

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS/INGLÊS E
LITERATURA CORRESPONDENTE

“INK ON [THEIR] HANDS LIKE BOMB RESIDUE:”
POETICS OF WAR IN THE WRITINGS OF
DIONNE BRAND AND JUNE JORDAN

GABRIELA ELTZ BRUM

Tese submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina
em cumprimento parcial dos requisitos para obtenção do
grau de
DOUTORA EM LETRAS

FLORIANÓPOLIS

Setembro 2013

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank a number of institutions and people who supported me during the last four years of my life.

* First and foremost my dear husband Julio, who told me I could do it and believed in my potential to accomplish this goal.

* CAPES, for giving me the financial support needed in order to dedicate myself entirely to my doctoral course and research.

* UFSC, for giving me the opportunity to learn from inspirational professors like José Roberto O'shea.

* My dear advisor Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins, for her generosity and kindness in sharing her knowledge and passion for poetry with me.

* Canadian poet and professor George Elliot Clarke, for always finding time to answer my e-mails and to help me with his wise critical views.

* Caribbean-Canadian poet Dionne Brand, for receiving me in Toronto with her open smile and for her help to clarify some doubts about my work.

* University of Toronto, for granting me a free pass to use their wonderful library for a whole month.

* My dear reviewer Alexander Gross, for reading my work and giving me great suggestions for improvements.

* And last but not least, my son Aitor, who made me smile even during the most difficult and challenging times.

ABSTRACT

“INK ON [THEIR] HANDS LIKE BOMB RESIDUE:”
POETICS OF WAR IN THE WRITINGS OF
DIONNE BRAND AND JUNE JORDAN

GABRIELA ELTZ BRUM

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
2013

Supervising Professor: Dr. Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins

This investigation deals with the discussion of contemporary conflicts, mainly armed, but also silent ones like racism, in the contemporary poetry of two black women writers: Caribbean-Canadian Dionne Brand and African-American June Jordan. These poets of resistance write poetry in order to criticize the establishment, warfare and its rationale, and American imperialism, among other issues. My research shows how these poets’ testimonials of contemporary socialist revolutions and armed conflicts in the Caribbean island of Grenada and in Nicaragua respectively have influenced their work in poetry and prose. Armed conflicts in places such as Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Somalia are also approached in their poetry. The comparative analysis focuses on the devices employed by Brand and Jordan in their poetics of war, the ways that their poems dialogue with the discourse of critics and theorists such as Susan Sontag, Virginia Woolf, Charles Simic, and Judith Butler, and how their poetry depicts their life experiences as witnesses of conflict. This dissertation aims to contribute as an observation of contemporary war poetry through the gaze of black women poets, who show their concern in registering not only historical events but also the history of what Charles Simic calls “unimportant events.”

Number of pages: 142

Number of words: 47.770

RESUMO

“INK ON [THEIR] HANDS LIKE BOMB RESIDUE:”
POETICS OF WAR IN THE WRITINGS OF
DIONNE BRAND AND JUNE JORDAN

GABRIELA ELTZ BRUM

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
2013

Professora Orientadora: Dra. Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins

Essa investigação trata de uma discussão sobre conflitos contemporâneos, principalmente armados, mas também silenciosos como o racismo, na poesia contemporânea de duas poetisas negras: A Caribenha-Canadense Dionne Brand e a Afro-Americana June Jordan. Estas poetisas de resistência escrevem poesia com a finalidade de criticar o sistema, a guerra e sua lógica e o imperialismo americano, entre outros assuntos. Minha pesquisa mostra como o testemunho dessas escritoras das revoluções socialistas na ilha caribenha de Grenada e em Nicarágua respectivamente influenciaram seus trabalhos em poesia e prosa. Conflitos armados em lugares como Iraque, Líbano, Palestina, Israel, Bósnia, Rwanda e Somália também são abordados em seus poemas. A análise comparativa é focada nas ferramentas utilizadas por Brand e Jordan em suas poéticas de guerra, na maneira que seus poemas dialogam com o discurso de críticos e teóricos como Susan Sontag, Virginia Woolf, Charles Simic e Judith Butler e na forma que seus poemas refletem suas experiências como testemunhas de conflitos. Essa tese tem como objetivo contribuir como uma observação sobre poesia de guerra contemporânea através do olhar de poetisas negras, que demonstram sua preocupação em registrar não somente eventos históricos, mas também a história do que Charles Simic nomeia “eventos sem importância.”

Número de páginas: 142

Número de palavras: 47.770

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1 – Introduction.....	p.1
Chapter 2 – Poetics of War by American and Canadian Black Women Writers – a trajectory	13
2.1 – Gwendolyn Brooks’s “Negro Hero” and its war within the war..	16
2.2 – Audre Lorde’s “Equal Opportunity” and its criticism of the American invasion of Grenada in 1983.....	19
2.3 – Sonia Sanchez’s visionary “Poem for July 4, 1994”.....	24
2.4 – Alice Walker’s pacifist poem “We pay a visit to those who play at being dead”	29
2.5 – Claire Harris’s long polyphonic poem “Sister (Y)our Manchild at the Close of the Twentieth Century”.....	33
 Chapter 3 – Dionne Brand’s Poetics of War.....	 37
3.1 – Dionne Brand’s testimonial of the Grenadian revolution and subsequent American military intervention.....	38
3.2 – War against racism in “Eurocentric”.....	54
3.3 – Poetizing History in the poem “III,” from <i>Inventory</i>	57
3.4 – <i>War Series</i> by painter Jacob Lawrence inspire Brand’s ekphrastic “ossuary XI”.....	65
 Chapter 4 – June Jordan’s Poetics of War.....	 74
4.1 – June Jordan’s testimonial of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua.....	75
4.2 – War resistance poetry about conflicts elsewhere.....	82
4.3 – Writing about life in “War and Memory”.....	93
4.4 – <i>Who Look at Me</i> , Jordan’s ekphrastic first published work.....	102
 Chapter 5 – A comparative analysis between Dionne Brand’s and June Jordan’s Poetics of War.....	 110
5.1 – Brand’s and Jordan’s applied poetics of resistance.....	110

5.2 – Brand’s and Jordan’s poems in dialogue with Simic, Woolf, Butler, and Sontag.....	118
5.3 – Testimonial poems by Brand and Jordan.....	123
Chapter 6 – Conclusion.....	127
References –	137

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1-	Jacob Lawrence, <i>Victory</i> (1947).	p. 67
2-	Jacob Lawrence, <i>Shipping Out</i> (1947).....	69
3-	Jacob Lawrence, <i>Another Patrol</i> (1946).....	70
4-	Jacob Lawrence, <i>Beachhead</i> (1947).....	71
5-	Jacob Lawrence, <i>Going Home</i> (1946).....	72
6-	Jacob Lawrence, <i>Reported Missing</i> (1947).....	73
7-	Ben Shann, <i>Willis Avenue Bridge</i> (1940).....	103
8-	Painter unknown, <i>The Slave Market</i> (1850-1860).....	104
9-	Nathaniel Jocelyn, <i>Portrait of Cinqué</i> (1839).....	106
10-	Romare Bearden, <i>Mysteries</i> (1964).....	108

Chapter 1 – Introduction

The issue of war has always generated a wide range of feelings and responses in various forms of art such as painting, music, and poetry. One of the first literary evidences of a poem written in the English language which deals with war as subject matter is the long poem *Beowulf*. This poem is essentially a warrior's story and it was not written down until the end of the ninth century, being recited primarily in oral form. At first, war poetry was written solely by men, preferably warriors or soldiers, who wrote with the experience of the war front. It was not until World War II that women poets like Marianne Moore and Gwendolyn Brooks produced war poetry that tackled different issues such as racism and pacifism.

This investigation deals with situations of conflict – mainly wars, but also urban tensions and other conflicts – portrayed in the contemporary poetry and critical writings by Caribbean-Canadian poet Dionne Brand and African-American poet June Jordan. These issues are subject matter for interrogations about social and power imbalances that lead a group to oppress and subjugate another group. Both writers use their literary skills to raise global awareness about serious and controversial issues, such as American imperialism, racism, the oppression of women, and war.

Brand and Jordan share common interests and backgrounds as African descendants, political activists, and feminists. Jordan joined the civil rights movement in the United States in her youth, as well as the gay and lesbian rights movement, and she declared herself bisexual. Brand moved from the Caribbean island of Trinidad to Canada in 1970 and there she joined the civil rights, feminist and socialist movements. Brand's experience of distinct geographical realities made her face different kinds of displacement: as a black woman with the legacy of diaspora, and as an immigrant in Canada. In addition, her homosexuality is yet another reason for feelings of displacement. Since the beginning of their careers, Brand's and Jordan's literary works have been a result of their political engagements as well as their life experiences as women, blacks, and homosexuals.

The title of this dissertation is an appropriation of the last line of the short poem "Autobiography (II)," published in

the collection *Black* (2006) by African-Canadian poet, scholar, and critic George Elliot Clarke. Since the first time I read the poem, this last line struck me in a special way: “Ink on my hands like bomb residue” (4).

Recent criticism has shown that North-American poetry has reached an interesting paradox. At the same time that contemporary poetry belongs to a subculture, inasmuch as poetry’s audience has visibly declined, “there have never before been so many new books of poetry published, so many anthologies or literary magazines.” The reason behind this prolific production is mainly a result of “public subventions for poets, funded by federal, state, and local agencies, augmented by private support in the form of foundation fellowships prizes, and subsidized retreats” (Gioia 1). It is in this fertile ground that the contemporary poetry of Brand and Jordan flourished.

The specific context of this investigation is defined by the analysis of situations of conflict in the poetry and critical writings of Brand and Jordan. The theme of war is explored in a broader scope than simply armed wars. Daily and sometimes silent wars are also included in this study, as the case of urban wars against black people and immigrants. The purpose of this research is to analyze some of Brand’s and Jordan’s poems in which conflicts of war are presented and to examine their dialogical relations with social, political, historical, and cultural contexts. Emphasis is given to the historical context. The research questions for the present study are the following:

1. In which ways do Brand and Jordan approach situations of conflict (wars and others) in their poetry in relation to daily life and individual suffering?
2. How do the poets’ personal histories interweave with collective history?
3. To what extent do the poems analyzed intersect and dialogue with one another?

As this investigation deals primarily with conflicts of war, I will focus on the connection between poetry and history in terms of providing a theoretical background. For poet and critic Charles Simic, while some poets are concerned with the history of “unimportant events,” historians retain, analyze, and connect significant events (“Notes” 126). According to James Longenbach “poems are statements about our place in the

world, and like every other act of communication, they are historical” (10).

From the following books I draw conceptual parameters to use as guidelines to support the theoretical and critical development of this dissertation: Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas* (1938), Charles Simic’s *The Uncertain Certainty* (1985) and *The Metaphysician in the Dark* (2003), Susan Sontag’s *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), Fred Wah’s *Faking It – Poetics & Hybridity* (2000), Linda Hutcheon’s *Splitting Images – Contemporary Canadian Ironies* (1991), and Judith Butler’s *Frames of War – When is Life Grievable?* (2010).

In Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas* (1938), my main interest is in her view of war as destroying human qualities, since a person may become so physically unrecognizable in situations of armed conflict that he/she may lose his/her human condition and seem more like an animal.

One of the main essays used in this study is Charles Simic’s “Notes on Poetry and History,” published in *The Uncertain Certainty* (1985). In this essay, Simic discourses about the importance of the contemporary poet in writing history and criticizes poets who do not approach history in their writings. In addition, he writes about some poets’ concern in registering the history of “unimportant events,” that is, everyday history. In his essay “Poetry and History,” from *The Metaphysician in the Dark* (2003), Simic revisits the former essay, adding the importance of precise numbers when counting casualties in situations of armed conflict, in order to make these numbers seem real and not just abstract numbers, like “astronomical distances or the speed of light”(38), among other issues.

In Susan Sontag’s *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) my attention is on Sontag’s “extended meditation on the imagery of war” (Charles Simic’s praise). In this book Sontag criticizes the manipulative American media. She writes about the impact of the daily broadcast of warfare and about the manner in which these images are depleted of their force by the frequency they are used. Sontag contends that “wars are now also living room sights and sounds” (18), and explains that “we are losing our capacity to react” (108). Another notion that I draw from her is her critique of technology in regard to the

waging of war at a distance. She is a pacifist who writes: “War tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War *ruins*” (8).

In Fred Wah’s *Faking It – Poetics & Hybridity* (2000), one of my interests lies in his definition of “poetics.” Another interest is in his concept of hybridity and its relation with the hyphen – a “crucial location for working at hybridity’s implicit ambivalence” (73). A different aspect that concerns my research is Wah’s notion of an applied poetics of resistance, through the poets’ use of tools such as irony, polyphony, and code-switching. Through the use of code-switching black poets strategically insert Black English vernacular in their poems as a form of resistance.

From Linda Hutcheon’s *Splitting Images* (1991), I draw parameters in relation to the use of irony in contemporary poetics of resistance. The double talk of irony allows writers of resistance to address the establishment and criticize different political issues by disguising their true intentions. According to Hutcheon, “irony today has become one of the major strategic rhetorical practices of postmodern art in general” (39). As a result, Brand and Jordan make use of this strategy in order to poetize history and criticize the contemporary world.

In *Frames of War – When is Life Grievable?* (2010), Judith Butler theorizes about the “grievability” of lives and questions whose lives count as dead numbers in situations of war and whose lives simply do not count “because they already inhabit a lost and destroyed zone [. . .]” (xix). Butler approaches the situation of certain populations, being the Palestinians prominent among them, and states that “if their very bodies are construed as instruments of war or pure vessels of attack, then they are already deprived of life before they are killed [. . .]” (xxix). Another issue that Butler deals with in the book is the use and the meaning of the word “democracy.” She asks: “Can one power ‘bring’ or ‘install’ democracy on a people over whom it has no jurisdiction?” (36). Brand and Jordan also approach this question in some of the poems analyzed.

As already mentioned, my interest in this study is to examine poems about situations of conflict present in several books by Brand and Jordan. Both writers have dedicated part of their work to the controversial theme of war. In Brand’s poetry collection *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* (1984) and in some

poems from *No language is Neutral* (1990) and *Land to Light On* (1997) she writes about the United States' invasion of the Caribbean island of Grenada in 1983 and her testimonial of the American military attacks. In *Inventory* (2006), her poetry is rooted in the occurrences of the early twenty-first century, such as Hurricane Katrina, war in Afghanistan and environmental catastrophes. Brand's poetry book "*Ossuaries*" (2010) deals with the "the bones of fading cultures and ideas, about the living museums of spectacles where these bones are found" (back cover).

In her poetry collection *Living Room* (1985), Jordan pays "a tribute to the freedom fighters in Nicaragua, Soweto, Palestine, Guatemala, and Lebanon, while speaking out against the inequities of race, gender, sexuality, and class within the US" (Scott 324). In the poem entitled "War and Memory," published in *Naming our Destiny* (1989), Jordan interweaves her memories of childhood, a time when she was treated like a "soldier" by her father, and the issue of war. In *kissing God Goodbye* (1997), Jordan writes several anti-war poems about conflicts in Iraq, Bosnia, and Lebanon, among other places.

The corpus for this investigation is divided into two parts: poetry and prose. The poetry part is comprised of twenty-six poems. Five poems by five different African-American and Caribbean-Canadian poets: Gwendolyn Brooks's poem "Negro Hero," Audre Lorde's "Equal Opportunity," Sonia Sanchez's "Poem for July 4, 1994," Alice Walker's "We pay a visit to those who play at being dead," and Claire Harris's "Sister (Y)our Manchild at the Close of the Twentieth Century." Plus, twenty-one poems from both writers: Dionne Brand and June Jordan. The poems by Brand have been chosen from the collections *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* (1984), *No Language is Neutral* (1990), *Land to Light On* (1997), *Inventory* (2006), and *Ossuaries* (2010). The poems by Jordan have been selected from *Living Room* (1985), *Naming our Destiny* (1989) and *Kissing God Goodbye* (1997).

The prose part is composed of one novel by Brand entitled *In Another Place, Not Here* (1986) and the following non-fiction books by her: *Bread Out of Stone* (1994) and *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2001). Jordan's non-fiction books used in the corpus of this study are *On Call* (1981), *Civil Wars*

(1985), *Moving Towards Home* (1989) and *Some of Us Did NOT Die* (2002).

This study is divided into six chapters. Chapter one is this introduction. In chapter two, I discuss World War II poetry and contemporary war poetry by American and Canadian black women. In this chapter I analyze five war resistance poems by five black women poets: Gwendolyn Brooks, Audre Lorde, Sonia Sanchez, Alice Walker and Claire Harris. In chapter three, I analyze Brand's poetics of war and her critical writings in dialogue with criticism on her work and theoretical background. In chapter four, I follow the same pattern with Jordan's poems. Chapter five is a comparative analysis between the two poets' poetics of war, and chapter six is the conclusion of this research.

Chapter two tackles the issue of war resistance poetry written by American and Canadian black women, from World War II to the present day. In this chapter my intention is to give an overview of the trajectory of war poetry and the way World War II poets like Gwendolyn Brooks were more concerned with fighting racism in the US than criticizing war as such. One of the books cited in this chapter is Susan Schweik's *A Gulf So Deeply Cut: American Women Poets and the Second World War* (1991). My interest is in Schweik's approach to historical roots and gender in women's war poems. The importance of this book for my research is that it is used as a source of different historicized readings of World War II poetry by American women.

Another source used in chapter two is *Bitter Fruit – African American Women in World War II* (1999), edited by Maureen Honey. My focus here is on the way that black women writers found opportunities in times of war for fighting against segregation and racial discrimination. Brand's essay "We weren't allowed to go into factory work until Hitler started the war: the 1920s to the 1940s" is employed in chapter two as a source of historical material about the working conditions of Canadian black women before and during World War II.

In section 2.1 – Gwendolyn Brooks's poem "Negro Hero" and its war within the war – I analyze Brooks's World War II poem "Negro Hero." The focus of my analysis is on the way Brooks fights racism in the American Navy through the use of a male voice.

In section 2.2 – Audre Lorde’s poem “Equal Opportunity” and its criticism on the American invasion of Grenada in 1983 – my goal in the analysis is to demonstrate Lorde’s relation with the Caribbean island of Grenada, her critique of American imperialism and her interest in allowing her black women characters to speak.

In section 2.3 – Sonia Sanchez’s visionary “Poem for July 4, 1994” – Sanchez uses the form of a chant in order to give her pacifist message. In this poem, Sanchez approaches some historical moments of human cruelty like Hiroshima, Auschwitz, and the Middle Passage, as well as more recent wars in Rwanda, Bosnia, and El Salvador and asks for peace.

In section 2.4 – Alice Walker’s pacifist poem “We pay a visit to those who play at being dead” – the focus of the analysis is to demonstrate Walker’s humanitarian activism as exemplified by her critique in the poem of the mental conditions of soldiers who experience the horrors of war, and return to their home countries unprepared to face the reality of daily life.

In section 2.5 – Claire Harris’s long polyphonic poem “Sister (Y)our Manchild at the Close of the Twentieth Century” – I explore how Harris approaches imperative issues through the use of polyphony, such as slavery and its legacy, American imperialism, contemporary wars, and the unreliable American media.

In chapter three, I discuss some of Brand’s essays in the collections *Bread Out of Stone* (1994) and *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2001) in dialogue with her poetics of resistance. In addition, several theoretical and critical writings by scholars such as George Elliot Clarke, Linda Hutcheon, Fred Wah, and Teresa Zackodnik are employed in the analysis of Brand’s poems. Judith Butler is another chief source for the analysis of some poems. Clarke’s essay “Harris, Philip, Brand: Three authors in search of literate criticism,” Krishna Sarbadhikary’s essay “Recovering History: The Poems of Dionne Brand,” and Joanne Saul’s “In the middle of becoming: Dionne Brand’s historical vision” are some of the critical sources employed in this chapter.

In section 3.1 – Dionne Brand’s testimonial of the Grenadian revolution and subsequent American military intervention – I analyze seven poems as well as the novel *In Another Place, Not Here* (1986) that deal directly with the issue

of the Grenadian socialist revolution in which Brand actively participated in 1983. Significantly, she witnessed the failure of the revolution and the American air raids.

In section 3.2 – War against racism in “Eurocentric” – I analyze one poem which approaches the issue of racism, apartheid, and colonialism. The conflict addressed by Brand in this poem is the silent war of racism.

In section 3.3 – Poetizing History in the poem “III,” from *Inventory* – I analyze one long poem which tackles the issue of the relationship of contemporary media and warfare. In this poem the poet writes about television news and the inventory of deaths. Sontag’s *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) is a relevant source here since it deals with war photography and the display of wars in the media and has a strong connection with poem “III.” Likewise, Simic’s essays “Notes on Poetry and History” and “Poetry and History” are employed for the analysis especially in relation to the impact of the wars as depicted through the media.

In section 3.4 – *War Series* by Jacob Lawrence inspire Brand’s ekphrastic “ossuary XI” – I analyze one ekphrastic poem in which Brand obliquely references five World War II paintings by African-American painter Jacob Lawrence through the use of low case for the titles of the paintings. Some essays employed in this section are “Contemporary Poetry and Ekphrasis” by Peter Barry and “Ekphrasis Reconsidered – On Verbal Representations of Non-Verbal Texts” by Claus Clüver.

In chapter four, some of Jordan’s non-fiction books that I use as critical material in dialogue with her poetry work are *Moving Towards Home* (1981), *On Call* (1981), and *Civil Wars* (1985). Jordan approaches a wide range of subjects in these books, from police brutality in the US to the viability of Black English. Another of Jordan’s titles used here is her collection of essays *Some of Us Did NOT Die* (2002). In this book, Jordan writes about several important issues such as her experience in Nicaragua in 1983 during the Sandinistas’ struggle against the *contras*, the situation of the Palestinian people, and racism in the United States.

Some of the essays that I employ as critical sources for this chapter are Philip Metres’s “June Jordan’s Righteous Certainty” and “Performing ‘Righteous Certainty.’ The Shifting Poetic Address of June Jordan’s War Resistance Poetry,” and

Jane Creighton's essay "Writing War, Writing Memory." Valerie Kinloch's book *June Jordan: Her Life and Letters* (2006) is also used as critical source.

In section 4.1 – June Jordan's testimonial of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua – I analyze four poems which deal directly with the issue of the socialist Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua and the American military support of the *contras*, the violent guerrilla group which opposed the revolution. Jordan went to Nicaragua to witness what was happening during the revolution. This section of the study also discusses two essays from Jordan's collection *On Call* (1981) that deal with the Nicaraguan revolution: "Moving Beyond the Enemy: Nicaragua and South Africa" and "Black Folks on Nicaragua: 'Leave Those Folks Alone!'"

In section 4.2 – June Jordan's war resistance poetry about conflicts elsewhere – I analyze five poems by Jordan which deal with the issue of contemporary wars. The poems are from different geographical locations such as the Caribbean island of Grenada, Iraq, Lebanon, Bosnia, and Palestine/Israel. Some critical essays that I employ in this section are "Beyond Mourning: The Legacy of the Grenadian Revolution in Literature" by Helen Scott, and "Aesthetics of memorialization: the Sabra and Shatila genocide in the work of Sami Mohammad, Jean Genet, and June Jordan" by Hussein Ali.

In section 4.3 – Writing about life in the poem "War and Memory" – I analyze one long poem which portrays Jordan's life, from her early and difficult years to her adult life. In this poem, Jordan writes openly about her life experiences and her engagement with political causes, and intertwines the history of World War II and the Vietnam War with her life history. A critical essay used in this section is Jacqueline Vaught Brogan's "From Warrior to Womanist: the Development of June Jordan's Poetry."

In section 4.4 – *Who Look at Me*, Jordan's ekphrastic first published work – my interest in choosing this long poem lies in its pictorial representation through the use of paintings which deal with the issue of slavery and racism in the US. Jordan's main focus on this work is in the observation of the gaze, in how whites look at blacks and the way the gaze is returned. "Affirmative Acts" by Richard Flynn and "This is the Only Time to Come Together – June Jordan's Publics and the

Possibilities of Democracy” by Nicky Marsh are some of the critical essays used for this section.

For the comparative analysis in chapter five, I compare Brand’s and Jordan’s devices applied in their poetics of resistance, I reiterate the theoretical background in dialogue with Brand’s and Jordan’s poems, and compare the poems in which the poets are witnesses of the events depicted.

In section 5.1 – Brand’s and Jordan’s applied poetics of resistance – I compare several poems by Brand and Jordan in relation to the poets’ use of certain devices such as polyphony, code-switching, Black English, irony, and ekphrasis.

In section 5.2 – Brand’s and Jordan’s poems in dialogue with Simic, Woolf, Butler and Sontag – I analyze some poems by both poets that dialogue with significant notions by the aforementioned theorists and critics in relation to the issue of war.

In section 5.3 – Testimonial poems by Brand and Jordan – I analyze and compare Brand’s and Jordan’s poems which portray their testimonials of the Grenadian and Nicaraguan socialist revolutions respectively and their critique of American imperialism. The use of the personal pronouns “I” and “we” is also discussed in relation to their testimonial poetry.

The significance of this research for the academic field is that it is an original work that compares the poetics of war of two important black women writers of the twenty-first century. For the PPGI program at UFSC, this study will contribute to enrich and expand the areas of African-American and African-Canadian studies as well as studies related to twentieth and twenty-first century war resistance poetry by women. So far, there have been two MA theses in the PPGI program that approach the work of Dionne Brand: “Reconstructing Identities: A Study of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and Dionne Brand’s *At the Full and Change of the Moon*” (2001) by UFSC professor Magali Sperling, and “From Local to Global: the Trajectory of Dionne Brand’s Political Engagement” (2008) by Rogério Silvestre da Silva. So far no theses or dissertations that approach the literary work of June Jordan have been defended in the PPGI program.

The personal significance of this research relates to my admiration of the poetry of Dionne Brand and June Jordan. The

subjects dealt with in their poems are universal issues that concern humankind as a whole. In this sense, this work raises awareness in relation to the everlasting problems of wars, their respective social injustice, and the subsequent destruction of the world and its peoples.

We will write, published or not, however we may, like Phillis Wheatley, of the terror and the hungering and the quandaries of our African lives on this North American soil. And as long as we study white literature, as long as we assimilate the English language and its implicit English values, as long as we allude and defer to gods we “neither sought not knew,” as long as we, Black poets in America, remain the children of slavery, as long as we do not come of age and attempt, then to speak the truth of our difficult maturity in an alien place, then we will be beloved, and sheltered, and published. But not otherwise. And yet we persist.

June Jordan
(*Some of Us Did NOT Die* 185)

Chapter 2 – Poetics of War by American and Canadian Black Women Writers – a trajectory

American and Canadian black women poets have always been writers of resistance, given that the fight against racism and oppression has always been at the core of their poetry. Poetry written by black women usually expresses and reflects their racial consciousness. By poetics, I use Fred Wah's concept, who understands it as "the tools designed or located by writers and artists to initiate movement and change" (51). One of the earliest records of black women poets in America is Lucy Terry, who orally passed down the poem "Bars Fight" (1746). The poem "chronicles a battle between British settlers and Native Americans, recording herself along with the massacre of the colonists," points out Keith D. Leonard in the essay "African American women poets and the power of the word" (170). Former slave Phillis Wheatley's 1773 collection *Poems on Various Subjects Religious and Moral* is considered the first publication by a black woman in the New World.

Early twentieth-century writings by both male and female American black writers have been associated by scholars with the Harlem Renaissance, "that flowering of African American literary culture in and around Harlem in the 1920s" (Leonard 173). The New Negro movement, as it was known, spanned the 1920s and 1930s and some of the women writers associated with that period are Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Angelina Weld Grimké, and Alice Dunbar-Nelson. In the poem "I Sit and Sew," Alice Dunbar-Nelson criticizes the fact that "women could not join the Union Army in the Civil War along with African American men though their desire for freedom was just as strong" (Leonard 175).

The next generation of black women poets includes Margaret Danner, Gwendolyn Brooks and Margaret Walker. These women poets are considered as producing what scholars call "Afro-modernism" or "African American modernism." According to Leonard, "these three poets used rigorous and intricate poetic form derived from both European literary and African American folk traditions and complex poetic personae to explore the rich internal lives of African American characters [. . .]" (177). The "complex poetic personae" that Leonard mentions can be exemplified by Brooks's black male personas in her war poetry.

Zora Neale Hurston, Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Walker, among others, used to publish their poems and short stories in

magazines such as *Negro Story*, *Negro Digest*, *The Crisis* and *Opportunity*. According to Maureen Honey, “poetry and fiction written by African American women appearing in these magazines allows their voice to be heard as they express bitterness about the color bar and determination to be soldiers of democracy on the home front” (3). These women poets believed that the war had a potential for positive changes. In addition:

These women sensed that the war brought opportunities for ending the racial and gender restrictions that had hindered black women from full participation in American life. As they confronted World War II, these writers inform us of the home-front battles they had yet to win – against racial discrimination in employment, transportation, restaurants, and housing, or sexism in the home. (Honey 6)

Job opportunities that most African-American women had during World War II were completely different from those of white women. While white women had clerical jobs, black women “went into dangerous munitions factories, did heavy labor for the railroads, or were hired as washroom attendants and cleaning women in war plants.” Honey states that black women were hired as a last option, “after white female and black male labor supplies were exhausted” (7, 35). In Canada, the situation was similar since black women “found themselves in the gender – and race – bound of their day, which placed them at the lower end of the economic strata” (172) maintains Brand in the essay “We weren’t allowed to go into factory work until Hitler started the war: the 1920s to the 1940s.” According to Brand “up to the Second World War at least 80 per cent of Black women in Canadian cities worked in domestic service”(175). During the war, black Canadian women were also hired to do factory work in munitions factories, which were dangerous jobs due to the risk of accidents.

For African-Americans, World War II represents a political turning point in view of the fact that it drove “women as well as men into the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s” (Honey 31). Turning back to literature, the new generation of radical activist writers experienced the era of the civil rights movement. These African-American poets rejected traditional forms of writing and the white literary aesthetics and believed in the power of black culture. The movement became known as the Black Arts movement, and Leonard

asserts that it had a strong commitment “to producing poetry exclusively for black audiences and for the sake of political revolution by representing unambiguous affirmative values and clear political perspectives” (179).

