greer’s apartment and the Cafeteria connects past desires for belonging and present feeling of familiarity. The ultimate ability to locate home in Greer’s apartment through an “immediate recognition” signals the memory and attachment in new constructions of home.

Of course, shaping an analogy between the queer migration model and Johnson’s experience is an imperfect practice. While certainly representing subversive female sexuality within a culture of containment, *Minor Characters* can never fully correspond to modern “coming-out” narratives. Adding to the complications of this analysis, to recognize Johnson’s move from her parents’ home—her migration—as fully liberatory, becomes problematic as the author relapses into what can be identified as consistencies with the hegemonic structures of the containment culture. Even though Johnson metaphorically “comes out”—emerging from the heteronormative confines of her upbringing into a sexually expressive environment—she continually falls back into patterns of submission to patriarchal dominance. Her dependence upon men and the romanticization of domesticity betray Johnson’s adherence to repressive gender roles for women.
Due in part to her immediate identification of heterosexual behavior as a condition for emancipation, Johnson problematizes the role that men play in her independence. From the onset, Johnson explains to readers that Alex Greer serves as motivation for leaving her parents home: “I would demonstrate [to Greer] how independent I was, how little I really expected from him. In my strange scheme of things, independence seemed the chief prerequisite for marriage” (103). While marriage to Greer falls through, wedlock remains a consideration for Johnson in later relationships. When Johnson dates artist Fielding Dawson, for example, she muses, “I might be tempted to become Fee’s ‘old lady,’ to straighten him out a little, clean up the studio, contribute to the rent, have a baby or two, become one of those weary, quiet, self-sacrificing, widely respected women brought by their men to Cedar on occasional Saturday nights in their limp thrift-shop dresses made interesting with beads” (170). Echoing the dominant ideal of heterosexual, monogamous marriage and the creation of a nuclear family, Johnson repeatedly returns to a surrender of her alternative lifestyle. In this recurring fantasy, Johnson adopts the prototype of femininity, serving in the domestic sphere through housework and maternal duties. Despite leaving the Upper West Side, Johnson’s thoughts reveal a perspective very much in line with containment culture narratives.

Johnson’s attachment to conservative ideals was not an isolated phenomenon, even in postwar countercultures. As Breines explains, “Girls’ identities were inextricably bound up with boys, their acceptance determined by whether they belonged to a male” (“The ‘Other’ Fifties” 396). Demonstrated both in her dealings with Greer and Dawson, Johnson’s reliance on her male companions plays out across her attempts at resistance.
The primary relationship detailed in *Minor Characters*, Johnson’s romance with Beat icon Jack Kerouac, proves subject to dominant cultural standards, as well. His transient nature, however, presents a constant complication to Johnson’s need to attach herself to the male rebel figure. “It was disconcerting,” she writes, “to be left so free. Men were supposed to ask, to take, not to leave you in place […] For Jack you didn’t have to be anything but what you were” (155). Moreover, that Johnson’s persistent desire to travel seems tied to Kerouac’s whereabouts confirms Breines’s assertion, “Nonconformity was articulated within traditional gender forms; these were the last to fall, even in ‘deviant’ subcultures” (“The ‘Other’ Fifties” 396). Johnson’s hopes to join Kerouac in Mexico seem more reflective of a desire to be the Beat male’s companion than suggestive of the need for exploration as beneficial to her individuality. Here, perhaps, Johnson’s ability to resist full submission to containment culture narratives owes, in part, to the anti-normativity of Kerouac’s behaviors.

While Johnson aspires to relocate to San Francisco or Mexico, she accomplishes neither. Her dreams of becoming a published writer are impeded by work as a secretary. During her study at Barnard College, “Professor X” tells to a classroom-full of “would-be writers,” “First of all, if you were going to be writers, you wouldn’t be enrolled in this class. You couldn’t even be enrolled in school. You’d be hopping freight trains, riding through America” (81). Reflecting on this, Johnson wonders:

How Beat could I actually be, holding down a steady office job and writing a novel about an ivy-league college girl on the verge of parting with her virginity? ‘If I had to go and apply for jobs like you, they’d have
to drag me into Bellevue in two days,’ [Kerouac] wrote. ‘That’s why I am and will always be a bum, a dharma bum, a rucksack wanderer.’ Maybe Professor X hadn’t been wrong when he said real writers would be out hopping freight trains. (205)

For Johnson, this limited mobility seems to stunt possibilities for resistance. Moreover, the tacit restrictions placed on women inhibit a realization of a true Beat identity for Johnson. While both Professor X and Kerouac neglect to realize the lack of choices presented to women in the postwar era, Johnson herself locates the failure to achieve her goals as personal shortcomings. Unable to experience the freedom of travel that is available to her male counterparts, Johnson feels confined to the replication of established roles for women and removed from the possibility of fully forming her true Beat identity.

The obstacles inherent in life as a woman persist in Johnson’s meditation on youth. As *Minor Characters* closes, in a final despairing reflection on her time as a part of the Beat movement, Johnson imagines herself twenty-two again. Removed from the girl she once was, the young woman becomes a separate person entirely in Johnson’s eyes:

How could she have been [mourning life], with her seat at the table in the exact center of the universe, that midnight place where so much is converging, the only place in America that’s alive? As a female, she’s not quite part of this convergence. A fact she ignores sitting by in her excitement as the voices of the men, always the men, passionately rise and
fall and their beer glasses collect and the smoke of their cigarettes rises toward the ceiling and the dead culture is surely being wakened. Merely being here, she tells herself, is enough. (262)

While Johnson’s part-consolatory, part-melancholic observation, “Merely being here […] is enough,” reflects the lack of agency experienced by Beat women in the 1950s counterculture, the statement may have more validity than Johnson intends. The foreword to *Minor Characters* tells readers, “Johnson never hitchhiked or bused around the Americas; she never made the journeys on which Kerouac’s art fed. Instead, the road of Beat women became, in Johnson’s words, ‘the strange lives we were leading’ (xix). While Johnson’s resistance did not involve the transience of Kerouac’s quest, merely being there, her presence in the Beat scene, served as opposition to the dominant ideals. Participating in a counterculture that challenged the widely accepted value of conformity for conformity’s sake contributed to the real subversiveness of the Beats—particularly evident through the women of the movement who arguably faced a greater degree of containment.

