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1. Introduction

“Nothing behind me, everything ahead of me,
as is ever so on the road.”

— Jack Kerouac

Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road* is considered a classic when it comes to road narratives. The story is loosely based on the travels the author and his friends undertook between 1947 and 1950. The novel exhibits a variety of thematic and stylistic choices that can be used to gain insight into the representation of the issues race and gender. The present thesis starts from the premise that profound insights not only into the author's perspectives but also into the culture of the postwar period of the United States can be gained by an analysis of Kerouac's novel. Following from this assumption, the goal of this paper is to explore the notions of race and gender in Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road*. In particular, the aim of the thesis is to demonstrate that the novel is characterized by a striking ambivalence, both in terms of content and style.

On the one hand, the protagonists are men for whom overcoming traditions and conventions is an explicit goal. They are sympathetic to the exotic and the foreign. They are drawn to the margins of society and attracted to women, but also fascinated by the subject of homosexuality. To transcend what they perceive as a stifling society, they give up their permanent homes for a while. In striking contrast to this progressive perspective, however, the protagonists reflect the common socio-political narratives of their time, and even exaggerate them at times. Even if they begin to gain a fragmentary understanding of their own cultural conditionality, they keep committing acts of racism and sexism, partly consciously, partly due to unreflected behavior. They view people of color primarily as exotic spectacle, rather than as individuals. By their disdainful actions, they prove that women do not appear equal to them either. The same is true for people who do not conform to what they consider the heterosexual norm. Analogous to the content of the story, the same ambivalence can be traced on the level of style.

First, the historical and social background of the time in which the story is set, will be looked at and brought into context. The 1940s and 1950s marked a difficult time for the United States and the whole world: World War II ended (for the United States in August of 1945), U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt died unexpectedly in April of 1945 and the economy was challenged to recover, after it needed to change production from wartime goods to peacetime everyday goods (see Zinn, *Postwar* 135). The American middle-class began to thrive and people were wealthier than ever before. City suburbs grew fast and the housing market exploded. Nonetheless, poverty and inequalities, especially in connection to racial issues prevailed and posed challenges for society and peaceful cohabitation. Racism was omnipresent in almost all areas of life and presented challenges and hardships for members of racial minority groups (see Ansell 129).

Furthermore, the late 1940s and early 1950s were a time when the spheres in which women could make independent decisions were subject to constant change. During the war many women had worked in factories and provided for their financial needs by themselves. With the end of the war and men returning home from the battle fields, women were once again expected to be responsible for the home, household and raising children, while men were perceived as the sole breadwinners and responsible for providing the financial support for the whole family (see Zinn, *Postwar* 138). Traditional gender roles were strengthened and stabilized by the rise of televisions and commercials. Although the term was not coined yet, “sexism” was common and widely accepted (see Shapiro 3). Throughout society, women, as well as homosexuals, were depicted as inferior and their opinions and voices were not taken seriously.

Popular culture, and specifically literature, changed after the war; a wider variety of authors and topics which were treated in works of literature emerged. Similarly, the size of the audience and its social diversity expanded (see Halliwell 55). The Beat Generation, which was highly influenced by Jack Kerouac and his style of writing, gained a large following among people interested in the margins of society.

Drawing from the historical background, the concepts of race, racial disparities, and racism as well as the concepts of sex, gender, gender roles, and sexism are being set into the context of the story of *On the Road*. The idealization and rejection of racial characteristics, as well as the notion of “whiteness”, and why “being white” is portrayed

as a habit as well as a burden, will be discussed in the first part of the thesis. Furthermore, aspects of individualization and the voice of racial minorities will be analyzed. In this context, it is discussed how racial minorities are represented and to what extent their opinions and views matter for the development of the story. Throughout the story, the protagonists portrayed in *On the Road* demonstrate both idealization as well as rejection of racial characteristics. Although the book is widely praised for breaking up common conventions of racism, it will be shown that the characters of the story engage in many acts of racism and they participate in the reproduction of racial prejudice and discrimination. However, the protagonists seem to be only partially aware of their actions, as they “filter [their] perceptions through white culture’s frames of reference” (Mikelli 62). Acts and perceptions of racism and their significance in regard with development of the story and the characters will be addressed and analyzed. It will be demonstrated how members of racial minorities are generalized and stereotypically described and how their lives are either romanticized or judged as irrelevant. As will be shown, the protagonists occasionally envy members of racial minorities. At the same time, they are not appreciated as being individuals who have voices and opinions of themselves. Sal’s struggle with his “whiteness” and with his identity in relation to the issue of racism will complement the first part of the analysis.

When it comes to gender issues and the depiction of men and women in *On the Road*, the story shows significant differences in the depiction of male and female characters. As will be demonstrated, men are mobile, “on the road” and free to travel, while women are either characterized as stationary and bound to the home and responsible for raising children or, in the rare instances where women joined men on the road, often depicted as a burden and a hindrance for the men’s freedom and carelessness. The male protagonists in *On the Road* embrace traditional gender roles which were prevalent in the mid-twentieth century, albeit the book is praised for its stance against conservatism and its challenging character toward normative, mainstream traditions and conformism (see Ganser 46). Both the notions of subversion as well as reproduction of gender roles can be identified throughout the story. Especially the character of Sal Paradise oscillates between subverting and reproducing (traditional) gender roles. Moreover, the dichotomy between men and women in *On the Road* will be analyzed. In particular, it will be demonstrated how male

treat female characters and it will be discussed if the protagonists are aware of gender disparities. Furthermore, it will be discussed to what extent the representation of women in the novel differs from that of men. In this context, it will be described how the depiction of different genders is influenced by society and the male narrator of the story. The same questions arise with regard to the representation of the encounters with homosexual men in the story.

As will be discussed in chapter 5.1.1, homosexuality is depicted in a far more progressive way than what would be suspected from a novel of the 1950s (see Bell 140-142). The present thesis will demonstrate that the representation of homosexuality is characterized by ambivalence: The protagonist Sal, who engages with homosexual men on different levels either admires their unconventional lifestyle and their subversion of dominant ideologies, or rejects and even threatens them as a result of the confrontation with “his own sexuality [...]” (Bell 140).

In chapter 5.3, the interconnectedness of gender, mobility and domesticity will be analyzed. According to Enevold (2000), traveling and being on the road has always been a male territory, dominated by male presence, a domain where women are rarely present and where they “are othered” (409). As will be shown, this paradigm can be identified throughout the story of *On the Road*. The male characters, in particular the protagonists, Sal and Dean, treat women in a misogynistic manner, either by insulting or by taking advantage of them sexually or financially. In those rare instances where men are joined by women on their journey, women are described as annoying, complaining and slowing down the process of traveling. On the other hand, there are the examples of female characters who are taken advantage of, either by exploiting them financially or to have sex with them. One prominent example of abandonment which does not affect or even include a female character, will be discussed and it will be demonstrated that not only women can be the target of rejection and also male friendships are vulnerable and can be exploited.

2. Methodology

This chapter explains the methods and approaches that will be applied in order to conduct the analysis of the given topics and set them into their social and historical background.

Jack Kerouac wrote the first draft of *On the Road*, reportedly within three weeks in April of 1951. This first draft, the so-called “Scroll” was written on a continuous roll of paper, without margins or any paragraphs. That version of the story “The Original Scroll” was not published until 2007, the 50th anniversary of the publication of the edited and revised version in 1957. This thesis bases its analysis, descriptions and references on the published version of *On the Road* from 1957 by Viking Press.

The main method that will be used in this thesis is the method of close reading, also known as close textual analysis. The primary text, *On the Road*, will be analyzed on the basis of its characters, their actions and how these actions influence, if at all, the development of the story. The analysis will not only draw from the content of the text, but equally so from the form and stylistic aspects.

How do the characters in the novel act, based on their social, economic and personal background? In addition, the question arises, what the motives and intentions behind actions regarding racism or sexism are and how these motives and intentions can be analyzed and put into a broader context. Therefore, the method of character analysis will be applied; with Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty being the main characters in the novel, these two will specifically be looked at. Sal Paradise is also the first-person narrator of the story, hence, everything presented in the story is presented through his eyes and influenced, respectively filtered, by his own opinions and beliefs (see Enevold 61). These aspects of subjectivity and filtered perception must be kept in mind when dealing with the analysis. Questions regarding the social and historical background of characters, as well as, the development of characters in the course of the story will be answered and interpreted.

Moreover, interactions between characters will be analyzed, both among characters who are equivalent with regards to their social group, i.e. male characters belonging to the same racial majority, as well as between characters who are considered belonging to different groups. A large part of the analysis will deal with the

question how members of the racial majority treat members of racial minorities. It will be analyzed if these interactions conform to historical conditions and to the traditional values of the 1950s, or if, as might be expected given the history of the Beats, these interactions and encounters reflect the unconventional approach the main characters pursue throughout the whole story. In order to respond to these questions the general perception of members of racial minority groups must be acknowledged, as well as the motives leading to certain utterances and actions, especially in connection with racial minority groups. Therefore, statements and their allocated meanings will be dissected, brought into context and analyzed in accordance with the character's respective social background and personality. In addition, the present document will show how the protagonists explained or justified their utterances and actions and respond to the question if these utterances and actions can be based on a specific justification. Especially the character of Dean Moriarty, frequently makes statements which do not provide specific background and must therefore be analyzed according to the context such as Dean's prior statements and his general stance on certain issues.

In addition, statements and utterances are analyzed in connection with their form and stylistic presentation. In this respect, the question arises to what extent the representation of members of the considered in-group of the main male characters differ from characters belonging to minority groups when it comes to stylistic and formal considerations. Dean Moriarty, as the main character besides the narrator Sal Paradise, is depicted using the most examples of direct speech, whereas members of racial minorities and female characters are in the majority of the cases represented through indirect speech. This shows, on the one hand, the low status they hold with the narrator, and makes it on the other hand difficult to dissect and set their statements into context. In order to analyze speech acts by racial and gender minorities, it is necessary to put them in relation to speech acts by members of the majority or dissect indirect speech acts provided by the narrator of the story.

3. Historical and social setting

The present thesis explores notions of race and gender in Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road*. In order to base the analysis on a proper understanding of the social and historical background portrayed by the novel, the events and conditions that were prevailing at the time, are being examined in this chapter. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, the United States, and the whole world, were recovering from the impact and implications of the second World War. Members of the army were returning home. The economy and industry needed to shift its focus from wartime products to peacetime and consumer friendly products. Moreover, the threat of a resurrection of conflicts burdened and influenced political decisions. The United States faced another issue, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt passed away unexpectedly and then vice-president Harry S. Truman had to take over the duties of the president (see Wallenfeldt 1). The dropping of atomic bombs on Japan in August of 1945 marked a definite end for the U.S. military involvement in the war.

3.1. Postwar America in the mid-twentieth century

Following the end of the war, the United States ran the risk of finding themselves in domestic economic hardships. Transitioning from a wartime to a peacetime economy proved difficult. Many private consumer goods were rationed during the war while the demand for war materials increased and in effect reduced unemployment and helped raising the gross domestic product (GDP). According to E. Ray Canterbury (2013), military expenditures peaked "at nearly half of the GDP during 1943-1944" (76). This all changed drastically immediately after the end of the war. America's economy was forced to transition from a war-driven industry to a "peacetime platform" (Canterbury 77). A considerable number of workers were laid off throughout almost all branches of manufacturing industries, during a time "hundreds of thousands of soldiers were going home and expecting to find jobs" (77).

The military was reduced to 1.5 million men in 1947. Although "the navy and army air forces remained the world's strongest" (Wallenfeldt 5), the United States were prone to fall into a depression with "massive unemployment" (6) of the armed forces

and the general public. Therefore, President Truman proposed his program to help stabilize the precarious situation. His plan consisted of a 21-point program from a public housing legislation to a Fair Employment Practices Act, which would prevent discrimination in hiring. Subsequently, Congress rejected almost all of President Truman's proposals and only passed the Employment Act of 1946 to help ensure full employment (see Wallenfeldt 6).

The recession following the war and the transition from wartime to a peacetime industry only lasted for eight months and the economy recovered rapidly. Private companies were the main drivers for an increasing GDP. War material and war plants were sold to private companies and put to a different use which led to an increase of production of consumer goods and "created millions of new jobs" (Wallenfeldt 6). Howard Zinn (1973) argues that the postwar years were also characterized by a shift in the wealth distribution between rich, middle-class and poor Americans.