The 1960s were characterized by the “Black is beautiful” rhetoric, and some poets associated with the Black Arts movement are Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, Audre Lorde, June Jordan, and Alice Walker. These poets played their part in the legitimization of Black English vernacular as a means of empowerment for the black community and a form of keeping the black culture alive. In addition, they diversified their artistic techniques by using black cultural forms like jazz or the sermon (Leonard 169).

The political writings that flourished in African-American literature can also be found in African-Canadian writings. Ayanna Black argues that “historically, African-Canadian writing has been overtly political, with little reference to the romantic or erotic,” quotes George Elliot Clarke in the introduction to his book *Eyeing the north star: directions in African-Canadian literature* (xvi). In 1990 Clarke found in the Public Archives of Nova Scotia a pamphlet entitled *The Book of the Bible Against Slavery*. It is a slave narrative by John William Robertson published in 1854 in Halifax. For Clarke, this finding dethrones the belief that African-Canadian literature begins with Caribbean-Canadian Austin Clarke’s first novel *The Survivors of the Crossing* in 1964. Another finding by Clarke is what he considers to be one of the first publications by an African-Canadian woman writer. It is a pamphlet of poems entitled *To My Someday Child*, by Nova Scotian Gloria Wesley-Daye and published in Montreal in 1975. Clarke was impressed that someone could use “the same medium as Shakespeare and Milton, Toomer and Brooks, to speak of alleyways and seaweed, ferry boats and broken glass, rats and bagpipes – [he] means, to sing [his] reality” (*Odysseys Home* 4).

Canada is a country of immigrants. Most immigrants seek in Canada a land of opportunity, with chances of a better life and an escape from poverty. Therefore, a few Caribbean women went to Canada in their youth searching for a better life, and there they became poets of resistance. These black women poets express their dissent of Canada’s policies of racial and cultural prejudice through their poetry. Some contemporary Caribbean-Canadian poets who use their pens in order to approach political issues and criticize the white, male establishment in Canada are Dionne Brand, M. Nourbese Phillip, and Claire Harris. These women immigrants share a Caribbean background and its history

of slavery. Consequently their past, as well as their conditions as immigrants, women, and blacks determine their critical views of white society in Canada and elsewhere. Clarke writes about a “collective memory,” which is manifested in “literary works that recall slavery, segregation, decolonization struggles, and the search for viable, independent economies” (*Odysseys Home* 11). In the subsequent sections I will analyze five poems, from World War II to the present time. Four poems are by African-American poets Gwendolyn Brooks, Audre Lorde, Sonia Sanchez and Alice Walker, and one poem is by Caribbean-Canadian writer Claire Harris.

2.1– Gwendolyn Brooks’s “Negro Hero” and its war within the war

During the Great War, “the authority of experience” was a prerequisite for the writing of war poems. Soldier poets such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sasson are exemplary of the tradition of Great War literature. Women were considered naive and lacking such authority, comments Susan Schweik in *A Gulf so Deeply Cut* (5-6). This trend was an obstacle for women writers, in view of the fact that they passively waited for the soldiers’ letters in order to get closer to the realities of war. Therefore, war poetry up to the 1940s had been written first and foremost by male writers and “had been accorded value on the basis of an authority of experience not available to women” (Stanford 182). In 1945, poet Elizabeth Bishop showed anxiety to her publisher in relation to her first collection, since “none of these poems deal directly with the war” (qtd in Schweik 34).

Gwendolyn Brooks was born in 1917 in the United States and spent most of her life in Chicago. Brooks was the first African-American winner of a Pulitzer Prize in 1950 for her volume of poems *Annie Allen* and recipient of the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters. The lack of the “authority of experience” did not prevent her from writing one of the most significant World War II poems. In “Negro Hero,” published in her first collection of poems *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945), Brooks uses the voice of a black man in the American Navy instead of her own. Her guise gives her freedom to move from the place of a mere observer of war to the center of the battle. Thus, her cross-dressed female voice gains the “authority” needed in order to be valued in literary circles and subverts the gender division of war poetry tradition. Schweik comments that “few literary women besides Gwendolyn Brooks took on the

persona of a male soldier in order to write Second World War poetry” (109).

The epigraph to “Negro Hero” – “to suggest Dorie Miller” – evokes Dorie Miller, a young black “mess attendant [. . .] who won the Navy Cross at Pearl Harbor for his ‘distinguished devotion to duty, extraordinary courage and disregard for his own personal safety during the attack’” (qtd. in Schweik 117). Miller worked as a cook in the American Navy during World War II but “broke through the color line to save his ship from attack” (Stanford 184). He had been “forbidden to participate in combat in World War II until the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor,” explains Leonard (178). The poem is written in his male voice and has as a primary point to show the conflicting situation of black soldiers within the segregated American Navy during World War II. Black soldiers had to face two kinds of enemies: the real ones and the racist fellow white Americans. This notion can be perceived in the lines: “(They are not concerned that it was hardly The Enemy my fight / was against / But them.)” (13-15). This line highlights Brooks’s war on racism, which becomes the main focus in the poem.

In lines such as “I had to kick their law into their teeth in order to save them” (1), Brooks’s male persona defies the white man’s “law” that banned blacks from the Navy since “the Navy would not allow black men to serve as anything but kitchen help, and would not instruct them in the use of guns” (Schweik 117). In this poem, Brooks extols the virtues of her “Negro Hero’s” performance in both battles and writes in his male persona voice: “For I am a gem” (12). Leonard claims that “the poem enacts the individualized way in which he comes to believe in himself enough to reject the traditions of segregation that he once accepted in order to defend the nation that excluded him” (179).

In “Negro Hero,” Brooks does not condemn war as such, but condemns the silent war of segregation in the American Navy. Philip Metres comments that “poets from Homer to Tennyson have depicted war as a terrifying but often glorious spectacle of honor and sacrifice” (“Performing” 176). Such a view can be noticed in the poem, as Brooks praises Miller’s warrior heroism and sacrificial nationalism instead of criticizing the war rationale. In the lines “Naturally, the important thing is, I helped to save them, them / and part of their democracy” (50-51) it is possible to recognize the black soldier’s heroism. However, in the following stanza, Miller is not so sure about his value, about being a “gem,” and shows insecurity and low self-esteem, a legacy of slavery:

Still – am I good enough to die for them, is my blood bright
 enough to be spilled,
 Was my constant back-question – are they clear
 On this? Or do I intrude even now?
 Am I clean enough to kill for them, do they wish me to kill
 For them or is my place while death licks his lips and strides to
 them
 In the galley still? (37-44)

The questions that Miller raises have traces of a corrosive irony: “is my blood bright / enough to be spilled” (37-38), and underline a severe criticism of racism. Stanford claims that “the questions point to the very structure of enclosure upon which a racist system depends to maintain itself, and the speaker’s restriction to the galley epitomizes this structure” (186). In the following stanza, which is the continuation of the previous passage and is rhymed and metrically regular with mostly iambic tetrameter lines, Brooks uses polyphony, since the voice which speaks is that of a racist white man, who endorses what Miller says in the previous passage:

(In a southern city a white man said
 Indeed, I’d rather be dead:
 Indeed, I’d rather be shot in the head
 Or ridden to waste on the back of a flood
 Than saved by the drop of a black man’s blood.) (45-49)

By allowing voice to a white man persona who speaks openly about his racist beliefs, Brooks explicitly condemns racism in “Negro hero.” In the next passage from the last stanza Miller seems to have come to terms with his worth and role in the war, and the word “gem” might be acknowledged again as true. The last stanza expresses Brooks’s criticism regarding the word “democracy,” due to the fact that there is an incongruity between racist beliefs in the US and the fight for democracy overseas. In the last lines, Miller demonstrates astonishment concerning the reason whites might prefer death and “the preservation of their law” than to be “saved by the drop of a black man’s blood” (49).

Naturally, the important thing is, I helped to save them, them
 and a part of their democracy.
 Even If I had to kick their law into their teeth in order to do
 that for them.
 And I am feeling well and settled in myself because I believe it

was a good job
 Despite this possible horror: that they might prefer the
 Preservation of their law in all its sick dignity and their knives
 To the continuation of their creed
 And their lives. (50-59)

Brooks's poem is of great magnitude mainly due to the poet's avant-garde use of the device of polyphony as a tool of resistance. Brooks uses polyphony through the adoption of male voices which talk openly about racism in the United States in the 1940s. In addition, although the dominant American media ignored the existence of black men in World War II, women poets such as Brooks testified to the black man's presence in the war. The poet's concern in constructing Miller's "complex poetic personae" and her form of critique by demonstrating what white racists in the 1940s thought of black people is unique and makes of "Negro Hero" an imperative poem in the history of African-American literature of resistance.

2.2 – Audre Lorde's "Equal Opportunity" and its criticism of the American invasion of Grenada in 1983

Poet Audre Lorde was born in 1934 in New York and passed away in 1992 after a fourteen-year battle against breast cancer. She had a strong connection with the Caribbean island of Grenada as her mother was a Grenadian immigrant. In the 1940s and 1950s her life-style and rumors of her lesbianism were outrageous in black literary circles and she was considered a "persona non grata," as she writes in her essay "My Words Will Be There" (262). It was during the Black Arts movement in the 1960s that Lorde established herself as a poet.

As a young adult, Lorde committed herself to the political left and engaged in the civil rights, the women's, and the gay rights movements. For Lorde, her role as a poet was inseparable from her position as a political activist. In her words: "I see protest as a genuine means of encouraging someone to feel the inconsistencies, the horror, of the lives we are living. Social protest is to say that we do not have to live this way" ("My Words" 264).

Lorde published her first book of poems *The First Cities* in 1968 and this was followed by ten further books of poetry as well as a considerable amount of prose essays and autobiography. "Rage" was a favorite word for Lorde and it is in the title of her volume *Cables to Rage* (1970). Lorde's rage is more apparent in her later works such as

Chosen Poems: Old and New (1982) and *Our Dead Behind Us* (1986), in which “Equal Opportunity” was published. In the title of the poem it is possible to perceive Lorde’s use of ironic double voice.

One of Lorde’s major concerns in her literary career was to encourage women’s empowerment, by allowing voice to her black women characters, since she believed that there were already many voices for men. Lorde comments that “there are very few voices for women and particularly very few voices for Black women, speaking from the center of consciousness, for the *I am* out to the *we are*” (“My Words” 268). In addition, she explains:

Primarily, I write for those women who do not speak; who do not have verbalization because they, we, are so terrified, because we are taught to respect fear more than ourselves. We’ve been taught to respect our fears, but we “must” learn to respect ourselves and our needs. (“My Words” 262)

In Lorde’s essay “Grenada Revisited: An Interim Report,” she states that she visited Grenada “seeking home” (176). In this essay, Lorde writes about what she witnessed in her visits to Grenada before and after the People’s Revolutionary Government (PRG). Lorde explains that if the US had helped Grenada financially when the PRG asked for economic help, things would have been much different, and considers:

Grenada would have been self-defined, independent; and, of course, that could not be allowed. What a bad example, a dangerous precedent, an independent Grenada would be for the peoples of Color in the Caribbean, in Central America, for those of us here in the United States. (*Sister Outsider* 170)

“Equal Opportunity” is a polyphonic poem in which Lorde allows voice to several women personas, like Imelda and Granny Lou, two dispossessed black Grenadian women during the American armed invasion of 1983. Clarke observes that the poem is “an ironic review of African-American ‘progress’ in the 1980s, from a black nationalist (Malcolm X), ‘feminist,’ and leftist perspective.” In the first stanza, Lorde presents us the American deputy assistant secretary of defense,

who is “a home girl” (4). A “home girl” can be understood as a black woman and “is a symbol of progress, of African-American advancement and feminist achievement,” comments Clarke. However, the achievements of the “home girl” in this case are reached through her support to American military violence. In “Equal Opportunity,” Lorde makes a critique of “home girl,” a fellow sister who joins the “enemy” in order to succeed in her career. Clarke explains this incongruity: “Martin Luther King’s demand for ‘Equal Opportunity’ has resulted in African-Americans, who were once victims of American racism/imperialism, actually enlisting, joining up with it, to oppress OTHER black people!”¹ Lorde ends the first stanza with a metaphor: “Blindness slashes our tapestry to shreds” (5). Clarke writes about this line:

Yet, “home girl” and Afro-Ams in general (?) suffer “Blindness” in not seeing that they are supporting oppressive “tapestry” (US flag--usually situated behind each military personnel in official photos; plus “moss-green military” uniform); even the M-16 (mentioned twice) rifle/bayonet can be considered part of the “tapestry”--as would be the Corsairs [US navy fighter jets] in stanza 2.²

In the second stanza, Lorde allows voice to the black and proud American female persona who has reached outstanding status as a secretary of defense and claims: “when I stand up to speak in uniform / you can believe everyone takes notice!” (8-9). In the following lines the poet evokes images of Vietnam war: “the stench of napalm upon growing cabbage” (12); and of American imperialism/piracy: “the chug and thud of Corsairs in the foreground / advance like a blush across her cheeks” (13-14).

In the third stanza, Lorde writes about the American invasion of Grenada, and describes the moment in which Imelda, a black Grenadian in a “tattered headcloth” (20), is searched inside her “one-room slat house in Soubise” (18) by American soldiers, while “her sister has been missing now ten days” (29). In this stanza, Lorde draws

¹ Clarke, George E. “Lorde’s Equal Opportunity review.” E-mail to the author. 21 August 2012.

² Idem

attention to the discrepancy between the heavy armed American soldiers and defenseless black Imelda in her poor shack:

An M-16 bayonet gleams
 slashing away the wooden latch
 of a one-room slat house in Soubise
 mopping up weapons search pockets of resistance
 Imelda young Black in a tattered headcloth
 standing to one side on her left foot
 takes notice
 one wrist behind her rip the other
 palm-up beneath her chin watching
 armed men in moss-green jumpsuits turn out her shack
 watching mashed-up nutmeg trees
 the trampled cocoa pods
 graceless broken stalks of almost ripe banana
 her sister has been missing now ten days (16-29)

The fourth stanza is written in the voice of Granny Lou, who speaks “beside the shattered waterpipe downroad” (30) in Caribbean demotic about her impressions of the invasion and compares it to the Israeli attacks on Lebanon. In this passage, Lorde uses italics as a way to give emphasis to Black English vernacular and agency to Granny Lou:

*If it was only kill
 They'd wanted to kill we
 many more would have died
 look at Lebanon
 so as wars go this was an easy one
 But for we here
 who never woke up before
 to see plane shitting fire into chimney
 it was a damn awful lot!* (32-40)

In the fifth stanza Lorde depicts shocking images of wars: “The baby’s father buried without his legs / burned bones in piles along the road” (41- 42) and criticizes the American intervention by giving voice to an American soldier who asks: “any Cubans around here, girl? any guns?” (43). In Lorde’s essay “Grenada Revisited: An Interim Report,” she writes about the search for Cubans during the invasion: “On October 25, 1983 American Corsair missiles and naval shells and mortars pounded into the hills behind Grenville, St. Georges, Gouyave.

American marines tore through homes and hotels searching for ‘Cubans’” (181).

In the long sixth stanza, Lorde describes the scene of Imelda’s home at the moment of being searched by American soldiers and condemns American hegemony and its unnecessary “help” for Grenadians. US “help” comes in the form of poison like cigarettes, malnutrition through the offer of chocolate, diseases like herpes, illiteracy and lack of water, comments Clarke³. The passage follows next:

For a while there was almost enough
 water enough rice enough quinine
 the child tugs at her waistband
 but she does not move quickly
 she has heard how nervous these green men are
 with their grenades and sweaty helmet
 who offer cigarettes and chocolate but no bread
 free batteries and herpes but no doctors
 no free buses to St. Georges market
 no reading lessons in the brilliant afternoon
 bodies strewn along Telescope Beach
 these soldiers say are foreigners
 but she has seen the charred bits of familiar cloth
 and knows what to say to any invader
 with a M-16 rifle held ready
 while searching her cooking shed
 overturning the empty pots with his apologetic grin
 Imelda steps forward
 the child pressing against her knees
 “no guns, man, no guns here. we glad you come, you carry
 water?” (48-68)

In the final stanza Lorde brings back “home girl,” the American deputy assistant secretary of defense, and through a corrosive wit, she criticizes the secretary’s discourse about “equal opportunity” for American black women: “as you can see the Department has / a very good record / of equal opportunities for our women” (72-74). The metaphorical last lines: “swims toward safety / through a lake of her

³ Clarke, George E. “Lorde’s Equal Opportunity review.” E-mail to the author. 21 August 2012.

own blood” (75-76) present twofold interpretations. Clarke writes about the dual analysis of “Equal Opportunity’s” last lines:

The last image – “swims toward safety / through a lake of her own blood” – suggests that “home girl,” for the sake of her own “progress” (liberal individualism), has ABORTED [responsibility for] other Black women/people (“her OWN blood”) OR is complicit in their MURDER by the troops/Pentagon that she serves, helping to kill “her own BLOOD.”⁴

Lorde sympathizes with the black Grenadian victims of US imperialism and violence, “but she judges ‘home girl’ as her EQUAL. As an African-American, Lorde claims an implicit right to chastise her fellow/sister citizen as ‘one of them,’ one of the oppressors,” observes Clarke. He complements that the American secretary “has joined the ‘pirates,’ and is now assisting in the piracy – the rapine and the looting of peoples as poor as those she has ‘risen’ from.”⁵ In conclusion, “Equal Opportunity” tackles some of the main concerns in Lorde’s literary career: namely to allow voice to black women in America and elsewhere, to criticize American hegemony and violence in third world countries as well as the collusion of black women with American imperialism.

2.3 – Sonia Sanchez’s visionary “Poem for July 4, 1994”

Sonia Sanchez was born Wilsonia Benita Driver on September 9, 1934 in Birmingham, Alabama and is considered one of the most influential writers of the Black Arts movement. Sanchez has published several volumes of poetry, short stories, plays, and children’s books, but she is best known for her poetry and activism. She has published over sixteen books and among her many awards are the 1999 Langston Hughes Poetry Award and the 2001 Robert Frost Medal for distinguished lifetime service to American poetry. In addition to being a contributing editor to *Black Scholar* and the *Journal of African Studies*, she has edited an anthology: *We Be Word Sorcerers: 25 Stories by Black Americans*. Sanchez is a lecturer on various subjects such as Black Culture and Literature, Women’s Liberation and Peace and Racial

⁴ Clarke, George E. “Lorde’s Equal Opportunity review.” E-mail to the author. 21 Aug. 2012

⁵ Idem

Justice. Due to her simultaneous career as writer and activist Sanchez has traveled extensively, reading her poetry not only in the US, but also in Africa, Cuba, Nicaragua, China, and England, among other countries.

In Sanchez's essay "Ruminations/Reflections," she explains why she writes: "I write to tell the truth about the Black condition as I see it" (415). Poet Haki Madhubuti in the essay "Sonia Sanchez: The Bringer of Memories," praises her and her work by saying that she is "the poet-revolutionary whose sole aim is liberation, peace, love, and effective writing." Besides, Madhubuti adds: "she has the major poet's quality; she is a visionary, unafraid to implant the vision" (420).

In this section, I analyze Sanchez's "Poem for July 4, 1994," published in 1999 in the collection *Shake Loose my Skin*. The title of the poem evokes Independence Day in the United States in the year 1994. In the poem's epigraph "For President Václav Havel," Sanchez demonstrates her admiration for Havel. He was the last president of Czechoslovakia (1989-1992) and the first president of the Czech Republic (1993-2003). Havel was a poet, playwright, essayist and activist. At the time of his death he was Chairman of the New York-based Human Rights Foundation.

The poem is divided into three sections and its first words, "It is essential," repeated several times, mark the urgency for action in regard to social and political issues such as wars, famine, and sexual harassment. In the first two stanzas from section one, Sanchez names some former American presidents and uses polyphony as a tool in order to criticize and allow voice to different political opinions:

I

It is essential that Summer be grafted to
bones marrow earth clouds blood the
eyes of our ancestors.
It is essential to smell the beginning
words where Washington, Madison, Hamilton,
Adams, Jefferson assembled amid cries of:

"The people lack of information"
"We grow more and more skeptical"
"This Constitution is a triple-headed monster"
"Blacks are property" (1-10)

In section one Sanchez makes use of the chant as a rhetorical device. This quality is present in the lines "It is essential that we always

repeat: / we the people, / we the people, / we the people.” (20-23). She comments that she chants in many of her poems since for her the chanting “calls up the history of Black chanters and simultaneously has the historical effect of old chants: it inspires action and harmony” (“Ruminations/Reflections” 416).

Section two is only one stanza long. In this section Sanchez alludes to the endurance and vastness of wars and uses polyphony again to give voice to a soldier:

“Let us go into the fields” one
brother told the other brother. And
the sound of exact death
raising tombs across the centuries.
Across the oceans. Across the land. (24-28)

Section three is the longest in the poem, and where Sanchez approaches several “essential” issues. In the first stanza, Sanchez calls attention to the fragility of our planet and our need “to save this / earth from extinction” (34-35). In stanzas two and three the poet moves toward multiculturalism in the US and criticizes several forms of “superiority” in regard to sexual choices, religious beliefs, and race, and urges all to live in peace and equality. In this section, Sanchez’s visionary attribute as a poet is clearly perceived:

This is the time for you and me.
African American. Whites. Latinos.
Gays.Asians. Jews. Native
Americans. Lesbians. Muslims.
All of us must finally bury
the elitism of race superiority
the elitism of sexual superiority
the elitism of economic superiority
the elitism of religious superiority. (41- 49)

In section three, Sanchez tackles the famine in Africa, the importance of spirituality and the horrors of wars. The poem encompasses several issues which are dealt with in poetics of resistance and again Sanchez uses the chant in order to convey her message. In the final verse of the next long stanza the poet makes use of onomatopoeia to bring the imagery of women’s, girls,’ and children’s screams of despair in situations of armed conflicts:

So we salute you and say:
 Come, come, come, move out into this world
 nourish your lives with a
 spirituality that allows us to respect
 each other's birth
 come, come, come, nourish the world where
 every 3 days 120,000 children die
 of starvation or the effects of starvation:
 come, come, come, nourish the world
 where we will no longer hear the
 screams and cries of women, girls,
 and children in Bosnia, El Salvador,
 Rwanda . . . AhAhAhAh AHAHAHHHHH (52-64)

In the following stanza, Sanchez's poetic persona becomes an eleven year-old boy or girl who is in a hospital bed during the civil war in Rwanda and cannot escape from the soldiers "laughing marching firing" (70) because he/she has had a leg amputated and cannot move. In this passage, Sanchez's poetry becomes "painful and challenging" (Madhubuti 427). The poet uses the pronoun "I" in lower case so as to allow voice to this child and as a tool of resistance to show the vulnerability and insignificance of children in situations of war. Sanchez uses a variation/repetition of ways children call parents. These words are displaced from their ordinary sense of affection and domesticity to a context of violence, in a dramatic cry for help:

Ma-ma. Dada. Mamacita. Baba.
 Mama.Papa. Momma. Poppi.
 The soldiers are marching in the streets
 near the hospital but the nurses say
 we are safe and the soldiers are
 laughing marching firing calling
 out to us i don't want to die i
 am only 9yrs old, i am only 10 yrs old
 i am only 11 yrs old and i cannot
 get out of the bed because they have cut
 off one of my legs and i hear the soldiers
 coming toward our rooms and i hear
 the screams and the children are
 running out of the room i can't get out
 of the bed i don't want to die Don't
 let me die Rwanda. America. United
 Nations. Don't let me die(65-81)

In the next passage, Sanchez points the finger at some of the most important historical moments of human cruelty, from the Middle Passage, when slaves had to cross the Atlantic Ocean in despicable conditions, to recent wars. Through the repetition of the words “no more,” this passage may be read as a hypnotic mantra. In addition, Sanchez’s hope for peace is unmistakably noticed,

no more hiroshima
 no more auschwitz
 no more wounded knee
 no more middle passage
 no more slavery
 no more Bosnia
 no more Rwanda
 no more intoxicating ideas of
 racial superiority (84-92)

The last stanza brings Sanchez’s belief in a better world. The poet repeats the words “it’ll get better” several times in order to reinforce this belief:

For *we the people* will always be arriving
 a ceremony of thunder
 waking up the earth
 opening our eyes to human
 monuments.
 And it’ll get better
 it’ll get better
 if *we the people* work, organize, resist,
 come together for peace, racial, social
 and sexual justice
 it’ll get better
 it’ll get better. (99-110)

In the previous passage, Sanchez uses italics for “we the people” and, in so doing, reminds us of her powerful chanting words. These words encompass all races in a huge community which can “get better” if we work together as “people.” The poet’s visionary solutions for different conflicts are made clear in the brevity and effective use of her words. Madhubuti maintains that “she has few peers that can match the urgency, anger, and love found in her work” (431). And it is this paradoxical and at the same time rare combination of anger and love

that assures the poetry of Sonia Sanchez its place among the most important representatives of contemporary African-American poetics of resistance.

2.4 - Alice Walker's pacifist poem "We pay a visit to those who play at being dead"

Alice Walker was born in Eatonton, Georgia, on February 9, 1944 and is known worldwide for her work as a writer as well as for her human rights activism. Walker is a Pulitzer Prize winner for her novel *The Color Purple* (1982), and in 2010 she was honored with the Lennon Ono Grant for Peace. Walker has traveled extensively in areas of conflicts such as Rwanda, Eastern Congo, and Palestine/Israel and her experiences in these countries have given her "authority of experience" to write about issues of war. Walker contends that "though the horror of what we are witnessing in places like Rwanda and Congo and Burma and Palestine/Israel threatens our very ability to speak, we will speak" (*Overcoming Speechlessness* 72).

In the back cover of Walker's poetry book *Hard Times Require Furious Dancing* (2010), Pearl Cleage praises her work: her poems are "so full of truth and light, that it is possible to forget how absolutely useful they are. And how necessary." For this analysis, my attention will focus on a specific poem from this book that approaches the issue of war: "We pay a visit to those who play at being dead" (116). In this poem, Walker depicts a visit to the cemetery where her family has been buried. Besides writing about her personal life, Walker makes important observations in relation to the consequences of war on soldiers' lives.

The poem starts with Walker writing about her deceased relatives, such as her mother and father. She points out the way that she resembles her mother in a recent photograph of herself, and the look in her father's eyes which she would always recognize. Walker also mentions a brother and her grandparents, who "are perpetually murmuring sweet nothings in [her] heart" (41-46). The poem progresses and Walker tells her family that she has brought friends with her. Afterwards, they have something to eat at the cemetery:

We sit
Content
&
Munch
Our veggie salad

& forbidden
 Potato
 Chips
 Sitting
 Serene
 Among
 Your graves. (59-71)

The issue of war emerges when Walker's niece rests her body "on an army veteran's / tombstone" (89-90). Walker's human rights activism comes into view in the following stanzas:

So many
 of you –
 I had not noticed
 this before –
 went off
 to fight
 strangers!

Returning
 wounded
 dead
 or
 strangers
 yourselves. (91-103)

These stanzas are impressive since Walker touches on the psychological effects of war on soldiers, who are prepared to go to wars, but not to return from them. Depression, displacement, and eventually suicide are some of the consequences of war after soldiers return to their home countries. Their lives have changed forever and they cannot be the same persons they were before the war. As a result, they become strangers in their own countries and within their families. In Walker's non-fiction book *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For* (2006), she remarks: "since the end of the war [Vietnam], more than sixty thousand who were in the war have died from suicide and drug overdoses and other ailments of the spirit and soul" (209). In this respect, Schweik comments on displacement and gender imbalances in the US during the post-war period, when there was "a sense of an often uncrossable gap between the male soldier who was understood to have experienced too much and the woman left behind who was understood to have experienced nothing at all" (6).

In Walker's straightforward way, she proclaims:

Are you not
perhaps
the reason
I have no
enthusiasm
patience
or admiration
for war? (110-117)

In the above passage we can perceive Walker's pacifism and anti-war activism. In this poem, her major concern is with the individual, the personal history of combatants, as the one of this single army veteran buried in the same cemetery of Walker's family. She writes directly to this man:

You,
the
poor
dispossessed
cannon
fodder

safer behind
the mule
you
left
than
behind
any
gun? (118-131)

In the preceding lines, it is possible to notice Walker's criticism in relation to the unimportance of this soldier's life to the army. Being "cannon fodder," an ordinary member of the army, probably a Southern black man "(as your own Southern country accent / amused many)" (146-147), his life would be much safer in the countryside "behind the mule" than holding a gun. In the following stanza, Walker writes with irony about her friend and co-worker Pratibha Parmar, a cinematographer from India who lives in England. Together they filmed in Africa a documentary film entitled *Warrior Marks: Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Blinding of Women* (1993):

My friend
 Pratibha (her name means “genius” in her
 original language,
 which is Hindi)
 brown
 Indian
 British
 with
 an accent
 that
 would
 have
 made
 you laugh
 (as your own Southern country accent
 amused many)
 films
 us all
 sitting
 talking
 eating
 laughing
being with
 you,

 as you
 play dead. (132-157)

In the passage above, Walker mocks Parmar’s Hindu accent while speaking in English. She talks to the army’s veteran as if he was listening to her and compares her friend’s accent with his own accent, from the US Southern countryside. Both accents are amusing in Walker’s opinion. The poet, towards the end of the passage, uses the word “being” in italics as a way to give emphasis to the company they are offering the dead soldier. Walker finishes the poem with irony, by saying that the unfortunate and deprived army veteran is “playing dead.”

This personal poem depicts a different and special day in Walker’s life, in which she is able to visit her deceased family in the company of her dear friend and relatives. Walker’s life history and her anti-war activism overlap and blend resulting in the inspiration needed for the creation of this piece of work. In addition, owing to her life experience, Walker is able to create a poem in which she approaches the controversial issue of war and writes, for instance, about the

psychological consequences of war on soldiers' lives, a subject that concerns society as a whole. Walker's most significant poems are those such as this one, in which her personal history, heritage and critical views of the world intersect.