Johnson’s resistance to containment culture begins as she questions the standards set by mainstream culture. The very questioning of dominant cultural codes signifies a deviation from widespread conformity. Among the new countercultural community, Johnson finds, “It all seemed strangely normal, like being with a new kind of family. I saw that what you learned to consider normal did not necessarily have to remain constant; ‘normalcy’ in fact might be an artificial idea” (121). In a culture where conformity was a virtue in and of itself, to recognize the insignificance and mutability of normalcy
represents a subversive way of thinking. Just as Johnson no longer understands normalcy as a constant concept, the new family with which she associates normalcy exists in a flexible nature as well. And, as family reflects belonging, Johnson’s identity formation falls into a continual state of flux. As Gorman-Murray explains, “Self-discovery and personal identity-formation is [sic] ongoing and fluid, never complete and fixed” (106). Thus, returning to the queer migration analogy, “coming-out” is not a “once-and-for-all-process” (110). Similarly, Johnson’s Beat identity moves fluidly in and out of resistance to and consonance with the larger culture. Complications arising from her seeming adherence to confining gender roles and sexual codes reflect the back-and-forth of identity formation.

Resulting from the mutable nature of the identity quest, Johnson engages in the continual negotiation of the two worlds in which she exists. Within the same text in which readers uncover suggestions of compliance with patriarchy, *Minor Characters* also portrays a young woman embracing the unconventional way of life offered by the counterculture. One episode in particular, in which Johnson sees Kerouac off at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, reveals the complex nature of resistance against containment, within an environment where recourse is limited:

The dark had come down over the river like thick black velvet. Here and there at the ends of dead-end streets were dim taverns all brown inside, with dock workers and sailors steadily drinking under yellow lights. There were no women in this nighttime world. Steam was coming out of the stacks of motionless freighters. It rose in startling whiteness against the
black sky. I’d never seen anything like it before. It was strange to think that because of my sex I’d probably never see any of this again, and would probably never have seen it at all if it hadn’t been for Jack. (138-9)

While Kerouac’s expedition would take him to Tangier, Johnson’s journey was no less significant. Grounding both Kerouac’s and Johnson’s experience is a need to “explore alternative ways of being, at the same time recognizing that this search is ongoing, generating movement between places” (Gorman-Murray 113). Fittingly, Gorman-Murray claims, “Queers often develop a strong affection for placelessness/movement” (113). He continues, “If we contemplate queer migration in light of this attachment to movement, it seems likely that for more than a few queer migrants final identity-fixing emplacement may not be as important as the quest itself” (113). Detaching herself from the need for normalcy frees Johnson from the desire for a definite sense of belonging. Instead, exploration and discovery take precedence. Whether the shift is from Brooklyn to Tangier, from the Upper West Side to the Village, from day to night, the quest uncovers a common desire among anti-normative subjects to search out spaces.

Johnson’s Resistance: Beyond Sexuality

Johnson’s anti-normative sexuality and the identity quest attached to sexual autonomy underpin the negotiation between containment culture and alternative space that occurs throughout *Minor Characters*. Through her rejection of the established social codes for women, Johnson defies containment. Echoing the findings of Nadel, May, and Beat chronicler John Tytell, scholar Heike Mlakar explores the U.S. policies that link “the containment of communism to the containment of women in the postwar domestic
ideal” (12). In this equation, transgressive sexuality becomes a national threat, symptomatic of an upset to established social institutions. Nonetheless, anti-normative sexuality is only one manifestation of dissent. As Mlakar explains, “Being economically, intellectually, or sexually independent was often considered as deviant and abnormal” (10). However, while sexuality motivates Johnson’s inaugural move away from her parents’ home and away from the larger postwar culture, this quest for sexual autonomy joins with other acts of deviance in a departure from the 1950s feminine ideal: Through her financial independence, career ambitions, and refusal to marry, Johnson advances toward an alternative womanhood.

Initially, being able to provide for herself serves as the means for Johnson’s sexual liberation; her wages afford the location where she may become sexually active. Johnson writes, “With the first paycheck from my new job, I’d bought an unpainted rocking chair, a small desk, two sheets, and a poster of Picasso’s *Blue Boy*—the furnishings of my first freedom” (101). Here, renting an apartment is Johnson’s “first freedom” as she breaks away from her parents’ care. However, it also acts a “first freedom” in the sense that it marks the mere beginning of Johnson’s independence. This act positions Johnson at the cusp of greater and growing personal freedom offered by financial self-reliance. When Johnson joins Kerouac at a diner, her date is unable to pay.

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8 John Tytell assembles a tribute to the Beats, a book of biography, commentary, and photography entitled *Paradise Outlaws: Remembering the Beats*. He reflects on the era: “The 1950s were an era when any public discussion of sexual matters in the United States was taboo, when masturbation was seen as a cause of insanity and premarital sex as immoral, when half of American women were married by the age of nineteen, oral sex was considered sheer perversion, and adultery and homosexuality were regarded as criminal acts” (53).
She reflects, “I say, ‘Look, that’s all right. I have money. Do you want me to buy you something to eat?’ […] I’ve never bought a man dinner before. It makes me feel very competent and womanly (127). That paying for Kerouac’s meal leads Johnson to feel “womanly” contradicts the postwar gender roles, which designate men as breadwinners, as providers for women.

Just as Johnson identifies herself as competent, others in the Beat circle react to her dedication to accomplishment, also. In a bohemian crowd dedicated to “Decadence and Decay” (65), Johnson’s drive raises suspicion, and certain acquaintances simply dismiss her as “the ambitious one” (147). Johnson continues that for a man, ambition was questionable, “but it was a worse trait in a woman” (147). While the male desire to “attain” likely represented for some the sort of ladder-climbing promoted by mainstream society, Johnson’s ambition became problematic for different reasons. The peers who disdain Johnson’s efforts reiterate the gender roles determined for postwar U.S. women. Even while scorning the men who play into society’s standards, these “nonconformists” adhere to the rules that limit women’s opportunities.