From 1945 onwards, the United States saw an incomparable increase in production of goods and services and therefore a significant rise of wealth. The distribution of wealth "continued in the historic American pattern:" (Zinn, *Postwar* 135), the rich became even richer while the poor received only little of the overall increase in wealth. Middle-class prosperity grew, since jobs were widely available and well-paid, and American industry produced more consumer goods than ever before. Subsequently, this era was dubbed the Golden Age of Capitalism (United Nations 23). An unequal distribution of wealth and power also existed with regard to America's companies. A small amount of corporations controlled the majority of manufacturing wealth, while small and middle-sized companies were frequently "absorbed by" (135) bigger companies.

The consequences of unequally distributed wealth were prevalent for millions of Americans and influenced every aspect of everyday life. The amount of money available to individuals determined, among other aspects, their housing situation, safety issues, medical treatment and how they were treated by the justice system (see Zinn, *Postwar* 137). This situation did not change for the bottom tenth of the population over the course of the years to come. Millions of Americans lived close to poverty, while the upper and middle classes were able to use and enjoy the newly built "highways, motels, restaurants, and office buildings" (138). The American middle-class started into a more prosperous life. Jobs and housing were widely available and

affordable. Companies produced a large amount of consumer goods and people in general gained access to a large variety of new products and services (see Pursell 99).

The role of women for years to come was established after the war. Since the middle class was thriving, more and more people moved into suburban houses and started a family (see Pursell 115). Women's roles included caring for and nurturing the children and being responsible for the entire household. Men spent the day working in corporations and their main responsibility within the family was to provide for the financial needs. Women were seen as the suburban middle-class housewives, and companies and advertisements catered to and strengthened this picture even further. The number of marriages and births of children grew significantly which also led to a growing number of new houses built. In 1949, "there were 1.4 million housing starts, and in 1950, another 1.9 million" (22), which led to numerous new communities and a growth of the American suburbs.

Companies and corporations catered to the new-found sedentism with advertisements and magazine articles tailored to middle-class families and households. Consumer products experienced a boost like never before, and commodities of everyday life were produced in mass, demanded and purchased by many more people than in the previous years, including the prewar years (see Pursell xiv). Not only everyday consumer goods relied on mass production, also houses and homes themselves were results of mass production, pioneered by William Levitt and Fritz B. Burns. "Houses like Fords", titled Harper's magazine already in 1934, referring to Henry Ford's method of mass production of automobiles. Burns perfected the mass-produced house by building "788 identical houses" (Pursell 24) and by "leaving some of the work for the new owners" (24). Along with these newly-built homes came the demand for many more amenities of modern civilization. Every household strove to have running water, a toilet within the building and at least a radio, or in later years a television set. Mass-culture and mass-consumerism was established and on the rise.

3.1.1. Popular culture

Popular culture exhibited considerable growth in the postwar years. People were widely employed and life for most was more prosperous than before. Therefore, culture, especially popular culture was more widely consumed than during the wartime.

The postwar affluence brought an “unprecedented consumer boom” (Jones, McCarthy, and Murphy 3) which was primarily led by television, which became the dominant means of consumption with the beginning of the 1950s. Television transformed the way of how people were consuming popular culture in the American households, and was for a large part responsible for the creation of values, cultural phenomena and modernity. The number of televisions in American households grew considerably. The 1950s also saw a rise of numerous other amenities of modernity. These included “air travel; two-car families and a greatly expanded highway system for them to drive on; supermarkets and fast food” (4). Such developments influenced and transformed the American culture for decades.

Daniel Horowitz (2012) argues that American intellectuals in the 1950s saw the risk of fast consumer goods spreading across America. It was feared that corporations could use the newly gained wealth and outlook for a better life which many people strove for after the war, to influence and exploit middle-class families and trick them into buying “commercial goods and experiences that offered false satisfactions” (Horowitz 19). In addition, the fear of communist influence was pervasive in numerous aspects of everyday life. This included popular culture and consumer products and services. Some observers feared that this “consumer culture” could undermine the free will and free society of America.

Regarding American literature, the early 1950s marked a “transitional period” (Halliwell 51). A number of American authors, among them Jack Kerouac, changed the way they wrote books and, thereby, transformed the perceptions of their readers. Halliwell states that “Jack Kerouac privileged personal experience over social responsibility” (53). It should be kept in mind that the role of writers and authors as rebels during the 1950s should not be overplayed, “when the climate of censorship made it difficult for writers to offer direct social commentary” (53), especially in the early years of the decade.

The rise of the paperback books after the second World War marked a change in the consumption of books and stories and gave rise to new genres like science-fiction and romance. Furthermore, the introduction of paperback books and the re-issuing of fiction enabled “the young William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac to find a readership” (Halliwell 55). Up to 1955, paperback books were only available by mail order or from a drugstore, later “they could be easily purchased from bookstores” (55).

On the Road serves as a representative example of a novel written in the early 1950s. If the fiction of this era, as Halliwell argued, could be considered a “direct reflection of gender roles, then it would seem that both sexes were uncomfortable with middle-class suburban life” (62). Furthermore, the postwar era marked the emergence of the anti-hero throughout fiction, exemplified by Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*.

3.1.2. The Beat Generation

In 1944, the term “Beat” was coined, allegedly, by Herbert Huncke. Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs and Jack Kerouac were the main figures of the Beat Movement, later named the “Beat Generation” in a New York Times article in November of 1952, by John Holmes. Although the term “Generation” was seen as “problematic and imprecise” (Weinreich 74) for describing the Beat Movement, it became widely used and accepted in later years. The three main representatives of the Beat Generation, Ginsberg, Burroughs and Kerouac were authors who deviated from traditional ways of writing in order to establish their own style and leave conventions behind. The new style these authors exhibited included spontaneous writing, without revision; best exemplified with Jack Kerouac’s original scroll of *On the Road*, which he, allegedly, wrote within three weeks. Kerouac saw revision as in conflict with his belief that language should be “pure, natural, unadulterated” (Weinreich 77) and therefore perceived revision as lying. It took Kerouac several years to find a publisher and finally be able to publish the finished version. In a letter Jack Kerouac wrote to Neal Cassady, the real-life person represented as the character Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*, he emphasized that he “yearn[s] to be non-literary” (qtd. in Hale 78). Furthermore, he said that “I have nothing to offer but the words that spring from my heart and mind in this enormous story” (qtd. in Hale 78). His style of writing became known as “spontaneous prose” and he argued that his work was a product of

jazz and bop, in the sense of a, say, tenor man drawing a breath, and blowing a phrase on his saxophone, till he runs out of breath, and when he does, his sentence, his statement’s been made ... That’s how I therefore separate my sentences, as breath, separations of the mind. (qtd. in Hale 78)

The word “beat” in its original sense meant “weary” or “tired” derived from “beaten down” used within the African-American community. With the rise of the Beat Movement, the term gained further meanings and connotations from “upbeat” to

“beatific” and later also derived connotations from musical senses. Jack Kerouac insisted that “Beat” for him meant something spiritual, even religious. In his mind the meaning of Beat was also connected “to a Catholic beatific vision, the direct knowledge of God enjoyed by the blessed in heaven” (Charters viii). This was his response to questions of reporters and journalists who pressured him to explain and define the term “Beat” to help them understand the meanings and implications of the Beat Generation. One of Jack Kerouac’s friends, John Clellon Holmes, wrote a novel titled “The Beat Generation” which included conversations between Holmes, Ginsberg and Kerouac verbatim, although he changed the names of the protagonists. Kerouac was mad and furious over Holmes’ book, since he was, for many years, not able to write about his travels and experiences with his friends, and Holmes published a nearly one-on-one narration of his real-life experiences. Holmes however, was able to understand Kerouac’s religious views on the term “Beat”, since the characters in Kerouac’s *On the Road* were on a quest to find their inner self and although they were rushing across the country, “their real journey was inward” (qtd. in Charters xxix).

In October of 1957, the year in which *On the Road* was published, Jack Kerouac said in an interview that he guessed he was the one who named his group the “Beat Generation”. The group of the “Beat Generation” did not only comprise writers, but “everyone from fifteen to fifty-five who digs everything, man” (Kerouac qtd. in Hale 80). “Beat means beatitude, not beat up” (80). He claimed further that the Beat Generation loved and “digged” everything and they were spiritual and owed debt to African American language and music. For years to come, Jack Kerouac remained the main spokesperson of the Beat Generation. He appeared at public readings and television interviews and wrote magazine articles telling stories about him and his friends, mainly John Holmes and Allen Ginsberg. He described how the three of them came up with a vision “of a generation of crazy, illuminated hipsters suddenly rising and roaming America, serious, bumming, and hitchhiking everywhere, ragged, beatific, beautiful in an ugly, graceful way” (Hale 81). Kerouac, on the other hand, proved that he was an inconsistent representative of the Beats, when he, for instance, appeared drunk and weary on William Buckley’s television show.

With the media attention growing, the Beats gained a large following among white middle-class young people who were actively seeking the margins of society and aspired to a life full of new and unknown experiences. In the following years the Beats

were transformed “into their caricature, the beatniks” (82). Within a short time, beatniks appeared in almost all areas of popular culture, from a Life magazine article with the title “The Only Rebellion Around: But the Shabby Beats Bungle the Job in Arguing, Sulking, and Bad Poetry”, to Bob Hope’s television show and even cartoons (qtd. in Hale 82). With their typical clothes and type of styling, the beatniks were “an instantly recognizable, hip-talking social type” (82). The beatniks’ admiration for jazz and black slang bore racial assumptions within. Blackness meant freedom, possibilities and, last but not least, joy, as exemplified in *On the Road*. When Sal Paradise walks through the black neighborhoods of Denver, he says that “there was excitement and the air was filled with the vibration of really joyous life that knows nothing of disappointment and ‘white sorrows’ and all that!” (Kerouac 164). Middle-class white beatniks turned to black music and black communities in order to reject their own way of living and explore new possibilities and a new lifestyle.

3.2. Issues of race in the late 1940s and early 1950s

Following World War II and the defeat of Nazi spokesmen who justified racial superiority, President Harry Truman appointed a Committee on Civil Rights in December 1946. This committee was “to inquire into and to determine whether and in what respect current law-enforcement measures and the authority and means possessed by Federal, State, and local governments may be strengthened and improved to safeguard the civil rights of the people” (United States, Executive Office of the President [Harry S. Truman]. Executive Order 9808).

The report of the committee lists numerous recommendations concerning racial disparities. Most of these recommendations were based on political and economic reasons and to a lesser extent on moral reasons. One of the national economic reasons was concerned with the financial costs of discrimination and found that “[t]he United States can no longer afford this heavy drain upon its human wealth, its national competence” (qtd. in Zinn, *Postwar* 171). Further recommendations included the installation of a permanent Commission on Civil Rights, a congressional legislation against voting discrimination and “the expansion of the civil-rights section of the Department of Justice” (171). President Truman urged Congress to work on and

implement the recommendations brought forward by the committee's report. The recommendations were, however, rejected by Congress.

In 1948, shortly before the presidential election, Truman issued an executive order demanding the armed forces to implement measures to ensure racial equality. As Howard Zinn in 2001 noted, "it took over a decade to complete the desegregation in the military" (Zinn, *People's History* 449). There were many more instances where reality was lagging behind policies made by either executive orders or court orders. The segregation of schoolchildren was judicially ended by the court ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*, which states that the doctrine of "separate but equal", an order which allowed racial segregation in almost all public spaces since the 1890s, "has no place" in public schools (450). In 1965, ten years after this court decision, "more than 75 percent of the school districts in the South remained segregated" (450). The "separate but equal" doctrine was finally ended by a court ruling in 1954. Although the real-life consequences of such rulings were hardly recognized in a timely manner, the message sent to the whole world, that the United States had prohibited racial segregation, was of great importance and set an exemplary model.