2.5 – Claire Harris's long polyphonic poem "Sister (Y)our Manchild at the Close of the Twentieth Century"

Claire Harris was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad, in 1937. She took a BA in English at University College, Dublin, and after acquiring a Post-Graduate Diploma in Education at the University of West Indies, Jamaica, she emigrated to Canada in 1966 in order to teach English and drama in Calgary's Catholic school system where she remained until 1994. In 1974-5 she went to Lagos to read mass media and communications at the University of Nigeria and there she decided to become a writer. In her return to Canada in 1975 she began to write for publication. In 1977 she published *Poetry Goes Public*, with the intention of introducing Canadian poetry to Canadians, who had little knowledge about their poets.

Among her many professional occupations were her work as editor for the literary magazine *Dandelion* from 1981 to 1989, and as managing director for the all-Alberta literary magazine *blue buffalo* from 1984 to 1987. Harris's poetry has been published in eight books, several magazines and anthologies and she has also written articles and edited an anthology of Canadian women's writing, *Kitchen Talk* (1992). Among her many awards, for her first poetry book *Fables from the Women's Quarters* (1984) she won the Commonwealth Award, Americas Region in 1985, and *Drawing Down a Daughter* (1992) was nominated for a Governor General's Award. Nowadays Harris has retired from teaching and travels extensively around the world, including areas of conflict such as Africa and the Middle East. Harris asserts in her essay "Why do I Write?" that she is a political writer "like all other writers" (*Grammar of Dissent* 32).

In this section, I analyze Harris's long and complex war resistance poem "Sister (Y)our Manchild at the Close of the Twentieth Century," published in the collection *Dipped in Shadows* (1996), and its approach of imperative issues such as the legacy of slavery and contemporary wars in countries like Iraq, Bosnia, and Somalia. The poem is an example of Harris's preference for the long-poem form, since for her "the long poem is valuable because of the space it provides to think things through thoroughly. It also allows space

for varieties of craft that one couldn't do in a form like the sonnet" (*Why we write* 124).

The poem chosen for this study explores a variety of visual resources; while some parts are in prose form, others are in different stanzaic variations. These different forms and shapes are what Harris calls "variety of crafts." For instance, on the first prose passage Harris uses italics when she writes "*her beautiful man who kills*" (5) and uses capital letters for "WARS ON / DRUGS WARS ON CRIME WARS ON DRUNK DRIVERS" (12-13). In so doing the poet emphasizes death and wars by using different fonts. In the following passage, Harris approaches the issue of slavery and its "terrible aftermath" (69):

the world glimpsed through the wavering aura of migraine five/ten
million Africans trapped branded transported twice five/ten dying
in the attempt the three hundred years of slavery rape its terrible
aftermath otherness fear and police boots batons bullets joblessness
fear invisibility the ceaseless niagaras of difficulty that idiot's tape
measure fear we who have as wings only hope only the feather's
bruising courage to make it come out even
a small thing
a footnote of history (66-74)

In the passage above Harris tackles several consequences of slavery for blacks in America, such as the recurrent feelings of fear, otherness, and invisibility. The last line depicts the insignificance of slavery for the white civilization. Being a "small thing" and "a footnote of history," slavery is minimized in the eyes and history of the western world. In an interview given to Nigel Thomas, Harris explains why slavery is an issue which whites prefer not to give much attention. She states that colonization not only enslaves physically but morally as well, and the colonizers could not declare to be civilized as they engaged in slavery. She concludes by saying that civilization and slaveholding do not go together (*Why we write* 116). Still in the same passage we can observe Harris's use of blank spaces before and after "we who have as wings only hope" (71). This break in the reading flow of the poem evokes a pause for contemplation.

In the next stanza Harris puts herself in the dual position of a North-American woman who is naïve for never having been poor and bombed, and of a black woman who suffers "race war" in Canada. The poet uses the personal pronoun "we" in order to write in the name of

I think every marine came here with the idea that he might get a chance for a confirmed kill (256- 265)

Clarke writes about the way that the poem explores “the vicious and violent racism of Canadian peacekeeping troops in Somalia.” According to Clarke, the marine is “himself a member of an oppressed people, striving to exercise the power of his white superiors.” In addition, he believes that “Harris hints that her soldier-protagonist’s refusal of solidarity with Somalis – another Native people – marks a failure of imagination, a loss of memory, and a rejection of his own mother.”⁶

Harris’s poem approaches several issues which concern her political writings. For her, the writing of poetry comes “often out of a sense of horror and immense curiosity about the human race. For a long while [she] wrote because [she] wanted to find out what humans would not do” (*Why we write* 122). By criticizing a varied scope of subjects such as racism, American television, and war, “Sister (Y)our Manchild at the Close of the Twentieth Century” finishes with Harris criticizing her sister’s “manchild,” a black Canadian marine boy who goes to Africa but does not recognize the African man as his equal and demonstrates the white Western belief in the supremacy of the Western men over the African.

In the next chapter, I will focus on a specific Caribbean-Canadian writer, Dionne Brand, who shares Harris’s Trinidadian nationality as well as similar critical views regarding the history and legacy of slavery, American imperialism and media, and the contemporary world with its conflicts and wars.

⁶ Clarke, George E. “Harris.” E-mail to the author. 16 Jul. 2012.

Chapter 3 – Dionne Brand’s Poetics of War

Revolutions do not happen outside of you, they happen in the vein, they change you and you change yourself, you wake up in the morning changing. You say this is the human being I want to be. You are making yourself for the future, and you do not even know the extent of it when you begin but you have a hint, a taste in your throat of the warm elixir of the possible. (Bread Out of Stone 84-85)

Born in 1953 in Guayaguayare, a fishing village in the Caribbean island of Trinidad, Dionne Brand is an African-Caribbean Canadian writer who writes short stories, novels, poems, essays and has directed several documentary films. Besides her career as a writer, Brand is a professor at University of Guelph. She is considered one of the most talented and prolific writers in Canada nowadays. Brand has won several awards, including the most prestigious literary award in Canada: The Governor General’s Award for Poetry and the Ontario Trilium Award for Literature for her poetry collection *Land to Light On* (1997). In 2011, Brand won the Griffin Poetry Prize for her poetry book *Ossuaries* (2010).⁷ Since the beginning of her career, Brand’s political engagements in the civil rights, feminist, and socialist movements as well as her experience of multiple displacements for being a black Caribbean immigrant in Canada, contributed towards the development of her writing as poetics of resistance.

Poets of resistance such as Brand are usually hybrid writers. Hybrid writers are those who are immigrants, visible “minorities” or of “mixed blood,” or encompass the three of them. In Wah’s view a hybrid writer “must develop instruments of disturbance, dislocation, and displacement,” (73) and that is what Brand does with her hybrid discourse. Brand’s critical views are a result of her life as a black immigrant who experiences racism and sexism in a white and male dominated country such as Canada and who uses her art in order to “disturb” the Eurocentric dominant society.

A hybrid writer like Brand faces in-betweeness, a situation of displacement, of not belonging anywhere, neither in their home country

⁷ Among Brand’s awards is the 2003 Pat Lowther Award for poetry for her book *Thirsty* (2002). In 2006, Brand won the Harbourfront Festival Prize and in 2009, she was named Toronto’s Poet Laureate.

nor in their adopted one. Wah views this situation as living in a *hyphen*, a “crucial location for working at hybridity’s implicit ambivalence” (73). For Wah the hyphen is an “elusive migrational floating carpet” that “offers a literal ‘place’ where the racialized writer can define her own occupancy of this ‘no-man’s land’” (87). Brand’s “occupancy” has been solidly acquired through the recognition of her talent and work. Besides, she does not consider herself as being in the margins of Canadian literature, since Brand recognizes that she is right in the middle of black literature (*Books in Canada* 14).

3.1 – Dionne Brand’s testimonial of the Grenadian revolution and subsequent American military intervention

Dionne Brand’s poetry collection *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* was published a year after the United States military invasion of Grenada in 1983. Brand was in Grenada at the time working as an information Officer for the Caribbean People’s Development Agency. As a result, this book is Brand’s testimonial of the “self-destruction of the Grenadian Revolution” and subsequent American military attack, states Clarke in the essay “Harris, Philip, Brand: Three authors in search of literate criticism.” In Brand’s words: “in writing *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* I was incredibly angry and terribly despairing at some points. Mighty ideas are not the same as military might” (qtd. in Birbalsingh 128). Most poems in the book are about the military occupations and some of them are in the form of diary, a form that gives readers Brand’s daily testimonial of the experience. Brand’s concern in registering this specific moment in history is visible throughout the book. In an interview published in *Poets Talk*, Brand exposes her feelings in relation to her experience in Grenada and compares that experience with her political activism in Toronto:

The experience in Grenada had made my perceptions laser sharp. Suddenly it was clear that we had just been playing around with revolution in Toronto, arguing with each other about whether Marx was right. It was just absurd, given the reality in Grenada. I had now seen what could happen, the planes from the skies and the earth just deceiving you and leaving you. We, it seemed to me, had just been joking around, like dilettantes or something. (81)

The People's Revolutionary Government of Grenada (1979-1983) was established through a bloodless coup that overthrew the corrupt government of dictator Sir Eric Gairy and put an end to twenty-seven years of his regime: "wasteful, corrupt, and United States sanctioned" states Lorde in her essay "Grenada Revisited: An Interim Report (*Sister Outsider* 177). What was idealized as a civilian government based on social equality and redistribution of land ended in armed conflict due to factional divisions within the PRG and the resulting murder of Prime Minister Maurice Bishop and several of his supporters on October 19, 1983. Bishop was previously the charismatic leader of the group The New Jewel Movement (NJM), which had as influence the politics of National Liberation, Black Power, and African socialism. Bishop's murder was the pretext for a combined US and Regional Security System (RSS) invasion of Grenada in 1983. The official name of the operation was "Operation Urgent Fury." However, the informal name was "The Sledgehammer and the Nutmeg" due to the discrepancy in size and power between the US and the Caribbean island and an allusion to the main spice produced and exported by the island, comments Helen Scott in her essay "Beyond Mourning: The Legacy of the Grenadian Revolution in Literature." Brand talks about her hope for Grenada before the American invasion in an interview in 1991:

I had just seen the end of the fighting in Zimbabwe. Sandinistas were in power in Nicaragua, and Bishop was in Grenada. The wings of the American eagle hadn't clamped themselves over so much of the world as they have today [. . .]. I felt that it was quite possible for a whole population to have a vision of equality, to see the possibility of living without being dominated by [. . .] patronizing and patriarchal governments. (qtd in Birbalsingh 126)

"Diary-The Grenada crisis" is a poem in which Brand exposes, in the form of testimonial, her experience in Grenada during the American intervention of 1983. The poem is written in the form of a diary, as the title suggests. The days change, but the time remains the same throughout the poem: five in the morning. This was around the time that the first American bombers attacked Grenada on a Tuesday morning in October 1983. In the first two stanzas, Brand describes the early morning atmosphere which anticipated the events that were to come: "in the morning smoke light / my chest and its arms cover my

breasts, / the ground, wet, the night before, / soil scented, / the open vault of the morning” (8-12). The poet’s use of the word “vault” in the last line together with the line “badluck’s cricket brown to the ceiling” (6) bring a sort of uneasiness to the reader, a feeling of apprehension and bad omen. In the third stanza, Brand acknowledges: “I could exchange this caribbean / for a good night’s sleep / or a street without young men” (23-25). In these lines Brand demonstrates her feelings towards the male sex, in Brand’s view the main responsible for the damages caused in wars and urban conflicts.

In the following stanzas, Brand depicts what she witnessed in Grenada in 1983:

In the pale air overlooking the town
 in the anxious dock
 where sweat and arms are lost
 already,
 the ship and the cement
 drop against the metal skies,
 a yankee paratrooper strangles in his sheet.

prayers for rain,
 instead again this wonderful sky;
 an evening of the war and those of us looking
 with our mouths open
 see beauty become appalling,
 sunset, breaths of grey clouds streaked red,
 we are watching a house burn.

All afternoon and all night,
 each night we watch a different
 fire burn,
 Tuesday, Butler House
 Wednesday, Radio Free Grenada
 Thursday, The Police Station
 a voice at the window looking
 “the whole damn town should burn”
 another “not too many of us will die.”

eyes full of sleep lie awake
 we have difficulty eating,
 “what’s that” to every new sound
 of the war. (33-59)

In the previous passage from “Diary,” Brand makes use of polyphony. One of the most significant characteristics of Brand’s poetry is her way of experimenting with diverse voices. According to Tereza Zackodnick “Brand privileges a dialogic of differences that makes a space for multiple voices and discourses”(6). In this poem, Brand’s “multiple voices” are probably those of the American soldiers, the Grenadian civilians, and Brand and her comrades. Brand makes recurrent use of this strategy in poetry and other forms of art, such as in her documentary films *Sisters in the Struggle* (1991) and *Long Time Comin’* (1991).

With the American strategic bombing of Radio Free Grenada, the country was isolated from the outside world during the US military intervention. Moreover,

the press was denied access to the island during the first four days of the invasion apart from two short trips for a carefully selected group of foreign reporters organized by the United States Information Agency [. . .]. During this press ban, all information from Grenada was provided by the U.S. Department of Defense, and many reports have since been proven incorrect. (Servaes 33)

Lorde also comments on the press ban during the invasion of Grenada: “For the first time in an american war, the american press was kept out until the stage could be set” (*Sister Outsider* 185). In the following stanzas, Brand demonstrates the impossibility of resting in situations of war and the uncertainty of what is coming next:

of every waking,
what must we do today,
be defiant or lie in the
corridor waiting for them,
fear keeps us awake
and makes us long for sleep.

In my chest,
a green-water well,
it is 5 a.m. and I
have slept with my glasses on
in case we must run. (70-80)

In Brand's essay "October," published in *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2001), Brand describes in detail her experience portrayed in the passage above, when she was "trapped" in a house in Grenada during the five-day war:

In the dawn, from the balcony, we could see warships out in the ocean. We were trapped in this house for several days. We did not know what was going to happen to us. I thought that we were going to die. We paced, we drank rum, we talked about the falling revolution, we quaked and crouched in a corridor when the bombs fell, we waited listening for the burst of the bombing raids. I felt growing thinner and thinner with nervousness. (155-156)

Although Brand's experience in Grenada was traumatic in several aspects and had serious consequences in her life, such as a recurrent fear, the outcome was positive. Brand explains this paradox in the essay "Cuba," published in *Bread Out of Stone* (1994): "Well, I joined the revolution in Grenada in 1983, and I can still say that it was the best year of my life because it made the world finally seem right" (54). In the same essay, Brand justifies why she went to Grenada:

Why I went there was because I could not live in the uneasiness of conquest and enslavement, and it didn't seem to me that paths with even the merest suggestion of acceptance of these could lead me out. I could not choose to do anything else but fling myself at the hope that the world could be upturned. (*Bread* 54)

Unfortunately, the world could not be "upturned" as Brand had hoped. In the poem "October 19th, 1983" Brand writes about her despair in seeing the revolution ending after only four years of positive changes. The poem is entitled after the day of Maurice Bishop's and his supporters' murders, a day that became known as "Bloody Wednesday." In the first two lines, Brand transfers to poetry her feelings of impotence and lack of words in the presence of the tragic facts. In the introduction to *Grammar of Dissent*, Carol Morrel summarizes the main points approached by Brand in the poem: "'October 19th, 1983' sounds the dirge-like repetition of the names of the dead, questions whether words

can convey the tragedy of the invasion, and keens the death of the dream of socialism in the Antilles” (22).

this poem cannot find words
 this poem repeats itself
 Maurice is dead
 Jackie is dead
 Uni is dead
 Vincent is dead
 dream is dead
 lesser and greater
 dream is dead in these antilles (1-9)

In the essay “October,” Brand writes about her sharp memories of “Bloody Wednesday.” She recalls in detail her revolutionary friends “who would die later that day.” In Brand’s words:

I remember them. Jackie was in yellow, she had a cigarette in her hand, she was fiery, waving the cigarette about and talking decisively; Vincent was next to her, I think his jersey was blue, he was punching the air with his hands as he spoke; Maurice was inside the darkened doorway. (*A Map* 162)

In relation to other poems published in *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* in which Brand deals with the issue of the Grenadian revolution, “October 19th, 1983” is the one in which her feelings are most exposed. In many parts of the poem, Brand demonstrates her sadness and dismay in relation to the end of The People’s Revolutionary Government of Grenada. Brand’s Marxist ideology and her dream of seeing Grenada as a free and egalitarian country come to an end: “there isn’t a hand large enough / to gesture this tragedy” (15-16) or “how do you write tears / it is not enough, too much / our mouths reduced, / informed by grief” (73-76). The poem ends with the premature death of the people’s government, which lasted only four and a half years: “it is *only* October 19th, 1983 / and dream is dead / in these antilles” (my emphasis 78-80).

In the poem “October 25th, 1983” Brand demonstrates the superiority of arsenal and number of soldiers of the American army in Grenada in comparison to the Grenadian armed forces (PRA – People’s Revolutionary Army). In the next lines, the poet describes the horrors of the military attacks on the civilians: “while it fed on the young of the

land, / eating their flesh with bombs, / breaking their bellies with grenade launchers” (10-12). In his essay “Poetry and History,” Simic argues that “we Americans often fought evil with evil, and while we did so, many innocents caught in-between paid the price. No matter what politicians and military men tell us, bombing has always been a form of collective punishment” (36). It is concerning this “collective” and unfair punishment that Brand writes about in the preceding lines.

In the following long stanza, Brand writes down the main issues of the reform program proposed by the People’s Revolutionary Government with the Cuban assistance, such as land redistribution, improvements in housing, health care, and education and the impossibility of fighting the US army with “dignity.” In the essay “A commentary on the poetry of Dionne Brand,” Nigel Thomas remarks: “the crushing of Grenada was America’s way of showing the rest of the world the extent to which it is prepared to go to impose its own ideology and economic model” (3). In the next passage, Brand writes about the imposition of democracy on Grenada through the use of force and violence by the US mighty military arsenal and the comparison between socialism and this kind of “democracy:”

america came to restore democracy,
 what was restored was faith
 in the fact that you cannot fight bombers
 battleships, aircraft carriers, helicopter gunships,
 surveillance planes, five thousand american soldiers
 six caribbean stooges and the big american war machine,
 you cannot fight this with a machete
 you cannot fight it with a handful of dirt
 you cannot fight it with a hectare of land free from
 bosses
 you cannot fight it with farmers
 you cannot fight it with 30 miles of feeder roads
 you cannot fight it with free health care
 you cannot fight it with free education
 you cannot fight it with women’s cooperatives
 you cannot fight it with a pound of bananas or a handful of
 fish
 which belong to you

certainly you cannot fight it with dignity. (13-29)

In *Frames of War* (2010), Judith Butler, like Brand, questions the use and meaning of the word “democracy.” According to Butler,

In the US we have heard in recent years about “bringing democracy” to countries where it is apparently lacking; we have heard, too, about “installing” democracy. In such moments we have to ask what democracy means if it is not based on popular decision and majority rule. [. . .] If the form of power imposed is called “democracy” then we have an even larger problem: can “democracy” be the name of a form of political power that is undemocratically imposed? (36-37)

Brand approaches in her war resistance poetry what Butler calls “destroyed zones.” In the poem “On American numeracy and literacy in the war against Grenada,” she criticizes the way the media counts the war dead in relation to the US and the countries they assault. Butler tackles this issue when she writes about the “ungrievable” lives, which “are those that cannot be lost, and cannot be destroyed, because they already inhabit a lost and destroyed zone” (xix). In the case of Brand’s poem, the third world countries of El Salvador and Grenada are considered “destroyed zones” inasmuch as the numbers of war dead are simply not relevant to the US. Butler asks: “How do such populations count when the rationale for the destruction is that they do not count at all?” (xix). Through the use of irony Brand criticizes the “ungrievable” lives of the war dead from El Salvador and Grenada:

when counting casualties in a war
the first is always American.
(for instance the first casualty in El Salvador
as reported in Newsweek was an american
army officer)
the 40,000 salvadoreans are just playing dead
and the grenadians lying face upward in the sun
at Beausejour are only catching flies. (14-21)

Brand’s experience in Grenada was so overwhelming for her life and career that she has revisited the theme in subsequent works. In *No Language is Neutral* (1990), *Bread out of Stone* (1994), *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996), *Land to Light On* (1997) and *A Map to the*

Door of no Return (2001) Brand approaches the issue of the Grenadian Revolution in poetry, essay and fiction.

In Brand's poetry book *No Language Is Neutral* (1990), the poet revisits the theme of the Grenadian revolution in the section entitled "Return." One of the poems in this section is "Phyllis" and is dedicated to Phyllis Coard, Minister of Women's Affairs in the People's Revolutionary Government of Grenada. Phyllis was the wife of Deputy Prime Minister Bernard Coard. She was imprisoned at Richmond Hill Prison in Grenada for her role in the coup led by her husband that overthrew Prime Minister Maurice Bishop by the time Brand wrote the poem. Moreover, Phyllis's name is mentioned briefly in the poem "October 19th, 1983", from *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun*: "Bernard, Phyllis, Owusu, H.A.! / what now!" (41-42). In "Phyllis," Brand repeats three times the lines "Phyllis, I know they treat you bad / like a woman" (6-7). In these lines, Brand implies that abuse, sexual or other, was committed against Phyllis while in prison. In addition, in this poem Brand recollects her time spent in the company of Phyllis in Grenada:

I know is you one there and I
never forget how one night you give
me a ride in your car
and I never forget your laugh like a bronze bauble
hanging in that revolutionary evening
Phyllis, when you sit down and explain
the revolution, it did sound sweet and it
did sound possible. (8-15)

"Jackie," another poem from *No Language is Neutral*, is dedicated to Jacqueline Creft, Minister of Education in the People's Revolutionary Government of Grenada. Jacqueline was killed on the same day that Prime Minister Maurice Bishop was killed, on October 19th, 1983, during the coup. In this poem, Brand writes about her memories of her first encounter with Jackie: "Jackie, that first evening I met you, you thought I was / a child to be saved from Vincent's joke" (1-2). Next, Brand writes about an afternoon they spent at the beach where Jackie "threw [her] / little boy among the rest of children in the hissing / ocean surf, dreaming an extraordinary life, an idea" (5-7). The poem ends with Brand's depiction of Jackie's death: "your mouth the colour of lightning, then in the last / moment, bullets crisscrossed your temple and your / heart. They say someone was calling you, Yansa, / thundering for help (17-20).

In the essay “Dionne Brand and Alanis Obomsawin: polyphony in the poetics of resistance,” Maria Lucia Milléo Martins remarks that “Brand’s concern is not simply speaking for those who were silenced but attributing to them some dignity of agency” (156). This notion can be noticed in Brand’s portraits of the previously mentioned revolutionary women in Grenada, as we can observe in the following lines from “Jackie:”

Jackie, gently, that glint of yellow in your eyes,
end of a day, cigarette smoke masking your tiredness
and impatience with this gratuitous rain of foreign
clerks, then you talked patiently, the past burning at
the back of your head. [. . .] (10-14)

In the collection of poems *Land to Light On*, Brand once more approaches the issue of the Grenadian revolution in the poem “IV xi.” Here Brand makes use of code-switching, a device used by writers of resistance in order to show that they can “own, but not be owned by the dominant language,” states Mary Louis Pratt (qtd. in Wah 82). Brand uses Caribbean demotic as a form of code-switching in several of her poems in order to locate “minority utterance in (performative) opposition to hegemonic patriarchal and nationalist discourses” (Dickinson 164).

Apart from Caribbean demotic, “nation language” is a different term used. Brathwaite describes “nation language” as “the kind of English spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and labourers” (qtd. in Wiens 4). Besides, Zackodnik claims that “nation language is itself polyphonic.” She adds that Brand’s synthesis of nation language and standard English exceeds hybridization in her “speakerly” poetry (7). In the poem “IV xi,” Brand combines two strategies: polyphony and code-switching in order to allow voice to the black Caribbean people.

Brand’s use of Caribbean demotic is an act of resistance, of showing that “through the Creolization of a dominant language (English)” she creates a “variable, distinct speech community,” comments Winer (qtd. in Dickinson 167). Prown calls Brand’s technique “dialectical maneuvers,” which include “the absence of possessives and grammatically correct personal pronouns” (qtd. in Wiens 5). In June Jordan’s essay “Nobody Mean More to Me Than You,” she states that “there are three qualities of black English – the presence of life, voice, and clarity” (*Some of Us* 163). In the following

lines of poem “IV ix,” it is possible to perceive the three qualities that Jordan mentions:

When we meet now we say, “It was the best years
of my life. I wouldn’t exchange it for youth.” Hustling European
guests into a hotel, pain stroking a face with the wrong answer
for the cause of the end of we. Watching only through a plane
window at Point Salines and busy no recalling where we was
rightly, eating coconut ice cream at the bar in Crown Point,
starting all over with hardly any heart. (6-12)

In the passage above, Brand mentions the Grenadian airport of Point Salines, a strategic place during the US military intervention. The airport was used by the US army as a jump off point for the military occupation. At the time of the military invasion, Cuban workers were rebuilding the airport in order to accommodate larger aircrafts that would bring European and American tourists to the island. However, former American president Ronald Reagan believed that the main reason behind the construction was to allow Soviet aircrafts en route to Cuba. Critics claim that the rationale for the US invasion was to prevent the construction of this airport and not to rescue American students who were in danger, to defend the Grenadian public from Bishop’s murders, and an alleged Cuban occupation as the US contended (Scott 321). Brand writes about this issue: “[. . .] climbing into the plane coming down at that tiny airport whose small ambition would lead to the American invasion” (*Bread* 84). Nowadays the airport is named after the leader of the Grenadian socialist revolution: Maurice Bishop International Airport.

In the essay “Nothing of Egypt,” Brand writes about her return to Canada after Grenada, her profound personal changes and her sensation of defeat and displacement. In Brand’s words: “Coming back, I felt more defeated than I had crouched into a muscle in the corridor where I’d spent most of the five-day war” (*Bread* 79). In this essay, Brand also recalls her body’s responses to the tragedy of the immediate past and her brain’s “disloyalty” to the present – the paradox of wanting to die and to live.

[. . .] days when I pitched like a drunk between
wanting to die quickly and dreadfully wanting to
live. It was only five days, but they took a long
time to pass. I could hear each minute’s temporal
hum and the hum of the blood in my head. The

skin burns. And the jaw clamps tight. And the mouth tastes like paper but sour. I could do nothing but think and notice the independence of my body and the disloyalty of the region of my brain that keeps notes on the present. I could do nothing but think because I could not sleep. (85)

Brand's absence of sleep during the five-day war was previously depicted in the poem "Diary - The Grenada crisis," from *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun*: "fear keeps us awake / and makes us long for sleep" (74-75). In the essay "Nothing of Egypt," Brand acknowledges the importance of the experience in Grenada for her life, and the freedom and power that she faced after having survived the armed attack on the fort and the subsequent American aerial bombardments:

How do I describe the feeling of freedom that you get when you don't die. Something says, "I don't have to take anything anymore, nothing has power over me." And even if years pass and you forget and sometimes you are afraid, the notion stays with you. Just this thought, nothing has power over me, causes you to change even more. (*Bread* 87)

In the same essay, Brand writes about her change in relation to the way she used to enjoy herself before and after Grenada. Brand used to enjoy dancing, but after her return to Canada "dancing lost its naturalness" (*Bread* 86). Besides, Brand writes about her sense of guilt, about her incapability of enjoying herself again after so many people were dead or lost during the Grenadian revolution:

Or at least when I tried to rejoin it in the same way, I failed. I wonder if they couldn't dance in Grenada for so many months after or so many years. How a war can seize your limbs, your sense of rhythm. How it can say if you dance, move one tendon to a pattern, you betray those who died or were lost; you act as if nothing has happened and nothing needs to be mourned. (*Bread* 86)

In the last paragraph of "Nothing of Egypt," Brand writes about her displacement and difficulty in explaining to others her "new

self” after Grenada. Brand felt a huge gap between herself and those alien to her experience in Grenada: “[. . .] of course you disappear from a certain life, you are released into another, and you do not call anyone to explain because the world is new and there are no lines of talk across” (*Bread* 88). In Brand’s interview published in *Poets Talk*, she comments that after Grenada she was able to come out as a lesbian. I believe that being in a revolution and surviving it gave Brand the courage needed to disclose her homosexuality. However, it was a difficult moment in Brand’s life, since she did not know what to do; she was unable to attend classes during her Master’s course because she felt that the professors had nothing to teach her and did not know anything. Yet, Brand recognizes that the problem was not with the professors but with the place “where [she] was in at that moment” (81-82). In Brand’s words: “I must have needed some explanation of the world after Grenada and that was impossible” (82). Furthermore, she explains in the same interview the way she used to relate to people in general after Grenada: “[. . .] got into fights with everyone. At that moment I decided I wasn’t going to tolerate anything” (82).

In Brand’s first novel *In Another Place, Not Here* (1986), the writer once again revisits the theme of the Grenadian revolution. Although the island where the revolution takes place is nameless in the story, it is easily identifiable as Grenada once the reader knows about the history of the Grenadian revolution. The story is divided into two parts: The first part is narrated in Caribbean demotic by Elizete, a worker at a cane plantation on the island, who recounts her remembrances of her lesbian relationship with Verlia, and by a narrator who reports Elizete’s experience as an immigrant in Toronto after Verlia’s death. The second part is about Verlia’s life, her immigration to Toronto at seventeen, her political engagements, her return to the Caribbean at thirty at the moment of the revolutionary socialist movement and her subsequent death due to the failed revolution. In this novel, Brand portrays several instances of her own life through the character Verlia, such as her immigration to Canada at seventeen, her political engagements, and her experience in Grenada at thirty. Consequently, this book can be considered “biofiction,” a term coined by Wah, since Brand’s character Verlia “borrows” a lot from her personal life history.