Refusing to submit to any source of discouragement, Johnson demands opportunity for herself. After making a meeting with Hiram Haydn and Bennet Cerf, Random House agrees to publish Johnson’s first novel (172). Shortly after, Johnson’s boss at Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy offers her a promotion. She describes the episode:

The following day at work, Robert Giroux [editor-in-chief] called me in and told me I was going to be promoted from a secretary to an editorial assistant. It was an honor to get such a promotion. I knew it was possible
to remain a secretary your entire working life. Perhaps someday I could even become an editor myself, although very few women got that far and the ones who had were all ladies of at least forty. You didn’t turn down luck like this unless you were crazy or rich or engaged to be married.

(173)

The same ambition that earned the disapproval of her fellow bohemians secured recognition among the heads of Random House and Farrar Straus. And even though Johnson realizes the significance of the editorial assistantship offered by Giroux, the opportunity at Random House resonates with her aspirations to write. To accept the position at Farrar Straus would be to give up any hope of becoming Kerouac’s “rucksack wanderer”; she would have to abandon dreams of San Francisco or Mexico City. Ultimately, then Johnson “cast[s her] ballot on the side of art and love”: “The next morning I told Mr. Giroux I’d be leaving Farrar, Strauss in August. I was going off to Mexico to finish my novel” (173). Opting for travel, for adventure, for the life of a writer, Johnson declines Giroux’s proposition and effectively rejects the postwar cultural codes that favor material achievement. Any question, then, of Johnson’s true “Beat-ness” fades. Clearly, Johnson’s ambition is not a sign of the desire for affluence or corporate success; rather, it reflects the rejection of any position prescribed to women by containment ideology. Johnson’s resistance to containment compounds as she dismisses gender roles and, at the same time, foregoes guaranteed professional prosperity.

The chance to write in Mexico serves as Johnson’s incentive to quit her job at Farrar Straus. That Johnson never made this journey cannot be ignored, nor can the fact
that Kerouac’s residence in Mexico also had weight in Johnson’s hopes for travel. However, these seeming shortcomings do not entirely compromise Johnson’s resistance to the hegemony. Not only does Johnson prove her sexual, intellectual, and economic autonomy throughout *Minor Characters*, but ultimately she demonstrates a commitment to independent womanhood. On Johnson’s twenty-second birthday, she leaves with Kerouac for a weekend in the countryside. Johnson recalls the “one glorious weekend” (195), as she and Kerouac reclined in a sun-warmed meadow:

> After a long time he said into the silence, “Well, I know we should just stay up here and get married and never go back.” Feeling the saddest happiness, I said that was what I knew, too. But my next thought had to do with being twenty-two, which, although it was older than I had ever been, was also, I suddenly realized, quite young after all; and, as if I were floating above Jack and me, looking down, I thought. I can do this now, be here with him like this. It’s all right. I have all the time in the world. (197)

While both Kerouac and Johnson seem to realize a socially-instilled emphasis on marriage—both knowing that they *should* retire from the city and marry—Johnson refuses. Despite the surge of early marriage across the U.S., Johnson recognizes the youthfulness of twenty-two and finds satisfaction in her life as a single woman, in life simply as it is in that very moment.

This ambivalence toward marriage to Kerouac, and the ultimate decision against it, substantiate claims of Johnson’s resistance to a culture of containment. Johnson goes further than living independently; she *chooses* to remain single despite marriage offers. In
postwar U.S. ideology, the idealization of marriage arose as a product of a culture that equated heteronormative unions with patriotic duty: As a component of the nuclear family, marriage was a building block in “the foundation of democracy,” May explains (65). She asserts: “The all-consuming dread of communism framed the fractures within American society. Differences among Americans were deflected onto the enemy. Any deviation from the status quo became a sign of possible subversion. The antidote to the dangers of the age appeared in the form of the nuclear family” (206). Johnson’s refusal to marry suggests a sense of security in a decision that, according to the dominant culture, signified a complete lack of security, both on the personal and national levels. Not only does Johnson’s decision have private significance, marking a milestone in her journey toward identity formation; but also, remaining legally unattached takes on cultural meaning as the symbolic resistance of the counterculture.

Ultimately, through the memoir Minor Characters, Johnson ruminates on life in the postwar climate of the United States. Situating herself both within a culture of containment and reactionary rebellion, Johnson embarks upon a journey marked by resistance and complication. Her early displacement from home precipitates a quest for belonging, underpinned by the search for personal identity. Johnson’s appeal to an alternative community comprised of figures exiled and estranged like herself lend her text to an analogous application of the queer migration model. The various places Johnson inhabits, her quest for community, and her peripatetic tendencies, together reflect an analogous relationship to concepts of queer identity formation. While Johnson’s experience reveals a complex negotiation of containment and counter-containment
behaviors and attitudes, the meaning she attaches to spatial locations discloses an ultimately subversive experience.