A considerable number of middle-class citizens in postwar America, especially those who immigrated to the United States during the war or shortly thereafter, strove to comply with and maintain the picture of the typical "white middle-class American family". In order to "assimilate, to become unobtrusive" (Harris x), immigrant families tried to blend in with the common American lifestyle and goals, which also included owning a house. Since city suburbs were flourishing after the war, houses were also widely available, but mainly to those, who conformed to the white, heteronormative, residential expectations. These expectations also corresponded to "the norms enforced by the mass media in the United States" (x), which laid out a set of rules and definitions which white, middle-class citizens were expected to follow. Harris recalled that her own grandparents, who were immigrants to the United States from Germany in 1933, faced those rules and expectations and

Like many other immigrants and upwardly mobile blue-collar and working-class Americans, they performed the cultural work required to establish solidly white identities. To be seen as other than white could be perilous and costly in a climate of nationwide and institutionalized racism, where anyone seen as 'other' could be denied housing, services, and societal benefits. (Harris x)

3.2.1. America's struggle with whiteness and racial disparities

After the second World War, it was widely agreed-upon that race and the notions of race that dominated the war, have no scientific basis. Nevertheless, structures persist in today's society which entail white privilege and benefit. New studies have shown that today's racism is much more silent and less obvious, sometimes even unconscious. Ansell argues that institutions "are recognized for being sometimes unintentionally racist, and even ostensibly race-neutral, but destructive and reinforcing of dominance nonetheless" (130). This new type of white racist attitudes are not publicly expressed but affect many parts of daily life, ranging from welfare, over housing to environmental racism. Recent events in the United States show that everyday racism is still present and widely accepted, especially within right-wing groups and policies.

Following the horrible crimes of the Holocaust during World War II, institutionalized racism and its implications, like segregation and colonialism, came to an end in most parts of the world during the 1950s and 1960s. The dismantling of the "formal systems built upon white supremacy" did not eliminate racial attitudes and ideologies (Ansell 165). Notions of white supremacy can be found in today's politics and societies, although it is hidden.

Whiteness as an academic field of study emerged in the mid-1990s in American social science. Some earlier scholarships dealt with topics like "white attitudes" or "white political organizations", but did not examine whiteness as a socio-historical construction. One key reason for the establishment of the research into whiteness was the intention to mitigate the power and superiority of whiteness towards other racial groups and the general belief that whiteness is the normal state of affairs and taken for granted (see Ansell 161-162).

The notion of "white supremacy" encapsulates the beliefs, attitudes and policies according to which the white race is superior to other racial groups. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, white supremacy was supported by scientific racism, and created the foundation for "social stratification and the restriction of citizenship rights throughout the Western world", which subsequent "was used as a justification for slavery and colonialism" (Ansell 164).

3.2.2 The Beat Generation's stance on race and racism

It should be noted that “the Beat Generation adopted the term ‘Beat’ from the systematically oppressed—and thus validly marginalized—black jazz musicians of the 1940s” (Collopy). By using this cultural black term in order to describe restlessness and the rejection of conformism and traditional values, the Beat Generation undermined racial oppression and hardships and shifted the focus to a romanticized perception of racial issues. Collopy states further that

Kerouac's claims that marginalized American life is beautiful because of its systematically imposed struggle and that jazz music is beautiful because bop singers have experienced hardship highlight his misguided admiration as he personally extends his societal superiority by appropriating and popularizing bop culture. (Collopy)

Similarly to Sal Paradise in *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac himself developed a romantic relationship with a Mexican woman. Although witnessing the harsh life of minority groups first hand, he romanticizes their hardships and “adopts a wistful, romantic idea of simple, honest labor” (Collopy), and similar to Sal's attitude toward picking grapes in California, Kerouac himself does not recognize his privileged position within the laborer community - “he is there willingly while his fellow workers have been left with no other option and thus must perform the menial, poor-paying work” (Collopy).

According to Collopy, it is Jack Kerouac's privilege as a white male that makes his statements and actions reprehensible. “American society, Kerouac says, desperately needs an infusion of the qualities embodied by her oppressed minorities: the existential joy, wisdom, and nobility that comes from suffering and victimization” (Panish 107), which is interpreted by Collopy as Kerouac not only romanticizing the lives and hardships of minorities, but also believing “that their suffering is necessary” (Collopy). Jon Panish (1994) argues that authors like Jack Kerouac perpetuated racist ideology by romanticizing and downplaying the lives of racial minorities “and raiding their culture and contemporary experience for the purpose of enhancing their own position as white outsiders” (108).

3.3. Issues of gender in the late 1940s and early 1950s

In order to define the term “gender”, it is very often contrasted with the concept of “sex” and explained in direct comparison to one another. Andrew Edgar (2008) argues that “sex (female/male) is a matter of biology, our gender (feminine/masculine) is a matter of culture” (139).

Judith Butler proposes a different approach to gender. She discussed the concept of performance in combination with gender and with sex. In her book *Gender Trouble* from 1990, she introduced the idea that gender is ‘performative’ and produced by a continued and repeated performance. Butler argues that gender roles as well defined structures do not exist. Instead they are only taken for granted “because gender roles are performed and copied and repeated (iterated), and have been repeated so many times and with such daily frequency that we come to experience gender as a hard, inescapable, reality” (qtd. in Evans 162). She argues further, that people are forced to perform gender roles in all social settings throughout our lives. Since these performances are deeply engraved in our everyday lives and behaviors, they are not consciously acted out, but subconsciously embedded in our conduct.

The notion of heteronormativity was analyzed and examined by anthropologist Gayle Rubin in 1975, who criticized that heterosexuality is an institution and perceived as the only possible “normal” standard. He argued against the common conception that gender is based on one sex and “that sexual desire be directed towards the other sex” (qtd. in Evans 118). The actual term “heteronormativity” was first coined in 1991 by Michael Warner and was meant to replace the concept of homophobia, which had many limitations “as an analytical category” (Evans 120). Monique Wittig explored the term “obligatory heterosexuality” and said that “the straight mind” and the “straight society” can only function in comparison and confrontation with “others” (see Evans 118). “Obligatory heterosexuality” oppresses these “others”, not only gay men and lesbians, but “it oppresses all women and many categories of men, all those who are in the position of the dominated” (qtd. in Evans 118). Evans argues that the term “heteronormativity” helped to shift the focus away from individual attitudes and beliefs to a new understanding of cultures and societies. This new understanding helps to “deconstruct the heterosexual/homosexual binary”, and breaks up the “normative notions of sexuality and gender”, therefore having the potential to unite people

identifying either as heterosexual or homosexual and furthermore “recognizing that heteronormativity and heterosexuality are not one and the same” (121).

In the years after the war, the gender gap in the United States was omnipresent and was even more established and consolidated in the following years and decades. Jobs were widely available, and people generally had more money and wealth than ever before. As a consequence, many people, especially middle-class families, moved to the suburbs and were able to settle down and tend to family life (see Pursell 21). Traditions were established by everyday life. During the war, many women rushed into the workforce and paid for their own expenses, while many men fought in the war and therefore were not able to support the workforce in the United States. After the end of the war, a large amount of propaganda which promoted the return to traditional gender roles was set in place. It spread the notion that “the gender displacements of the war [...] were only temporary” (22). Men were supposed to earn money and provide financially for the family, and were able to do so due to well-paid jobs that were up-and-coming across the United States. On the other side were women, who were supposed to stay at home and take care of the household and the family. The picture of a typical housewife and mother, who cared for the family, was painted during the postwar years and can be found in countless advertisements and in the popular culture of that time (see Pursell 34).

Despite this division of the spheres of activity according to gender, reality showed that many women also worked outside the family home in factories and companies across the United States. As Arthur Flemming mentioned, women were often only seen as being able to take jobs as assistants and engineering aides, but for him it was important that women were fully employed as scientists. Arthur Flemming was an official of the presidential Office of Defense Mobilization (see Eisenmann 16).

World War II changed the views on women in the workforce. During the war many women were needed to join the workforce in order to fill the gap that young men, who were deployed in the war, left unoccupied. Although the gender gap was reinstalled after the end of the war, when many soldiers returned home and were looking for jobs, a considerable amount of women stayed within the workforce. Many women tried to become employed, while maintaining the image of the homemaker and mother (see Eisenmann 13).

3.3.1 The Beat Generation in connection with masculinity and gender issues

According to Barbara Ehrenreich (1983), the Beats challenged and subverted the main ideas of 1950s traditional gender roles. They rejected the work environment of white-collar employees, as well as, the growing suburbanised family life. *On the Road* illustrates all of these instances of rejection and subversion by the mere fact of “telling a story of a male narrator who does the opposite of all traditional male expectations” (Tan 61). The main characters in the novel, Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty reject traditional responsibilities of being the breadwinners of a nuclear family by traveling through the United States, and furthermore to Mexico, instead. Interestingly enough, the Beats rejected traditional expectations toward men, but at the same time reinforced women’s role in society (see Tan 64). “By emphasizing the importance of masculinity, the Beats diminished the role of women altogether” (64). In *On the Road*, this observation is illustrated in numerous instances. Women in the novel are one-dimensional characters, depicted almost always in connection with a man or a place (see Cresswell, *Resistance* 258). In the 1950s, women were expected to take care of the household and the children, while men were required “to grow up, marry and support their wives. To do anything else was less than grown-up, and the man who willfully deviated was judged to be somehow ‘less than a man’” (Ehrenreich 11-12).

According to Ehrenreich, the Beats’ understanding of rebellion against society included walking away from responsibilities (of the home and family), in order to join male friends on the road and to hang out with “[...] junkies, male prostitutes, thieves, would-be poets and actual musicians” (56). Furthermore, the Beats defined their own version of masculinity, “highlight[ing] the idea of male friendship and its importance over any other relationship” (Tan 61), refusing the idea of the “expected breadwinner role in the 1950s” (61). Kerouac’s *On the Road*, which is based on his real-life adventures with his fellow Beats, emphasizes male friendships over traditional family values and roles, while the characters in the novel make up their own nuclear family on the road. Lianne Tan (2016) states that “[t]he Beats’ emphasis on relationships between men, both in their work and in reality, diminished the cultural importance of family and men’s role in it” (62).

When it comes to homosexuality, the Beats openly confronted the issues and circumstances that were believed to be connected with homosexuality in the 1940s and 1950s. There was the general belief and fear that men who were not engaged in fulfilling marriages and the nuclear family, posed a threat to national security, by being “tempted by ‘degenerative seductions’, including both Communism and homosexuality” (Tan 63). Evidently, members of the Beat Generation did not share this fear. Instead, they chose a lifestyle of freedom and honesty and accepted homo- and bisexuality within their ranks. The revised version of *On the Road* from 1957, does not explicitly mention homosexuality between the main characters, all original “references to homosexuality were cut” (McDowell 415) but it can be argued that “its sexual ambivalence and indeed homoeroticism remains” (415).

4. Race and the depiction of whiteness and inequalities in *On the Road*

Race, racism and racial inequalities play a considerable part in *On the Road*. Although racism is never explicitly mentioned or discussed in the novel, it can be seen in fact in countless instances throughout the story. Almost all characters encounter racial issues in the course of the story of *On the Road*. These encounters are of essential importance for most of the plot lines, and sometimes even lead to character development. At times, they are the subject of retrospective reflections, especially with the character of Sal Paradise. Statements regarding racial minorities made throughout the story are a direct and clear representation of how racism affected society in the postwar years in the United States. Rachel Ligairi (2009), points out that the character of Sal Paradise sympathizes with racial minorities and even engages in a love relationship with a member of a racial minority group, which was uncharacteristic and even “naively romantic” (139) for the time of the late 1940s. On the other hand, however, Sal omits the difficult conditions and restrictions these minorities were facing on an everyday basis. Oppression, segregation and disadvantages in everyday life do not play much of a role in *On the Road*. The lives of African-Americans are praised and depicted as the epitome of carelessness and a joyful life. Nevertheless, the main (white) characters in the book experience what it means to be white and that it can be a relief as much as a burden to belong to the dominant group, and that it seems nearly impossible to overcome racial conventions imposed by society and history.

4.1. Idealization and rejection of racial characteristics

The idealization and rejection of racial characteristics in *On the Road* go hand in hand and alternate with each other in, sometimes, fast succession. In the actions and interactions of the character of Sal Paradise, it can be observed that members of racial minorities were dealt with in various ways. Sal treats individuals who fall into this category mostly with respect and as almost being on the same level as him and, as mentioned before, he sometimes sympathizes with minorities in a manner unusual for the postwar era and idealizes and romanticizes their lives. Nevertheless, Sal's point

of view is highly influenced by his environment and his own history and social upbringing.

Sal Paradise is a white, young man, whose ambition it is to write novels and stories, and there is not one single doubt in his head that he will succeed with his plans, when he says, "I was a young writer and I wanted to take off. Somewhere along the line I knew there'd be girls, visions, everything; somewhere along the line the pearl would be handed to me" (Kerouac 9). His "whiteness" is unconsciously engraved in all of his actions and most of his utterances but especially in his thinking and perceptions of the world. His ethnic background not only carries with it the potential of a glorious future, but it also affords Sal a certain freedom to explore, experiment and invent himself in the light of racial inequalities.