The image of people jumping off a cliff in despair was one of the most powerful scenes Brand experienced in Grenada in 1983. She uses the image of this incident when her character Verlia jumps off a cliff as she runs from the armored attacks. In the essay “Affective coordination

and avenging grace: Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here*," John Corr comments on Verlia's suicide and the paradox defeat/defiance behind her rationale: "In a gesture that is equal parts defeat and defiance, Verlia leaps off a cliff while defending the island's socialist government from heavily armed American invaders and power-hungry, pseudo-Marxist internal usurpers" (3). Similar to the self-destruction of the successful socialist government of Grenada by its own people, Corr contends that "Brand represents the collapse of Grenadian socialism in such a way that it occurs despite the success of the system and the will of the people" (6). In the novel, Brand compresses the events from October 19th in twenty-four pages in a diary form written by Verlia. In the next paragraph, Corr comments on the temporality of the historical events depicted in the novel:

Brand's novel deviates from historical accounts of Grenada's socialist demise by slightly disrupting the temporality of its events. She spreads out October 19th, 1983 – Grenada's Bloody Wednesday – over a few days. This temporal distortion is necessary. Even extrapolated, the series of events feels compressed in the novel. Had she tried to represent them in an even more compressed time frame, Verlia would not have had time to note them in her diary. Nonetheless, Verlia records events akin to those that transpired on "Bloody Wednesday:" the imprisonment of Grenada's revolutionary leader by a usurper; the liberation of the leader at the insistence of the people; the subsequent execution of the leader; the ensuing uprising of the people in protest; and the usurper's militarized effort to destroy unarmed protesters and lightly armed dissidents with the heavy armour of personnel carriers. (5)

After Verlia's death, Elizete decides to go to Toronto. In this novel "the history of slavery in the Caribbean and the echoes of colonization are inscribed not only in the island where Elizete lives, but are also carried with both Verlia and Elizete as they journey at separate times to Toronto," remarks Joanne Saul in her essay "In the middle of becoming: Dionne Brand's historical vision." In the interview "At the full and Change of Canlit: an interview with Dionne Brand," she remarks that her fictional characters are connected to history inasmuch

as “[. . .] history hovers over them, whether they want to or not, whether they know it or not, whether they like it or not.” As a result, *In Another Place, Not Here* the history of the Grenadian revolution and Brand’s personal life history are at the root of the plot, whether Elizete and Verlia “want it or not.”

In the essay “October,” Brand approaches the issue of the Grenadian Revolution fifteen years after the occurrence. In this essay, Brand writes in detail about the events that took place in Grenada on October 19, 1983. A piece of information that Brand gives us is that she was feeling extremely ill on that day. Besides, for the first time in her non-fiction writings about the Grenadian revolution, Brand writes about which side she took in relation to the overthrow of Maurice Bishop. In addition, she discusses the reasons behind her recurrent “fear” even fifteen years after the end of the socialist dream. In the next passage from “October,” Brand writes about the early atmosphere of October 19th, 1983, a different day since its beginning, from Brand’s fever to the high spirits of Bishop’s release from house arrest and later, his murder:

That day I didn’t hear the baby crying. I usually heard the baby crying in the morning. But my head was full of a pain and fever, so I didn’t hear the baby cry. I was awakened instead by the sound of a great crowd. This same burning head had led me to this island. I had come here in search of a thought, how to be human, how to live without historical pain. It seemed to me that a revolution would do it. But I woke up that morning not because I heard the baby’s usual noise but because I heard the crowd. (*A Map* 157)

Brand explains in this essay that Bishop “had been placed under house arrest because it was alleged he had violated democratic centralism.” She then acknowledges for the first time that she had supported Bishop’s overthrow. In just one brief sentence, Brand justifies herself: “In a moment of naiveté, of textbook fascination, I had supported this decision” (*A Map* 158). Five years before, in Brand’s “biofiction” novel *In Another Place, Not Here*, Verlia (Brand) writes in her diary about her mistake in supporting Clive’s (Maurice Bishop’s) overthrow:

I am torn and afraid to say it, afraid to even write it down. At first I thought Clive was wrong and I

was even proud that we could challenge the leader and have him submit to the will of the party. Then it broke apart and the outcome was not reason and discipline as I expected. Then the people went to free Clive from house arrest and I had to take it back. (224)

Following, Brand writes about the inexperience of the opposition group who “could not sense that anyone else could be concerned with their trouble nor that there were outside forces [in this case, the US] about to put an end to their project” (*A Map* 158). In “October,” Brand recognizes that she “knew nothing at all that day.” For instance, she could not perceive the heavy and dangerous atmosphere which prevailed before Maurice Bishop’s and his supporters’ murders. A woman whom she hardly knew but “knew where she lived” (*A Map* 164) saved her life when she convinced Brand to leave the fort just before the armored attacks took place. It was just five minutes from the time Brand arrived home and she heard the sound of gunfire. Brand describes the scene with precision:

The crowd where I had been standing began running in all directions. I saw people leap from the cliff and bump raggedly down its side. There was nowhere to run. People threw their bodies down the cliff trying to get away. I could not hold the glass, the water spilling was like hard stones. I did not feel as if I was in my body. (*A Map* 165)

Brand’s awareness that she could have died on that cliff “covered [her] like a cloak” (*A Map* 167). Verlia’s death in the novel could have been Brand’s own death had she stayed five more minutes at the fort. In the following passage from “October,” Brand writes about her bewildering dreams in which she has difficulty to separate fantasy and reality:

In my dreams I lay on the cliff, cut up, my limbs in disarray, the rocks breaking through, pebbles in my mouth. In my dreams I had stayed at the fort for five more minutes. I had convinced the woman from Carriacou to wait with me. We had been killed. When I awoke from these dreams I was not certain which was the dream and which was the real day. (167)

At the end of the essay, Brand acknowledges that the fever she had the day of Bishop's death "seemed to last for years." In Brand's words: "As in a fever, you do not always know where you are. And then again, you know precisely and dreadfully where you are. A fever makes you acutely sensitive [. . .]. You feel everything" (*A Map* 169). This hypersensitivity that Brand claims to feel may have its positive side for a poet, since her perceptions of the world become laser sharp. The essay ends with Brand's friend answer to a question she raises at the beginning of the essay: "Marlene, did we, ah, did you go crazy after? Did you have trouble with life?" (*A Map* 156), and Marlene's answer is "yes." For Brand, her friend's affirmative answer is a kind of comfort; at least she is not alone in her permanent "fever."

3.2 – War against racism in “Eurocentric”

The poem “Eurocentric,” from *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun*, does not relate to the US invasion of Grenada. However, the poem approaches colonialism, its invasive actions and use of violence, as well as racism. In this poem, Brand criticizes the Eurocentric and racist dominant society. By using the personal pronoun “you” right in the first two lines, Brand talks directly to the subject of her poem. According to Arun Prabha Mukherjee very often the non-white Canadian writer “uses ‘we’ to stand for a particular racial/ethnic group whereas ‘you’ or ‘they’ very often stands for a white person or persons” (77). Brand herself thinks it is “tricky” to use “you” since it sounds accusatory and, in doing so, the poet “is not taking responsibility in the poem” (*Poets Talk* 80). Yet, that is the tone in “Eurocentric,” an accusatory poem in which Brand points the finger at the dominant culture’s responsibility for several historical moments of racism and for the wars and their consequences:

There are things you do not believe
 there are things you cannot believe
 (in fairness I do not mean women here except
 jean kirkpatrick and the like)
 these things
 they include such items as
 revolutions, when they are made by people of colour
 truth, when it is told by your privilege
 percussive piano solos, squawking saxophones
 rosa parks’s life, bessie smith’s life and any life
 which is not your own, (1-11)

In the excerpt above, Brand praises some renowned black women such as Rosa Parks and Bessie Smith. Rosa Parks is considered the pioneer of the civil rights movement in the US. On December 1, 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, she refused to concede her bus seat to a white passenger. As a result, she was arrested and fined for violating the city decree. This act of disobedience aroused public attention and the consequent movement for ending legal segregation in America. Bessie Smith was an African American blues singer often recognized as “The Empress of Blues.” She was the most famous female blues singer of the 1920s and 1930s in the US. On the other hand, Brand downgrades a white woman, Jean Kirkpatrick. She was former American president Ronald Reagan’s foreign policy adviser during the 1980 campaign and she was the first woman nominated as US Ambassador to the United Nations. She supported anticommunist governments around the world, including the *contras* in Nicaragua and the military *juntas* in Guatemala and El Salvador.

In the essay “Recovering History: The Poems of Dionne Brand,” Krishna Sarbadhikary states that the poem “scathingly exposes a worldview which does not and cannot believe in things which do not affect white male-identified interests directly,” as we can notice in the lines “revolutions, when they are made by people of colour” (7) and “rosa parks’s life, bessie smith’s life and any life / which is not your own” (10-11). In the next passage from “Eurocentric,” Brand criticizes racism and colonialism in the United States and elsewhere:

ripe oranges with green skins,
blacks lynched in the american way,
Orange Free State, bantustans,
waking up in the morning, in any place where you
do not live,
people anywhere other than where you live wanting
freedom
instead of your charity and coca-cola, (12-19)

In the preceding passage, Brand exposes one of the most violent acts of racism committed against black people in the US: the lynching of blacks in the “american way.” Poet Sonia Sanchez in her book *Homegirls and Handgrenades* (1984) published a poem entitled “Reflections After the June 12th March for Disarmament,” in which she also approaches the issue of racism in America by writing about the lynching and hanging of blacks. In Sanchez’s words: “I have come to

you from the lynching years, / the exploitation of black men and women by / a country that allowed the swinging of / strange fruits from southern trees” (9-12). In their poems both poets are concerned about registering this shameful part of the American history. The hate group Ku Klux Klan, founded in 1956 in Louisiana, was behind most of these acts of atrocity in the southern part of the country.

In the same passage, Brand writes about South Africa’s apartheid roots by bringing up Orange Free State. It is worth noticing that Orange Free State is the only name in the whole poem in which Brand uses capital letters. The Orange Free State was a white independent Dutch (Boer) republic in South Africa during the second half of the nineteenth century. By mentioning this specific place in history, Brand reminds us of the white colonizers in South Africa, the ones responsible for the creation of apartheid. Furthermore, Bantustans were separate territories for black South Africans to live, as part of the policy of apartheid. In the line “chains other than ornamental ones,” (32) Brand alludes to the slavery period and to the subjugation of Africans by European colonizers.

In the following line, “women, who do not need men” (22), it is possible to notice a recurrent subject in Brand’s poetry, that is, women’s autonomy from men. During an interview published in *Poets Talk*, Brand speaks about her feelings in relation to the opposite sex: “Male domination scared me. I had a different reaction than a lot of women. I wasn’t even out as a lesbian or even knowledgeable of desiring women as a possibility. Male domination just scared me” (77). This sentiment toward the male sex is an important factor behind Brand’s feminist discourse in some of her poems.

In the lines “massacres more in number than 1 american officer / 4 american nuns” (25-26), Brand criticizes the numbers of American casualties in comparison to the dead numbers in the countries they attack. As already mentioned, Butler refers to this issue stating that certain populations do not count as human beings since their bodies are construed as tools of war. Consequently these populations are “deprived of life before they are killed, transformed into inert matter or destructive instrumentalities, and so buried before they have had a chance to live, or to become worthy of destruction, paradoxically, in the name of life” (xxix).

In the following lines “war, unless you see burning children; / hunger, unless you see burning children” (33-34), Brand tackles the importance of images for people who have not experienced war in order to make them aware of the real damages that result from wars, being the

children the most vulnerable victims. These lines are an allusion to the famous photograph of the Vietnam War taken by Huynh Cong Ut in 1972. In the photograph we can see “children from a village that has just been doused with American napalm, running down the highway, shrieking with pain,” describes Sontag (*Regarding* 57). Sontag discourses about the impact of certain photographs in the collective memory, or as she prefers to say, “collective instruction.”

Photographs that everyone recognizes are now a constituent part of what a society chooses to think about, or declares that it has chosen to think about. It calls these ideas “memories,” and that is, over the long run, a fiction. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as collective memory – part of the same family of spurious notions as collective guilt. But there is collective instruction. (85)

At the end of the poem, Brand moves from the personal and accusatory pronoun “you” used at the beginning of the poem for “we” and “I”: “I have discovered / how much we are / how many words I need” (44-46). By using the personal pronoun “we,” Brand includes herself in a particular group or community. According to Butler, if a person identifies with a certain community of belonging based on “nation, territory, language or culture,” this person feels responsible for that community, for those who are “recognizably like [him/her] in some way” (36). That is what happens to Brand when she uses “we,” given that she puts herself in a position of speaking in the name of the black community. By finishing the poem with the line “how many words I need” (46), Brand addresses her poetic self and acknowledges the strength of her words.

3.3 – Poetizing History in the poem “III,” from *Inventory*

“One year she sat at the television weeping” is the first line of poem “III” from Brand’s poetry collection *Inventory* (2006). Why did this woman weep for so long? The title of Brand’s book might facilitate with the answer. The *Inventory* that Brand writes about is the number of deaths that this woman witnesses and lists everyday of her life for a whole year while watching television news. The horrors of the images broadcast are part of the daily living room “entertainment show” on TV.

Although there is a common knowledge in the media that “if it bleeds, it leads,” the response may vary according to each spectator’s sensibility or lack of it: “compassion, or indignation, or titillation, or approval, as each misery heaves into view,” remarks Sontag in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (18).

In the past, the image of war would come from “paintings of historical scenes and illustrations for daily newspapers,” comments Simic (“Poetry” 37). In the early twentieth century, women poets such as Marianne Moore would get motivation for the writing of their war poems by observing photographs of wars in the newspapers. Moore’s best-known war poem, entitled “In Distrust of Merits,” came from “the pressure of the news.” Laurence Stapleton notes that “she once said that her incentive for writing the poem was a newspaper photograph of a dead soldier” (qtd. in Schweik 35). From late twentieth century on, one of the ways for contemporary poets like Brand to obtain raw material for the writing of war poems is by watching the TV news. Brand’s response to the “pressure of the news” on her resulted in the long poem “III.” All the way through its 475 lines, Brand approaches imperative issues of our time.

Simic comments on “the pressure of reality on the contemporary poet,” the way that the media brings fresh and raw data of history “soon after the event and in such detail that makes each one of us a voyeur, a Peeping Tom of the death chamber.” In poem “III” Brand creates a nameless woman persona, who is the poet’s response to this “pressure of reality” in her own life, the way that she, as a poet, and people in general are led to watch images of violence and destruction through the media, anytime, everyday. At the same time that these images of suffering and violence shock, they also bring a kind of “unreality” to our lives, a sort of “suspicion that all that suffering is meaningless, that it is already being forgotten, that tomorrow brand-new sufferings will come,” observes Simic (“Notes” 125).

The idea of commonplace is present in the following line from poem “III:” “all this became ordinary far from where it happened” (24). This statement demonstrates that once geographically far from the places where wars, hurricanes, tsunamis, bombings, and other incidents take place, we experience the occurrence as an everyday event. The sensation of being secure from these harms makes us feel insensitive about other people’s pains. In the introduction to *Frames of War*, Butler argues that “without the assault on the senses, it would be impossible for a state to wage war. Waging war in some ways begins with the assault on the senses; the senses are the first target of war” (xvi). Sontag adds:

“flooded with images of the sort that once used to shock and arouse indignation, we are losing our capacity to react. Compassion, stretched to its limits, is going numb” (*Regarding* 108). However, the female persona in Brand’s poem resists the numbness caused by the daily flood of images of violence and suffering: “everyone grows perversely accustomed, / she refuses” (137-138).

The first war broadcast daily in the United States was the Vietnam War in the 1960s. “Ever since, battles and massacres filmed as they unfold have been a routine ingredient of the ceaseless flow of domestic, small-screen entertainment,” states Sontag (*Regarding* 21). This idea of entertainment is developed in William Hazlitt’s essay on Shakespeare’s *Iago*, in which he comments that “‘love of mischief’, love of cruelty, is as natural to human beings as is sympathy” (qtd. in Sontag 98). In Sontag’s book *At the Same Time*, she develops this notion of entertainment by writing about the importance of violent videogames for the new generations in the United States and elsewhere, in which killing people is the main goal. She even ponders that soon there will be videogames such as *Interrogating the terrorists*, in which images of torture and humiliation will be part of the “entertainment.” Sontag declares that the violent crimes are outdated; on the other hand, the easy pleasure derived from violence seems to have increased (148).

Brand destabilizes the binary dichotomy between reality and fiction by saying that fiction is real and the news unreal. We can observe this notion in the following lines from poem “III:” “the news was advertisement for movies, / the movies were the real killings” (18-19). An example of this paradox is found in Sontag’s explanation about the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. The attack “was described as ‘unreal,’ ‘surreal,’ ‘like a movie’”(22). Sontag comments:

After four decades of big-budget Hollywood disaster films, “It felt like a movie” seems to have displaced the way survivors of a catastrophe used to express the short-term unassimilability of what they had gone through: “It felt like a dream.” (*Regarding* 22)

In the following stanzas, Brand writes down the *inventory* of deaths that her female persona witnesses in “the latest watchful hour” (31).

Twenty-seven in Hillah, three in fighting in
 Amariya, two by roadside bombing, Adhaim,
 Five by mortars in Afar, in firefight in Samarra

Two, two in collision near Khallis, council member
 In Kirkuk, one near medical complex, two in
 Talafar, five by suicide bomb in Kirkuk, five (32-37)

In these stanzas, we can perceive the exact number of casualties in the Middle East during one hour of television news. The ways that these people's lives end vary: suicide bomb, roadside bombing, fights, firefight, collision, mortars, etc. The exact number of deaths (twenty-seven in Hillah) triggers in the reader awareness of individual deaths, of real persons who have lost their lives in a violent and unfair way. Simic writes about the importance of precise numbers when reporting casualties in order to make people aware of the individuality of experience, and not as an abstract notion:

A figure like 100,000 conveys horror on an abstract level. It is a rough estimate since no one really knows for sure. It is easily forgotten, easily altered. A number like 100,001, on the other hand, would be far more alarming. That lone, additional individual would restore the reality to the thousands of casualties. ("Poetry" 39)

Brand knows about the importance of individual records in order to make her audience aware of the veracity of casualties in her *inventory*. Brand does not want to see her list of fatalities "easily forgotten" by her readers. Consequently, she is precise to the point of mentioning just one death: "one near medical complex" (36). However, towards the end of the poem Brand generalizes when she writes about the average number for the monthly casualties: "Eight hundred every month for the last year" (459).

In the next stanzas, Brand moves from the Middle East to the Western World, more precisely to the United States, where the casualties by urban violence occur in public places such as shopping malls, restaurants, schools, football stadiums, and buses:

seven by shop window, with small girl, in wading pool,
 twelve half naked by the river, nine shot dead in

Missouri shopping mall, possible yes, in restaurant
 in Madison, three nephews, one aunt in Nashville fire bomb,
 six by attack near hospital in Buffalo, two listening to radio

sixteen by bomb at football stadium, one reading
 on bus “the heart is enclosed in a pericardial
 that is lined with the parietal layers of serous membrane...”
 (51-58)

In the preceding stanzas, Brand gives a picture of the urban violence committed against innocent people in public places. The places mentioned in the poem are supposed to be areas of public security and entertainment, and not regions of risk such as the places mentioned before in the Middle East. The unfortunate medical student, who loses his/her life while studying in a bus, is an example of the unjustified violence against civilians that occur daily in “civilized” countries. This image portrays the unsafe condition of our contemporary Western World, and the lack of human values and kindness present in our time. By using the personal pronoun “we,” “the poetic voice refuses to let us forget our own complicity in the present historical moment of destruction and extermination,” states Sandra Regina G. Almeida in the essay “‘Impossible citizens’ in the global city: Dionne Brand’s discourses of resistance” (132): “let’s at least admit we mean each other / harm, / we intend to do damage” (319-321).

Brand then assuages the gravity of the poem by making use of irony. One of the strategies used in irony writing is repetition. She writes: “she’s heard clearly now, twenty-three, / by restaurant bomb near green zone, Ibn Zanbour,” (45-46). Some lines later, Brand ironically apologizes for repeating herself: “twenty-three by suicide bomb at Ibn Zanbour kebab / restaurant, no need to repeat this really, just the name / of the kebab place is new, isn’t it” (80-82). In the following stanza, Brand employs irony again by making use of a double voice, “with the forked tongue of irony” (Hutcheon 1). The poet, by using the ironic double voice, means the opposite from what she writes:

let us forget all that, let us not act surprised,
 or make coy distinctions among mass
 murderers, why ration nuclear weapons,
 let us all celebrate death (222-225)

In the lines “outside bank in Kirkuk, the numbers so random, / so shapeless, apart from their shape, their seduction of infinity” (84-85),

Brand mentions “shapeless” numbers. This idea of shapelessness reminds me of Virginia Woolf’s non-fiction book *Three Guineas*, in which she describes a war photograph that she sees of a shapeless corpse. In Woolf’s words: “This morning’s collection contains the photograph of what might be a man’s body, or a woman’s; it is so mutilated that it might, on the other hand, be the body of a pig” (14). In Sontag’s opinion, Woolf’s claim is that “the scale of war’s murderousness destroys what identifies people as individuals, even as human beings” (*Regarding* 61). Even though Brand does not write about shapeless bodies, we can perceive in the previous lines the connection between Brand’s “shapeless” and “random numbers” with Woolf’s notion of the destruction of the identification of people as individuals and human beings in situations of wars. Butler remarks that “numbers are a way to frame the losses of war, but this does not mean that we know whether, when or how numbers count” (xx).

In the stanzas that follow, we can observe in Brand’s work the same concern expressed by Simic in registering the history of “unimportant events.” For Simic, “the image of a dead cat, lying in the rubble of a bombed city” is more important than “the rationale for that air campaign” (“Poetry” 36). In Brand’s subsequent stanza coincidentally there is an image of a cat that, for a short while in poem “III,” diverts the focus of the persona’s inventory of deaths to some “unimportant events” in her everyday life:

the paper now, and where’s the hair oils
the butter’s gone rancid,
remember the cat we used to have,
it disappeared the first day,
lemons, remember to buy lemons (120-124)

In the next stanza, Brand demonstrates again the importance of individual histories and “unimportant events” in her writings. In an interview published in the journal *Canadian Woman Studies* in 2000, Brand approaches this issue while talking about her second novel *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999). In the interview, Brand mentions that she does not look at history when she writes, “but something like, a small impression in a book, by a guy, and I think, that’s really interesting to write down, and to write down in its smallness, in the smallness that it appeared in the small life” (24). It is about these “small lives” that Brand writes down:

fingered vendors, the washing to be done,
 the sewing, the bicycles to be repaired
 the daily lists to be made of mundane
 matters, like the cost of sugar, or the girl losing
 her new pencils again (146-150)

Religion is another issue that Brand tackles and criticizes in poem “III.” Brand considers herself an atheist and in the line “don’t pray it only makes things worse, I know” (208), we can observe Brand’s lack of religiousness. In Brand’s blog posting entitled “All power to the young women in the streets of Kabul,” she writes about the connection between patriarchy and religion in relation to the control of women’s freedom. In addition, Brand criticizes the different religions by asking the following questions: “Why one may ask do matters of ‘faith’ have so much to do with the control of women? Why is the control of women so important to a belief in a god?” In another blog posting entitled “Patriarchy and election,” Brand writes about her atheism: “God help me I’ve been visiting the Conservative Party web site. Now being an atheist you know when I invoke god I’m truly in trouble, but the web site can generate a Women’s Studies course all on its own.” By observing these remarks, it is possible to perceive Brand’s position as feminist and atheist.

Another issue that Brand deals with in the same stanza is her view of masculinity as being the gender of war making. We can notice this by observing the lines: “and why, why are only the men in the streets, / all over the world” (210-211). According to Woolf, fighting is a male characteristic that women do not share. On the other hand, maternal instinct is the women’s counterpart that men do not share (127). Sociologist and critic Anthony Giddens approaches this issue in his book *Beyond Left and Right*, but he demonstrates a disagreement with the feminist notion of masculine gender as being the gender of war making. In his opinion, “war is not an expansion of a generalized aggressiveness, but associated with the rise of the state. Although there might be some men who actively relish war, the large majority do not” (235). However, Brand shares with other feminists the belief that Giddens refutes.

The issue of immigration has often been approached in Brand’s writings. An immigrant herself, she has written about the persecutions committed against black immigrants in Canada. In poem “III” Brand mentions briefly in her *inventory* what happens yearly to thousands of illegal immigrants worldwide, who risk their lives in unsafe boats in

order to reach their dreamlands: “thirteen drowned off the coast of Italy” (259). Due to the location of the incident, Africans were the most probable occupants of the boat.

As mentioned before in this study, the use of polyphony is a constant mark in Brand’s poetry work, and in the poem “III” it could not be different. In the following stanzas, we can perceive the variety of voices that Brand promotes in her work:

the conversation is over except,
 “we won’t change our way of life for this savagery
 against civilized nations . . . murders when we talk peace” (336-338)

or

and the man who killed Van Gogh, Mohammed
 Bouyeri, said to Van Gogh’s mother,
 “I have to admit I don’t have any sympathy for you,
 I can’t feel for you because I think you are a non-believer” (411-414)

In *Inventory*, another of Brand’s concerns is in relation to environmental catastrophes that have become so frequent in our time. In poem “III,” Brand does not register the figure of casualties that result from natural disasters; nevertheless, she writes about her apprehension concerning the future of our planet: “when the planet is ruined, the continent / forlorn in water and smoke” (166-167). In the lines “a hurricane moving toward Guantanamo / seems harmless enough / and merely the hand of God” (344-346), Brand again uses irony. By using a double voice, Brand writes that God is to blame for the environmental catastrophes. Yet, what the poet implies is the opposite: men are truly responsible for the natural disasters that occur daily in our planet.

In the same stanza, we can perceive Brand’s criticism in relation to the professionals that work with media and broadcast the daily flood of images of wars, bombings, firefights etc.: “though ominous rain, the blue sea’s limning screens / are saturated with experts on terror” (347-348). With the advance of technology “the war itself is waged as much as possible at a distance, through bombing, whose targets can be chosen on the basis of instant relayed information and visualizing technology from continents away,” states Sontag. According to Sontag, when we witnessed the daily bombing operations in Afghanistan in late 2001 and early 2002, those operations were commanded from US Central Command in Tampa, Florida (*Regarding*

67). Brand condemns the use of this technology in order to broadcast “half-hourly repetitions / of the same shameless verses” (357-358):

where did they learn this,
 where you wonder did such men, ruddy with health,
 cultivate this wicked knowledge

then you realize they have an office
 a new industry for the stock exchange
 and an expense account, an ardour for subterfuge
 they’re traders, like anybody else these days,
 in what’s obvious,
 and skilful in half-hourly repetitions
 of the same shameless verses

day and night (349-359)

Concluding, poem “III” is an account of the occurrences of the early twenty-first century broadcast daily through the TV news. In this poem, Brand is able to poetize history by writing about urgent and important issues that concern humankind as a whole. Brand’s poem alerts readers about the situation of the contemporary world, the way that people kill each other as a customary event, every day, every hour, and the way that the media reports these “shapeless and random numbers.” In poem “III,” Brand not only writes about contemporary events through a historical view, but also registers the history of “unimportant events.” By making an inventory of casualties for a whole year, Brand’s woman spectator is able to reach a conclusion: “yet, this figure, eight hundred every month / for the last year, and one hundred / and twenty in a brutal four days” (472-474). “Things, things add up” (475) is the last line of long poem “III.” As a result, this last line gives readers a sense of continuity, discomfort and at the same time acceptance of the inevitability of the facts, mainly because “tomorrow brand-new sufferings will come.”

3.4 – *War Series* by Jacob Lawrence inspire Brand’s ekphrastic “ossuary XI”

Published in 2010, *Ossuaries* is Dionne Brand’s latest awarded poetry book. In this collection, the poet has reached a mature and sometimes cryptic way of writing that it is definitely not aimed at the general public. Consequently, it is Brand’s most sophisticated work in

terms of content and language usage. Reviewer and poet Sonnet L'Abbé writes about the book:

Ossuaries is a long poem in 15 parts, 15 “ossuaries,” that speaks sometimes in the voice of the main character, Yasmine, and sometimes speaks of her life. Each ossuary is a cascade of tercets (three-line stanzas) that unfurls in one long stream of images and contemplations, pausing only in breathless commas, never coming to a full stop. (*The Globe and Mail*)

The collection of paintings *War Series* by the twentieth-century African-American painter Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000) was the inspiration behind the writing of Brand's ekphrastic poem “ossuary XI.” The word ‘ekphrasis’ has Greek roots and means ‘speaking-out’ or ‘out-speaking,’ writes Peter Barry in his essay “Contemporary Poetry and Ekphrasis.” Barry explains that what the ekphrastic poem speaks of “lies unambiguously ‘outside’ the poem, rather than within the poet's imagination, even though it is not in the ‘real’ world, but in the parallel universe of art” (155).

James Hefferman defines ekphrasis as “the verbal representation of visual representation” (qtd. in Clüver 22). However, Clüver contests and revises this notion by expanding Hefferman's definition of ekphrasis and adds: “Ekphrasis is the verbal representation of a real or fictitious text composed in a non-verbal sign system” (26). By extending the definition, Clüver includes the word “text,” which is used in semiotic discourses, and opens space for different kinds of representation, such as musical compositions, dance, photography, and architecture, among others.

Brand turns into an “ekphrast” the moment that she “becomes an observer of things, rendering [her] observation into a language that ‘stems from matter,’ becoming hence a thinker in and into words” (Al-Joulán 54). In a conversation with Brand in Toronto in 2011, the poet told me that she wrote down in a notebook her impressions of Lawrence's *War Series* while attending the exhibition, and afterward she used the “matter” in order to write the poem.

During World War II Lawrence joined the United States Coast Guard and served with the first racially integrated crew on the USCGC Sea Cloud. In the course of his time in the Coast Guard, Lawrence was able to paint and sketch while at sea. Throughout “ossuary XI” Brand

cites the names and writes down her impressions of six paintings from Lawrence's *War Series*: "Victory," "Shipping Out," "Another Patrol," "Beachhead," "Going Home," and "Reported Missing." "ossuary XI" starts with the following tercet, which gives reader a hint of Lawrence's painting "Victory," although Brand does not use capital letters when she refers to Lawrence's paintings in the poetic form:

In the museum I sat with Jacob Lawrence's war,
his "victory," red and drenched, looked like defeat,
of course (1-3)



Fig.1-Victory (1947)

Brand's impression of Lawrence's painting ironically entitled "victory" is based mainly in the portrayal of the soldier's body language. The criticism that Brand demonstrates in these first lines shows Brand's view regarding the issue of war, since for her, even though there is always a "victory," this victory is "red and drenched" in blood. For Brand, there are no victories in situations of war, mainly because the war dead and the suffering of civilians do not compensate for the political rationale behind the war. Brand's view about the issue

of war is clear: “someone outside can never tell you how stupid war is, how insensible or how heartless” (*A Map* 168).