Moreover, sexuality proves only an impetus for other acts of cultural deviance in which Johnson engages. Her decision to leave her parents’ home; her desire to engage in non-marital, casual sex; even to work outside the home help position her as anti-normative against the backdrop of containment in the 1950s conservative culture. While Johnson occasionally reverts to culturally expected ways of thinking, her definitive refusal of the dominant postwar lifestyle implies a rejection of hegemonic ideals in accordance with Jackson’s “symbolic strategies to resist subordination” (54). From renting her own apartment, to desiring a life in Mexico City, to refusing prosperity in the corporate space, to declining married life in the countryside, Johnson’s impulse to move or attachment to movement symbolize her resistance to containment.
CHAPTER 3: HETTIE JONES’S HOW I BECAME HETTIE JONES

Like Johnson, Jones’s dissatisfaction with the dominant culture of containment prompted the move away from her parents’ home. First, her search leads her to Mary Washington College in Virginia, and, then, ultimately, to the Beat enclave of Greenwich Village. From Morton Street to Twentieth Street to Fourteenth Street and, finally, to Cooper Square, Jones works to make a home for herself, and later, for her family. The discussion of women and the home space often proves problematic, conjuring the constructions of subservience and domesticity traditionally associated with the homemaker’s role. Moments of How I Became Hettie Jones reveal the author’s struggle with life as a wife and mother. Jones writes, “Roi was free of the slough of domesticity, the broody inelegance of playpen clutter, my milky left shoulder” (98). In precisely this way, Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex echoes the negative assessment of women’s relationship to the household. In the home, a woman's duties include “cleaning” and “tidying up”—efforts that she describes as an “endless struggle” and as “torture,” costing a woman “sweat and tears” (451). As for a woman's material contribution to the household: “She makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present” (451). Beauvoir's estimation, while certainly pinpointing the monotony and toil involved in obligatory domestic labor, neglects to account for women for whom the traditionally feminine role of homemaking holds an individualizing function. As scholar Iris Marion Young asserts, “Not all homemaking is housework” (130). Indeed, for some, including Jones, homemaking can also provide a much-needed element in identity-formation, both for the homemaker and for the members of the household. In Jones’s ability to transform the
household space first into a Beat “scene” and then into a position for activism and empowerment, she complicates a reading of homemaking as a fully subjugative role.

Cause a Scene: Creating a Space for Beat Bohemia

Longing for belonging, Jones moves to Greenwich Village. The search for affiliation apart from conformism describes the journey of a number of Beats. In his analysis on Beat spaces, scholar Robert Holton discusses the trend: “It is important to emphasize the sense that these anomic spaces were valuable not solely as spaces of individual eccentricity, but more importantly as sites of reconstructed community” (23). While Holton’s analysis goes on to highlight the experience of Sal Paradise, narrator of Kerouac’s On the Road, not all searches took the form of transcontinental journeys. In fact, scholar Simon Rycroft writes that many Beat realities reflected a lifestyle rooted to one area. Rycroft’s discussion identifies several of the major North American counterculture enclaves—New York, Los Angeles, Denver, San Francisco, and Mexico City—making space for those among the Beat movement for those unable to take to the adventure-ridden “road.” He explains that among those for whom “mobility was not an option […] the beat experience was a sedentary one and enclaves in many American cities were characterized by the beat lifestyle of jazz, coffee, Benzedrine and poetry” (426). In these spaces, adherence to the Beat ethos qualified their membership to the movement: “The defining characteristic of these spaces was that of an intellectual, spiritual and poetic revolt which sought to redefine the cultural politics of everyday life” (426). For Rycroft, this non-road resistance is the preferred rebellion of the non-affluent (426). However, his analysis also applies to other Beats for whom recourse had to be
found in stationary spaces. Namely, women, whose obstacle was the dominant culture’s prescribed roles and social codes for their gender, should be seen as subversive despite immobility.

In addition to Rycroft, other scholars also seem to warn against the neglect or dismissal of many ignored members of the Beat movement. Clinton R. Starr examines the trend of community-seeking among constituents of the postwar US-American counterculture, arguing for an expanded view of the players involved in the movement. Major figures like Ginsberg and Kerouac, he asserts, are just two of the many behind the resistance: “From the vantage point of many people who crowded into bohemian enclaves, icons like Ginsberg and Kerouac were simply two members, admittedly among the most influential, of a much broader social and cultural phenomenon” (45). Ignoring the existence and significance of other participants results in a shortsighted view of the movement: “Taking the Beat Generation seriously as a counterculture requires placing these long ignored individuals at the center, not the periphery of analysis” (45). Precisely in line with the evaluations by Rycroft and Starr, then, attention to formerly peripheral figures adds to a more comprehensive understanding of this postwar avant-garde circle. Specifically, Jones’s hand in developing the Beat scene should be acknowledged. Note, however, that her part in the 1950s counterculture extends beyond mere presence or participation. Without question, Jones’s role in the Beat generation was foundational: Her involvement in creating spaces for alternative expression contributed to the evolution of the Beat legacy.
The first space of consequence that Jones helps to develop is an environment for Beat bohemia. Starr points to specific communal locations—“coffeehouses, bars, restaurants, jazz clubs, and parks in urban bohemian enclaves”—as Beat domains that fostered “positive, meaningful interaction with others” (45). “Moreover,” Starr asserts, “these public spaces formed the sites wherein beatniks engaged in a quotidian politics of resistance” (45). While forming and joining spaces for resistance remains central to understanding the Beat attraction to coffeehouses and clubs, labeling such commercial locations as strictly “public” is problematic. As scholars Laurel Klinger-Vartabedian and Robert Vartabedian discover in their analysis of the twentieth-century coffeehouse movement, “The coffeehouses were obviously an extension for the desire of belongingness and a physical place for people to come together” (212). In this way, these communal spaces foster a home-like environment, a retreat away from the alienating dominant conformist culture. Hominess, in fact, seems to be what one female bohemian sees in such common areas: “I think of a coffeehouse as everybody’s living room” (Lynch 127). Such descriptions echo classifications typically designated for private spaces only: “‘Private’ suggests certainty and familiarity and a retreat from […] the public sphere” (Sibley). Thus, conjuring images of home for the Beats and bohemians who frequented them, these communal spaces blur the line between public and private areas. Scholar David Sibley points to other cultures involved in softening the division between public and private, namely, other communal cultures. Such community-based living “encompasses both the home and the street, with much weaker boundaries between the inside and the outside” (158). Certainly, as a movement characterized by transience
and coterie, even in commercial spaces existed a sense of privacy. The communal space was a world within itself.