Eftychia Mikelli (2011) argues that Sal has the power to put on different identities from different races, when he claims that in a way he is a Mexican when working on the cotton-field with Terry, a Mexican girl Sal meets on the bus to Los Angeles and immediately falls in love with. "The racial cross-dressing that is at work here reveals Sal's power to choose the persona he prefers at will. Sal's identification with the Mexicans can indeed be viewed as a passing whim and suggests a certain playfulness on his part, as it lasts for only fifteen days" (Mikelli 62). Sal can take on and off this Mexican identity whenever he wishes, which stands in stark contrast to the "real" Mexicans he works with. While he is picking cotton in California with Terry, he mentions that the other people in the camp on the field "thought [he] [were] a Mexican, of course; and in a way [he] [is]" (Kerouac 88), he also identifies, in a way, with African-Americans who also pick cotton, when he says he was "[s]ighing like an old Negro cotton-picker, [he] reclined on the bed and smoked a cigarette" (87). As has been stated above, these examples show Sal's idealized and romanticized point of view and attitudes toward racial inequalities and hardships racial minorities faced. By imagining himself as being part of the Mexican people, he does not only undermine his own background and descent, but moreover, by presuming to be Mexican, in light of all the privileges he enjoys, he does injustice to the difficulties and struggles Mexicans and African-Americans faced due to racism and segregation in the postwar era. Mikelli states further that "[t]his is blatant distortion of history on Sal's part as he romanticizes an era of slavery. The African-Americans are not viewed objectively as poor, oppressed and

exploited people. Rather, they are modelled upon a misconceived image of a past situation and are invested with an unlikely meekness and placidity” (Mikelli 58).

However, his wide freedom of movement and autonomy do not contribute to the sense of privilege or even happiness that Sal feels. Instead, in the course of the story, Sal finds himself alone, weary and reflecting. He questions and eventually regrets being white as well as his thoughts and his behavior which he deems influenced and shaped by his “whiteness”, as can be seen when Sal wanders through the colored neighborhoods of Denver and wishes that he would be “anything but what [he] was so drearily, a ‘white man’ disillusioned” (Kerouac 163).

Sal’s development from the beginning to the end of the story is characterized by self-reflections and by questioning his own actions and the resulting consequences. Exceptions to these considerations are analyzed and discussed later on. The fact that he is white is significant for Sal and it could be argued that his ethnicity obliges him, pushes him, but also restricts him - at the same time representing a subjugation as well as a protection. John Leland (2007) argues in this context that Sal, unlike Dean Moriarty, does not run away from “the messes he makes of his life” (6), but rather tries to find a way to cope with the challenges life handed him. He says that Dean and Sal have completely different starting points for their journeys, and even more so, different goals and outlooks what these journeys might mean for their personal development. While Dean is “the perfect guy for the road because he actually was born on the road” (Kerouac 3), Sal is more restrained and envisions his journey as “the dividing line between the East of my youth and the West of my future” (16), arguing that his journeys function as a means of personal growth and development. It could be argued that Sal has an appreciation for responsibility and accountability, though he does not always succeed in manifesting the latter. It seems as if he might see this appeal as caused by or as manifestation of his ethnic background.

It can be argued that Sal Paradise’s overall development is only minor, and compared to other characters in other novels, he does not change and develop at all throughout the story. Nevertheless, he experiences some changes that can be observed and analyzed. Many instances in the novel show Sal’s ever-increasing struggle with his own attitudes toward racial minorities. While he does not explicitly mention racial encounters in the beginning of the story, this changes, at the latest, when he meets Terry, the young Mexican girl, with whom he falls in love. Sal describes

their first encounter, and immediately mentions that she is Mexican, when he says: “I had bought my ticket and was waiting for the LA bus when all of a sudden saw the cutest little Mexican girl in slacks come cutting across my sight” (Kerouac 72). They spend some time together in Los Angeles and later move on to Terry’s family in Sabinal, where Terry and Sal end up picking cotton on a cotton-field. With Sal in the same position as a Mexican immigrant laborer, it could be argued that he understands and recognizes the hardships of such workers. What however distinguishes Sal from the real immigrant laborers is the fact that he is neither forced into this way of life by his descent nor by existential circumstances or moral obligations. He even envies the Mexican workers for their speed and accuracy. As with many instances, that will follow, Sal romanticizes the hard work and the forced labor of slavery. Sal’s “[...] desire to become like or merge with the margins that his own power has established, demonstrates the pitfalls of such romanticism” (Mermann-Jozwiak 98). While working on the fields, he describes his observations in a naive manner, which can be interpreted as being highly influenced by his own ranking in society.

There was an old Negro couple in the field with us. They picked cotton with the same God-blessed patience their grandfathers had practiced in ante-bellum Alabama; they moved right along their rows, bent and blue, and their bags increased. My back began to ache. But it was beautiful kneeling and hiding in that earth. (Kerouac 87)

The story line with Terry ends when Sal contemplates their common future but decides to go back home to New York again and to leave Terry behind, when he “feel[s] the pull of [his] own life calling [him] back” (Kerouac 89). Sal’s attitudes and behaviors toward Terry, her family and their (imposed) lifestyle shows, on the one hand, that his decisions regarding race and racism can be seen as rather progressive and liberal, when he, for example, takes on the role of the surrogate father for Terry’s child, and even refers to him as “my baby boy” (85). On the other hand, it must be noted that Sal’s opinions about minorities are often, as argued by Ligairi, characterized by romanticized and naive conceptions which lets him keep emotional distance to the hardships racial minorities faced (139). On this note it seems sensible to assume that for Sal, his encounter and his subsequent romance with Terry, do not imply any sustainable moral obligations, a fact which might shed a light on his perceptions on members of minorities and lies in stark contrast to him calling Terry’s baby his. Drawing from this, it can be derived that Sal’s concern for the situation of minorities does not

exceed a certain depth, and that while he is sympathetic to these groups, they are not primarily morally relevant to him but instead much more an object of interest to be looked at with pleasure from the outside. As becomes apparent from his decision to leave Terry and his work on the cotton-field behind and make his way back to New York, Sal's view on racial difficulties is mainly positioned on the outside, from his "white" point of view. He, unlike the people dependent on the work on the cotton-fields, and even more so the slaves being forced to work in the years and decades prior, has the ability and freedom to return to his more comfortable life whenever he wants.

As has already been indicated, Sal Paradise perceives his origins as a kind of burden, as something tyrannical that blocks certain avenues and renders some options inaccessible. This becomes evident when, later in the book, Sal finds himself thinking about Terry and imagining what their life would have looked like if they had decided to stay together. He regrets his decision to have left Terry, more or less, for the mere reason that they did not share the same (racial) background. When he walks alone and lonely through the streets of Denver he reminisces about his life and decisions and questions his own limitations which he considers as imposed on him due to his whiteness. The statement, "All my life I'd had white ambitions; that was why I'd abandoned a good woman like Terry in the San Joaquin Valley" (Kerouac 163), shows his painful realization. It seems noteworthy that these "white ambitions" which do obviously represent a radically fuzzy concept, lack on the one hand the concreteness of a well formulated goal or a system of values, but on the other hand exert a force strong enough to serve Sal as a credible retrospective explanation of his own decision to leave a woman he deems good. In the same instance he envies the lives of African-Americans and is "wishing [he] [was] a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for [him], not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night" (163).

While Sal thinks about all the joy and liveliness he witnessed during his stroll through the colored neighborhoods in Denver, in the same train of thought he ignores the harsh reality of racism and racial disparities, especially, African-Americans had to deal with in the postwar years. Hence, it can be argued that Sal's sympathy is not primarily oriented toward minorities and their lives as such, but mainly toward the romanticized fantasies he himself and white society brought upon racial minorities. It seems that he does not really understand nor seek to gain more profound insights into

the lives and hardships of racial minorities and that he does not even know what his own whiteness means and what implications result thereof.

Sal's desire for freedom "from obligations, from the law and police, from being tied to any one place or even any one woman" (Frederickson) is only possible because of the privileges society grants white males in America. In *On the Road*, this freedom is often shown in contrast to the lack of freedom people of minorities face. When Dean Moriarty and Sal travel to Mexico they see a little indigenous girl on the side of the road and Dean envisions her lack of possibilities, the lack of her possibility to travel, to see the world. His thought, "She'll never, never leave here and know nothing about the outside world. It's a nation. Think of the wild chief they must have" (Kerouac 271), demonstrates his understanding of this little girl's, and ultimately all her peoples', limitations and disadvantages in life. With the same statement, he also acknowledges his and Sal's own freedom without mentioning it explicitly and without questioning the apparent inequality. Moreover, Dean points out that her people "[...] off the road, over that bluff, miles back, must be even wilder and stranger, yeah, because the Pan-American Highway partially civilizes this nation on this road" (271), arguing that only Western culture, and their own way of living would bring civilization to indigenous peoples.

Dean and Sal look at the indigenous people along the road in Mexico merely from a spectator's point of view. There are a few encounters with indigenous people in Mexico which implicate that Native Americans are mainly perceived as shy, silent and backwardly. Dean and Sal are intrigued by these encounters and almost celebrate the people they meet along the way. "Dean drove on with his mouth hanging in awe, ten miles an hour, desirous to see every possible human being on the road" (271). One of Sal's first descriptions of indigenous people in Mexico is that

These people were unmistakably Indians and were not at all like Pedros and Panchos of silly civilized American lore - they had high cheekbones, and slanted eyes, and soft ways; they were not fools, they were not clowns; they were great, grave Indians and they were the source of mankind and the fathers of it. (Kerouac 255)

While from the perspective of a privileged white man, it might have been considered as an expression of respect and admiration, this assertion generalizes and diminishes indigenous peoples across the United States and Mexico. Sal compares these Mexican "Indians" with indigenous people he knows from the United States, who are,

from his perspective, “fools” and “clowns”. It is revealing that Sal regards himself as entitled to pass judgment on this group of people, whom he hardly knows. This also reflects Sal's attitude, according to which he, as a white man, stands above other groups in a hierarchical sense.

His perceived status and self-esteem are shown not only in his role as a judge over the value of a culture, but also in his role as an admirer of the exotic. The quote mentioned previously also emphasizes Dean and Sal's overall excitement about Mexico and that they “had finally found the magic land at the end of the road and we never dreamed the extent of the magic. [...] ‘What’ll we do? What’ll we do? Let’s move!’ We got out and went back to the car. One last glimpse of America across the hot lights of the Rio Grande bridge, and we turned our back and fender to it and roared off” (Kerouac 251). This glorification of foreignness, unusual and rebellious conventions can be observed in all of Sal and Dean's experiences, whether it be home in the U.S. or in Mexico. Both of them are on a constant journey to make new and unconventional experiences and meet and “dig” new people. Sal sets the scene in the beginning of the story when he says:

I shambled after as I've been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes ‘Awww!’ (Kerouac 7)

However, Sal and Dean seem unwilling to have this enthusiasm compromised by a more profound and conscious engagement with the "objects" of their shared experience, their conditions of life, nor the moral implications that the latter might have for both of them.

The indigenous people in Mexico are met with prejudices and attitudes by Dean and Sal that focus on their savagery, stupidity and the outward appearance. Sal notes that “[t]he Indians along the road began to be extremely weird. [...] They were short and squat and dark, with bad teeth; they carried immense loads on their backs” (Kerouac 270). Later when they come across some indigenous girls who try to sell them rock crystals, Dean is fascinated by them and their raggedness. Sal and Dean's description of these Native Americans is highly generalizing and objectifying. It can be

argued that the indigenous girls are perceived as almost the same way people look at animals in a zoo.

'Look at those eyes!' breathed Dean. They were like the eyes of the Virgin Mother when she was a child. [...] When they talked they suddenly became frantic and almost silly. In their silence they were themselves. 'They've only recently learned to sell these crystals, since the highway was built about ten years back - up until that time this entire nation must have been silent!' (Kerouac 271).

It is noticeable in such instances that these direct descriptions are always expressed by Dean, while Sal stays quiet and only describes their experiences in a broader sense. The reader does not get to know what Sal really thinks, on the one hand, about their encounters with indigenous people, and on the other hand, about Dean's remarks. Sal's reluctance to join in with Dean's observations can be observed on different levels. It could be argued that Sal has similar opinions about racial issues as Dean, since they have spent a considerable amount of time together and have faced similar circumstances. On the other hand, there are several instances in the book where Sal sympathizes and even identifies with racial minorities as has been described before, which does not apply to Dean. Viewed from another perspective, Dean might represent not so much an individual as a psychological structure: a reverberation of society's assumptions and prejudices, located in the protagonist's mind in a manner analogous to Freud's superego. Taking this interpretation as a starting point, it is possible to interpret Sal's silence in response to Dean's remarks as the manifestation of his inability to rise above the conformism he recognizes as false and to actively combat everyday racism.