In the following stanza, Brand refers to some technical details of the painting she is observing, such as the “angular gentle faces” and the kind of paint used, gouache, but she does not write the title of the painting. In addition, the poet puts herself in a dual position: in the company of the painter and in the place of the soldiers, and cries together with Lawrence for the sorrow felt toward those men, who face their misfortunes in situations of war: “I cried with him, held his lovely heads, / his angular gentle faces as my own, his bodies, / driven with intention, attack their catastrophe in gouache” (10-12).

In the next stanzas, Brand writes about the similarity between Lawrence’s painting “Shipping Out” and the Middle Passage, or as she prefers to call it, “the door of no return.” It was “the door out of which Africans were captured, loaded onto ships heading for the New World [. . .]. It is a door many of us wish never existed” (*A Map* 19). In the poem Brand writes about the enormous amount of Africans who died in the ships due to the inhuman conditions they had to face in the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean. In her essay “Bread Out of Stone,” published in *Grammar of Dissent*, she writes about the way Africans were brought to America and the numbers of survivals and deaths in the crossings:

Listen, I am a black woman whose ancestors were brought to a new world lying tightly packed in ships. Fifteen million of them survived the voyage, five million of them women; millions among them died, were killed, committed suicide in the middle passage. (179)

The stanzas which depict Brand’s statement above are the following:

“shipping out”
 who could not see this like the passage’s continuum,
 the upsided down-ness, the cramp, the eyes compressed

 to diamonds,
 as if we could exhume ourselves from these mass graves,
 of ships, newly dressed (13-18)



Fig.2 - *Shipping Out* (1947)

In the subsequent stanzas, Brand writes about the world we live in and its need for salvation. According to L'Abbé “ultimately, Brand offers up a dark vision of the pain and process of poetic memorialization” (*The Globe and Mail*). Brand calls the remnants of the world “our ossuary:”

if we could return through this war, any war,
as if it were we who needed redemption,
instead of this big world, our ossuary

so brightly clad, almost heroic, almost dead,
the celebratory waiting, the waiting,
the smell of wounds (19-24)

The following stanza from “ossuary XI” depicts the next painting, in which Brand writes about the lack of temporality in Lawrence’s painting. The poet imagines contemporary “dense clouds of carbon” around the sailors’ embarkation on the ship:

“another patrol” those three,
it could be any year then or now or in the future,
it could be home, dense clouds of carbon (28-30)



Fig.3 - *Another Patrol* (1946)

The subsequent painting inspired Brand in the writing of the following stanzas from “ossuary XI:”

“beachhead” the arms wide as Olaudah Equiano,
the teeth fierce, bayonets for self-inflicted wounds,
suicides, and riots when the end of the day
is another precipice, another hill,
the imaginary line moving like revolving latitudes,
the heart then is an incendiary

the guitar strings of veins play a future
music still unheard, the bayonets
do their sacrificial work, close (46-54)



Fig.4 - *Beachhead* (1947)

In the first tercet Brand mentions the name of “Oludah Equiano,” an ex-slave who became one of the most influential Africans engaged in the British movement towards the abolition of slavery. Equiano was brought from Africa and sent first to Barbados, then to the British colony of Virginia, and finally England, where he married and published his autobiography in which he exposed the horrors of slavery in America. Equiano’s book was of extreme importance for the abolitionist movement in England.

“Going Home” is another title from Lawrence’s *War Series* that appears in “ossuary XI.” Brand mentions the “fragility” of the soldiers in their return home, not just physically, but emotionally:

“going home” the wounds, hand, shoulder,
head, in gauze and blood,
fragile like eggs (67-69)



Fig. 5 - *Going Home* (1946)

In the next stanzas, Brand mentions Lawrence's painting "Reported Missing." Brand repeats the words "missing again" several times and, by doing so, she conveys a feeling of continuity, of lives that are forever missing, of bodies that disappear everyday in all corners of the world:

"reported missing" again, missing again,
missing, again missing,
a body out of time, moving at a constant angle

its paths through space under these forces,
flights impossible to correct,
the unnecessary barbed wire's twisted crosses (91-96)



Fig. 6 - *Reported Missing* (1947)

In “ossuary XI” Brand brings her impressions of Lawrence’s *War Series* and transforms them in an ekphrastic war resistance poem. In this poem Brand approaches the most ancient form of injustice and suffering on earth – wars – and the oldest form of depicting images of wars – painting – in order to create a hybrid poem in which poetry and painting work together for Brand’s cause, which is to criticize the wars and their consequences. In *Ossuaries* Brand reaches a point of maturity and complexity where her criticism regarding our planet is severe. As a result, Brand’s “*Ossuaries* is a difficult, but beautiful, exhumation, a furious dirge for an era not yet passed,” comments poet LAbbé.

In Brand’s trajectory as a poet, it is possible to perceive in the development of her career a change from local to global issues. While in her early works such as *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* her main concern is in relation to armed conflicts in the small Caribbean island of Grenada, which is close to her homeland, Trinidad, in her subsequent work *Inventory* Brand focuses on urban conflicts in North-America and the Middle East. In *Ossuaries*, the poet reflects in a deeper and more complex way about the world and humankind. Brand is not alone in this kind of trajectory. African-American poet June Jordan follows the same path moving from local to global issues. In chapter four, I will analyze some of Jordan’s poems which follow the same trajectory as Brand’s, and where conflicts – armed or not – are the main subject.

Chapter 4 - June Jordan's Poetics of War

All of my life I've been studying revolution. I've been looking for it, pushing at the possibilities and waiting for that moment when there's no more room for rhetoric, for research or for reason: when there's only my life or my death left to act upon. Here in the United States you do get weary, after a while; you could spend your best energies forever writing letters to the New York Times. But you know, in your gut, that writing back is not the same as fighting back. (Some of Us did NOT Die 199)

June Jordan (1936-2002) was a versatile and talented African-American woman and writer. Raised in Harlem and then Brooklyn, as the only child of Jamaican immigrants, she pursued a varied career as a poet, essayist, playwright, novelist, scholar, journalist, and political activist. Jordan's political engagement started in her youth, when she joined the civil rights movement. She also participated in the women's rights movement, movement for gay rights, Black Power movement, Black Arts movement, and movements against wars. In later life, she campaigned for the inclusion of black studies in university curricula as well as the use of Black English in the written form in order to give voice to black people and to keep the black culture alive. Among her many ventures was the creation of a project called "Poetry for the People," in which she encouraged students to write poetry. For Jordan, "the creation of poems [was] a foundation for true community: a fearless democratic society," quotes Philip Metres in his essay "Performing 'Righteous Certainty'" (181).

Jordan was a human rights activist who approached various imperative issues in her writings such as racism, sexism, wars and their consequences, women's rights, sexual freedom, among others. A prolific writer across genres, she published twenty-seven books in a career that spanned almost forty years. However, the media seems to have overlooked the significance of Jordan's work. In the essay "June Jordan and the new black intellectuals," Scott MacPhail states that "perhaps it is the importance of direct activism to Jordan's intellectual work that frightens off the mainstream press" (5).

Jordan's poetry reflects her personal experiences and she is considered "a most personal of political poets," states Adrienne Rich in the foreword for a 2005 collection of Jordan's poems entitled *Directed*

by *Desire*. Jordan's challenging childhood, a time when her demanding and sometimes tyrannical father treated her like a "soldier," made her a tough woman and had enduring consequences on her life and work. Rich compares Jordan's multi-faceted poetry to that of some renowned poets worldwide:

Her poetic sensibility was kindred to Blake's scrutiny of innocence and experience; to Whitman's vision of sexual and social breadth; to Gwendolyn Brooks's and Romare Bearden's portrayals of ordinary black peoples' lives; to James Baldwin's expression of the bitter contradictions within the republic. (*Directed by Desire* xxii)

In spite of her different occupations and projects Jordan lived a troubled life. A childhood marked by domestic violence was followed by two traumatic experiences of rape. Besides, she was abandoned by her husband and left with a child to raise and support. In addition, Jordan almost died when she underwent an abortion which was poorly executed and had to be repeated twice to be accomplished, in order to get rid of an undesired pregnancy. And finally, a breast cancer ended her life. Nevertheless, Jordan kept on fighting like a soldier against the inequalities of our world until the end of her life, by using the only weapon she had: powerful words that reflected her critical view of the world. Rich comments that "she believed in and lived the urgency of the word – along with action – to resist abuses of power and violations of dignity in – and beyond – her country" (*Directed by Desire* xxi). Alice Walker writes on the back cover of Jordan's book *Living Room* (1985) that "she is among the bravest of us, the most outraged. She feels for all. She is the universal poet."

4.1- June Jordan's testimonial of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua

June Jordan went to Nicaragua in 1983, coincidentally, the same year that Brand was in Grenada. Both revolutions started in the same year – 1979. In that year, the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN) overthrew the violent and corrupt dictator Somoza, who had been in power for nearly half a century. Jordan was invited by the poet Roberto Vargas, First Secretary of Cultural Affairs at the Nicaraguan

Embassy in Washington, DC, to read her poetry to the English speaking black people of Nicaragua. These Nicaraguans were either “survivors of an early 19th century slave ship mutiny, as runaway slaves from Jamaica/Barbados/Grenada or as laborers imported by British colonialists who attempted to settle this east coast of Nicaragua in 1894,” explains Jordan in the essay “Nicaragua: *Why I had to Go There*” (*Moving* 152). In the same essay, Jordan explains her reasons for visiting Nicaragua during the revolution:

I wanted to see for myself what was happening: I wanted to face the violence reported by the newspapers and supported by my taxes: to make my witness of this First World dream before it buckled into yet another nightmare colony, another “vacation paradise,” another “vital” outpost of the big guys. I wanted to get real: to put my life, as well as my words, on the line. I had to go to Nicaragua. (*Moving* 152)

Similarly to Brand in Grenada, Jordan had an urge to go to Nicaragua and witness events through her own eyes, to be part of a socialist dream and not simply to passively believe the information disseminated by the unreliable American media. In the essay “Moving Beyond the Enemy: Nicaragua and South Africa,” Jordan criticizes the Reagan administration and its financial support of the *contras*, the violent opponents of the revolution who were based in Honduras and received training, arms and money from the US. In Jordan’s words: “Perhaps the most important contribution we can make to international justice is just this: Stop United States’ collaboration with the enemies of self-determination” (*On Call* 145). In the essay “Black Folks on Nicaragua: ‘Leave Those Folks Alone!’” another critique that Jordan makes is in relation to the way the Reagan administration promoted propaganda against Nicaragua. Among the varied allegations leveled at Nicaragua were claims that the country was exporting weaponry to guerrillas in El Salvador, and Cuba and the Soviet Union were controlling Nicaragua (both without evidence) (*On Call* 57-58).

Jordan’s poetry book *Living Room* was published in 1985, two years after her experience in Nicaragua during the Sandinista revolution. The cover of the book depicts the main issue approached by Jordan in the collection – wars – since it portrays a soldier holding a gun. However, the scene appears unsuitable for the title of the book, which

can only be understood upon a reading of the last poem, entitled “Moving Towards Home.” Several poems in the collection constitute Jordan’s testimonial of the events she witnessed during her trip to Nicaragua. In the following poem from *Living Room*, “from Nicaragua Libre: photograph of managua,” we can observe the everyday history of what Simic calls “unimportant events” intertwined with the history of the Sandinista revolution:

The man is not cute.
 The man is not ugly.
 The man is teaching himself
 to read.
 He sits in a kitchen chair
 under a banana tree.
 He holds the newspaper.
 He tracks each word with a finger
 and opens his mouth to the sound.
 Next to the chair the old V-Z rifle
 leans at the ready.
 His wife chases a baby pig with a homemade
 broom and then she chases her daughter running
 behind the baby pig.

His neighbor washes up with water from the barrel
 after work.
 The dirt floor of his house has been swept.
 The dirt around the chair where he sits
 has been swept.
 He has swept the dirt twice.
 The dirt is clean.
 The dirt is his dirt.
 The man is not cute.
 The man is not ugly.
 The man is teaching himself
 to read. (1-26)

Jordan’s poem can be ekphrastic in a sense that she depicts with precision a “photograph” of Managua. Readers can easily imagine the domestic rural scene in Nicaragua in which a man is teaching himself to read sitting under a banana tree while his wife chases their daughter who chases a piglet. The only part of the poem that shows that the family is living in an area of conflict is in the lines “Next to the chair the old V-Z rifle / leans at the ready” (10-11). Jordan’s poem subtly refers to the

constant threat of the *contras* against the Sandinistas civilians, and it shows that civilians must be always ready to defend their families' lives. Jordan writes about the motto of the revolution: "All arms to the people." In her words: "I saw all of the people armed: nine year olds, Black women, elderly men. Everyone was armed with World War II rifles or AK-47's or whatever might come to hand; people forming volunteer militia to defend the revolution they had made" (*Moving* 156).

In the poem "from Nicaragua Libre: photograph of managua," Jordan presents the Nicaraguans as poor people living in dirt floor houses. However, she portrays these people as extremely neat in spite of their economic conditions: "He has swept the dirt twice" (20). In the essay "Nicaragua: *Why I Had to Go There*," Jordan writes about this issue: "As I walk along, it hits me that I have never seen such hovel levels of struggle for daily life. Or such cleanliness and order and quiet. The dirt is kept clean by homemade brooms. The hair is combed. I hear no shouts, no babies screaming" (*Moving* 153). The contrast between extreme poverty and neatness and peace overwhelms the poet, who writes about her impressions of the Nicaraguan people in poetry as well as in the essay form. Martins comments that in the poem "Jordan repeats several times the words 'the dirt,' and by doing so, it is possible to associate this image with 'the dirt' of the war, in the sense of sweeping the country, causing devastation and, in a metaphorical sense, suggesting the political corruption involved."⁸

In the poem "Fourth poem from Nicaragua Libre: Report from the frontier," from *Living Room*, Jordan writes about a scene of destruction she witnessed in Nicaragua. Again, moments of everyday life mingle with the harsh reality of the Sandinista revolution:

gone gone gone ghost
gone
both the house of the hard dirt floor and the church
next door
torn apart more raggedy than skeletons
when the bombs hit
leaving a patch of her hair on a piece of her scalp
like bird's nest
in the dark yard still lit by flowers

I found

⁸ Martins, Maria L. M. "Chapter four." E-mail to the author. 12 October 2012.

the family trench empty
 the pails of rainwater standing full
 a soldier whistling while thunder invaded
 the afternoon
 shards
 shreds
 one electric bulb split by bullets
 dead hanging plants
 two Sandinistas riding donkeys
 a child sucking a mango
 many dogs lost
 five seconds left above the speechless
 tobacco fields
 like a wooden bridge you wouldn't
 trust
 with the weight of a cat (1-26)

In the previous poem, Jordan writes about the remnants of a house and a church in a small village on the frontier of Nicaragua after being bombed. Jordan demonstrates the domestic character of the revolution, given that the family had a trench of their own: “the family trench empty” (11). The lines “leaving a patch of her hair on a piece of her scalp / like bird’s nest” (7-8) evoke Woolf’s belief in the obliteration of the recognition of people as human beings in situations of war. Moreover, these lines confirm Jordan’s testimonial of the revolution, when she was “eye-witness to the charred relics of a body, of a home, as recently destroyed as the night before” (*Moving* 157). In the lines “a child sucking a mango / many dogs lost” (20-21), we can again perceive Jordan’s concern as a poet for registering the history of “unimportant events.”

The short poem “Safe” is about Jordan’s adventure in a dugout canoe on Rio Escondido at night, where she acknowledges the natural and unnatural threats that she may face in Nicaragua during the conflicts between Sandinistas and *contras*. Jordan explains her constant state of tension while in Nicaragua: “Every night and every morning and every day there is the possibility of ambush or *contra* raids or artillery shelling or simple assassination. This is the deal everywhere I go” (*Moving* 157). “Safe” is about this tension:

The Río Escondido at night
 in between
 jungle growing down to the muddy

edges of deep water possibilities
 helicopter attack
 alligator assault
 contra confrontations
 blood sliding into the silent scenery
 where I sat cold and wet
 but surrounded by five
 compañeros
 in a dugout canoe (1-12)

In “Safe,” Jordan makes use of the device of code-switching through the insertion of the Spanish word “compañeros” (11). Pratt argues that “aesthetically, code-switching can be a source of great verbal subtlety and grace as speech dances fluidly and strategically back and forth between two languages and two cultural systems” (qtd. in Wah 82). By using the word “compañeros,” Jordan demonstrates solidarity with the Nicaraguan resistance and places herself in the middle of the Sandinista struggle.

The next poem “Verse for Ronald Slapjack Who Publicly Declared, ‘I, Too, Am a Contra!’” was published in the collection of poems *Naming our Destiny* (1989). In this poem, Jordan sarcastically criticizes former president of the United States, Ronald Reagan. Hutcheon comments that “certainly irony appears to be used by those who are concerned about the incongruities and discrepancies of power structures” (30). Jordan’s poem challenges these structures, as we can notice in the next passage, in which she makes a severe criticism of former president Reagan and his administration regarding the issue of war:

You got that right.
 You the founding father
 for the morally retarded
 the armed with butter-for-brains and truly mean
 the burn and brag
 the mercenaries
 the leftover lackeys from last year’s greed freak
 the do-anything-go-anywhere for the thrill
 of a little killing or
 if flexible
 a big kill (23-33)

In the previous passage we can observe Jordan's critique when she claims that killing is a "thrill" for Reagan and his supporters. Butler writes about the reasons for waging wars by saying that "lives are divided into those representing certain kinds of states and those representing threats to state-centered liberal democracy, so that war can then be righteously waged on behalf of some lives, while the destruction of other lives can be righteously defended" (53). Consequently, the American armed support of the *contras* in Nicaragua was a way to defend "threats to [American] state-centered liberal democracy."

Jordan uses the word *contra* in the poem as a word game, in the form of ironical repetition, and it has a two-fold meaning: *contra* as in contrast or opposition and in allusion to a member of the guerrilla force that opposed the left-wing government in Nicaragua. The passage follows next:

contra-dictory
 we seen you
 contra-dicted
 we seen you
 contra-factual
 we seen you
 contra-verified
 we seen you
 contra-Constitution
 we seen you
 contra-Bill-of-Rights
 we seen you
 contra-sanctuary
 we seen you
 contra-smart
 we seen you
 contra-all-intelligence
 we seen you
 contra-hospital-ship
 we seen you
 contra-heart
 we seen you
 contra-sign-of-independent-life
 Fact is
 Mister Slapjack Quack-Quack
 in a happy
 peaceful
 law-abiding scheme of things

you jus' contra-indicated! (40-68)

The type of irony used by Jordan in this poem is the *Corrosive* type, defined by Hutcheon as “the aggressive, cutting, cruel, derisive, disdainful, sneering irony of negation.” The build-up of [multi-barbed] ironic repetition and the use of anti-climax at the end of the poem are strategies used in the corrosive type, comments Hutcheon (8). Poets of resistance such as Jordan use irony as a powerful weapon against governments’ deeds. The repetition of the word *contra* does not allow the reader to forget the target of Jordan’s criticism: American ex-president Ronald Reagan. Besides, she uses in the poem the language of the black Nicaraguans and joins them in solidarity and as witness: “we seen you.” Jordan ends the poem with mockery by calling Reagan “Mister Slapjack Quack-Quack” and strategically employs Black English vernacular in the contraction “you jus’ contra-indicated” (68) as a tool of resistance.

4.2 - War resistance poetry about conflicts elsewhere

Jordan wrote extensively about the issue of war and in this section I am going to analyze some anti-war poems about conflicts in different places such as Grenada, Lebanon, Iraq and Bosnia. In “Another Poem About the Man,” published in *Living Room* (1985), as the title suggests, Jordan criticizes once more ex-president Ronald Reagan’s administration by using the devices of irony and code-switching. In this poem, the poet approaches and condemns Reagan’s armed intervention during the socialist revolution in Grenada in 1983:

the man who brought you the garbage can
 the graveyard
 the grossout
 the grimgram
 the grubby grabbing
 bloody blabbing nightly news
 now brings you
 Grenada

helicopters grating nutmeg trees
 rifles shiny on the shellshocked sand
 the beautiful laundry of the bombs falling into fresh air
 artillery and tanks up against a halfnaked girl
 and her boyfriend

another great success
 brought to you
 by trash delivering more trash to smash
 and despoil the papaya
 the breadfruit and bloodroot
 shattered and bloodspattered
 from freedom
 rammed down the throat
 of Grenada now Grenada she
 no sing no more

Grenada now Grenada she
 no sing no more she lose
 she sky
 to yankee invaders
 Grenada now Grenada she
 no sing no more (1-29)

Here Jordan explicitly demonstrates her reproof regarding the American armed intervention in Grenada. In the poem, the word “Grenada” carries a second connotation, meaning at the same time the name of the country and the bombs that the US deliberately dropped on the tiny Caribbean island. The lines “artillery and tanks up against a halfnaked girl / and her boyfriend” (12-13) describe the cowardly use of heavy weaponry by the US during the invasion in relation to the people of Grenada, which were “halfnaked” and deprived of any means of defense or combat against such powerful weapons.

In the essay “Beyond Mourning: The Legacy of the Grenadian Revolution in Literature,” Helen Scott writes about the third stanza: “The flesh of violated fruit becomes indistinguishable from that of humans, and Grenada itself is personified as an assaulted woman.” This notion of the lack of identification of people as individuals and human beings in situations of war has been previously discussed in this study. Moreover, Jordan associates the brutality of the invasion with rape, an issue she approaches repeatedly in both prose and poetry as consequence of her trauma. Another recurrent subject dealt with in this investigation is the imposition of “democracy” by the United States on the countries they attack. This issue is present in the lines “from freedom / rammed down the throat” (20-21).

At the end of the poem, Jordan makes use of code-switching, by using Black English vernacular: “Grenada now Grenada she / no sing no more” (28-29). The use of Caribbean demotic by Jordan is an act of

resistance; it shows that although the US might be the most powerful country in the world, it cannot dominate the language of the people they assault and on whom they impose their regime. In this poem, Jordan uses code-switching as a tool of resistance and it serves the purpose of allowing voice to the oppressed black people of Grenada. In Jordan's words: "[. . .] I work, as a poet and writer, against the eradication of this language, this carrier of Black survivor consciousness" (*Civil Wars* 69).

The poem "The Bombing of Baghdad," published in *Kissing God Goodbye* (1997), is Jordan's critique of the US military invasion of Iraq in 1990-91. The war became known as "Operation Desert Storm," and it was a war waged by a UN coalition force led by the United States against Iraq in response to Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait. In this poem, "Jordan uses the chant both to invoke the relentless 42-day bombing campaign as well as to catalog the human catastrophe that led from the destruction," states Meters ("Performing"183). Due to the rhythmical repetition of the words "we bombed," Jordan's poem becomes a sort of chant. Besides, the poet includes herself and takes responsibility for her country's campaign against Iraq, as we can notice in the passage that follows:

1

began and did not terminate for 42 days
 and 42 nights relentless minute after minute
 more than 110,000 times
 we bombed Iraq we bombed Baghdad
 we bombed Basra / we bombed military
 installations we bombed the National Museum
 we bombed schools we bombed air raid
 shelters we bombed water we bombed
 electricity we bombed hospitals we
 bombed streets we bombed highways
 we bombed everything that moved /we
 bombed everything that did not move we
 bombed Baghdad
 a city of 5.5 million human beings (1-14)

By observing the previous passage, we can perceive a similarity in relation to the accuracy of numbers in Brand's inventory of deaths in the poem "III" and Jordan's depiction of the destruction of Iraq's main city, Baghdad. The "Bombing of Baghdad" also evokes Butler's theory of the "ungrievable" lives, since it is possible to notice that the

population of Baghdad does not count as human beings in the eyes of the American army. According to Butler,

If the Islamic populations destroyed in recent and current wars are considered less than humans, or “outside” the cultural conditions for the emergence of the human, then they belong either to a time of cultural infancy or to a time that is outside time as we know it.” [. . .] It follows from such a viewpoint that the destruction of such populations, their infrastructures, their housing, and their religious and community institutions, constitutes the destruction of what threatens the human, but not of the human itself. (125)

For Jordan, those lives are human and count: “a city of 5.5 million *human beings*” (my emphasis, 14). In the next passage, Jordan ponders on this issue:

6

And all who believed some must die
they were already dead
And all who believe only they possess
human being and therefore human rights
they no longer stood among the possibly humane
And all who believed that retaliation / revenge / defense
derive from God-given prerogatives of white men
And all who believed that waging war is anything
besides terrorist activity in the first
place and in the last (70-79)

Metres observes that the above passage shows how Jordan “makes a strategic choice that she cannot address certain people,” since “they were already dead” (71). According to Metres, the poem “invites the reader to identify with the living; even if ones resists the Manicheanism of these lines, they have a moral force that compels its listener to be on the side of the living” (“June Jordan’s” 193). Jordan destabilizes the binary dichotomy army/terrorists by calling those who wage wars terrorists. The poet’s reproach of the war’s supporters by calling them terrorists and monsters (inhumane) puts this poem among the most judgmental ones in her war resistance poetry.

Meters points out two elements in Jordan's bombing narrative: a personal lyric and a historical narrative. The personal lyric is present in the passage: "The Bombing of Baghdad / did not obliterate the distance or the time / between my body and the breath / of my beloved" (36-39). According to Meters, "though the personal lyric shows us the primacy and endurance of physical love it also relates how the war did not manifest itself physically for American civilians." Jordan demonstrates in these lines that for her female persona, in her position as an American living in a "safe" country, her contact with the war was a virtual one through the media, without physical interference of the war in her private and love life, as opposed to the civilians in Baghdad. The historical narrative that Meters observes reports the death of Crazy Horse and the exploits of Custer: "The historical narrative, which dominates the poem from sections III-VI, makes an explicit connection between the 'guts and gore of manifest white destiny' (61) of Custer and US western expansion and the bombing of Iraq [. . .]" ("June Jordan's" 191- 192). The exemplary passages from sections three and six follow next:

3

This was Custer's Next-To-Last Stand
 I hear Crazy Horse singing as he dies
 I dedicate myself to learn that song
 I hear that music in the moaning of the Arab world (40-43)

6

And this is for Crazy Horse singing as he dies
 because I live inside his grave
 And this is for the victims of the bombing of Baghdad
 because the enemy traveled from my house
 to blast your homeland
 into pieces of children
 and pieces of sand (94-100)

Towards the end of the poem Jordan writes about her shame as an American in relation to the destruction of Iraq caused by her home country. Metres summarizes: "the poem becomes both elegy and apology" ("June Jordan's" 193). The passage is the following:

And in the aftermath of carnage
 perpetrated in my name
 how should I dare to offer you my hand
 how shall I negotiate the implications
 of my shame?

My heart cannot confront
 this death without relief
 My soul will not control
 this leaking of my grief (101-109)

Jordan's sense of shame associated with her nationality is evident in other poems such as "Apologies to All the People in Lebanon," from *Living Room*. In this poem, Jordan exposes her deeper feelings and presents her sincere apologies to the Arab world. The poem is "dedicated to the 600,000 Palestinian men, women, and children who lived in Lebanon from 1948-1983" (epigraph) and it is about the genocide of civilians, mostly Palestinians, in the Sabra and Shatila Camps in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1982 by the Israeli army with the use of American-made weapons. The president of Israel at that time was Ariel Sharon, who became known as the "Butcher of Sabra and Shatila." In this poem, Jordan talks directly to the Palestinian people: "They said you shot the London Ambassador / and when that wasn't true / they said so / what" (3-6). The personal pronoun "they" is used repeatedly throughout the poem, meaning sometimes the untruthful discourse of the American media and other times the deceptive discourse of the Israeli government:

They said something about never again and then
 they made close to one million human beings homeless
 In less than three weeks and they killed or maimed
 40,000 of your men and your women and your children

But I didn't know and nobody told me and what
 could I do or say, anyway?
 They said they were victims. They said you were
 Arabs.
 They called your apartments and gardens guerrilla
 strongholds.
 They called the screaming devastation
 that they created the rubble.
 Then they told you to leave, didn't they?

[.....]

Yes, I did know it was the money I earned as a poet that
 paid
 for the bombs and the planes and the tanks
 that they used to massacre your family

But I am not an evil person
 The people of my country aren't so bad

You can't expect but so much
 from those of us who have to pay taxes and watch
 American TV
 You see my point;

I am sorry.
 I really am sorry. (32-44, 58-69)

In this poem, Jordan criticizes the manipulative American media: “What the media euphemistically terms the ‘rubble’ she denotes ‘the screaming devastation;’ and what the media demonizes and metamorphosizes as ‘guerrilla strongholds’ she takes back to its original state of ‘apartments and gardens,’” observes Hussein Ali in his essay “Aesthetics of memorialization: the Sabra and Shatila genocide in the work of Sami Mohammad, Jean Genet, and June Jordan.” Walker, in her small but powerful book *Overcoming Speechlessness* (2010), writes about the American media and government in relation to the conflicts between Israel and Palestine: “Americans have been deliberately misled by our government and by the media about the reality and *meaning* of events in the Middle East: this is especially true where Palestine and Israel are concerned” (22-23). Both Jordan and Walker criticize the American media controlling of news, not only in relation to the veracity of events in the conflicts between Israel and Palestine but also in relation to the manipulation and meaning of words, through the use of “demonized” language that changes, for instance, “apartments” into “guerrilla strongholds.”