The problem with commercial spaces is, of course, that they cannot remain always open for business. Thus, the private residence also emerged as a space that allowed for interaction between Beats. The founding of such a location prevails as one of Jones’s central contributions to the Beat scene. The section of How I Became Hettie Jones entitled “Twentieth Street” describes the apartment of Hettie and LeRoi Jones as part of the center of the Beat scene. Following a reading by Jack Kerouac at the “newly opened” Seven Arts Coffee Gallery, Jones writes, “A crowd of thirty, thus inspired, needs a big enough place to party” (69-70). This initial invitation issued to thirty, helped establish the Joneses as permanent hosts, their home another landmark on the Beat scene tour. Accordingly, Jones explains, “That Friday night party never ended. Soon we had a studio couch and a folding cot, one or two weekly boarders, twenty or more weekend regulars, occasional bashes for hundreds” (71). More than merely a place for carousal or for temporary lodging, 402 West Twentieth Street fostered community and belonging. Years later, when sheepishly thanked by a fellow writer for the hospitality, Jones reflects on never feeling inconvenienced, but rather, glad for the guests. Jones explains, “Never having to manage alone made all the difference to me, as never having to go home alone—or always having a home to go to—made all the difference to them” (71). Among these “Twentieth Street poets” Jones feels a strong sense of kinship, “a large, extended family of which Roi and I are the proud and satisfied parents” (92). Not only is Jones at
home in this scene she helped to create, but her role is imbued with a sense of authority: She proudly provides for her Beat companions.

In addition to fostering a feeling of familial belonging, the scene Jones helped to create also fostered the new intellectual and aesthetic movement championed by the Beats. Mlakar views Jones’s contribution as an example of the literary salon in the twentieth century. She points to the historical presence of women’s salons—those Paris salons headed by Madame de Rambouillet, Madame Geoffrin, and Madame de Stael from the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries (107). Later French salons of the twentieth century pioneered by Alice B. Toklas and Gertrude Stein, as well as that of Natalie Clifford Barney, were critical societies in “literary bohemia” (Mlakar 107). Jones’s Village pad, then, arises as an example of the modern US-American salon. Mlakar explains:

For the Beat Generation, salons were replaced by ‘pads’ located in the center of Manhattan. They often served as ‘communes’ or bohemian meeting places. […] These places were immensely important for the flourishing of Beat literature, as literary critics were always around. Poems and prose were read aloud to the others, writers and new publications were being discussed in great detail, and the wittiest reviewers were always directly and personally available. (107)

Classifying Jones’s apartment as one of these salons is corroborated by Kerouac’s reaction to Jones, who, for him, seemed to sympathize with the Beat aim and ethos. Jones describes her reception of Kerouac during a coffeehouse reading: “When the reading
began I sat alone at a table up front to pay attention. He noticed. He kept catching my eye and reading to me, and he was marvelous” (70). Jones’s sensitivity to Kerouac’s “meaning” certainly made an impression on the Beat icon. Later, returning to her home for a large gathering after the reading, Jones recalls, “All night Jack kept running to me with different people: ‘I didn’t remember who she was,’ he kept saying, ‘but she was listening so hard at the reading, she was really listening to me—she understood what I said!’” (71).

Jones’s understanding and promotion of Beat attitudes and ideas manifested in other ways, as well. Another contribution critical to understanding Jones’s impact on the Beat movement is her involvement in producing and circulating a print medium for Beat literature. Along with husband LeRoi, Jones engaged in the creation of Yugen, a small magazine featuring the work of well- and lesser-known Beat writers. Jones explains, “Our magazine—Yugen, a new consciousness in arts and letters—was Roi’s idea, but as he’s written, I ‘went for it.’ I think I threw myself at it, actually. Few magazines out of New York, to that date, had promised the new consciousness that everyone downtown agreed was just what the world needed” (53-4). “Throwing” herself at the effort amounted to hours of toil by Jones: “Piece by piece I put it all together, on my old kitchen table, with triangle and T-square borrowed from the Changer” (54). Not only has Jones succeeded in reconfiguring an apartment into a “scene,” but she has helped to reshape literary consciousness, all while transforming the domestic space of the kitchen table into a place for creativity and voice. The space that Jones helps to develop is not just that of the artists featured in Yugen. Through the magazine’s production, Jones
herself finds a completeness and belonging: “Three a.m. The pages have been passed. The dozen of us has doubled, the couch and chairs are crowded, the room is alive with a din that satisfies every emptiness I’ve ever felt” (76). The houseful that Yugen attracts, the accomplishment of creating Yugen, encourages a feeling of accomplishment. And the feelings tied to Yugen take central significance for Jones. She reflects on this realization as the magazine begins to attract public attention:

We’d attracted attention. In late 1958, the critic Gilbert Seldes remarked that even though he wasn’t always ‘with’ the poetry in Yugen he found in it a lot of feeling—his italics. It was this that all my late-night cutting, pasting, aligning, and retyping finally taught me—what comes from reading things over and over, taking apart and putting together, the heart of the matter, the way it feels. (75)

Also noteworthy of the above passage is the reference to critical response to Yugen. Although she removes herself from direct responsibility for Yugen’s success, in addition to the emotion and labor Jones put into Yugen, her access to critical literary avenues adds to her consequence. Otherwise stated, Jones’s literary connections also helped to get Yugen off the ground. Jones networked through her position as subscriptions manager at jazz-centered magazine the Record Changer and through her boss there, editor Richard Hadlock. This position led to a similar job at the Partisan Review—the resource that would help to push Yugen into public light. Jones explains, “At Partisan I’d had pleasant business dealings with the distributor Bernahard DeBoer and his wife, who took on Yugen as a favor and helped to put it into otherwise
inaccessible places, like Midwest campus libraries” (54). This contact, in particular, was especially advantageous. Today’s Beat experts point to Jones’s affiliation with the *Partisan Review* as significant to the Beat trajectory. Tytell writes, “Perhaps because of the infiltration of Hettie Jones, who worked at *Partisan Review* in the 1960s […] an attitude of rigid dismissal evolved to tolerance and even support” of the Beat ethos and aesthetic (196). In addition, scholar Jennifer Love concludes, “Hettie’s work not only helped to provide the Beats a forum wherein they could be published and read by a wider audience, but her connections with more established literary magazines may have influenced their eventual acceptance of Beat writing” (19). Thus, in critical esteem, Jones’s contribution to the Beat legacy is considerable: She emerges as the figure who has helped to carve a space for the “peripheral” Beats.