Sal's inner struggles with his own whiteness and his attitudes toward racial minorities will be discussed in depth in the following section.

Dean's inability to see or recognize disparities and problems racial minorities faced during slavery in America is reflected in the parts of the book where he "digs" African-Americans and their lifestyle, primarily for living a life outside of the mainstream. He does not recognize that this marginalized lifestyle is a burden placed upon African-Americans and he does not consider the experiences of racism and segregation these people were faced with. It can be argued that Dean sees African-Americans solely as part of his entertainment and support for his rebellion against conformity, an interpretation supported by the lines: "Negroes were working in the hot

afternoon, stoking the ferry furnaces that burned red and made our tires smell. Dean dug them, hopping up and down in the heat" (Kerouac 127). Sal and Dean strive to fight conformism and rebel against all kinds of conservative views and common conceptions forced upon them by society and social norms, as can be seen by their unwanted encounters with the police and Sal's work as a barracks guard, which he does not take seriously and fails to meet basic requirements. Their rebellion is mainly targeted against rules and conventions of capitalism and conservatism and to a lesser degree against racial inequalities and its implications. There still is a difference between Dean and Sal regarding their view on racism and racial situations, and how they are handling them. Most of the time, Dean seems to act out of unreflected spontaneity when it comes to encounters with racial minorities. This only confirms his overall erratic, frantic and crazy behavior and attitude toward life and people. It can be argued that Dean perceives the role of members of racial minorities primarily as providers of entertainment, characterized by exoticism and otherness. As is shown multiple times throughout the story, Dean "digs" African-Americans, their music, their lifestyle and their alleged carefreeness. Throughout the story, "dig" becomes the commonly used term to show appreciation and the emphasis to embrace everything. As Jordan Bates put it, "'Digging' becomes a most appropriate metaphor: Dean and the others deepen and widen and unearth the meaning of their immediate experience with two eyes open and a tremendous hunger for life" (Bates). Sal describes Dean's obsession with African-Americans while Dean visits him and his family in Virginia, "[Dean] dodged a mule wagon; in it sat an old Negro plodding along. 'Yes!' yelled Dean. 'Yes! Dig him! Now consider his soul - stop awhile and consider.' As he slowed down the car for all of us to turn and look at the old jazzbo moaning along. 'Oh yes, dig him sweet' [...]" (Kerouac 102). When Dean and Sal are on the road, Dean repeatedly gets excited about encounters with members of racial minorities, especially African-Americans. "Dean was in ecstasies. 'Dig this guy, man! dig [sic] the way he sits there and don't move a bone and just balls that jack and can talk all night while he's doing it, only thing is he doesn't bother with talking, ah, man, the things, the things I could - I wish - oh, yes.'" (182).

4.2. Being white as a habit and a burden

Whiteness, as argued by Ansell (2013), “is the subject of a burgeoning literature or sometimes field of study (‘white studies’) that emerged in American social science in the mid-1990s” (162). In later studies the notion of “whiteness” has been seen as a socio-historical construct for the purpose, among others, “of displacing or eradicating whiteness, or at least rendering it less invisible” (162). The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “white” in connection with the racial meaning as “being a member of a group or race characterized by light pigmentation of the skin” and “of, relating to, characteristic of, or consisting of white people or their culture” (“White.” Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary).

In *On the Road* white privilege is not explicitly mentioned. By bypassing white privilege without comment, it can be argued, it is reconstituted as the norm. The freedom to travel and obtain a job or a place to live rather easily is portrayed as a lived normality among the white characters in the book and the existence of these privileges is not scrutinized in the story at all. Members of the white majority have internalized their privileges and advantages and take them for granted without even taking note of them. These internalized privileges can be observed throughout the novel in many instances. The normality as which they are perceived by the character of Sal Paradise is reflected in the fact that these privileges are not referred to as such and often are not mentioned at all, neither are injustice or discrimination. Instead, the narrative often bypasses descriptions of such circumstances and presents them as normal and given.

The self-evidence of their use of white privilege to maximize their own well-being displayed by Sal and Dean Moriarty as well as the fact that the narrator does not find their privilege worth mentioning suggests, that the hegemony of the white majority seems to appear to both of them to be a positive fact of life as it allows them a variety of freedoms and opportunities which are unavailable to minorities. However, as shown primarily by the character of Sal Paradise in the novel, whiteness and its perceived implications can be experienced as a burden and can be felt to trigger negative personal consequences. One example was mentioned before, when Sal leaves Terry behind, and later regrets his decision and reflects on his own whiteness which as he perceives it coerced him into this decision.

It could be argued that Sal's intention regarding Terry was merely to conquer her and to call her his own, and that he quickly loses interest after this goal has been met (see Mikelli 64). Mikelli argues further that the affair with Terry "was only an escapade" (64) and that Sal somehow admits that he was only "adventuring in the crazy American night" (Kerouac 91). However, there are also indications that Sal is pushed by his internalized conventionalism which leads him to the decision to leave Terry. He explains his decision with his "own life" calling him back, while being unable to access his actual, real intentions toward Terry. His intrinsic convictions make it impossible for him to follow his intention to stay with Terry. When he later in the book reflects on his "whiteness" and laments over his "white sorrows" (165), it can be seen that his decision to have "[...] abandoned a good woman like Terry [...]" (163) burdens and haunts him and therefore can be seen as a clear sign that his decisions are highly influenced by his racial and social background. Furthermore, it can be argued that his own will and conscious intentions are less profound in controlling and determining his actions than his intrinsic conventions. Although he is aware of his "whiteness" and his "white ambitions" (163), he is unable to overcome the limitations and burdens placed upon him. It can be argued that his culture and whiteness prevent him from gaining strength for self-expression and personal growth. He is unable to muster the necessary amount of mental strength to overcome what he sees as the cultural restrictions imposed on him as a white man. Furthermore, Sal sees himself being caught in the circumstances of his upbringing and cultural background and does not seem to find a way out of it.

Sal Paradise struggles with his own identity and takes to the road in order to find and acquire a (new) meaningful identity for himself. Sal is quite aware of his limitations regarding his own identity when he says, "I like too many things and get all confused and hung-up running from one falling star to another till I drop. [...] I had nothing to offer anybody except my own confusion" (Kerouac 113). Hilary Holladay (2009) states that Sal's confusion over his identity stems from his aspiration to somehow find a "finished" identity, rather than accepting that life is "a reality to be experienced" (159). The fact that Sal is in the privileged position to be able to "try on" new and different identities already indicates his actual (white) identity and therefore must not be ignored. From "I was a Mexican" (Kerouac 88) and "wishing I were a Negro" (163) to "a 'white man' disillusioned" (163), Sal strives to take on and try out

many different identities which shows his struggle and instability with his given identity. Mikelli argues that although Sal wants to discard his own white identity and exchange it with “an exotic Fellaheen one” (62), his understanding of minorities’ identities and the resulting disparities is rather limited and filtered “through [his] white culture’s frames of reference” (62).

Wandering through Denver’s colored neighborhood Sal says: “I wish I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a ‘white man’ disillusioned” (Kerouac 163). He is tired of his whiteness that he experiences as limiting and restricting and, in this instances especially, lead him to his sorrowful stroll, where he passes houses of African-Americans who seem happy and joyous, while he “was [...] wishing [he] could exchange worlds with the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America” (163). As can be observed from this line of thought, Sal naively romanticizes the lives of African-Americans, ignoring their problems and limitations facing racial inequalities. Racial minorities were facing many instances of racism during the postwar time and were highly marginalized, as can be exemplified by the well-known story of Rosa Parks, an African-American woman, who refused to vacate her seat in a bus to a white passenger. She was arrested for violating segregation laws (see Bredhoff 207).

Sal is not able to replicate his desired lifestyle, including madness and carelessness, which he is seeking throughout the course of the story in himself, he therefore projects it onto others, especially racial minorities, and tries to find a suitable identity for himself. On the one hand, he idealizes what he considers the characteristics and the lives of racial minorities but rejects his own membership of the white race and mourns his assumed inability to step out of his “white sorrows”. He laments: “Down in Denver, down in Denver, All I did was die” (Kerouac 164). John Leland (2007) argues that Sal’s sorrow is less about what he strives to become in life than his rejection of what he already is and has been since birth. Furthermore, Leland says that Sal’s desire to be someone else does not mean he wants to “be one or another permanently but to invent himself temporarily as any of them” (83). He wants to be free, to try on different identities, to be somebody else. Sal’s longing for a life without conventions and restricting rules can be observed throughout the book and is the main essence of Sal and Dean’s life on the road. African-Americans (along the road) are perceived as the

people who have internalized this lifestyle and are therefore celebrated and looked at with envy by Sal and Dean.

While picking cotton in California, Sal seems to enjoy his new rough and down-to-earth life. In a moment of reflectiveness, he says: "I was a man of the earth, precisely as I had dreamed I would" (Kerouac 88). Mark Richardson (2001) says that Sal's "remark opens up a crucial chain of associations affiliating 'earthiness' with 'the Fellahin' and with 'the primitive'. To become a man of the earth is to tka on color - to shed the over-civil skin of White cultivation in order to bring to life the essential man (and masculinity) that lie beneath" (224). It can be understood that Sal is of the opinion that the primitive life and the Other "are actually what is *essentially* human" (224) and that his whiteness has prevented him from seeing that he has always been a man of the earth. Furthermore, Richardson says: "White Americans reduce Mexican-American and Black farm workers to poverty only to flatter them with suggestions that their lives are idyllic and charmed, free of White worry, White responsibility, White inhibitions - in a word, with suggestions that they are 'natural'" (225).

Going back to Sal's first trip to the west, when he wakes up in a Des Moines hotel room, he at first does not know where he is, he says that he "[...] really didn't know who [he] was for about fifteen strange seconds. [He] wasn't scared; [He] was just somebody else, some stranger, and [his] whole life was a haunted life, the life of a ghost" (Kerouac 15). It seems ironic that it is precisely Sal's whiteness, which he regrets and sees as a burden, since it is his whiteness that allows him to indulge in longing for the Other and the exotic, and to intermittently embody other identities. In that his mental representation of the marginalized segments of society does not entail the same mutability and hence subjectivity, Sal naively reconstitutes the hegemony of the white demographic. Sal interprets people and experiences along the road "through his preconceptions. He sees archetypes, not persons" (Leland 14).

4.3. The voice of racial minorities and Sal's longing for an identity

All racial minorities in *On the Road* are depicted in similar ways, although clear differences can be identified depending on the ethnic group. Most characters which are members of racial minorities are merely described and talked to, but they rarely have a voice of their own. Even more seldomly these characters are represented as

agents who have the power to decide for themselves and change the course of the story. While the majority of whites in *On the Road* have the freedom to say almost everything and do almost everything, the minorities, and especially the racial minorities, do not experience that freedom and ease. The resulting implications lead to racism and misconceptions regarding the lifestyle of racial minorities.

African-Americans are often depicted as a source of entertainment in the novel, conveying an unconventional lifestyle and presenting themselves as happy and carefree. Sal and, even more so, Dean find themselves “digging” African-Americans, their lifestyle and their affiliation to jazz music. Sal says that he was “wishing [he] could exchange worlds with the happy, true-hearted, ecstatic Negroes of America” (Kerouac 164). Sal even associates African-Americans with a lack of worries and assumes that they know “nothing of disappointment and ‘white sorrows’ and all that” (164), with the “Chicken Jazz’n Gumbo disk-jockey” from New Orleans confirming his and Dean’s perception, who says: “Don’t worry ‘bout *nothing!*” (126). In describing instances like these, Sal and Dean speak from the privileged point of view which also allows them “to appropriate history at will” (Mikelli 58). As argued by Mikelli, Sal’s attitudes toward African-Americans undermine their actual history and portrays them as “one-dimensional, not fully developed characters” (58). It can be argued that Sal’s behavior constructs situations which endorse the white ideology to suppress and control the racial other (see Mikelli 58).