In Jordan’s poem, at the same time that the poet apologizes for being American, she excuses her inaction by demonstrating her impotence and alienation in the face of tragedy: “But I didn’t know and nobody told me and what / could I do or say, anyway?” (36-37). When Jordan alleges that “nobody told [her],” she implies that the American media hid the truth about the genocide from its audience. Although

Jordan is not emotional when she writes that she could not do much about the war waged against Lebanon, the poet's empathy for the Lebanese and Palestinian people's sorrow has the potential to move the reader. In the lines "They said they were victims. They said you were / Arabs" (38-39), Jordan demonstrates the Western world prejudice in regard to the Arab race. For the West they are peoples not worth living, or as Butler maintains their lives are "ungrievable" lives. In Jordan's collection of essays *Some of Us Did NOT Die* (2002), the poet writes about this issue:

What I gradually began to understand, however, was something importantly different. The problem was that the Lebanese people, in general, and that the Palestinian people, in particular, are not whitemen: They never have been whitemen. Hence they were and they are only Arabs, or terrorists, or animals. Certainly they were not men and women and children; certainly they were not human beings with rights remotely comparable to the rights of whitemen, the rights of a nation of whitemen. (191)

Jordan's acknowledgment of the true situation of the Palestinian people happened "gradually" in her life, and what she writes coincides with what Butler writes about "ungrievable" lives. Both critics agree in their comments that Arabs are not seen as human beings in the eyes of the Eurocentric Western World, and as such their lives do not count.

The poem "Bosnia Bosnia," published in *Kissing God Goodbye* (1997) approaches mainly the issue of violence against women in situations of war. The stanza "Too bad / there is no oil / between her legs" (1-3) repeats itself throughout the poem and relates the greed for oil behind the main contemporary wars and behind the systematic rape of Muslim women during the war in Bosnia. Meters adds that "Bosnia Bosnia" evokes that "the lack of oil in Bosnia had something to do with the US government's inaction when Muslim women were being raped and brutalized" ("June Jordan's" 190). Jordan wrote in prose about this issue: "And here are more than 20,000 mostly Muslim women systematically suffering gang rape around the clock in the former Yugoslavia. And here is nobody powerful in this country, from President Clinton up or down, opening his – or her – mouth" (qtd. in *June Jordan* 136).

In the poem, Jordan not only focuses on the war in Bosnia and the rape of women, but also expands her topic to violence and mistreatment against women and men everywhere, from places such as Somalia to South Central L.A. In the following stanza, it is implicit that the greed for oil is responsible for these sufferings, since the money that should be used for social investments and improvements instead finance the wars for oil in the Middle East:

Too bad
 there is no oil
 in South Central L.A.
 and in between the beaten men and beatup women
 and in between the African and Asian throwaways
 and in between the Spanish and the English speaking
 homeless
 and in between the dealers and the drugged
 and in between the people and criminal police
 too bad
 there is no oil (30-40)

The poem “Moving Towards Home,” which has been translated into Arabic, was first published in the collection *Living Room*. Its epigraph is the wail of a Muslim woman who asks: “Where is Abu Fadi, who will bring me my loved one? (New York Times 9/20/82).” According to Jane Creighton in her essay “Writing War, Writing Memory,” Jordan “assumes the woman’s voice, inhabits it as an act that is less about appropriation than it is about solidarity.” This solidarity that Creighton mentions was the main cause of an uproar during a poetry reading entitled *Moving Towards Home*, after Jordan’s controversial poem. Organized by Sara Miles and Kathy Engel in 1982, the event gathered Arab, Israeli, and American poets. Creighton comments that the poem’s “open identification with the Palestinians and its frank evocation of the Holocaust in terms of Israeli perpetrators” resulted in Jordan being “surrounded by shouting white man, both Israeli and American,” in the aftermath of the reading. Creighton explains the reaction of the audience: “For some in her audience, to assert such identification while castigating the Israeli government for practices linked to the genocide of the Jews was an unpardonable reduction of history, not to mention an anti-Semitic act” (250-251). The poem was written as Jordan’s reaction to the massacre of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon.

In the poem, Jordan repeats that she does not wish to speak about “unspeakable events” such as “the nurse again and / again raped / before they murdered her on the hospital floor” (21-23). Yet, that is exactly what she does in this war resistance poem. By not “wishing to speak” Jordan approaches the injustices and cruelties of wars and the suffering of victims. Valerie Kinloch comments that “with this poem, Jordan gives voice to what the unspeakable – rape and murder – has done and how she has to use her available language in order to get close to the process of becoming free” (*June Jordan* 139).

According to Ali, the poem develops along three psychic stages: in the opening stage (lines 1-52), the persona casts a wide visual net to encompass diverse acts of atrocities, such as the one depicted previously. “This stage registers the shock and indignation of the overwhelmed poetic mind,” which struggles to deal with the atrocities that the persona witnesses, comments Ali. “In the second stage (lines 53-71), the most necessary imperative is singled out – the ‘need’ to speak about living room:”

because I need to speak about home
 I need to speak about living room
 where the land is not bullied and beaten into
 a tombstone
 I need to speak about living room
 where the talk will take place in my language
 I need to speak about living room
 where my children will grow without horror
 I need to speak about living room where the men
 of my family between the ages of six and sixty-five
 are not
 marched into a roundup that leads to the grave
 I need to talk about living room
 where I can sit without grief without wailing aloud
 for my loved ones
 where I must not ask where is Abu Fadi
 because he will be there beside me
 I need to talk about living room
 because I need to talk about home (53- 71)

Jordan’s reference to “living room” here serves as title for her book. When we think of living room, we imagine a place of security, comfort, family reunion, well-being and peace, although the everyday broadcast of wars and armed conflicts may change this atmosphere.

However, living rooms are nonexistent in countries in which armed conflicts and wars take place. As a result, Jordan needs to talk about living room, about “home,” where the poet can recover from the atrocities she witnessed in war-torn countries such as Lebanon and Nicaragua and where she can be a poet, because for her, “a poet is someone at home” (*Some of Us* 175). Creighton believes that “Jordan’s effort to ‘talk about living room’ challenges all to be present, to be in dialogue, and to understand ‘living room’ itself as a kind of consciousness under threat” (251). Kinloch adds:

Home, for the poet, signified a sense of belonging in and to a world of justice in which violence was not tolerated and where the imaginings of a “Beloved Community” held within it safety, comfort, and free will. Jordan searched for this place, this home, her entire life. (*June Jordan* 91)

The third stage that Li suggests (lines 72-78) “depicts the birth of the reconceived self who probed the suffering of the Sabra and the Shatila victims.” It is the poem’s most controversial part, in which Jordan puts herself in the skin of the Palestinians and which caused the uproar during the aforementioned poetry reading. According to Creighton, in this part Jordan allows voice – agency – to the Palestinian subjects and thereby raises the provocative and problematic notion of the truth about suffering across complex boundaries (250):

I was born a Black woman
and now
I am become a Palestinian
against the relentless laughter of evil
there is less and less living room
and where are my loved ones?

It is time to make our way home. (72-78)

Jordan’s identification as a Palestinian is a result of her true sympathy and solidarity with the suffering of those people. Through her poetry, she is able to offer her hand and support to countries such as Lebanon and Iraq despite her government’s deeds and abuse of power. In the introduction to *Still Seeking an Attitude*, editor Kinloch asserts: “She seeks to reclaim life and living space for all oppressed people” (7). That is what Jordan can do as a poet, to write about the injustices in the

world and to ask for a better and fair world, where every human being can have a “living room” in which to sit and feel safe at home.

4.3 – Writing about life in “War and Memory”

I first came across “War and Memory” while reading *Arms and the Woman – War, Gender, and Literary Representation*, edited by Helen M. Cooper, Adrienne A. Munich and Susan M. Squier. The editors present the poem directly after the introduction since its main themes are war and gender. It is one of Jordan’s longest and best known poems. Metres comments that this poem was inspired by Elizabeth Bishop’s coming-of-age poem “In the Waiting Room.” However, while in Bishop’s poem the poet has “quietly turbulent meditation in the waiting room, Jordan finds herself in a home that resembles a war zone,” adds Metres (“June Jordan’s” 185). “War and Memory” was published in the collection of poems *Naming our Destiny* (1989). In the poem Jordan recollects her existence, from her early and violent childhood to her adult life. It is the most personal of her political poems, in which Jordan exposes her life openly in a poetic and at the same time straightforward way. In “War and Memory,” as the title suggests, Jordan approaches varied issues such as racism, domestic violence, World War II, the Vietnam War and apartheid, and intertwines her memories of her family life and historical events related to wars and armed conflicts.

According to Jacqueline Vaught Brogan in her essay “From Warrior to Womanist: the Development of June Jordan’s Poetry,” section one is “deeply personal, autobiographical, while stylistically anticipating the structural move to follow in the poem toward the larger polis, the political, even cosmos-polis” (202). The poem starts with Jordan writing about her father, a man who triggered both fear and admiration. The first lines describe a domestic scene of an ordinary day in her family life: “Daddy at the stove or sink. Large / knife nearby or artfully / suspended by his clean hand handsome / even in its menace” (1-4). Right from the beginning of the poem the reader can feel the threat faced by Jordan at “home,” a place of supposed security, whereas there was a constant feeling of “menace” for her. In “War and Memory,” Jordan makes use of polyphony. As well as her own, she brings the voices of her mother and father to the poem in order to highlight situations of conflict and violence in her everyday life. We can observe this strategy in the following lines:

“You answer me!” he’d scream, at last:
 “I speak to you. You answer me!”
 And she might struggle then
 to swallow
 or to mumble finally out loud
 “And who are you supposed to be? The Queen
 of England? Or the King?”
 And he
 berserk with fury lifted
 chair or frying pan
 and I’d attack
 in her defense: “No
 Daddy! No!” rushing for his knees
 and begging, “Please
 don’t, Daddy, please!”
 He’d come down hard: My head
 break into daylight pain
 or rip me spinning crookedly across the floor (49-66)

In the previous passage, we can observe the patriarchal order of Jordan’s family, where the two women could not express themselves freely without the risk of being victims of domestic violence. Jordan demonstrates that even knowing that she would be target of her father’s tyranny; she would support and defend her powerless and voiceless mother against his literal and emotional weapons. In the next passage from the poem, we can notice Jordan’s reaction to her father’s abuse of power as well as the complicated issue of racism within the black West Indian family:

I would race about for weaponry
 another chair a knife
 a flowered glass
 the radio
 “You stop it, Daddy! Stop it!”
 brandishing my arsenal
 my mother
 silently
 beside the point.
 He’d seize me or he’d duck the glass
 “You devil child!
 You damn Black devil child!”
 “And what are you supposed to be?”
 My mother might inquire
 from the doorway:

“White? Are you supposed to be a white man
 Granville?”
 “Not white, but right!” And I would have to bite and kick
 or race away
 sometimes out the house and racing
 still for blocks
 my daddy chasing
 after me (73-95)

Metres observes in the passage above that it is only through Jordan’s “own weapons that she can defend herself and her mother, who remains ‘beside the point’ – that is, she is both without agency to respond to the monological argument of the father and literally threatened by the ‘point’ of the knife” (“June Jordan’s” 186). Another issue present in the same passage is racism within the black West Indian family. Granville has incorporated the white and dominant American view of blacks as being inferior to whites and feels ashamed of his own daughter, who is black. Metres states that the poem “explicitly connects the abusive violence of the father to a system of racial domination that manifests itself both ‘at home’ and abroad in physical violence” (“June Jordan’s” 185). While addressing the Northwest Regional Conference of the Child Welfare League in 1978, Jordan explained her father’s abusive and violent acts against her:

“[. . .] it would not have helped me, it would not have rescued me, to know that one reason my father beat me to the extent of occasional scar tissue was because he himself felt beaten and he himself felt bullied and despised by strangers more powerful than he would ever be.” (*Civil Wars* 134)

The explanation given by Jordan is the same that most black women, writers or not, give in order to understand the reasons for domestic violence: the black man in America feels inferior to the white man and powerless outside home, and when at home uses verbal and many times physical violence in order to vent his spleen and feel better about himself. In the poem there is a line that illustrates Granville’s need to feel authoritative at home: “I am master of this castle!” (34).

In the following lines, Jordan reveals her father’s interest in the wider world, since he is eager to know about different cultures such as the Fiji Islanders and Brazilians: “Daddy at the table reading / all about

the Fiji Islanders or childhood / in Brazil / his favorite National Geographic research / into life beyond our / neighborhood” (96-101). At this stage in the poem Jordan balances Granville’s irrational reactions of fury in their everyday life with his developed intellect, which craves for knowledge of “life beyond [their] neighborhood.” Creighton describes Granville’s contradictory personality based on the information given by Jordan in “War and Memory” as well as in *Soldier*, her autobiography:

The Granville Ivanhoe Jordan of “War and Memory” and *Soldier* is the proud, intensely hardworking West Indian immigrant who is at the same time sharply aware of black status in the United States and what he and his family are up against. Jordan presents him in all his layers. He is the strict disciplinarian who trains her according to military codes, treats her as and even calls her the son, who, American-born, will overcome all the social obstacles laid before them. He is teacher, drill instructor, master carpenter to whom she is apprenticed, and the intellectual who enforces the reading of Shakespeare. The king of the house, he is also the tyrant, explosive, a master of surveillance who wakes his child up in the middle of the night to beat her for some infraction, so that she must be ever watchful and vigilant. (253)

Granville’s multiple talents and dedication to Jordan’s education versus his violent attacks on his daughter and wife would trigger in Jordan mixed feelings concerning her father. In the next lines, Jordan demonstrates the importance of her father for her education, in which Black English was not encouraged; Granville’s ambition was to make of Jordan an authentic and well educated American woman: “I was quite confused, ‘But in this picture, / Daddy, I can’t see nobody.’ / ‘Anybody,’ he corrected me: ‘You can’t see / anybody!’” (125-128). Toward the end of the poem the poet seems to have overcome all the suffering her father caused her and writes: “and I / buried my father with all the ceremony all of the music I / could piece together” (264-266). Although Jordan’s father was a tyrant most of the time, he had a crucial role in Jordan’s intellectual development and education as a child. Her mother, on the other hand, was a weak woman whom Jordan pitied and who had to be “saved” by Jordan from a merciless husband.

In the following passage, we can observe that Jordan's personal life history, her family history and a people's history related to World War II intersect. In the scene described we can notice the way Jordan approaches the issue of the German holocaust through the history of "unimportant events" that takes place in an ordinary day in her childhood. Metres contends that "the national wars – the Second World War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the War on Poverty – emerge against that sense of 'war' as something that pervades daily life" ("June Jordan's" 186):

"Momma!" I cried, after staring at the front page photo of the Daily News.
 "What's this a picture of?"
 It was Black and White,
 But nothing else. No people
 and no houses anywhere. My mother
 came and took a look above my shoulder.
 "It's about the Jews." she said.
 "The Jews?"
 "It's not! It's more about those Nazis!" Daddy
 interjected.
 "No, Granville, no!
 It's about the Jews. In the war going on,"
 my mother amplified, "the German soldiers
 take away the Jewish families and they make
 them march through snow until they die!"
 "What kind of an ignorant
 woman are you?" Daddy shouted out, "It's
 not the snow. It's Nazi camps: the concentration
 camps!" (104-123)

Section two ends with the following lines:

and I remember
 wondering if my family was a war
 going on
 and if
 there would soon be blood
 someplace in the house
 and where
 the blood of my family would come from (138-145)

We can notice in the preceding lines that Jordan metaphorically portrays her family as a “war”: “wondering if my family was a war / going on” (139-140). The reality of Jordan’s family life was similar to that of people in situations of conflict, where the absence of security and the constant threat of danger and pain are continually present. As a result, Jordan as a child could not help but compare the suffering of the Jewish families with her own reality.

Section three is extremely short and is about Jordan’s memory of the Spanish Civil War: “The Spanish Civil War: / I think I read about that one” (146-147). Sections 4-6 deal with historical moments witnessed by Jordan like the Vietnam protests and Kent State University shootings, as well as her private life history of betrayal and economic deprivation. Jordan writes with irony about the Vietnam protests in section five:

5

There was TV
 There were buses down to Washington, D.C.
 You could go and meet your friends
 From everywhere.
 It was very exciting.
 The tear gas burned like crazy.
 The President kept lying to us.
 Crowd counts at the rallies.
 Body counts at the news.
 Ketchup on the steps of universities.
 Blood on the bandages around the head of the Vietnamese
 women shot between the eyes.
 Big guys.
 [.]
 Kill anything that moves.
 Kent State.
 American artillery unlimited at Jackson State
 Who raised these devil children?
 Who invented these Americans with pony
 tails and Afros and tee shirts and statistical
 arguments against the mining of the harbors
 of a country far away? (158-170, 178-184)

Section five encompasses several moments of protests in the United States related to the Vietnam War: from rallies in Washington D.C to the shootings of students in Kent State and Jackson State

universities during anti-war protests in May, 1970. In this section, Jordan criticizes the American president at the time, Richard Nixon: “The President kept lying to us” (164) about the end of the war. And the media: “Body counts on the news” (166). Jordan is particularly ironic in this section as we can perceive when she writes in an ironical double voice: “Who raised these devil children? / Who invented these American with pony / tails [. . .]” (180-182) referring to the student protesters in Jackson and Kent State universities. Or when she writes: “It was very exciting. / The tear gas burned like crazy” (162-163). The poet makes use of irony again when she employs the word democracy while referring to the graves of students killed in Kent State University and their relation with the Vietnam War rationale:

And I remember turning from the footage of the tat-tat-tat-
tat-tat-tat
helicopters
and I wondered how democracy would travel from the graves
at Kent State
to the hidden trenches
of Hanoi (185-191)

In section six, Jordan pours out her life by writing about her difficulties as a single mother to make a living and raise her son alone. It is touching the way she describes the scene of her son, Christopher, alone in the rain while waiting for the day-care pickup that never comes. It is one of the most striking parts in “War and Memory,” since it deeply affects the reader with a feeling of sorrow for the little boy and the mother, who is totally alone in her struggle to make ends meet. The passage is the following:

6

Plump during The War on Poverty
I remember making pretty good
money (6 bucks an hour)
as a city planner and my former
husband married my best
friend and I was never positive
about the next month’s rent but
once I left my son sitting
on his lunchbox in the early rain
waiting for a day-care pickup and I went
to redesign low-income housing for Lower

East Side of Manhattan and three hours after that
 I got a phone call from my neighbors
 that the pickup never came
 that Christopher was sitting
 on the sidewalk
 in his yellow slicker
 on his lunchbox
 in the rain. (192-210)

Section seven is the last one in the long poem “War and Memory.” In the first three stanzas Jordan goes back to her childhood and tells us about her phone calls to the government in order “to tell them how many parents / ate real butter or stole sugar / from The Victory Rations / [they] received” (212-215). In addition, she writes about her calls to the operator asking for the police to help her with her father’s beatings, “but no one listened to / a tattletale / like [her] (220-222). In the next stanza, Jordan writes about her relief at the police never showing up in her home:

I think I felt relieved
 because the government didn’t send a rescue
 face or voice to my imagination
 and I hated
 the police
 but what else could you do?

Peace never meant a thing to me. (223-229)

Despite its brevity, the last line of this passage tells us a lot about Jordan the child, the woman and the poet. It is due to her father’s violent and unfair treatment toward her during her childhood that “peace never meant a thing to [her]” in her early years. Later on, owing to the several occurrences in her adult life which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter and to her deep sense of justice, she became a woman warrior who fought incessantly against the injustices of our world by using the only weapon she had: her talent as a writer and poet. The lines “and I / lust for justice” (267-268) illustrate Jordan’s main goal in life.

In section seven, Jordan approaches several aspects and moments of her life in a sort of potpourri, such as her bisexuality and her dislike for the word “lesbian,” her desire to synchronize her American culture with the culture of the Nicaraguans when she tried to speak Spanish in Nicaragua, her struggle against apartheid in South

Africa, and her sensation of being a warrior while growing up. Mary K. DeShazer comments about how writers such as Jordan, Lorde, and Maxine Hong Kingston have used the “imagery of woman warriors in order to interrogate their own oppression and articulate their own means of liberation” (qtd. in “June Jordan’s” 186-187). The passage follows next:

I fell in love with Black men White
 men Black
 women White women
 and I
 dared myself to say The Palestinians
 and I
 worried about unilateral words like Lesbian or Nationalist
 and I
 tried to speak Spanish when I traveled to Managua
 [.....]
 and I
 always wore one sweater less than absolutely necessary to keep
 warm

and I wrote everything I knew how to write against apartheid
 and I
 thought I was a warrior growing up (241-250, 258-263)

The last lines of the poem give space for multiple interpretations: “and I / invent the mother of the courage I require not to quit” (271-272). Metres analyses these lines by comparing to what Jordan calls “righteous certainty” – “when her burden becomes almost too heavy to bear, she needs to invent herself a certainty in order ‘not to quit.’” Metres also comments that Jordan alludes to the main character in Bertold Brecht’s *Mother Courage and Her Children*, “a woman who is battered by war, losing all three of her children over the course of the play” (“June Jordan’s” 187). However, the use of the words *mother* and *courage* at the end of the poem also suggests the memory of Jordan’s mother, a woman who did not have the courage needed to fight against the domestic violence committed against her and her daughter by her husband Granville. Consequently, Jordan had to invent this courage from a very early age, a courage which is usually not required by a young girl. She had to invent the “mother of courage” as a child in order to replace the “courage of her mother” and employ it during her whole life in order “not to quit” her fight as an activist above all else.

4.4 – *Who Look at Me*, Jordan’s ekphrastic first published work

Published in 1969 as a children’s poetry book and dedicated to Jordan’s only son Christopher, *Who Look at Me* is Jordan’s first published work. The book is a long ekphrastic poem which was inspired by twenty-seven paintings by both black and white artists. The paintings were chosen by Jordan’s editor, Milton Meltzer, whom she thanks at the beginning of the book for “his encouragement and respect.” In his essay “Affirmative Acts,” Richard Flynn comments that “the title serves as a Black English refrain, a call followed by responses, a litany of the ways in which African Americans are represented, or rather are not represented in white culture” (124).

The poem is about race and pictorial representation and depicts the conditions of African-Americans in a white society in the course of history as well as the way white people look at them, and the way they return the gaze. The stanzas can be divided into two kinds: while some are in dialogue with the paintings, others do not correspond to them. Although the poem can be read as a text-only work, a full appreciation of its impact is only possible once the reader observes the connection between the text and the images. Nicky Marsh writes about the book in her essay “June Jordan’s Publics and the Possibilities of Democracy:”

The text’s scrutiny of the interdependencies of social integration and visual and literary representation is clear in the ambiguities of its opening question – “who would paint a people black or white?” Its attempt to answer this modulates between a children’s primer, a harsh critique of a racially inflected “blindness,” and an investigation into recent histories of racialized and aestheticized representation. (*Still Seeking* 20)

In the first stanzas, we can perceive the link between the title of the book, *Who Look at Me*, and the text. Jordan writes about a “white stare” which “splits the air” and criticizes the “blindness” of whites when looking at blacks:

A white stare splits the air
by blindness on the subway
in department stores
The Elevator
(that unswerving ride

where man ignores the brother
by his side)

A white stare splits obliterates
the nerve-wrung wrist from work
the breaking ankle or
the turning glory
of a spine (5-16)

The painting shown next by Ben Shann, entitled *Willis Avenue Bridge* (1940), portrays a black elderly couple sitting on a bench on a bridge. The figure is accompanied by the lines “We have lived as careful / as a church and prayer / in public” (130-132). “We” here both refers to the couple and, in a large sense, to the blacks oppressed in America and elsewhere, among which the poet includes herself. In just three lines the poet alludes to the dangers faced by African-Americans on the streets in the US, particularly from white police officers who have killed many innocents and been quick to accuse the black community of robberies and violent crimes against whites. Jordan writes about the murder of Arthur McDuffie, who “died because three cops beat him to death because he went through a red light and he was Black,” quotes Kinloch in the essay “Moving Towards Home: Political Essays” (*June Jordan* 86). During the time of the hate group Ku-Klux-Klan, blacks were violently killed, lynched or hanged just because of the color of their skin.



Fig. 7 - Ben Shann, *Willis Avenue Bridge* (1940)

The following lines precede the painting *The Slave Market* (1850-1860), by an unknown painter:

we come from elsewhere
 victim to a rabid cruel cargo crime
*to separate and rip apart
 the trusting members of one heart*
 my family
 I looked for you
 I looked for you (138-144)



Fig.8 - Painter unknown, *The Slave Market* (1850-1860)

Jordan writes in these lines about the history of slavery in America, from the horrible conditions that the Africans had to face in the Middle Passage to the suffering of families torn apart in the slave markets. It is a powerful painting which touches the reader profoundly. The way that the little boy is being separated from his mother by force (the white man pulls his hair) already shows the mistreatments that this boy is likely to face in his life as a slave. Jordan writes “my family” (142) and locates herself as part of this gigantic stolen family brought

from Africa to America as slaves. Marsh comments on how this painting appears in the book:

The Slave Market is reproduced twice, on one page in its entirety and on the facing page a detail from it of a slave trader separating a child from his mother by his hair. The few words preceding these pictures, positioned low on the right hand of the page, “(slavery:) the insolence” suggest a rage, tautly bound in syntax, that neither the painting nor the poem – for profoundly contrasting reasons – is able to articulate. (21)

The next stanzas approach again the main issue of the book, which is “to be looked at” and “to look back to” in the binary dichotomy white/black. In this passage, Jordan uses the personal pronouns “we” and “you” to refer to blacks and whites respectively. In the following passage, she writes about the hard and “backbreaking” work that blacks had to do in the plantations, and the ill treatments inflicted upon them: “homicide of daily insult daily death” (191). The blacks’ need “to be seen” by whites is imperative in *Who Look at Me* and we can perceive it clearly in this part of the poem. There is no painting that corresponds to this part:

In part we grew
by looking back at you

that white terrain
impossible for black America to thrive
that hostile soil to mazelike toil
backbreaking people into pain

we grew by work by waiting
to be seen
black face black body and black mind
beyond obliteration
homicide of daily insult daily death
the pistol slur the throbbing redneck war
with breath (181-193)

Since *Who Look at Me* was published as children’s book, Jordan’s choice of writing about the historical moment of the Amistad Revolt in poetry is strategic. If we take into account that her target

audience was African-American children and such information was probably not taught in schools, reading the book allowed them to feel proud about themselves and their historical past as slaves. In the next passage, Jordan approaches the history of the Amistad Revolt and praises the African leader of the revolt, Cinqué. The Amistad Revolt was named after the ship in which the mutiny occurred on the coast of Cuba. The ship ended up in the US and the Africans were taken to court. Ex-president John Quincy Adams defended them in court and they were freed to go back to Africa. The painting works as an illustration and portrays the leader of the revolt – Cinqué:

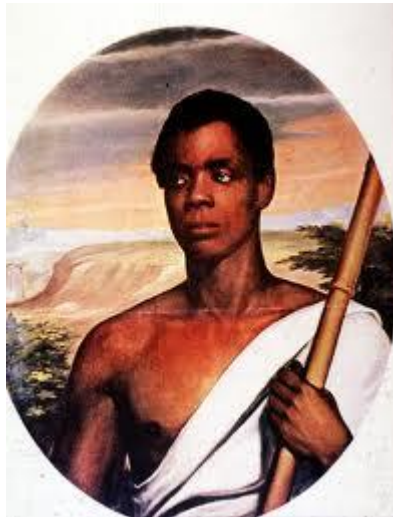


Fig. 9 - Nathaniel Jocelyn, *Portrait of Cinqué* (1839)

In part we grew
 with heroes who could halt a slaveship
 lead the crew
 like Cinqué (son
 Of a Mendi African Chief) he
 led in 1839
 the Amistad Revolt
 from slavehood forced
 a victory he
 killed the captain killed the cook
 took charge

a mutiny for manhood
 people
 called him killer but

some
 The Abolitionists
 looked back at robbery
 of person
 murdering of spirit
 slavery requires
 and one
 John Quincy Adams (seventy-three)
 defended Cinqué who
 by highest court decree
 in 1841 stood free
 and freely he returned
 to Africa
 victorious (194-221)

The following painting by Romare Bearden entitled *Mysteries* (1964), is accompanied by the lines “Although the world / forgets me / I will say yes / AND NO” (264-267). At the same time that the persona accepts to be forgotten by the world there is a scream of resistance against racism. The collage depicts a scene of a group of black people in a shack. The shack is probably in a slum where people live in poverty and misery and are forgotten by the world. Flynn points out that the figures in the collage are composed of fragments of both children and adults and this disruption between child and adult is “magnified when it is placed in the context of Jordan’s children’s book” (126). In addition, Flynn writes:

Jordan’s poetry emphasizes the way that Bearden’s *Mysteries* appropriates the tropes of exoticism and freakishness historically forced on African Americans and turns them against the viewer. It tells us that those who perpetuate the fragmented and fragmenting images of African Americans as exotic freaks are themselves the real freaks; the collaboration between text and image in *Who Look at Me* becomes a way of seeking liberation from their carnival. (127)



Fig.10–Romare Bearden, *Mysteries* (1964)

The book ends with its title in the form of a question and a cry, since the capital letters function as a scream for attention: WHO LOOK AT ME? Jordan writes in her poetics of resistance on behalf of the oppressed blacks of the world who need recognition by whites. They neither want to be “a partial nothing clearly real” (18) nor “someone number two” (275). The poet’s subject matter is original since Jordan criticizes slavery and racism through the gaze and in dialogue with pictorial representations of this gaze. Moreover, her book does not seem to be aimed at ordinary kids, but children like she was as a child: a “soldier” child, a term she uses to define herself in her autobiography *Soldier*.

Jordan’s trajectory as a poet is similar to Brand’s in some aspects. Metres comments that “if at first she focused on African American issues [. . .] – then later she increasingly focused in both poems and prose on linking the struggle of African Americans to those of the third world, especially in areas of colonization and state oppression [. . .]” (“Performing” 176). Like Brand’s, Jordan’s trajectory moved from local to global issues. In her first work, *Who Look at Me*, her main concern is related to the history of slavery and racism in North-America. In *Living Room*, the topic for her poems expanded to the socialist revolutions in Central America in Nicaragua and Grenada and conflicts in the Middle East. And in *Kissing God Goodbye* Jordan approaches most recent conflicts in Bosnia and Iraq, among others.