Jones’s involvement in creating a distinctly Beat scene within the walls of her apartment on Twentieth Street is among her most significant contributions to the countercultural movement. This space not only provided Beats and bohemian artists with a gathering space—a location to meet, to make connections, and to share ideas—but it provided a position from which the collective clique could separate itself from the larger culture. Not only does Jones construct a home for postwar bohemia, but she successfully changes the meaning of home for those in her surroundings. Dismantling perceptions of home as a site of struggle for women, Jones positions herself as an instrumental, creative, and authoritative subject in her home.
Mother Jones: Positioning Maternity as a Place for Active Resistance

The redefinition of home space exists in a rubric apart from Jones’s direct involvement with the Beat scene, although it stems from the shared values that encourage the questioning of dominant social codes. In addition to the alternative “family” Jones forms with the artists and intellectuals that surround her, the marriage Jones shares with LeRoi results in the creation of a family well beyond the bounds of convention in postwar US-American containment culture. While her marriage to LeRoi—a union between a Jewish-American woman and African American man—certainly represents a challenge to the racially divided society of the 1950s, the children she raises push Jones into active defense. Refusing to be contained by a culture that rejects interracial couplings, that disdains mixed-race persons, that complicates maternity and motherhood, Jones engages further in the creation of resistant spaces.

Rooted in the historical construction of her relationship to home, seeing a woman’s subversiveness and resistance in constructions of motherhood frequently raises problems. First the maternal body, then the space of motherhood complicates the autonomy and possibilities of a pregnant or mother subject. Patricia Hill Collins points out in her analysis entitled “Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing about Motherhood,” that one “dimension of racial ethnic women’s struggles for maternal empowerment concerns the process of keeping the children that are wanted, whether they are planned or not” (53). This struggle surfaces for Jones when an unexpected

9 While in the 1994 article “Shifting the Center,” Collins’s discussion focuses primarily on the maternal experiences of women of color, six years later, with the publication of Black Feminist Thought, Collins does, in fact, recognize the necessity of accounting for
pregnancy and the subsequent marriage to LeRoi prompt her parents to attempt interference. Jones’s father pleads that she terminate her pregnancy rather than raise a child with LeRoi. Here, the precariousness of the pregnant body is amplified. This scene does more than suggest that the dominant ideology seeks to control the pregnant subject psychologically through dissuasion and threat. The intervention by the dominant figure turns physical as Jones’s father “grabs” at her (63). The vulnerability of the pregnant subject and her body compounds in Jones’s dramatic reaction: “I tore myself loose and ran for the door. On the wide wooden stairs […] I tried to go faster but I didn’t want to fall. I mustn’t hurt the baby, I thought, I mustn’t fall” (63). Here, the parlous nature of the pregnant body complicates and limits Jones’s negotiation with physical space.

Even following maternity, spatiality inhibits Jones. As a mother, Jones has responsibility for additional bodies, her options and movements become more complicated. Scholar Marsha Marotta explains, “Most mothers still are not able to be equal participants in the public world since the role of mother-caregiver continues to put limits on their public presence” (21). Certainly such a plight seems to shape Jones’s interaction with public spaces. Describing a sudden exasperation with the sense of isolation brought on by new motherhood, Jones starts out for Washington Square, where she will be in the company of other mothers with children. She describes the episode:

I grabbed the baby and started for Washington Square, where I knew a few mothers to talk to. It was a mile-long walk there, and neither easy nor fast

white mothers of mixed-race children. Here, anticipating this expanded discussion, I utilize Collins’s article to analyze Jones’s situation. Further discussion of this matter will follow.
with a fold up stroller or a Snuggli carrier or a backpack. Western women with babies weren’t supposed to cover distance. All I had was a big, heavy, hard to maneuver carriage, but I got past the three doors, down the six steps, and all the way to Greenwich and Tenth before the baby woke, hungry and fussing. Although 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. (94-5)

The binaries that place men in the public realm and confine women to the private reverberate here. Alienated by the inaccessibility of the public world, Jones is nearly defeated and pushed back into the domestic sphere, a reflection of, as Marotta describes, “not only spatial control but also a social control on identity” (22).

Jones will not be defeated, however, by a culture that aims to contain her to a role of traditional domesticity and maternity. This potential to redefine the space of motherhood is noted in *Writing Women and Space* by Allison Blunt and Gillian Rose: “Since the outcome of the decoding process can never be guaranteed, contestation and renegotiation of the meaning of space is always possible” (3). Precisely, motherhood as Jones transforms it is not an experience defined by limitations. From the perspective of ideological resistance and identity formation, her initial flight down the stairs, away from the pleadings of her father, demonstrates a turning away from and a rejection of the dominant cultural codes of 1950s US-American that reject miscegenation. And while Jones certainly comes face-to-face with the politics of race through her relationship with
LeRoi, this awareness only intensifies, taking on unexpected weight with motherhood. Most consequential for Jones and her sense of “becoming” the person with whom she identifies, motherhood serves as the experience that places Jones in a position for activism. Her maternal experience, as a mother of biracial children, arises as a site from which she challenged the ideology of dominant culture. Motherhood transforms into a place of resistance. As her children, first Kellie, then Lisa, are born and grow, Jones becomes more conscious of the implications of their biracial background. Seeing the emerging Civil Rights movement arising out of the South, Jones has a moment that seems almost to be an awakening when her daughter Kellie runs into the house: “She ran to me and I grabbed her up and held her. I’d never imagined such risks, I’d seen her from my own perspective and not from this” (109). Here, she realizes the dangers her daughter faces in the world outside the safe space of home. Among strangers, Jones’s awareness increases, and, as a result, so, too, does her emotional response. She recalls one particular episode, a train ride with Kellie:

There on the train, pair by pair, the eyes of the world drifted in and settled on us. Nothing can ready you for this. With Roi I had the thing licked, but with Kellie it was different; she was both threat and potential victim, and I had to protect her. It felt, sitting there, as if we were wearing a skin of public opinion, that stuck and clung and pressed and forced a change in the way you could breathe. (107)

Here, with Kellie, Jones wears the skin of public opinion, target of the hegemonic eye. As Thompson explains, Jones experiences a feeling of “otherness” stemming from
“being in a different relation to people of color, and having a different sensitivity to racism, other than mainstream, white hegemony” (92). This sense of “otherness” that Thompson identifies is echoed as Jones describes her interaction among “whites-only groups”: “Without [Roi] or the children, I felt misrepresented, minus a crucial dimension, and seeing race prejudice everywhere, shocking and painful. Other whites in black families speak of this; Diana Powell […] calls it feeling ‘disguised in your own skin’” (202). These experiences of difference influence Jones to create a space of belonging not only in her own identity formation, but also as she attempts to cultivate the identities of her daughters.

In her own memoir, *Bulletproof Diva: Tales of Race, Sex, and Hair*, Jones’s youngest daughter Lisa Jones describes her mother’s role: “Motherhood has been more than a domestic chore or emotional bond for my mother. It’s a political vocation—one she’s taken seriously enough to go up against the world for” (34). In her chapter on “Black Women and Motherhood,” *Black Feminist Thought* author Patricia Hill Collins reflects on Jones’s experience, showing its implications for families composed of white mothers and mixed-race children:

Studies of White mothers of mixed-race children confirm this phenomenon of White mothers becoming politicized in fighting the battles confronting their Black children. Raising their Black children in racist environments fosters new views of motherhood for many of these women. This is an entirely different understanding of political activism and empowerment than fighting on one’s own behalf. (194)
A large part of the activism Jones sought to incorporate into her life and into the experiences of Lisa and Kelly involved providing them with words and language. Jones reflects on her frequent trips with Kellie on the Hudson Tubes to Newark: “I’d explain the tunnel under the river and name the world as we crossed the meadows, with her beside me nose to the pane, absorbed […] I marveled at how like me she was, how female and how conscious in that little body. The way I’d been in mine and never told. I wanted to give her every word” (106). Then, when Jones and LeRoi become involved with the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, the two decide to demonstrate with the group at the UN. Jones explains, “I wanted to take Kellie, to explain” (134). Although Jones never identifies it as such, her desire to impart “words” upon her daughters reflects an understanding of the principle that “language is a medium for communication and exchange that reflects underlying social relations of power” (Jackson 169). Likely, Jones shares realization with her fellow Beats regarding the transgressive nature of language. As Holton explains, among the Beats existed an “emphasis on language […] an indication of the need to redefine the world” (17). Holton continues, “The sources of this new language were not likely to be found in middle America, but in the various wrinkles and folds of the postwar cultural fabric not yet smoothed out by the homogenizing power of modernity” (17). From the spaces of dissent, then, springs a language with the power to transform social relations. For Jones, introducing her children to words, to explain, and to direct them toward understanding is to provide them with a position from which to resist the silencing power of containment culture.
In the memoirs of both Johnson and Jones, events clearly demonstrate a reaction against postwar U.S.-America’s culture of containment. Carving out new spaces within an oppressive society proved a challenge for both authors. Accordingly, Johnson admits, “Young women found the pursuit of freedom much more complicated” (xxxiv).

“Nonetheless,” she continues, “it was my revolution” (xxxiv; emphasis mine).

For Johnson, then, rebellion was a personal pursuit. Her resistance to the culture of containment manifests in an ambitious quest—for sexual autonomy, career achievement, personal identity—that takes shape as individual action. Shortcomings were distinctly hers, as well. As Johnson explains, “Those of us who flew out the door had no usable models for what we were doing” (xxxii). However, while Johnson had no model on which to base her rebellion, her pioneering efforts of resistance created a model for generations of women to follow. Thus, her “shortcomings” should not be overemphasized. Ultimately, Johnson’s text contributes agency and subjectivity within a culture of containment, a protofeminist model that connects the first- and second-wave feminist movements. Finally, although Johnson sees her actions as distinctly personal, the resistance within Minor Characters reflects a move toward alternative ideology that resonated for women of the 1960s, ‘70s, and beyond who sought precedence for the rejection of confining gender roles and social codes.

While Johnson claims that her “revolution” was personal, Jones’s resistance to dominant culture took on a more public presence. Similar to Johnson, she precipitates major socio-political movements that emerge strongly in subsequent generations.
However, Jones’s actions are evidently more purposeful, her daughters serving as an impetus for activism. When Jones takes her children to the Fair Play for Cuba Committee demonstration, she anticipates the politicism that she will honor throughout her life. Ultimately, Jones’s refusal of the culture of containment reflects concerns of race discrimination prevalent in the postwar U.S. In this way, her resistance takes both personal and public forms. For Kellie and Lisa, Jones offers language and knowledge and, consequently, power. For a broader audience, Jones vocalizes her stance on African American civil rights.

Both women participate in establishing the literary tradition of the Beats. Jones not only offers her home as a pad for artistic conglomeration, but she helps in the production and promotion of *Yugen*, a magazine that contributes to the rise in popularity and the literary acceptance of Beat writing. Thus, again, Jones’s actions have both lasting and immediate public consequence. Jones, herself, seems always to feel cut off from self-expression in *How I Became Hettie Jones*: “Beside my desk at *Partisan* I kept a green metal waste can,” Jones explains, “where most of my lunchtime attempts to write got filed” (48). Johnson, on the other hand, successfully pens *Come and Join the Dance*, her first novel published in 1962.¹⁰ Johnson’s participation in this literary movement, like her rebellion, exists primarily on the level of personal achievement.

Jones and Johnson express resistance to containment culture in outwardly divergent ways. Interestingly, though, resistance to containment is reiterated through the genre of memoir, recalling and reasserting both women’s participation in the Beat movement.