Since Sal Paradise is the narrator of the story, everything that takes place has to be seen through his eyes and through his perception of the world. All of his statements are to be considered subjective and not an objective representation of events. Therefore, the reader only gets to know what is experienced and consciously known by Sal himself, what is relevant to him and what he wants the reader to know and hear. Evidently, this holds true also with regard to encounters with members of racial minorities. *On the Road* does not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the majority of Americans during the mid-twentieth century, although it must be said that Sal’s views are highly influenced by mainstream (white) opinions and perspectives.

As has been stated before, various approaches to representation are distinguishable, which can be mapped to different racial groups. While African-Americans do not generally have a voice and the opportunity to express their opinions

in the novel, Mexicans, on the other hand, are portrayed in much greater depth and as having their own voice. The Mexicans with whom Sal comes in contact with, are usually called by their name and are depicted as more than solely one-dimensional characters. This does not only apply to the Mexicans Sal comes across in the U.S., but also those in Mexico. Most prominently with the character of Victor, who functions as a tour guide for Dean and Sal and turns out to be their contact person concerning various issues in Mexico. Victor is “allowed” to have his own views and opinions and he is perceived by Sal and Dean as an individual who knows his way around and is accepted by them as a leader and guide. When Sal and Dean continue their journey, Dean offers Victor to take him with them back to the United States, but Victor says that “I got wife and kid - ain’t got a money - I see.” (Kerouac 266). This is one of the rare instances where a member of a racial minority group is able to express their intentions and wishes freely and without the fear of repression. Victor’s wish is not ridiculed but taken seriously and not discussed any further.

When Sal works on the cotton-field with Terry, he even identifies with the Mexicans, saying that others on the field: “They thought I was a Mexican, of course; and in a way I am” (Kerouac 88). While Sal’s identification with the Mexican people is remarkable, it must be said that Sal’s impression of belonging to the Mexican minority is not characterized by longevity. After only a few days he “feel[s] the pull of [his] own life calling [him] back” (88), he leaves Terry and her family behind and returns to his own life, which means his life on the road and his life in New York.

Sal’s interactions with members of the African-American community paint a different picture than his interactions with Mexicans in America. As has already been said before, African-Americans are seen as the perfect representatives of an unconventional lifestyle and serve as a source of entertainment and joy for Dean and Sal. Sal envies the lives of African-Americans, imagining them as being “happy, true-hearted, ecstatic” (Kerouac 163). When he was living with his friend Remi Boncoeur in Mill City, Sal’s description of Remi’s neighbor matches his concept of the happy and cheerful African-American:

The strange thing was that next door to Remi lived a Negro called Mr Snow whose laugh, I swear on the Bible, was positively and finally the one greatest laugh in all this world. This Mr Snow began his laugh from the supper table when his old wife said something casual; he got up, apparently choking, leaned on the wall, looked up to heaven, and started; he staggered through the door, leaning on neighbor’s walls; he was drunk with it, he reeled throughout Mill City

in the shadows, raising his whooping triumphant call to the demon god that must have prodded him to do it. I don't know if he ever finished supper. There's a possibility that Remi, without knowing it, was picking up from this amazing man, Mr Snow. And though Remi was having worklife problems and bad lovelife with a sharp-tongued woman, he at least had learned to laugh almost better than anyone in the world, and I saw all the fun we were going to have in Frisco. (Kerouac 55)

Also Sal's description of Mill City, which "[was] the only community in America where whites and Negroes lived together voluntarily; and that was so, and so wild and joyous a place I've never seen since" (Kerouac 53), shows Sal's positive attitude toward African-Americans with its unmistakable focus on the lighthearted, the entertaining, and the exotic. African-Americans encountered by Sal (and Dean for that matter) are rarely mentioned by name or perceived as individuals. As can be seen above, Remi's neighbor Mr Snow is one of the rare African-Americans who is mentioned by name and, at least, slightly individualized. Most encounters with African-Americans in the book are characterized by a lack of individuality and personalized engagement. African-Americans are always referred to as "Negroes" and in two instances even as "wild Negroes" (77, 118), which shows Sal's (and society's) generalization of racial minorities and their interchangeability. The question now arises as to what the term "wild Negroe" might refer to.

It could be argued that the description "wild" stands in contrast to the concept of "civilized" and therefore depicts the notion of the uncivilized, ragged and savage African-Americans that was predominant in previous decades and centuries. On the other hand, it might be considered that the description "wild" is positively connotated for Sal in that it underlines his desire to escape from his own life and share the life experiences with "wild Negroes". Considering the low relevance Sal attributes to the personalities of African-Americans, it can be said that he uses racial minorities as a mere means to an end in order to satisfy his own desires and prospects in life. He compares himself with the image he projects onto minorities and strives to find his "real" identity and purpose in life, at the same time disregarding the disadvantages and hardships racial minorities face in society. Moreover, by not recognizing names and individualities of African-Americans and generalizing lifestyles and character properties, Sal behaves in the same way as most of the members of his majority group and exactly as is "expected" by his intrinsic "whiteness" and conformism. Individuality regarding African-Americans does not seem to be important and relevant for Sal and

his storytelling, which can be interpreted as the involvement in his own beliefs which are highly influenced by his whiteness and the resulting points of view.

The lack of individuality can be observed to a greater extent when it comes to encounters with Native Americans in Mexico. As mentioned before, Sal and Dean come across indigenous people on their journey through Mexico in the latter part of the novel. It can be observed that these Native Americans do not have a voice in the story at all. Sal only mentions that the indigenous girls who want to sell them crystal rocks on the side of the road “[...] yammered around the car. One particularly soulful child gripped at Dean’s sweaty arm. She yammered in Indian” (Kerouac 272). Sal does not seem to try to understand or comprehend what these indigenous girls are uttering. From a contemporary point of view, Sal’s attitude toward Native Americans can be described as highly discriminatory and racist. Indigenous people in *On the Road* are merely objectified and perceived as a group of people without identity whose sole purpose it is to entertain others and work as merchants on the side of the road. Furthermore, it can be observed that these indigenous people are perceived and described as if they were some kind of hazy figures or specters and do not really exist in reality, only on this particular part of the road in Mexico. They are only described vaguely and from an emotional distance. Dean and Sal are fascinated by the mere looks of the Native Americans, and are not willing to consider their individuality and their identities. As mentioned before, especially the encounter with the three-year-old indigenous girl seems to intrigue them. Dean’s statements to and about her underline and confirm his point of view and his judgement affected by his own racial and social background.

‘She’s probably never seen anybody parked here before in her entire life!’ breathed Dean, ‘Hel-lo, little girl. How are you? Do you like us?’ [...] ‘Gee, I wish there was something I could give her! Think of it, being born and living on this ledge - this ledge representing all you know of life. Her father is probably groping down the ravine with a rope and getting his pineapples out of a cave and hacking wood at an eighty-degree angle with all the bottom below. She’ll never, never leave here and know anything about the outside world.’ (Kerouac 271)

Sal Paradise works with Mexicans, admires African-Americans and is astonished by indigenous people in Mexico. It can be observed that his relationship with racial minorities is rather ambivalent. While he identifies with Mexican fieldworkers, his admiration considering an unconventional lifestyle goes to African-Americans. His encounter with indigenous people in Mexico makes it obvious that Sal apparently does

not have much experience with Natives, except with “[...] Pedros and Panchos of silly civilized American lore [...]” (Kerouac 255), which shows his limited knowledge and, possibly also, interest in Native Americans. His knowledge regarding indigenous people stems from “American lore” (255) which leads him to believe that the Natives he encounters in Mexico “were not fools, they were not clowns; they were great, grave Indians [...]” (255), but still “appear as basic, primitive, wailing humanity” (Mermann-Jozwiak 99). It can be said that Sal’s attitudes toward racial minorities do not change significantly throughout the story. His reflection of his own “whiteness” and “white ambitions” (Kerouac 164) becomes more specific and leads him to scrutinize his actions and attitudes influenced by his white social background. In the end he is guided by his internal conventions and values and marries a white woman named Laura and lives with her in New York. As Mermann-Jozwiak says: “Sal’s imperialist nostalgia, his desire to become like or merge with the margins that his own power has established, demonstrates the pitfalls of such romanticism” (98).

Another aspect of racial injustice and imbalance can be analyzed by looking at mobility vs immobility regarding race. As illustrated in the chapters above, racial minorities, in contrast to the main characters Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty, seem not to have the ability to move and be mobile. While Sal and Dean follow their freedom and opportunities and quite literally chase across the country multiple times, and even travel abroad to Mexico toward the end of the story, the less fortunate characters in the book, particularly racial minorities, are depicted as being stationary, immobile and less likely to take a roadtrip across the United States. When Sal works with Mexicans on the fields, it becomes clear that these people are not able to travel the country, but need to adhere to the rules of the farmers and bosses whom they work for. At the parting of Sal and Terry both are of the unspoken conviction that Terry will not be able to visit Sal in New York, although this is what they plan at the last time they meet. “‘See you in New York, Terry,’ I said. She was supposed to drive to New York in a month with her brother. But we both knew she wouldn’t make it” (Kerouac 92). Sal on the other hand is free to go whenever he “feel[s] the pull of [his] own life calling [him] back” (89). He is not restricted by a job (although in need of the money), nor do any social conventions hold him back from traveling wherever he wants to.

A special case of immobility in connection to a racial minority group is demonstrated by the encounter Sal and Dean have with Native Americans in Mexico.

The three-year-old Native girl, Sal and Dean come across embodies the notion of immobility regarding racial minorities. Dean describes his assumption of her and her life as, "*Think of it*, being born and living on this ledge - this ledge representing all you know of life. [...] She'll never, never leave here and know anything about the outside world" (Kerouac 271). Dean's comment shows his ignorance and arrogance toward minorities. He assumes the little girl's immobility on the basis of his knowledge about the living conditions of racial minorities. His own mobility is the counterpart of her immobility. It can be argued that the *immobility* of racial minorities enables the *mobility* of the racial majority. According to Cresswell (2006), tourists and citizens are dependent on each other. "Citizens, allowed to move freely, depend on the noncitizens, the aliens who are not free to move in the same way. Tourists depend on the relative immobility of those who service the leisure class - those who are stuck in the picturesque European south as well as those (mostly women in the early years) who were left at home" (Cresswell, *Move* 15).

5. Gender, sex and the depiction of men and women in *On the Road*

The depiction of gender, gender roles and the perception and the handling of various gender roles can be observed in a wide range of examples throughout the story of *On the Road*. Since the book was written in the middle of the twentieth century, it must be kept in mind that the views, perceptions and representations of gender roles are influenced by the conditions prevailing during that time. Laura Birkin (2016) states that “the attitude toward women depicted in the novel will most likely shock the contemporary feminist reader” (18). *On the Road* portrays inequalities and discrimination regarding men and women of the 1940s in the United States and furthermore confirms and reinforces gender roles based on these imbalances. It can be argued that while men are depicted as having the freedom to go “on the road”, women, on the other hand, represent the domestic and stationary aspects of life. Women are required to take care of the household and are forced to remain in the “immobile place-bound domesticity” (Enevold 406), as exemplified by Dean’s statement that “the thing to do was to have Marylou make breakfast and sweep the floor” (Kerouac 8). One exception to this rule in the book is, in fact, Marylou, who is the only female character who joins the men on the road for a longer period of time. Sal’s aunt also takes a journey with Dean and Sal, but only a very short one and solely for the purpose of returning home from her relatives. Moreover, it can be said that women in *On the Road* are subjected to the male gaze, objectified and infantilized. Most of the women are reduced to their physical appearance and exist solely for the “male characters to have sex with” (Birkin 18). The female characters are often reduced to their physical appearance and portrayed as being underdeveloped, boring and in some instances as burdens (see Birkin 20). Being on the road is a male fantasy and the road is depicted as the male domain, where seemingly everything is possible and permitted, and where women are not welcome, unless they serve the men as objects of sexual desires.

On the Road serves as a good example of the representation of “male friendships in an age when guys have trouble making friends” (Leland 45). The male friendships in the novel, especially the one between Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty,

are depicted as being rich, honest and based on, at least most of the time, mutual understanding. In this context it can be observed that there are significant disparities regarding male relationships in contrast to relationships between males and females. Female characters are frequently referred to as “whores”, particularly Marylou who is on various occasions described as a “whore” by Sal, for instance, when he says: “I saw what a whore she was” (Kerouac 156) and when he talks about how Dean “wanted absolut proof that she was a whore” (167). According to Birkin, the fact that women are called “whores” is “highly hypocritical of the male characters in *On the Road*” (18), since men are never blamed for having too much sex with different partners nor are they ever called derogatory names. It can be argued that men are even praised for having sex with more than one partner, when Sal explains that “Dean was making love to two girls at the same time” (Kerouac 38), and that it seems rather unexpected for them to find themselves in monogamous relationships, when Dean realizes with surprise: “All the time I’ve been here I haven’t had any girl but Inez - this only happens to me in New York! Damn!” (227). From such statements it is evident that promiscuity is considered desirable in men while it justifies derogatory judgements when observed in women.