Jordan was a true “soldier” when the issue was war resistance poetry. As a soldier, she visited and read her poetry in war-torn countries such as Nicaragua and Lebanon. Like the English poet Wilfred Owen, a combatant during the Great War, she wrote with “authority of

experience.” Jordan’s anti-war poetry is a product of her life experiences and testimonials, from her early fights as a child against the ill treatments of her father to the horrors she witnessed in the countries she visited. Jordan’s poetics of resistance demonstrates her view of the oppressed to the world and shows that she cared for and supported those peoples in situations of war and armed conflicts, despite her government’s violent and unfair political actions against them. Concluding, Jordan’s major role as a writer of resistance was to fight for the rights of all the unjustly subjugated people of the world.

Chapter 5 – A comparative analysis between Dionne Brand’s and June Jordan’s poetics of war

Black women writers have many things in common from the outset; in the case of Brand and Jordan, the political issues these women engaged with since their youth as well as their life experiences as black women are at the root of their poetics of resistance. As descendants of Caribbean families from Trinidad and Jamaica, and sufferers of racism in Canada and the US respectively, these black women fighters “shake” the white, mostly male establishment in America and elsewhere and criticize the government of their countries, mainly the US ill actions against third world countries and peoples. An immigrant herself, Brand also approaches in her writings the saga of black immigrants in Canada and other countries. For Jordan, twice a victim of rape, sexual abuse is an important and recurrent theme in her poetry and prose.

Brand and Jordan are from different generations and countries. However, their poetics of war reveal many similarities. Both writers have dedicated part of their work to the controversial theme of war. An important aspect they share is the “authority of experience” in their writings. These poets traveled to countries in which revolutions were taking place in order to witness events and participate in the socialist dreams of Grenada and Nicaragua. While Jordan wanted “to get real” in Nicaragua, Brand hoped that the world could be “upturned” in Grenada. Jordan has also been to other countries in conflict, such as Lebanon. The testimonials of the conflicts Brand and Jordan witnessed enable their anti-war poetry to draw the reader closer to the realities these poets translated into words.

5.1- Brand’s and Jordan’s applied poetics of resistance

Oppositional writers like Brand and Jordan use a number of tools in order to approach and criticize issues such as racism, sexism, violence against women, imperialism, armed conflicts, and wars. The strategies used in their poetics of resistance enhance the quality of their work and also serve to differentiate their writings from the white literary tradition. In this section, I analyze the most relevant tools employed in Brand’s and Jordan’s poetry such as polyphony, Black English vernacular, code-switching, irony, and ekphrasis, among others.

The use of polyphony is an outstanding characteristic of Brand’s writings. From the beginning of her career she used to experiment with diverse voices. First, she would give voice to the black

and poor Caribbean women back in Trinidad, and later, to the black women immigrants in Toronto, who are usually excluded from mainstream discourse. In Brand's poetics of war related to the Grenadian revolution, the poet allows voice to the Grenadian civilians, to herself and her comrades and also to the American soldiers, making polyphony a democratic use of language.

Jordan, on the other hand, does not use polyphony as much as Brand in the poems analyzed in this study, but the epigraph in the poem "Moving Towards Home" is the voice of a Muslim woman: "Where is Abu Fadi, who will bring me my loved one?" In this statement, Jordan gives agency to the desperate Muslim woman in order to touch the reader and as a way of demonstrating that Arabs are human beings who suffer like western men do. In "War and Memory," besides Jordan's own voice, she allows voice to her father and to her mostly voiceless mother to finally speak against her tyrannical husband, Granville. Through the use of polyphony, Jordan tackles the complicated family order of her childhood, in which her personal account mirrors a collective history.

Both Brand and Jordan make use of Black English vernacular as an important tool in their poetics of resistance. They use this strategy in order to allow voice and agency to the oppressed black people and as a way to confront the dominant discourse. When Jordan taught her first class on Black English in 1984, she "worked for language preservation and against linguistic rape," states Kinloch in her essay "Black English as a Linguistic System" (84). Jordan believed that Black English represents an "irreplaceable system of community intelligence" (*Some of Us* 157). If for Jordan the writing in Black English worked as a way of empowerment for her black students, for Brand, the English language that she claims differs from the language white writers assert. She explains this notion in an interview published in *Books in Canada*:

The one [language] that I want contains the resistances to how that language was made, because that language was made through imperialism, through the oppression of women. As women and as peoples of colour we write against that language. The more power we acquire to speak and act and so on, the more we change that language. (15)

Brand uses Caribbean demotic in the poem “IV xi” from *Land to Light On*: “Watching only through a plane / window at Point Salines and busy no recalling where we was / rightly, eating coconut ice cream at the bar in Crown Point, / starting all over with hardly any heart” (9-12). She uses *no* recalling instead of *not* and conjugates *we* with *was* as a political act, a form of writing against the language of the oppressor and puts herself in the position of all Grenadians who suffer due to the end of the socialist dream. Jordan presents a similar perspective in her poem “Another Poem About the Man,” published in *Living Room*. In this poem, the poet also writes about the end of the Grenadian revolution: “Grenada now Grenada / she no sing no more.” Through the use of Caribbean Black English or demotic and its multiple negation, Jordan demonstrates the uneven power relations between the United States and Grenada and refuses to write in the language of the “enemy.”

Brand’s and Jordan’s choice of writing in Caribbean demotic in some poems is strategic and it is applied in the form of code-switching. According to Wah, “code-switching is the movement between two languages, usually the intentional insertion into a master language of foreign or colloquial terms and phrases [. . .]” (82), as illustrated in the passages above. Jordan inserts Caribbean demotic only towards the end of her mostly standard English poem. The same happens in the poem “Safe,” from *Living Room*, where Jordan writes in Spanish the word “compañeros”(11). By writing in Spanish, Jordan demonstrates her solidarity with the Nicaraguans and takes part in the Sandinista revolution. In order to dissent the superiority of the English language and a Eurocentric religious belief, Brand extols the African divinity “Yansa” in the poem “Jackie,” from *No Language is Neutral*, as we can perceive in the lines “They say someone was calling you, Yansa, / thundering for help” (17-20). The introduction of an African word in Brand’s standard English poem is a deliberate act of resistance.

Irony is another device used by Brand and Jordan in their poetics of resistance. Poets can approach delicate and controversial issues by making use of ironical double voice. Hutcheon mentions that “the double-talk of irony blurs the borders between what it is permissible to say and what is in fact implied” (31) and this ambiguity is a favorable aspect for oppositional writers like Brand and Jordan in the sense that they can disguise their political work behind the mask of irony.

Some of Brand’s poems analyzed in this study contain traits of irony, such as “On American numeracy and literacy in the war against Grenada,” from *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun*, and poem “III,” from

Inventory. In “On American,” when Brand writes about the number of casualties in El Salvador and Grenada in comparison to the American ones, there is a strong element of sarcasm: “when counting casualties in a war / the first is always American, / [. . .] / the 40,000 salvadoreans are just playing dead” (14-15, 19). The same happens in the poem “III,” when she writes: “let us all celebrate death” (225) or “a hurricane moving toward Guantanamo / seems harmless enough / and merely the hand of God” (344-346).

Jordan makes use of irony in the poems “Verse for Ronald Slapjack Who Publicly Declared, ‘I, Too, Am a Contra!’” and “War and Memory” from *Naming our Destiny*, and “Bosnia Bosnia” from *Kissing God Goodbye*. The poem “Verse” is a critique of former US president Ronald Reagan. Jordan ends the poem with irony through the use of anti-climax in the line “you jus’ contra-indicated!” (68). In “War and Memory” she criticizes the violence against civilians during protests against the Vietnam War by mocking it: “It was very exciting / The tear gas burned like crazy” (62-63). In “Bosnia Bosnia,” the poet sarcastically repeats the lines “Too bad / there is no oil / between her legs” (1-3) and stresses the message she wishes to convey.

By using the double-talk of irony in combination with other strategies such as repetition and anti-climax, Brand and Jordan are able to address important and urgent issues. Politicized poets like them use irony in order to “address the dominant culture from within that culture’s own set of values and modes of understanding, without being co-opted by it and without sacrificing the right to dissent, contradict, and resist,” affirms Hutcheon (49). As a result, the use of irony by Brand and Jordan simultaneously authorizes their discourse and allows it to be used as a powerful weapon, a sort of verbal “bomb.”

The use of ekphrasis in Brand’s “ossuary XI” from *Ossuaries* and in Jordan’s *Who Look at Me* is also a strategy of their poetics of resistance. If we take into account that the translation for ekphrasis is ‘speaking out’ or ‘out-speaking,’ the use of ekphrasis can be an instrument of resistance given that it helps poets to ‘speak out’ against the injustices of the world. In “ossuary XI,” Brand writes about her impressions of Jacob Lawrence’s paintings which depict scenes of World War II and associates some of them with the issue of slavery in America. Jordan also uses reproductions of paintings from varied North-American artists in *Who Look at Me* in order to criticize racism and slavery in the US. Both poets notably celebrate black heroes in their ekphrastic poetry. While in “ossuary XI” Brand compares the soldier in the painting “Beachhead” to Olaudah Equiano, an ex-slave who fought

as if it were we who needed redemption,
instead of this big world, our ossuary

so brightly clad, almost heroic, almost dead,
the celebratory waiting, the waiting,
the smell of wounds (19-24)

Another relevant aspect in Brand's and Jordan's poetry is the power of images present in their poems. In free verse images must be constructed "as concrete and specific as possible" (Perloff 151). In some of Brand's and Jordan's poems analyzed in this study, the power of images is striking, as we can notice in the following passage from Brand's poem "Diary – The Grenada crisis," from *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun*, in which she vividly describes the American military attack on Grenada:

prayers for rain,
instead again this wonderful sky;
an evening of the war and those of us looking
with our mouths open
see beauty become appalling,
sunset, breaths of grey clouds streaked red,
we are watching a house burn. (40-46)

In the poem "from Nicaragua Libre: photograph of managua," from *Living Room*, Jordan describes with precision, like a "photograph," what she encounters when she visits Nicaragua, constructing the poem's image "as concrete and specific as possible:"

The man is not cute.
The man is not ugly.
The man is teaching himself
to read.
He sits in a kitchen chair
under a banana tree.
He holds the newspaper.
He tracks each word with a finger
and opens his mouth to the sound.
Next to the chair the old V-Z rifle
leans at the ready.
His wife chases a baby pig with a homemade
broom and then she chases her daughter running
behind the baby pig. (1-14)

In relation to punctuation in the poems analyzed, Brand and Jordan use unorthodox punctuation or no punctuation at all as tools of their poetics of resistance. For example, in Brand's poem "III" the poet ends a line with a question but there is no question mark: "twenty-three by suicide bomb at Ibn Zambour kebab / restaurant, no need to repeat this really, just the name / of the kebab place is new, isn't it" (80-82). Brand again omits the question mark in the poem "Diary-The grenada crisis" from *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun*: "eyes full of sleep lie awake / we have difficulty eating, / 'what's that' to every new sound / of the war" (56-59). In Jordan's poems analyzed in this study, we can observe that some of them do not have punctuation at all, which conveys a sense of continuity and provides an on-flowing rhythm, as we can notice in the following passage from "Moving Towards Home," from *Living Room*:

I need to talk about living room
 where I can sit without grief without wailing aloud
 for my loved ones
 where I must not ask where is Abu Fadi
 because he will be there beside me
 I need to talk about living room
 because I need to talk about home (65-71)

A final strategy applied by Brand and Jordan as instrument of resistance is the use of unconventional capitalization. In some of Brand's poems, the poet does not use capital letters when she writes proper names. This strategy is perceived in several poems. In the poems from *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* such as "October, 19th, 1983" Brand writes: "dream is dead in these *antilles*" (my emphasis 9). In the poem "October 25th, 1983" Brand uses lower case when she writes about the United States. In this case it is an anti hegemonic critique of the US, and also a rejection of the white literary aesthetics. The passage follows next:

america came to restore democracy,
 what was restored was faith
 in the fact that you cannot fight bombers
 battleships, aircraft carriers, helicopter gunships,
 surveillance planes, five thousand american soldiers

six caribbean stooges and the big american war machine, (13-18)

Still in the same poem, Brand uses lower case when she writes about the third world countries of El Salvador and Grenada: “the 40,000 salvadoreans are just playing dead / and the grenadians lying face upward in the sun / at Beausejour are only catching flies” (19-21). Brand’s use of lower case is a strategy utilized to demonstrate the dehumanization of the people killed in these countries, the victims being mostly blacks whose lives are considered “ungrievable.” In “Eurocentric,” also from *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun*, Brand again uses lower case when writing the proper names of renowned black women: “rosa parks’s life, bessie smith’s life and any life / which is not your own” (10-11). By using lower case, Brand evokes the insignificance of these black women for the Eurocentric and white American society. In the whole poem there is only one proper name which is capitalized: Orange Free State (14). The capitalization of only this name among many others is another act of resistance, given that Brand wants to call attention to the roots of apartheid in South Africa.

In Brand’s ekphrastic poem “ossuary XI” from *Ossuaries*, the poet uses lower case for all six titles of Jacob Lawrence’s paintings *War Series*: “victory,” “shipping out,” “another patrol,” “beachhead,” “going home,” and “reported missing.” Brand chooses this approach in order to insert the titles of the paintings within the poem’s context. Therefore, I was surprised to find out that these names were in fact the titles of Lawrence’s paintings. A quick reader might easily read through the poem without realizing this connection.

In Jordan’s poems analyzed in this study, she also makes use of unconventional capitalization. In the poem “Verse for Ronald Slapjack Who Publicly Declared, ‘I, Too, Am a Contra!’” Jordan criticizes former American president Ronald Reagan and uses capital letters to write his name in an ironical double voice: “Mister Slapjack Quack-Quack” (64). In “War and Memory,” Jordan uses capitalization strategically as an act of resistance. In some lines the word “black” is capitalized, as we can notice in “You damn Black woman!” (40), or “You damn Black devil child!” (84). In these lines, Jordan capitalizes the word black in order to call attention to the word and its derogatory meaning. However, in the next passage she capitalizes the word “black” in order to equal the races black and white and uses capital letters for both. In doing so Jordan encompasses both colors and celebrates equality:

I fell in love with Black men White
men Black

women White women (241-243)

Jordan also uses capital letters when referring to figures of authority like her mother or father: “Daddy” and “Mommy.” The same happens when she writes “President.” Other capitalized words in the poem are “Operator” and “Police,” both signifying authority for Jordan as a child. A final comment on capitalization is about the line “Plump during The War on Poverty” (192), in which Jordan writes about her economical condition at the beginning of her career. The use of capital letters in this line is Jordan’s strategy to call attention to her condition and a form of demonstrating her criticism regarding the establishment.

5.2 – Brand’s and Jordan’s poems in dialogue with Simic, Woolf, Butler, and Sontag

Some of Brand’s and Jordan’s war resistance poems analyzed in this study have similar points of view with discourses of critics and theorists such as Charles Simic, Virginia Woolf, Judith Butler, and Susan Sontag. In this section, I identify certain poems by Brand and Jordan that dialogue with the aforementioned critics’ outlook regarding the issue of war.

In Simic’s essay “Notes on Poetry and History” he demonstrates his desire to “experience the vulnerability of those participating in tragic events” (126), an aspect of what he calls the history of “unimportant events.” Brand and Jordan also demonstrate in their poems the same interest expressed by Simic in registering ordinary moments of everyday life and people’s vulnerability amid situations of conflict and war. In the next stanza from Brand’s poem “Diary-The Grenada crisis,” from *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun*, we can observe Brand’s and her comrades’ vulnerability during the American military invasion of Grenada:

of every waking,
what must we do today,
be defiant or lie in the
corridor waiting for them,
fear keeps us awake
and makes us long for sleep.

In my chest,
a green-water well,
it is 5 a.m. and I

have slept with my glasses on
in case we must run. (70-80)

In the poem “Safe,” from *Living Room*, Jordan endorses Simic’s idea of writing about ordinary people’s experiences of vulnerability in tragic situations. In “Safe,” the poet writes about her own vulnerability during the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua:

The Río Escondido at night
in between
jungle growing down to the muddy
edges of deep water possibilities
 helicopter attack
 alligator assault
 contra confrontations
 blood sliding into the silent scenery
where I sat cold and wet
but surrounded by five
compañeros
in a dugout canoe (1-12)

Simic contends that the history of “unimportant events” which occur in everyday life is the sort of history that a poet is likely to be concerned with, and this belief is shared by Brand and Jordan. In Brand’s poem “III” from *Inventory*, it is possible to notice the importance of daily events amid situations of conflict broadcasted on TV. Martins comments that in this poem, Brand juxtaposes “here” and “there.” And “although life follows its course detached from tragedies elsewhere, the poet reminds us that ‘that ravaged world is here.’ In this sense, the inventory calls attention to closer tragedies, unperceived and to the vulnerability of ‘here.’”⁹ In the poem, the female persona for a short while changes the focus from the news on TV and her inventory of deaths to some ordinary events and “inventories” of daily life:

fingered vendors, the washing to be done,
the sewing, the bicycles to be repaired,
the daily lists to be made of mundane
matters, like the cost of sugar, or the girl losing
her new pencils again (146-150)

⁹ Martins, Maria L. M. “Chapter five.” E-mail to the author. 10 Jun. 2013

Jordan too focuses on everyday events when she writes about the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. In the following passage from “Fourth poem from Nicaragua Libre: Report from the frontier,” from *Living Room*, we can clearly perceive Jordan’s aim at registering the daily life of ordinary people participating in the history of “unimportant events” amidst the revolution:

I found
 the family trench empty
 the pails of rainwater standing full
 a soldier whistling while thunder invaded
 the afternoon
 shards
 shreds
 one electric bulb split by bullets
 dead hanging plants
 two Sandinistas riding donkeys
 a child sucking a mango
 many dogs lost
 five seconds left above the speechless
 tobacco fields
 like a wooden bridge you wouldn’t
 trust
 with the weight of a cat (10-26)

In Jordan’s poem “War and Memory,” the poet writes about a common day in her family life during World War II, in which the history of World War II becomes the background to Jordan’s family history. The passage follows next:

“Momma!” I cried, after staring at the front page
 photo of the Daily News.
 “What’s this a picture of?”
 It was Black and White,
 But nothing else. No people
 and no houses anywhere. My mother
 came and took a look above my shoulder.
 “It’s about the Jews:” she said.
 “The Jews?”
 “It’s not! It’s more about those Nazis!” Daddy
 interjected.
 “No, Granville, no!
 It’s about the Jews. In the war going on,”
 my mother amplified, “the German soldiers

take away the Jewish families and they make
 them march through snow until they die!"
 "What kind of an ignorant
 woman are you?" Daddy shouted out, "It's
 not the snow. It's Nazi camps: the concentration
 camps!" (104-123)

A different issue that Simic approaches is the importance of registering individual record of deaths in conflicts and wars, in order to make these casualties seem real and not like abstract numbers which are easily forgotten. Brand shows the same concern in the poem "III," from *Inventory*: "Twenty-seven in Hillah, three in fighting in / Amariya, two by roadside bombing, Adhaim," (32-33). Although Jordan does not report numbers of casualties in "The Bombing of Baghdad," she demonstrates the significance of numbers and accuracy when writing about the attacks: "began and did not terminate for 42 days / and 42 nights relentless minute after minute / more than 110,000 times" (1-3).

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf argues about the destruction of the identification of people as individuals and humans in situations of war. Both Brand and Jordan tackle this issue in their anti-war poetry. In the poem "III," from *Inventory*, Brand writes: "outside bank in Kirkuk, the numbers so random, / so shapeless, apart from their shape, their seduction of infinity" (84-85). Brand does not describe the "shapeless" bodies, but Jordan does. In the poem "Fourth poem from Nicaragua Libre: Report from the frontier," from *Living Room*, when Jordan writes "when the bombs hit / leaving a patch of her hair on a piece of her scalp / like bird's nest," (6-8), she demonstrates the cruelty of wars and the way people lose their identification as human beings and seem more like animals or inanimate objects like a "bird's nest."

Butler's notion of "ungrievable lives," those lives that do not count because they "already inhabit a lost and destroyed zone" (xix), is exemplified in some of Brand's and Jordan's poems. In Brand's poem "On American numeracy and literacy in the war against grenada," from *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun*, the third world countries of El Salvador and Grenada are considered "destroyed zones," given that the numbers of casualties are "ungrievable" and not pertinent to the US. Jordan also approaches the issue of "ungrievable lives" in "The Bombing of Baghdad," from *Kissing God Goodbye*, since the American army appears not to consider Arabs as human beings. In *Frames of War* Butler discusses the Western idea that "Islam poses a threat to culture, even to prevailing norms of humanization" (131). However, Jordan does

not agree with that notion and shows respect for the Islamic cultures through her poetry. The poet finishes the following passage emphasizing that Arabs are human beings,

we bombed everything that moved – we
bombed everything that did not move we
bombed Baghdad
a city of 5.5 million human beings (11-14)

Another issue that Butler approaches in *Frames of War* and Brand and Jordan deal with in their poetry is related to the imposition of democracy by the United States on the countries they assault. Both Brand and Jordan have written some poems which criticize US hegemony and question the use of the word “democracy.” Butler asks: “can ‘democracy’ be the name of a form of political power that is undemocratically imposed?” (37). In the poem “October 25th, 1983” from *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun*, Brand approaches this controversial issue by using the double voice of irony:

america came to restore democracy,
what was restored was faith
in the fact that you cannot fight bombers
battleships, aircraft carriers, helicopter gunships,
surveillance planes, five thousand american soldiers
six caribbean stooges and the big american war machine,
you cannot fight this with a machete
you cannot fight it with a handful of dirt (13-20)

Similarly, Jordan criticizes her home country, the United States, for its imposition of “democracy” on countries such as Grenada and distant Vietnam. In the poem “Another Poem About the Man,” from *Living Room*, concerning the Grenadian revolution, she writes: “from freedom / rammed down the throat” (20-21). In seventies America, there was an incongruity in relation to the use of the word democracy, since the country seemed more like a dictatorial regime concerning the issue of protests against the Vietnam War. In “War and Memory,” from *Naming our Destiny*, Jordan uses the same strategy as Brand, the ironic voice: “and I wondered how democracy would travel from the graves / at Kent State / to the hidden trenches / of Hanoi” (188-191).

In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag criticizes the American media for its manipulation of information as well as the broadcasting of wars and the impact of those images, which are depleted of their force

by the frequency in which they are used. She states: “Wars are now also living room sights and sounds” (18). Brand and Jordan also criticize the American media in some of their poems analyzed in this study. In Brand’s poem “III,” she criticizes the professionals that work with media: “though ominous rain, the blue sea’s limning screens / are saturated with experts on terror” (347-348). She continues:

they’re traders, like anybody else these days,
in what’s obvious,
and skilful in half-hourly repetitions
of the same shameless verses

day and night (355-359)

Jordan likewise approaches the issue of the media in her war resistance poetry. In “Apologies to All the People in Lebanon,” from *Living Room*, the poet criticizes the way the media manipulates the language: “They called your apartments and gardens guerrilla / strongholds. / They called the screaming devastation / that they created the rubble” (40-43). In addition, she excuses herself from taking action against the massacre in Lebanon by saying: “You can’t expect but so much / from those of us who have to pay taxes and watch / American TV” (64-66). In these lines Jordan openly criticizes the unreliable and manipulative American media. In “War and Memory” she approaches the importance of casualties for the media: “Body counts at the news” (166). Jordan wrote in the 1980s a poetic prose critique of the American media in relation to black people’s lives: “At the end of the 1960s, American mass media rolled the cameras away from black life and the quantity of print on the subject became too small to read” (*Civil Wars* 163).

5.3 –Testimonial poems by Brand and Jordan

In relation to Brand’s and Jordan’s war resistance poetry, they position themselves as witnesses, participants in history and do not dissociate their work as poets from their life histories and political engagements. Brand’s and Jordan’s poetics of resistance share this intimate connection between their personal lives and political activism. In some of the poems analyzed in this study we can observe their concern with registering moments of their lives in situations of vulnerability and risk intertwined with public historical events. Jordan

reflects: “A poet writes of her own people, her own history, her own vision, her own room [. . .]” (*Some of Us* 175).

Brand and Jordan make explicit the relation between experience and poetry. In their testimonial poetry the use of the personal pronouns “I” and “we” indicate their participation as witnesses in the events described. In these poems, the poets make evident the confluence of collective and individual histories, the latter being the main focus of attention — anonymous suffering, or the history of “unimportant events.” In Brand’s poems about the Grenadian revolution we can notice her testimonial of the American military attacks as exemplified by the following lines from “Diary-The Grenada crisis,” from *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun*: “we are watching a house burn” (46) or “we have difficulty eating” (57). In the next passage, Brand describes the uncertainty of what she might have to face during the aerial bombardments:

In my chest,
a green-water well,
it is 5 a.m. and I
have slept with my glasses on
in case we must run. (76-80)

In Brand’s poems “Phyllis” and “Jackie,” from *No Language is Neutral*, the poet addresses the two revolutionary women she met and made friends with while in Grenada. In “Phyllis” she writes: “I know is you there and I / never forget how one night you give / me a ride in your car” (8-10). In “Jackie,” Brand evokes the revolutionary Grenadian and writes about her impressions of her: “Jackie, gently, that glint of yellow in your eyes, / end of a day, cigarette masking your tiredness” (10-11).

In the poem “IV ix,” from *Land to Light On*, Brand uses the personal pronoun “we” in order to show her frustration with the end of the socialist dream. In this poem, Brand uses Caribbean demotic as an act of resistance and locates herself among the revolutionary Grenadians. In the subsequent passage, Brand describes the day of her return to Canada after the end of the revolution, when she had to “start all over with hardly any heart” (12): “Watching only through a plane / window at Point Salines and busy no recalling where we was / rightly, eating coconut ice cream at the bar in Crown Point, / starting all over with hardly any heart” (9-12).

Jordan likewise uses the personal pronoun “I” when she writes her testimonial poetry of the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua. In the poem “Fourth poem from Nicaragua Libre: Report from the frontier,”

from *Living Room*, she writes about a scene of ruin she witnessed in Nicaragua: “I found / the family trench empty” (10-11). In “Safe,” also from *Living Room*, Jordan depicts a night journey she took in a dugout canoe on a river in Nicaragua. In this poem, the poet articulates a feeling of safety in the company of her Sandinistas *compañeros*, despite the threats that she faced in a country in conflict: where I sat cold and wet / but surrounded by five / *compañeros* / in a dugout canoe (1-10).

In the poem “The Bombing of Baghdad,” from *Kissing God Goodbye*, Jordan uses the personal pronoun “we” as an acknowledgment of her position as an American citizen who involuntarily takes part in the destruction of Baghdad by the American army. “We” in this sense is used on the basis of nation, territory and culture and encompasses Jordan’s position as perpetrator: “we bombed schools we bombed air raid / shelters we bombed water we bombed / electricity we bombed hospitals we / bombed streets we bombed highways” (7-10). Still in the same poem, Jordan uses the imagery of her house when she writes about the US attacks on Iraq: “because the enemy traveled from my house / to blast your homeland / into pieces of children / and pieces of sand” (94-100). Towards the end of the poem, the poet demonstrates her sorrow for the suffering caused by her home country and her shame at being American: “And in the aftermath of carnage / perpetrated in my name / how should I dare to offer you my hand / how shall I negotiate the implications / of my shame? (101-105). In “Apologies to All the People in Lebanon,” from *Living Room*, Jordan uses “I” in order to apologize for her role as an American citizen who pays taxes which are used by her country to give armed support for the military intervention in Lebanon:

Yes, I did know it was the money I earned as a poet that
paid
for the bombs and the planes and the tanks
that they used to massacre your family

But I am not an evil person
The people of my country aren’t so bad

You can’t expect but so much
from those of us who have to pay taxes and watch
American TV

You see my point;

I am sorry.
I really am sorry. (58-69)

In “Moving Towards Home,” from *Living Room*, the personal pronoun “I” is used throughout the poem so that Jordan can express her necessity to talk about “living room” and “home” despite so many unspeakable events:

because I need to speak about home
I need to speak about living room
where the land is not bullied and beaten into
a tombstone
I need to speak about living room
where the talk will take place in my language
I need to speak about living room
where my children will grow without horror
I need to speak about living room where the men
of my family between the ages of six and sixty-five
are not
marched into a roundup that leads to the grave
I need to talk about living room
where I can sit without grief without wailing aloud
for my loved ones
where I must not ask where is Abu Fadi
because he will be there beside me
I need to talk about living room
because I need to talk about home (53- 71)

“War and Memory,” from *Naming our Destiny*, is Jordan’s most personal poem. Throughout its 272 lines the poet, by using the personal pronoun “I,” writes about her life, from her early and challenging years to her adult life. As a result, the reader at the same time learns about the poet’s life struggles and the context of important historical events. “War and Memory” is both, a personal and historical poem, in view of the fact that “the most reliable ‘histories’ are told by first-person pronouns which remain subordinate, even anonymous,” maintains Simic (“Notes” 127), and that is the sort of history told by Brand and Jordan.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

For the conclusion of this dissertation I will reiterate the research questions presented in the introductory chapter in order to evaluate the results of my research. Also, I will demonstrate that the poems by Gwendolyn Brooks, Audre Lorde, Sonia Sanchez, Alice Walker, and Claire Harris analyzed in chapter two dialogue and intersect with Dionne Brand's and June Jordan's poems discussed in this study.

1. In which ways do Brand and Jordan approach situations of conflict (wars and others) in their poetry in relation to daily life and individual suffering?

During this research, one of the main focuses of analysis in relation to Brand's and Jordan's poetics of resistance is on Charles Simic's notion of the role of some poets in registering the history of "unimportant events." According to Simic, "poetry succeeds at times in conveying the pain of individuals caught in the wheels of history" ("Poetry" 36). In their poetry, Brand and Jordan approach situations of conflict related to daily life and individual suffering in two ways: by using their own experience as subject matter for their poems and by allowing voice to usually female personas who experience conflicts (armed or not) and individual suffering in their everyday lives.

In several poems analyzed in this study, as in Brand's poems related to the American military invasion of Grenada in 1983, Brand herself is an "individual caught in the wheels of history." She is a witness of the aerial bombardments and exposes her suffering through poetry. One of Brand's major concerns in her poetics of resistance is to depict daily life in a definite moment and its relation to political events, like the Grenadian revolution.