¹⁰ While never referred to by its title, *Come and Join the Dance* is Johnson’s novel in-progress during the events described *Minor Characters*. 
movement. Both struggles, too, share a common nature of rebellion. For Jones and Johnson resistance takes geographical form as they operate against containment through movement and through the creation of alternative spaces.
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

Containment, originally intended to preserve American affluence and protect capitalist interests, soon diffused into cultural terms, leading to conformity on an epidemic level. Soon a value system developed that privileged the nuclear family and “middle class values” that dictated the performance of gender and sexuality. As containment became an increasingly oppressive presence in the lives of US-American citizens, the Beats surfaced as a cluster of disaffected dissidents, dedicated to challenging the strict behavioral codes in place across the domestic front. This countercultural opposition to repression took almost literal form: Refusing to be contained by society, members of the Beat generation expressed their resistance through spatial means, moving away from sites of concentrated conservatism and establishing new spaces for alternative living.

Because this movement reflects a position of privilege—most of its members coming from a white, upper-middle and middle-class background—focusing on this group as a marginalized social subset is not without complications. Indeed, marginalization was, for many Beats, a choice. Their mode of rebellion, often manifested in cross-country road trips, international escapades, and flirtations with hardship, reflects their affluent upbringings. It is no wonder, then, that scholars of social change often aim their projects toward the disadvantaged—working class, ethnic, or third world persons—who are often the most significant actors in periods of opposition and rebellion.11

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11 In her book *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties*, Wini Breines similarly addresses her choice to focus scholarship on an affluent and advantaged group. Breines also concedes the well-deserved attention to disadvantaged subjects
Notwithstanding, the Beats reflect a specific and no less authentic experience in the culture of postwar US-America. The nature of their resistance impacted American art and literature. And while the Beats are rarely remembered for politicized action, scholars often point to this group as the precursor to later active partisanship that followed directly in the 1960s and 1970s. While some Beats are considered predecessors of later countercultural movements, others became participants in the Civil Rights, Women’s Liberation, and Gay Liberation movements. Thus, exploring the Beats’ enactment of opposition to containment—their approaches to and manifestations of resistance—enlightens and understanding of the significance and consequence of certain strategies and historical patterns of rebellion.

The strategies of Joyce Johnson, documented in *Minor Characters*, and those of Hettie Jones that emerge in *How I Became Hettie Jones* are particularly valuable for exploring Beat resistance. Johnson’s memoir reveals the implications of subversive sexuality in a conservative climate. *Minor Characters* highlights the junction between physical geographies and ideological geographies, where the Village represents a mappable location for the psychical departure from normative values. Moreover, looking at the process through which she comes to identity formation and community discovery aids in a realization of the intersection between queer and feminist theories, through the use of an analogy that parallels between her experience and the queer migration model.

Jones’s strategy for resistance reveals a transformation of space into alternative forums and families. First, through participation in the “scene,” Jones establishes a Beat before undertaking her analysis of the historical role and cultural significance of white, middle-class coming of age in the postwar period.
“pad” within her home, and a modern “salon” for writers, artists, and bohemians. And her kitchen became the site of Yugen’s production, effectively reconstructing an emblem of domesticity into a space for creation and expression. In another move to reshape the traditionally domestic space, Jones embraces marriage and, later, motherhood. The Joneses challenge the conventions of the mid-twentieth century nuclear household. Moreover, her role within her family pushes her into activism, marriage and motherhood becoming spaces from which to challenge white hegemonies.

Aside from Minor Characters and How I Became Hettie Jones, a body of work exists that has only begun to receive its much-deserved scholarly consideration. Pioneering texts such as Ronna C. Johnson and Nancy M. Grace’s Breaking the Rule of Cool: Interviewing and Reading Women Beat Writers, as well as their collection Girls Who Wore Black: Women Writing the Beat Generation; Richard Peabody’s A Different Beat: Writings by Women of the Beat Generation; and Brenda Knight’s Women of the Beat Generation: The Writers, Artists, and Muses at the Heart of a Revolution bring attention and visibility the work of female Beats. However, there remain gaps in criticism. While much effort has been spent establishing the legitimacy of exploring Beat writing beyond that of the major male figures, literary analysis of such writing continues to be limited. Exploring the geographical expression of resistance by female Beats may be one avenue for scholarship. Certainly, the significance of space in the works of Johnson and Jones has not been explored exhaustively. Moreover, other female Beats elicit similar scholarly treatment. For example, Carolyn Cassady’s Off the Road: My Years with Cassady, Kerouac, and Ginsberg, like Jones, invites further investigation of
sedentary resistance to containment through her subversion of the traditional nuclear family. Cassady’s encounter with such transgression involves her engagement in a polyamorous relationship with both Neal Cassady and Jack Kerouac. Additionally, Brenda Frazer, like Johnson, provokes further investigation into the intersection of physical and ideological geographies in her work *Troia: Mexican Memoirs*. Frazer’s experience as a prostitute in Mexico provokes discussion not only of resistance to sexual containment, but also conversations regarding the shift between public and private bodily space. Moreover, Frazer’s writing reflects a stream-of-consciousness style of prose that challenges the spatial and temporal structuring of text. Like the works of Johnson and Jones, Cassady and Frazer are two additional texts that showcase the interplay of geographical resistance and female Beat writing. Certainly, the possibilities extend into a number of untapped arenas.

The Beat trend attracted a number of women who escaped traditionalism in pursuit of greater freedom, sharing a vision with others like John Clellon Holmes, who described the “beat” ethos arising in the American youth: “the youthful thirst, the restless exuberance, the quality of search” (qtd. in Charters and Ginsberg 172). The search Holmes describes emerges in the writings of Joyce Johnson and Hettie Jones, for whom the motion behind the Beat quest proved to be just the antidote to social repression. Literal movement and the reconfiguration of space came to represent a definite reaction against ideological containment experienced both spatially and psychically. These women, who felt containment two-fold—as constituents of an unconventional movement
and as members of the marginalized sex—break open new arenas for investigation and enlighten an understanding of U.S. postwar attitudes and experiences.
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