While there are also instances where male relationships are challenged and vulnerable – most prominently exemplified when Dean leaves sick Sal behind in Mexico to drive back to his girlfriend Inez in New York – such instances are embedded in a narrative of compassion and a profound understanding of the complexities of men's lives. Sal at first seems to be disillusioned regarding Dean, but understands his motives in the same sentence, when he realizes that Dean has abandoned him. In the aforementioned example, Sal says: “When I got better I realized what a rat he was, but then I had to understand the impossible complexity of his life, how he had to leave me there, sick, to get on with his wives and woes” (Kerouac 276). Sal is the target of feminization by Dean at this point, since Sal is abandoned like many women in the book before, whenever Dean comes to the conclusion that these women would hinder his journeys and subsequently his joy and fun on the road (see Ganser 46). Another example of Dean abandoning his friends and leaving them back in the street can be found when he, Marylou and Sal drive to San Francisco. Dean orders them to find a hotel while he manages his arrangements with Camille. Sal describes the scene after they got out of the car: “Suddenly Dean was saying good-by. He was bursting to see

Camille and find out what had happened. Marylou and I stood dumbly in the street and watched him drive away. ‘You see what a bastard he is?’ said Marylou. ‘Dean will leave you out in the cold any time it’s in his interest’” (Kerouac 154). Despite these aforementioned incidents, the image which is generally conveyed is that male interactions are characterized by depth, honesty, and reasonable negotiation of interests.

The state and destiny of the women in the book are only very rarely discussed and acknowledged. So are their thoughts, ambitions and aspirations. When Sal visits Dean and Camille in San Francisco in the third part of the book, he recognizes a “full-length oil painting of Galatea Dunkel over the sofa” (Kerouac 170), and it dawns on him that the women are having lives of their own and that he has never been aware of their autonomy and own opinions. However, this degree of understanding is, apparently, only worth one sentence when Sal “suddenly realize[s] that all these women were spending months of loneliness and womanliness together, chatting about the madness of the men” (170). Sal’s empathetic insight is disregarded immediately thereafter.

It can be said that gender roles in *On the Road* play a significant part and contribute to the development of the story and also the characters. Although the novel portrays a rather traditionalist view regarding gender roles, and women in particular, Ganser (2009) argues that the novel should not be “reduced to a misogynist dimension” nor should it be viewed as a conservative text (46). *On the Road* acknowledges masculine insecurities and takes position against mainstream notions of masculinity. The contrast between these two poles – the hegemony of traditional gender roles on the one hand and the opposition against mainstream attitudes toward them on the other—will be analyzed in the following.

5.1. Subversion vs. reproduction of gender roles

An analysis of attitudes toward gender roles as well as the interaction of women and men in *On the Road* reveals a differentiated picture: Traditional gender roles are either confirmed and sometimes even reinforced, or criticized, questioned and mitigated. The characters in the novel are embedded in and influenced by their social backgrounds

and historical conditions. While the story uses misogynist images and reproduces value concepts connected to repression and unequal treatment of men and women, the text, on the other hand, is widely recognized for its rebellion against conformity and normative mainstream society (see Ganser 46). The characters in the book strive for non-conformism and try to break out of the widespread normative conceptions. There is an imbalance between how the characters want the world they live in to be and the way they behave themselves toward marginalized groups, and especially toward women.

The behavior men show toward women in the book can be perceived in different ways. While most women are depicted and treated as minor, “underdeveloped and side-lined” (Birkin 20) characters whose sole purpose in the story is to make themselves available to the men and to have sex with them or to take care of the household, some women are shown as influential and as respected persons, as exemplified by the character of Sal’s aunt. She is presented as “a respectable woman hung-up in this sad world” (Kerouac 110). However, the latent disrespect for women, which runs through the entire book, can also be identified with regard to this exceptional woman. Sal never mentions the name of this aunt as he refers to her solely as “my aunt” (5). In addition, he does not seem to listen to her concerns about him and his journeys. Sal’s aunt represents his safe haven to which he can return whenever he is in trouble or needs shelter. Moreover, he can rely on her financial support throughout the story, although he promises to pay her back everything. Already in *Part One* Sal says: “I sent my aunt an airmail letter asking her for fifty dollars and said it would be the last money I’d ask; after that she would be getting money back from me” (50). More instances where Sal can rely on his aunt’s money follow throughout the book when he “shot [his] aunt a penny postcard across the land and asked for another fifty” (89), not so long after the previous request. It can be argued that Sal’s aunt is his safeguarding and backing which makes his travels and life experiments possible in the first place, “[saving his] lazy butt again” (92). Even though Sal is aware of and appreciates his aunt’s reliability and generosity, the relationship between him and his aunt seems more like one between a subject and an object than between two equal subjects. In addition, male characters, and here Dean must be mentioned in particular, do not seem to reflect on their own behavior or question their actions toward female characters to a larger extent.

As has been stated above, relationships between men are depicted as having a deeper meaning and a higher value than those between men and women. When Sal and other friends visit Dean and his newly married wife Marylou in their cold water pad in New York, Dean immediately turns his attention away from Marylou and toward his male friends. In another instance when Sal and Carlo Marx go to visit Dean and Camille in Denver, Dean again shifts his focus away from his love life and toward his friends.

‘Why, Sa-a-all!’ said Dean. ‘Well now - ah - ahem - yes, of course, you’ve arrived - you old sonumbitch you finally got on that old road. Well, now, look here - we must - yes, yes, at once - we must, we really must! Now Camille -’ And he swirled on her. ‘Sal is here, this is my old buddy from New Yor-r-k, this is his first night in Denver and it’s absolutely necessary for me to take him out and fix him up with a girl.’ (Kerouac 39)

The men in the novel do not seem to pay much attention to the needs and worries of the women and prefer to leave them behind and start off on other adventures. A later episode shows the men’s lack of empathy when Sal describes that “[i]t was horrible to hear Camille sobbing so. We couldn’t stand it and went out to buy beer and brought it back to the kitchen. [...] [He] had no idea what was really wrong, except perhaps Dean had driven her mad after all” (Kerouac 166). Sal, more than other characters, seems to show some empathy but ends up being annoyed by Camille’s sobbing and dismisses it with the assumption that she has been driven crazy. According to Leland (2007), the road Sal and Dean have chosen “is a male fantasy that goes back to Huck and Tom [...] who all chose starvation and travail over clean laundry and the comforts of women” (46).

In contrast to the succinct descriptions of women and the simplistic conclusions men draw about them in *On the Road*, relationships between men are characterized by depth, truth, and meaning. “Sal is not one of the mad ones” (Leland 46), he often breaks out of the manliness of the road and acts as the silent, passive observer, who lets Dean drive and invites the readers to be his travel companions. Sal and Dean view the space of the road, and in a narrower sense, the car as “their rolling confession booth” (50). It can be argued that they perceive the act of confession as the essence of their friendship. Their friendship is strengthened and deepened by confessions and the resulting vulnerability. For instance, when Sal proposes the idea of going to Italy with Dean, Dean seems taken aback at first and uncertain of Sal’s real intentions. Sal says that this instance

was probably the pivotal point of [their] friendship when [Dean] realized [Sal] had actually spent some hours thinking about him and his troubles, and he was trying to place that in his tremendously involved and tormented mental categories. Something clicked in both of [them]. In [Sal] it was suddenly concern for a man who was years younger than [him], five years, and whose fate was wound with [his] across the passage of the recent years; in him it was a matter that [Sal] can ascertain only from what he did afterward. He became extremely joyful and said everything was settled. (Kerouac 172)

By this, Dean and Sal's friendship is raised to the next level and it is obvious in the novel that no male-female (love) relationship can ever come close to this.

Most of the women, as mentioned before, are frequently referred to and dismissed as "whores", "that dumb little box" (Kerouac 167) and being "awfully dumb" (4). Sal's description of a girl, when he was "shopping women in the afternoon" (143), matches these patronizing attitudes toward female characters, when he "found a real gone dumb girl who was out of her mind [...] Her beautiful body was matched only by her idiot mind" (143). Marylou is frequently described as a "whore", especially by Sal, on various occasions, but according to Birkin (18), Marylou is only referred to as a "whore" when she is now longer under Dean's influence and he is no longer able to control her sexual activities. "'And where's Marylou?' I asked, and Dean said she'd apparently whored a few dollars together and gone back to Denver - 'the whore!'" (Kerouac 5). As long as the female characters are useful and interesting for the male characters, they are treated with more respect and kindness, but at the same time they are reduced to infantilized descriptions and representations. Throughout the book, women are referred to as "girls", as can be seen, for instance, when Sal meets Marylou for the first time, describing her as a "sweet little girl" (4) or Sal's first encounter with Terry, who he saw while he "was waiting for the LA bus when all of a sudden [he] saw the cutest little Mexican girl" (73) at the bus station in Bakersfield. Furthermore, he describes her physical appearance and therefore makes her the object of his male gaze, by saying: "Her breasts stuck out straight and true [...]" (73). When both of them find themselves in an argument, a little later in their shared story, Sal falls back into his internalized misogynist and racist mindset and describes the scene as follows: "[...] I got mad and realized I was pleading with a dumb little Mexican wench and I told her so; and before I knew it I picked up her red pumps and hurled them at the bathroom door and told her to get out" (76).

Moreover, it can be observed that women in the book apparently need to be “innocent” and “pure” in order to meet the requirements of a marriageable woman. Sal, describing his first encounter with Laura, his girlfriend at the end of the story, emphasizes her “pure and innocent dear eyes” and declares that she was the one he “had always searched for and for so long” (Kerouac 278). Birkin argues that Sal “offers the reader a perfect rendering of the Madonna-whore complex, according to which a man can sleep with as many “whores” as he wishes, but will only marry a “pure”, sexually uncompromised woman” (19). The concept of the ideal woman and wife is illustrated when Sal and Dean “ended up with a colored guy called Walter” (Kerouac 185) in San Francisco, who invites them to his home where he lives with his wife. As they arrive at the apartment, Walter’s wife is asleep, and Sal describes only her smile and that she is “the sweetest woman in the world” (185). Throughout Sal and Dean’s visit, Walter’s wife does not say a single word and only “smiled and smiled” (185). Dean is thrilled by her behavior and says to Sal after they have left that “[...] there’s real woman for you. Never a harsh word, never a complaint, or modified; her old man can come in any hour of the night with anybody and have talks in the kitchen and drink beer and leave any old time.” (185).

There are not only discrepancies regarding the relationship between men and women in *On the Road*, but also between heterosexual and homosexual men. Sal describes a number of encounters with homosexuals throughout his travels. During the 1940s and 1950s homosexuality in the United States was viewed as despicable and an abomination. Persons who did not comply with heteronormativity were highly marginalized, patronized and had to hide their sexual preference in public (see Edelman qtd. in Bell 139). According to Bell, homosexuality in the postwar era was not only perceived as illegal, “but likewise un-American” (Bell 139). “The State’s efforts to control homosexual behavior, [...] responded to the widespread perception of gay sexuality as an alien infestation, an un-natural because un-American practice” (Edelman qtd. in Bell 139).