In Brand's poem "III," from *Inventory*, the persona's everyday events are the background for the inventory of deaths depicted through the media. Brand's poem deals with the time we are living, the daily and tragic news on TV, and the individual suffering of the persona who cannot feel indifferent in the face of the occurrences: "everyone grows perversely accustomed, / she refuses" (137-138). In Jordan's poems related to her experience in Nicaragua during the Sandinista revolution we can clearly perceive her concern in writing about the history of everyday events amid the revolution. This concern is evident in several poems, such as "from Nicaragua Libre: photograph of managua," from *Living Room*:

He holds the newspaper.
 He tracks each word with a finger
 and opens his mouth to the sound.
 Next to the chair the old V-Z rifle
 leans at the ready. (7-11)

Jordan's suffering in the face of tragic events is also noticed in the poem "The Bombing of Baghdad," published in *Kissing God Goodbye*. In this poem, Jordan criticizes the American military invasion of Iraq in 1990-91, and demonstrates her deep sorrow: "My heart cannot confront / This death without relief / My soul will not control / This leaking of my grief" (106-109). In Jordan's poem "War and Memory," she again depicts her life experiences of distress along with situations of conflict and war. The next passage from the poem portrays Jordan's personal conflict and individual suffering when she had to leave her child alone waiting for the pickup which never came:

I got a phone call from my neighbors
 that the pickup never came
 that Christopher was sitting
 on the sidewalk
 in his yellow slicker
 on his lunchbox
 in the rain. (204-210)

As aforementioned, Brand and Jordan demonstrate in their poetics of resistance a great concern in registering everyday events amidst situations of conflict. Besides, they express in their poetry the ways in which wars and other conflicts affect daily life. Simic conveys the same interest that Brand and Jordan share: to write in poetry "the reverse history of what in the great scheme of things are often regarded as 'unimportant' events" ("Poetry" 36).

2. How do the poets' personal histories interweave with collective history?

Brand and Jordan are politically left-wing and their belief in socialism was the main reason for their interest in going to Grenada and Nicaragua respectively in order to witness the popular revolutions. Their testimonials of the socialist revolutions and armed conflicts are part of their personal histories. Simultaneously, their personal histories interweave with the collective history of the Grenadian and Sandinista revolutions in the 1980s. According to Simic, "the poet like anyone else is part of history, but he or she ought to be the conscious part" ("Notes"

126). Brand's and Jordan's awareness of the United States government and its hegemonic actions in the third world countries of Grenada and Nicaragua are expressed in their war resistance poetry, a way these women poets found to criticize the establishment and American imperialism.

In Simic's view, poets should either contemplate or ignore the horrors of war like "[. . .] armies slaughtering each other, civilians fleeing for their lives, the orphan factories working around the clock" ("Poetry" 36). Brand and Jordan think profoundly about the issue of war and write with the authority of experience of those who faced the terror of seeing their lives put at risk. The events Brand and Jordan witnessed in Grenada and Nicaragua respectively and translated into words in their poems are part of a history often untold, ignored or distorted by the media's manipulation.

A historical issue that is always present in Brand's and Jordan's poetics of resistance is slavery and its legacy – racism. Both poets have suffered racism in Canada and the US respectively and use their roles as poets to deal with this issue and raise awareness. In Brand's poem "Eurocentric," the poet approaches the history of racism in the US, by mentioning "blacks lynched in the American way" (13), as well as the history of apartheid in South Africa. In addition, Brand extols in the poem two black women who made history: Rosa Parks and Bessie Smith. In "ossuary XI," Brand makes a connection between the painting "Shipping Out" (1947) and the Middle Passage and criticizes the inhuman conditions in which blacks were brought to America. In the same poem, she writes about ex-slave Olaudah Equiano, a key person in regard to the abolition of slavery in England. Brand's personal life history as a black immigrant in a predominantly white society like Canada is interweaved with the collective history of slavery and racism in America.

Jordan too approaches the issue of slavery and racism in both poetry and prose. In her essay "Nicaragua: *Why I had to Go There*" she explains the presence of blacks in Nicaragua. Jordan's family was from a Jamaican background and her interest in the history of slavery in Nicaragua reflects an attempt to understand her own family history of slavery in Jamaica. In Jordan's personal poem "War and Memory," she deals with the history of racism in the US within her own family, exemplified by her father calling her "You damn Black devil child!" (84). In doing so, Jordan's father internalizes the belief in the inferiority of blacks in relation to whites. Jordan's family history interconnects with the history and legacy of slavery in America.

In Jordan's poetry book *Who Look at Me*, the poet again tackles the issue of racism in the US. In the book, Jordan writes about her observation of the gaze, in the way whites look at blacks and how that gaze is returned. Jordan's personal experience as a black woman living in a white society is at the root of her observation. In the same poem, Jordan deals with the issue of slavery in America and the historical moment of the "Amistad Revolt," when blacks were in charge of a mutiny in order to free themselves. The poet's interest in writing poetry about this specific moment of black "victory" is strategic.

In "War and Memory," Jordan brings her memories of childhood and history together. In the poem the poet's life intersects with the collective history of World War II, the Vietnam War and apartheid and we, as readers, cannot separate Jordan's life, with its everyday events, from the historical events that the poet depicts and which occurred during her life time. As a result, in "War and Memory" the history of "unimportant" events reflects the collective history of the twentieth century.

Brand and Jordan have lived through several contemporary wars besides those in Grenada and Nicaragua. They have witnessed through the media conflicts in the Middle East in countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Israel/Palestine, as well as civil wars in African countries such as Rwanda and Somalia, and conflicts in Eastern Europe, for instance in Bosnia. Their war resistance poetry simultaneously depicts their knowledge of contemporary conflicts and politics, and registers the collective history of warfare and armed conflicts in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Brand's and Jordan's life experiences and their testimonials of armed conflicts interweave with collective history, and they use poetry in order to write about both strands of history. Brand comments in an interview that she believes that "history, and the history of the people that [she] comes from, is important, and that it is important to rewrite that history in a way that saves our humanity" (*Books in Canada* 14).

3. To what extent do the poems analyzed intersect and dialogue with one other?

American and Canadian black women poets Gwendolyn Brooks, Audre Lorde, Sonia Sanchez, Alice Walker, and Claire Harris were chosen for chapter two due to their political engagements regarding the issue of war and armed conflicts. For these women poets, resistance poetry is a way to write about history, criticize the war rationales and American imperialism.

Each poem from chapter two focuses on different aspects of these poets' poetics of resistance. While Brooks's main concern in her World War II poem "Negro Hero" is in the fight against racism in the American Navy, Lorde's poem "Equal Opportunity" criticizes the American armed intervention in Grenada by allowing voice to black women in Grenada and the US. In Sanchez's "Poem for July 4, 1994," she uses the form of a chant in order to convey her pacifist message against the horrors of war, while in Walker's "We pay a visit to those who play at being dead," the poet approaches the mental conditions of soldiers once the war is over and they return to their homelands. In Harris's long poem "Sister (Y)our Manchild at the Close of the Twentieth Century" she deals with several imperative issues such as slavery, racism, and war. The twenty-one poems by Brand and Jordan analyzed in this study and the five poems by the abovementioned women poets intersect and dialogue in several ways. Due to the poets' shared histories as North-American black women and political activists, they share a common view of the world and its injustices and turn their observations into their poetics of resistance.

Harris's long poem "Sister (Y)our Manchild at the Close of the Twentieth Century" dialogues with Brand's poem "ossuary XI" and Jordan's *Who Look at Me*, given that the three poems relate to slavery. In the lines: "million Africans trapped branded transported twice five / ten dying / in the attempt the three hundred years of slavery rape its terrible / aftermath otherness fear and police boots batons bullets joblessness" (67-69), Harris not only writes about the history of the Middle Passage but also writes about the legacy of slavery, like feelings of otherness and fear, and the lack of job opportunities for black people.

Brand, Jordan, and Lorde approach the issue of the Grenadian socialist revolution in their poetry. The three poets have strong connections with the Caribbean, since their families' histories are from Trinidad, Jamaica, and Grenada respectively. The geographical link is one reason for their common concern in registering such revolution. Another reason is their position as political activists who promptly react against American imperialism and its violence in third world countries, and who use their poetry for the sake of spreading information and awareness.

While Brand writes from her personal testimonial of the American armed intervention in Grenada, Jordan and Lorde write from their knowledge of the facts. The poems analyzed share the poets' similar view regarding the discrepancy in size and power of the American army in relation to the People's Revolutionary Government

army. While Brand writes in “October 25th, 1983” that “you cannot fight bombers / battleships, aircraft carriers, helicopter gunships, / surveillance planes, five thousand american soldiers / [. . .] you cannot fight this with a machete” (15-17 / 19), Jordan writes in “Another Poem About the Man.” “artillery and tanks up against a halfnaked girl / and her boyfriend”(12-13). Lorde approaches the same issue in “Equal opportunity” as we can notice in the lines about Imelda: “and knows what to say to any invader / with a M-16 rifle held ready / while searching her cooking shed” (61-63). In Brand’s, Jordan’s, and Lorde’s poems analyzed here the American military attacks on the tiny island of Grenada are severely criticized as acts of injustice and inequity.

Harris’s poem “Sister (Y)our Manchild at the Close of the Twentieth Century” intersects with Jordan’s “The Bombing of Baghdad” given that both poems are a critique of the US military invasion of Iraq in 1990-91. In both poems the poets take the side of the Arabs and show their humanity. In Harris’s poem an Iraqi woman persona says: “*you think we are Red Indians? You can not / come here and kill us we are human too*” (188-189). In Jordan’s poem, she demonstrates the same view: “we bombed everything that moved / we / bombed everything that did not move we / bombed Baghdad / a city of 5.5 million *human beings*” (10-14 my emphasis).

Harris’s poem “Sister (Y)our Manchild at the Close of the Twentieth Century” overlaps with Jordan’s “Apologies to All the People in Lebanon” and Brand’s poem “III” due to their critique of the American media. While Harris uses the double voice of irony to criticize the reliability of the American media in the lines “except these words we gave you (this was / on CNN so must be true)” (191-192), Jordan criticizes the manipulation of language in the media: “They called your apartments and gardens guerrilla / strongholds. / They called the screaming devastation / that they created the rubble” (40-43). And Brand criticizes the professionals that work with media: “though ominous rain, the blue sea’s limning screens / are saturated with experts on terror” (347-348).

Brand’s poem “III,” Jordan’s “The Bombing of Baghdad,” and Sanchez’s “Poem for July 4, 1994” share a common concern in registering numbers of casualties. Brand demonstrates this in presenting an individual record of deaths in the lines “Twenty-seven in Hillah, three in fighting in / Amariya, two by roadside bombing, Adhaim,” (32-33) and by doing so, she makes these casualties seem more real. Jordan conveys the significance of numbers and accuracy when writing about the American attacks on Baghdad: “began and did not terminate for 42

days / and 42 nights relentless minute after minute / more than 110,000 times” (1-3). And Sanchez contemplates the numbers of death resulting from famine in the world: “come, come, come, nourish the world where / every 3 days 120,000 children die / of starvation or the effects of starvation” (57-59).

Brand’s poem “III,” Jordan’s “Fourth poem from Nicaragua Libre: Report from the frontier,” Lorde’s “Equal Opportunity,” and Sanchez’s “Poem for July 4, 1994” illustrate the atrocities of war and the way war makes people lose their identification as human beings, becoming shapeless or mutilated. Brand writes: “outside bank in Kirkuk, the numbers so random, / so shapeless, apart from their shape, their seduction of infinity” (84-85). And Jordan’s lines resonate with the same sentiment: “when the bombs hit / leaving a patch of her hair on a piece of her scalp / like bird’s nest” (6-8). Like Jordan, Lorde depicts shocking images of wars: “The baby’s father buried without his legs / burned bones in piles along the road” (41- 42). Sanchez, on the other hand, focuses on the mutilation of a young boy/girl caused by soldiers: “i am only 11 yrs old and i cannot / get out of the bed because they have cut / off one of my legs and i hear the soldiers” (73-75).

The issue of democracy is present in some of the poems analyzed in this study. In Gwendolyn Brooks’s poem “Negro Hero” the poet approaches the subject through the voice of a black man in the American navy during World War II: “Naturally, the important thing is, I helped to save them, them / and a part of their democracy” (50-51). In Brand’s poem “October 25th, 1983” the poet uses the double voice of irony in order to criticize America’s violent imposition of democracy on Grenada, “america came to restore democracy” (13). In Jordan’s “Another Poem About the Man,” concerning the Grenadian revolution, the poet shares Brand’s view: “from freedom / rammed down the throat” (20-21). And in Jordan’s “War and Memory,” she uses the ironic double voice in order to criticize the killings of students at Kent State University and the Vietnam War: “and I wondered how democracy would travel from the graves / at Kent State / to the hidden trenches / of Hanoi” (188-191).

The two ekphrastic poems “ossuary XI” and *Who Look at Me* by Brand and Jordan respectively intersect and dialogue in several ways. The poets’ choice of paintings so as to inspire their poetry is already an important connection between the two poems. In addition, the issues that the poets deal with are as well related. Both poets use ekphrasis to write about slavery and racism in the US. In Brand’s “ossuary XI” the poet associates Lawrence’s painting *Shipping Out* (1947) with the

Middle Passage while Lawrence's other painting *Beachhead* (1947) inspires Brand to extol Olaudah Equiano, the aforementioned ex-slave and chief figure in the abolition of slavery in England.

Jordan writes about racism in association with most of the paintings present in *Who Look at Me*. Ben Shann's painting *Willis Avenue Bridge* (1940) inspires Jordan to write about the lives of blacks in America: "We have lived as careful / as a church and prayer / in public" (130-132). *The Slave Market* (1850-1860), by an unknown painter, is the inspiration behind Jordan's critique of the cruelty of slavery: "we come from otherwhere / victim to a rabid cruel cargo crime / to separate and rip apart / the trusting members of one heart / my family / I looked for you / I looked for you" (138-144). Like Brand, Jordan extols a black man, the leader of the Amistad Revolt, Cinqué, through Nathaniel Jocelyn painting *Portrait of Cinqué* (1839). And Romare Bearden's painting, *Mysteries* (1964), inspires Jordan to write about the conditions of life for blacks in the slums: "Although the world / forgets me / I will say yes / AND NO" (264-267).

The concern expressed by black women poets in allowing voice to women of all races is another meeting point in their poetry. In Lorde's poem "Equal Opportunity" the poet allows voice to three black women: the young and successful American secretary of defense, Imelda – a poor Grenadian in a "tattered headcloth" (20), and Granny Lou, who criticizes the American aerial bombardments: "*But for we here / who never woke up before / to see plane shitting fire into chimney / it was a damn awful lot!*" (37-40). In Harris's poem "Sister (Y)our Manchild at the Close of the Twentieth Century" the poet gives voice to an Iraqi woman who complains about the American military attacks: "*you think we are Red Indians? You can not / come here and kill us we are human too*" (187-188). Jordan allows voice to women in two of the poems analyzed in this study: In "Moving Towards Home" its epigraph is the wail of a Muslim woman who asks: "Where is Abu Fadi, who will bring me my loved one? (*New York Times* 9/20/82)". By giving agency to this Muslim woman, Jordan foregrounds the humanity of Arabs, who are usually dehumanized in the US media as enemies. In "War and Memory," she gives voice to her previously voiceless mother who can finally speak against her tyrannical husband Granville: "And who are you supposed to be? The Queen / of England? Or the King?" (54-55). By allowing voice/agency to women, the poets studied in this research use their poetics as an instrument of empowerment for the oppressed women of the world.

Lorde's poem "Equal Opportunity," Brand's poem "IV xi," and Jordan's poem "Another Poem About the Man" dialogue in the sense that the poets use Caribbean demotic as a form of resistance against American imperialism, and as empowerment for blacks. Lorde uses italics in order to emphasize the voice of the black Grenadian Granny Lou – "*If it was only kill / They'd wanted to kill we*" (32-33). And allows voice to her black character Imelda when she talks to the American soldiers – "no guns, man, no guns here. we glad you come, you carry / water?" (48-49). Brand uses Caribbean demotic to address the Grenadian revolution as well – "guests into a hotel, pain stroking a face with the wrong answer/ for the cause of the end of we. Watching only through a plane / window at Point Salines and busy no recalling where we was" (8-10). Jordan similarly uses the demotic when she writes about the Grenadian revolution – "Grenada now Grenada she / no sing no more" (28-29). The use of Caribbean demotic in the poems analyzed is a strategy employed by these poets of resistance in order to allow voice/agency to the subjugated black Caribbean people.

Through a comparative reading of the poems analyzed, it is possible to claim that they reveal similar aims in regard to their political functions. The issue of slavery and its "aftermath" is a commonality in several poems, since it is an issue that concerns black poets who share a need to address this subject so as to remind the Eurocentric and white society of this shame. In the poems about the Grenadian and Nicaraguan socialist revolutions as well as the poems that approach conflicts in Lebanon, Baghdad, Bosnia, among other places, the poets' main critique relates to the United States' hegemonic and violent "operations" in third world countries in the name of "democracy," and the treatment towards the populations of those countries whose lives are considered "ungrievable" for the US army. The issue of the unreliability of the American media is another concern shared by the poets in this study, who use their political poems in order to condemn such manipulation of information. Concluding, I would like to mention the poets' common political aims at allowing voice/agency to the oppressed women who are denied discourse, and at giving empowerment for blacks, through the use of Black English vernacular, a tool against the dominant language.

In *Frames of War* Butler writes about the destruction of poems by the US Department of Defense. She mentions a collection of twenty-two poems entitled *Poems from Guantánamo* which survived censorship. She comments that "most of the poems written by Guantánamo detainees were either destroyed or confiscated, and were certainly not allowed to be passed onto lawyers and human-rights

workers [. . .]” (55). The Pentagon’s rationale for the censorship was that poetry “presents a special risk” to national security because of its “content and format” (Falkoff qtd. in Butler 55). Butler asks:

Could it really be that the syntax or form of a poem is perceived as a threat to the security of the nation? [. . .] Or is it that they explicitly criticize the United States, for its spurious claim to be a “protector of peace,” or its irrational hatred of Islam?” (55)

In most of the poems analyzed in this study the poets criticize the United States, its violence in third world countries, its racism, its manipulative media, and its hatred of Arabs, among other issues. Luckily these poems were not confiscated or destroyed by the US Department of Defense for presenting a risk to national security due to their “content and form.” The ink found on the hands of these black women poets is the sort of weaponry they use in their war resistance poetry. The ink on their hands is like bomb residue, a bomb which does not kill or mutilate in the name of peace, a bomb which explodes in awareness, asking for peace.

REFERENCES

Primary sources

- Brand, Dionne. *A Map to the Door of No Return*. Toronto: Random House, 2001.
- . *Bread Out of Stone*. 1994. Toronto: Random House, 1998.
- . *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun*. Toronto: Williams-Wallace, 1984.
- . *In Another Place, Not Here*. 1986. New York: Grove, 1996.
- . *Inventory*. Toronto: McClelland, 2006.
- . *Land to Light On*. Toronto: McClelland, 1997.
- . *No Language Is Neutral*. Toronto: McClelland, 1998.
- Brooks, Gwendolyn. "Negro Hero." In *Selected Poems*. 1944. New York: Harper Perennial, 2006.
- Harris, Claire. *Dipped in Shadows*. Fredericton, NB: Goose Lane, 1996.
- Jordan, June. *Civil Wars*. Boston: South End Press, 1985.
- . *Kissing God Goodbye: Poems, 1991-1997*. New York: Anchor Books, 1997.
- . *Living Room*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1985.
- . *Moving Towards Home*. London: Virago Press, 1989.
- . *Naming Our Destiny*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1989.
- . *On Call*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1981.
- . *Some of Us Did NOT Die*. New York: Perseus Books, 2002.
- . *Who Look at Me*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1969.
- Lorde, Audre. "Equal Opportunity." In *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*. 1997. New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 2000.
- Sanchez, Sonia. *Shake Loose my Skin*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1999.
- Walker, Alice. *Hard Times Require Furious Dancing*. Novato: New World Library, 2010.

Secondary sources

- Ali, Zahra A. Hussein. "Aesthetics of Memorialization: The Shabra and Shatila Genocide in the work of Sami Mohammad, Jean Genet, and June Jordan." *Criticism* 51.4 (Fall 2009): 589- 621.
- Al-Joulani, Nayef Ali. "Ekphrasis Revisited: The Mental Underpinnings of Literary Pictorialism." *Studies in Literature and Language* 1.7 (2010): 39-54.
- Almeida, Sandra Regina Goulart. "'Impossible citizens' in the global city: Dionne Brand's discourses of resistance." *Ilha do Desterro* 56

- (2009): 119-136.
- Barry, Peter. "Contemporary Poetry and Ekphrasis." *The Cambridge Quarterly* 31.2 (2002): 155-165.
- Beverly, Daurio. "The Language of Resistance." *Books in Canada*. (1990): 13-16.
- Birbalsingh, Frank, ed. *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English*. New York: St Martin's, 1996.
- Blackmer, Corinne. "Writing Poetry like a Woman." *American Literary History*. 8.1 (1996): 129-152.
- Brand, Dionne. "Bread Out of Stone." In *Grammar of Dissent – poetry and prose by Claire Harris, M. Nourbese Philip, Dionne Brand*. Ed. Carol Morrell. Fredericton: Goose Lane, 1994, 171- 180.
- . "All power to the young women in the streets of Kabul." Online Posting. 17 Apr. 2009. Dionne Brand's Blog. 17 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/dionne-brand/2009/04/all-power-young-women-streets-kabul>>
- . "Patriarchy and the election." Online Posting. 1 Oct. 2008. Dionne Brand's Blog. 15 Mar. 2011. <<http://www.rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/dionne-brand/2009/10/patriarchy-and-election>>
- . "We weren't allowed to go into factory work until Hitler started the war." In *We're rooted here and they can't pull us up: essays in African Canadian women's history*. Ed. Peggy Bristow. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994. 171-191.
- Brogan, Jacqueline Vaught. "From Warrior to Womanist: The Development of June Jordan's Poetry." In *Speaking the Other Self: American Women Writers*. Ed. Jeanne Campbell Reesman. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997. 198-209.
- Butler, Judith. *Frames of War – When is Life Grievable?* London/New York: Verso, 2010.
- Butling, Pauline. "Struggle and Community, Possibility and Poetry." In *Poets talk: conversations with Robert Kroetsch, Daphne Marlatt, Erin Mouré, Dionne Brand, Marie Annharte Baker, Jeff Derksen and Fred Wah*. Alberta UP, 2004. 63- 87.
- Clarke, George Elliot. *Black*. Vancouver: Houghton-Boston, 2006.
- . "Embarkation: Discovering African-Canadian Literature." In *Odysseys home: mapping African-Canadian literature*. U of T Press, 2002. 3-23.
- . *Eyeing the north star: directions in African-Canadian literature*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1997. Introduction xi – xxv.
- . "Harris." E-mail to Gabriela E. Brum. 16 Jul. 2012.

- . "Harris, Philip, Brand: Three authors in search of literate criticism." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 35.1 (2000): 161-189.
- . "Lorde's Equal Opportunity review." E-mail to Gabriela E. Brum. 21 Aug. 2012.
- Clüver, Claus. "Ekphrasis Reconsidered – On Verbal Representations of Non-Verbal Texts." In *Interart Poetics*. Ulla-Britta Lageroth et al. eds. Amsterdam: Daniels, Dieter, 2000. 19-34.
- Corr, John. "Affective coordination and avenging grace: Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here*." *Canadian Literature* 201 Summer (2009):113.
- Creighton, Jane. "Writing War, Writing Memory." In *Still seeking an attitude: critical reflections on the work of June Jordan*. Kinloch, Valerie, and Margret Grebowicz, eds. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005. 243-255.
- Dickinson, Peter. *Here is queer: nationalisms, sexualities, and the literatures of Canada*. Toronto: Toronto UP, 1999.
- Flynn, Richard. "'Affirmative Acts' – Language, Childhood, and Power in June Jordan's Cross-Writing." In *Still seeking an attitude: critical reflections on the work of June Jordan*. Ed. Kinloch, Valerie, and Margret Grebowicz. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005. 119-143.
- Giddens, Anthony. "Political Theory and the Problem of Violence." In *Beyond Left and Right- the Future of Radical Politics*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994. 229-245.
- Gioia, Dana. *Can Poetry Matter?* Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 2002.
- Honey, Maureen, ed. *Bitter Fruit – African American Women in World War II*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *Splitting Images-Contemporary Canadian Ironies*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1991.
- Kinloch, Valerie. *June Jordan: Her Life and Letters*. Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2006.
- Kinloch, Valerie, and Margret Grebowicz, eds. *Still Seeking an Attitude: Critical Reflections on the work of June Jordan*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005.
- L'Abbé, Sonnet. "Ancient Today's." Online Posting. 23 Apr 2010. The Globe and Mail. 30 May 2011.
- <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/arts/books/article1544436.ece>>
- Leonard, Keith D. "African American women poets and the power of the word." In *African American Women's Literature*. Ed. Angelyn Mitchell and Danille K. Taylor. New York: Cambridge UP, 2009. 168-186.
- Levi, Jan H., and Sara Miles, eds. *Directed by Desire – the collected*

- poems of June Jordan*. Washington: Copper Canyon, 2005.
- Longenbach, James. *Modernist Poetics of History*. Princetown: Princetown University Press, 1987.
- Lorde, Audre. "Grenada Revisited: An Interim Report." In *Sister Outside*. New York: The Crossing Press, 1984. 176-189.
- . "My Words Will Be There." In *Black Women Writers (1950-1980)*. Ed. Mari Evans. US, 1983. 261-268.
- Macphail, Scott. "June Jordan and the New Black Intellectuals." *African American Review* 33.1 (1999): 57.
- Madhubuti, Haki. "Sonia Sanchez: The Bringer of Memories." In *Black Women Writers (1950-1980)*. Ed. Mari Evans. US, 1983. 419-432.
- Martins, Maria L. M. "Dionne Brand and Alanis Obomsawin: polyphony in the poetics of resistance." *Ilha do Desterro* 56 (2009): 151-164.
- . "Chapter four." E-mail to Gabriela E. Brum. 12 Oct. 2012.
- . "Chapter five." E-mail to Gabriela E. Brum. 10 Jun. 2013.
- Marsh, Nicky. "This is the Only Time to Come Together – June Jordan's Publics and the Possibility of Democracy." In *Still seeking an attitude: critical reflections on the work of June Jordan*. Ed. Kinloch, Valerie, and Margret Grebowicz. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005. 15-31.
- Metres, Philip. "June Jordan's Righteous Certainty." In *Behind the Lines – war resistance poetry on the American homefront since 1941*. Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2007. 179-195.
- . "Performing 'Righteous Certainty': The Shifting Poetic Address of June Jordan's War Resistance Poetry." In *Still seeking an attitude: critical reflections on the work of June Jordan*. Eds. Kinloch, Valerie, and Margret Grebowicz. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005. 175-188.
- Mukerjee, Arun Prabha. "Ironies of Colour in the Great White North: The Discursive Strategies of Some Hyphenated." In *Oppositional aesthetics: readings from a hyphenated space*. Toronto: TSAR, 1994. (69-79).
- Perloff, Marjorie. "After FreeVerse – The New Nonlinear Poetics." In *Poetry On & Off the Page*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1998. 141-167.
- Sanchez, Sonia. "Ruminations/ Reflections." In *Black Women Writers (1950-1980)*. Ed. Mari Evans. US, 1983. 415-418.
- . *Homegirls and Handgrenades*. 1984. New York: White Pine, 2007.
- Sarbadhikary, Krishna. "Recovering History: The Poems of Dionne

- Brand.” In *Intersexions –Issues of Race and Gender in Canadian Women’s writing*. Ed. Coomi Vevaina and Barbara Godard. New Delhi: Creative Books, 1996. 116-130.
- Saul, Joanne. “In the middle of becoming: Dionne Brand’s historical vision.” *Canadian Woman Studies* 23.2 Winter (2004): 59-63.
- Schweik, Susan. *A Gulf So Deeply Cut: American Women Poets and the Second World War*. Madison: Wisconsin UP, 1991.
- Scott, Helen C. “Beyond Mourning: The Legacy of the Grenadian Revolution in Literature.” *Works and Days* 57/58 29 (2011): 319-327.
- Servaes, Jan. “European Press Coverage of the Grenada Crisis.” *Journal of Communication* 41, 1991.
- Simic, Charles. “Notes on Poetry and History.” In *The Uncertain Certainty*. Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1985.124-128.
- . “Poetry and History.” In *The Metaphysician in the Dark*. Michigan: Michigan UP, 2003. 35-40.
- Sontag, Susan. *At the Same Time: Essays and Speeches*. London and New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007.
- . *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Picador, 2003.
- Stanford, Ann F. “Dialectics of Desire: War and the Resistive Voice in Gwendolyn Brooks’s ‘Negro Hero’ and ‘Gay Chaps at the Bar.’” In *Modern Critical Views – Gwendolyn Brooks*. Ed. Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2000. 181-198.
- Thomas, H. Nigel. “A commentary on the poetry of Dionne Brand.” *Kola* 21.1 Summer (2009): 10-11.
- . ed. “Claire Harris.” In *Why we write: conversations with African Canadian poets and novelists*. Toronto: TSAR Publications, 2006. 115-130.
- Walcott, Rinaldo, and Leslie Sanders. “At the full and change of Canlit: an interview with Dionne Brand.” *Canadian Woman Writers* 20.2 Summer (2000): 22-25.
- Walker, Alice. *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For*. New York: New Press, 2006.
- . *Overcoming Speechlessness – a poet encounters the horror in Rwanda, Eastern Congo, and Palestine/Israel*. New York: Seven Stories, 2010.
- Wah, Fred. *Faking It-Poetics and Hybridity*. Edmonton: NeWest, 2000.
- Wiens, Jason. “‘Language seemed to split in two:’ National ambivalence(s) and Dionne Brand’s ‘no language is neutral.’” *Essays on Canadian Writing Toronto* 70 Spring (2000): 81- 102.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Three Guineas*. 1938. San Diego: Harcourt, 2006.

Zackodnik, Teresa. "‘I Am Blackening in My Way:’ Identity and place in Dionne Brand’s *No Language is Neutral*." *Essays on Canadian Writing Toronto* 57 Winter (1995) : 194-211.