5.1.1. Homosexuality in *On the Road*

Homosexual men in *On the Road* are referred to as “queers”, “fags” and “fairies”. In accordance with racial issues, the main characters in *On the Road* try to contradict

socially established norms and tackle heteronormativity but end up reproducing and reinforcing acts of homophobia. Dean seems to engage in acts and utterances of homophobia more than other characters in the book. When he and Sal hail a ride from San Francisco, Sal explains that the car “belonged to a tall, thin fag” (Kerouac 187) and says furthermore that Dean describes the car as a “fag Plymouth” and as an “[e]ffeminate car!” (187). It can be argued that this instance demonstrates the difference of opinions regarding the view on homosexual men between Sal and Dean. While Dean makes use of disparaging remarks, Sal stays quiet and only describes Dean’s statements, and therefore, it can be argued, condoning Dean’s actions. The only circumstance under which Dean shortly changes his attitude toward this specific homosexual man, is when “Dean tried everything in the book to get money from the fag” (190). After some time, the man grows suspicious and ends up not giving Dean any money. After his plan has failed, Dean gives up and says: “You see, man, it’s better not to bother. Offer them what they secretly want, and they of course immediately become panic-stricken.” (190). Sal, however, seems to be more open to the topic of homosexuality. In San Francisco he encounters many homosexuals and sometimes he goes to the city and visits gay bars with his gun and then he threatens homosexual men who try to approach him in a “bar john” (66). Afterwards Sal is sorry for his behavior and cannot understand why he does this, since he “knew queers all over the country” (66). He tries to explain his behavior with his loneliness and the mere fact that he has a gun and wants to show it to someone. Sal’s conduct can be interpreted on different levels. According to Bell, Sal’s observations of gay men can be “framed as attempts at dissimulation” (139), but Sal more often than not, seems to be interested in and even on the lookout for homosexual males, whom he identifies as a “group of men who subvert cultural expectations and dominant ideologies” (140). Throughout the story, Sal identifies homosexual men and arguably seeks their company, from the “queer saint” (Kerouac 7) in New York, to the “handsome queer boys” (78) in Los Angeles. The aforementioned incident where Sal intimidates a gay man with his gun in the restroom of a gay bar, surprises and startles himself. Bell argues that the gun itself bears a phallic symbolism, and similar to “Sal’s own frenetic sexual energy in these instances, it is never discharged” (Bell 140). Furthermore, it is argued that Sal’s attitudes toward homosexual men might be interpreted as a confrontation “of his own sexuality rather than that of the other men in the restrooms”

(140). Sal's participation in homosexual acts is limited to observation and surveillance, which makes marginalization of queer encounters in the text appear less stringent. As noted by Bell, "the gay male in *On the Road* is at once seen and embodied", unlike the common blurry conceptions of the homosexual as a "hidden menace or an invisible specter" (142).

5.2. Stylistic representations and the voice of women

The female characters in *On the Road* are mostly depicted as silent, passive bystanders whose opinions and assertions do not seem to be interesting or, not to mention, influential for the male characters who are deemed to be the decision makers. Galatea Dunkel evidently, is one of the few women in the novel who makes herself heard. She speaks openly about what she, and presumably many of the other characters, think about Dean and his attitudes and behavior, however, arguably without much influence and potential to change Dean's conduct. "I think Marylou was very, very wise leaving you, Dean," said Galatea. "For years now you haven't had any sense of responsibility for anyone. You've done so many awful things I don't know what to say to you." (Kerouac 176).

Galatea is depicted as the woman who speaks her mind and tries to make her opinions heard. She is also the one who phones the men in New York from Louisiana, after her husband Ed Dunkel and Dean leave her in Tucson without any money and all by herself. She is left behind since to her travel companions she appears to be a burden and an obstacle to their intention to remain moving ahead.

All along the way Galatea Dunkel, Ed's new wife, kept complaining that she was tired and wanted to sleep in a motel. If this kept up they'd spend all her money long before Virginia. Two nights she forced a stop and blew tens on motels. By the time they got to Tucson she was broke. Dean and Ed gave her the slip in a hotel lobby and resumed the voyage alone, with the sailor, and without a qualm. (Kerouac 101)

After being left alone in Tucson, Galatea Dunkel wires home for money and takes the bus to New Orleans to Old Bull Lee, who is an old friend of Dean's. Bull Lee calls Sal and Dean in New York since he has no idea who Galatea or Ed Dunkel are. The fact that Galatea "wanted to know how Ed was. She was all concerned about his happiness" (Kerouac 106) is depicted as a reprehensible transgression. It is depicted

as very uncommon for a woman to express her interest in a man and to demonstrate it through her own self-determined actions. In consequence, Sal calls her “a tenacious loser” (106) after having spoken to her on the phone. Not long after, another phone call reaches the men. In stark contrast to the “tenacious loser” Galatea, the second call comes from “sweetest Camille” (107). This shift from a derisive description of a woman to a favorable description shows the instability of the men’s benevolence toward women.

The episode with Galatea exemplifies a tendency that runs through *On the Road*: In contradiction to the social expectations of the postwar era, it is not men who provide for material needs of women. On the contrary, Sal and Dean regularly rely on women's financial support. Especially during the 1940s and 1950s, men in the family were the sole breadwinners who provided the financial means for the whole family, while women were responsible for the household and for raising children (see Pursell 34). In *On the Road* these traditional gender roles are sometimes challenged or almost reversed, as exemplified in the following paragraph.

Men relying on financial support from women is specifically portrayed in the book at least three times: One example is Galatea Dunkel, who supports her new husband Ed and Dean’s journey from San Francisco to Tucson, where she ultimately is left behind. Galatea’s plans to start a family and settle down are disrupted by Ed’s intention to marry her solely for her money in order to put his and Dean’s plan to go on the road again into practice and to, thereby, do the opposite of settling down. Although she provides the money and therefore the prerequisite for the potential of free action, she is still not able and allowed to make decisions. Instead, she is exploited solely for her money, as Ed and Dean admit by saying they “decided to bring the girl along to the East and have her foot the bill” (Kerouac 100). She is then left behind as soon as her money runs out and she becomes annoying according to the men. In another instance, Sal spends the night with a rich girl, who “pulled a hundred-dollar bill out of her stocking” (165) in the morning and tells him to continue his trip to San Francisco and have fun. Eventually, when Sal works with Terry in California picking grapes, Terry, out of her kindness and love for Sal, offers to provide for him and her equally. “She said she’d work picking grapes and make enough money for both of us; meanwhile I could live in Farmer Heffelfinger’s barn down the road from her family. I’d have nothing to do but sit in the grass all day and eat grapes” (89), says Sal.

The examples of Galatea Dunkel telling Dean what she thinks about him, are not the only instances where a woman states her opinion, and potentially has the influence to change the behavior of other characters (mostly men) and the course of the story. When Camille throws Dean out of the house in San Francisco, she is depicted as “this haunted woman” who gives Dean and Sal “the sad look of a harassed woman’s life” (Kerouac 170). Instead of attempting to understand her emotional state and motivations, Sal reports only on her sobbing and calling Dean “Liar! Liar! Liar!” (170). Most of the time however, women stay silent or, at least, their statements are not mentioned by Sal. When Sal leaves Terry she says that she will miss him and loves him, but does not get a voice in the actual process of decision making of him leaving. The one woman in the book who seems to get treated differently, is Sal’s aunt.

Sal’s aunt is his safe haven and acts as his mother’s substitute. Sal regularly has to ask her for money and she provides him shelter and the comfort of a welcoming home, whenever he is in New York. Sal views her as “a respectable woman hung-up in this sad world, and she knew the world” (Kerouac 110). When she, Sal and Dean are stopped by the police, she is the one who pays the fine and when they finally arrive in New York, Sal’s aunt buys groceries and cooks up “a tremendous breakfast” (110). Similar to the other female characters in *On the Road*, however, it can be observed that the character of Sal’s aunt is underdeveloped and depicted as a side character. Despite providing support and assistance to Sal’s many unpredictable escapades and even hosting his friends, she is not given a proper name in the novel and only referred to as “my aunt” (5). The statement, “[m]y aunt once said the world would never find peace until men fell at their women’s feet and asked for forgiveness” (110), demonstrates, on the one hand, Sal’s understanding of women and their views, but at the same time, his inability and his misogyny, prevents him from getting to the bottom of the matter and raising real interest for the hardships of women.

Women are the quiet bystanders and do not have much of a voice, but when they do and try to stand up for themselves or seem to interfere too much with the plans of the male characters, they are immediately denounced, insulted as “whores” and generally portrayed as killjoys. According to Birkin, women “are shown as a negative influence on the men” (20), since the “othered” role is imposed upon them. When Dean leaves Sal in Mexico, Sal reminisces that Dean had to leave him in order “to get on with his wives and woes” (Kerouac 276), thereby interlinking women and problems.

Women seem to live on this fine line between being lovers, “the sweetest woman in the world” (185), and being depicted as killjoys, “tenacious loser[s]” (106) and “kept complaining” (101). Even “sweetest Camille” (107), can be argued, falls from grace when Dean is dissatisfied with her behavior and says that “[s]he’s getting worse and worse, man, she cries and makes tantrums [...] gets mad every time I’m late” (166).

Male friendships on the other hand seem to withstand problems and hardships more easily than relationships between males and females. These friendships help the male characters to navigate through the story and through the country, figuratively and literally. There are the occasional rejections and insults between men, most prominently when Dean leaves sick Sal behind in Mexico, but there are also episodes where men are there for each other and their relationship is supported by a real friendship, best exemplified by the passage where Dean becomes aware of Sal’s true friendship: “It was the pivotal point of our friendship when he realized [Sal] had actually spent some hours thinking about him and his troubles” (Kerouac 172).

When it comes to linguistic differences regarding the interaction with each other, there is a clear distinction between the utterances between men and those between men and women. While women, as mentioned above, are often called derogatory names like “whore”, “dumb box” or “tenacious loser” by the men, the men among themselves use, most of the time, more appreciative and sympathetic assertions: “Poor, poor Dean - the devil himself had never fallen farther” (Kerouac 171), said Sal after Camille threw Dean out. Sal even defends Dean when Galatea Dunkel and others attack him and accuse him of leaving Camille and acting irresponsible.

‘Dean, why do you act so foolish?’ said Galatea. ‘Camille called and said you left her. Don’t you realize you have a daughter?’ ‘He didn’t leave her, she kicked him out!’ I said, breaking my neutrality. They all gave me dirty looks; Dean grinned. ‘And with that thumb, what do you expect the poor guy to do?’ I added. They all looked at me; particularly Dorothy Johnson lowered a mean gaze on me. (Kerouac 176)

Sal’s defense of Dean seems misguided, given the origin of his injury: Dean injured his thumb when he hit Marylou on the brow (see Kerouac 168).

Nevertheless, the general tone toward women in the book is characterized by objectification, infantilization and devaluation. Women are constantly referred to as “whores” (Kerouac 154) or being “awfully dumb” (4), furthermore they are “overlooked and mistreated” (Birkin 19). The majority of women seem to be reduced from well-

rounded characters to a mere existence primarily “for the male characters to have sex with and subsequently abandon” (18).

5.3. Mobility vs. domesticity

“I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up” (Kerouac 3).

A central theme in the book is the dichotomy between the private realm of the female characters and the public life of the male characters, as argued by Tim Cresswell (*Resistance*, 1993). This dichotomy starts with the very first sentence in the book, cited above. Sal Paradise recounts that he met Dean Moriarty for the first time after his marriage broke up. Sal’s life with his wife comes to an end, his new life with Dean, and subsequently his life on the road, begins. This notion of a strict dualism of the private/public sphere was criticized by Linda McDowell (1996), who argues that Cresswell’s analysis is “too simple a dualism between masculinity and femininity, and their respective associations with the road and the home” (413). Furthermore, McDowell mentions that “a central theme of *On the road* which Kerouac had always argued was consistently misunderstood - that the quest was a spiritual one, that their journey really was an inward one. And [...] [that] women were not to be excluded” (415). Others, like Enevold (2000), Elmwood (2008) and Bell (2015), argue in a similar way as Cresswell does. Enevold arguing that “Women have been constituted in immobile place-bound domesticity and symbolic geography”, and further: “The many different travel genres are consequently filled with male protagonists [...] thus making both travel canon and road into ‘male’ territories - spaces in which men have moved and women have seldom broken into” (406).

Sal’s understanding of the connection between Dean and the road is also noted in the very beginning of the story. “With the coming of Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could call my life on the road” (Kerouac 3), says Sal. The story of *On the Road* starts with the coming of Dean, and, as Cresswell points out, concludes “with the departure of Dean” (Cresswell, *Resistance* 258), where it all began, in New York. It can be argued that the first sentence of the book which denotes the departure of a woman and the arrival of a male friend, sets the overarching tone for the rest of the novel, in which male friendships appear to be more substantial than romantic

relationships between men and women. This difference of importance can be seen in multiple instances throughout the story, as mentioned before. At one occasion, Sal attempts to describe his arrival at Dean and Camille's house in San Francisco from Camille's point of view.

My arrival was somewhat like the coming of the strange most evil angel in the home of the snow-white fleece, as Dean and I began talking excitedly in the kitchen downstairs, which brought forth sobs from upstairs. Everything I said to Dean was answered with a wild, whispering, shuddering 'Yes!' Camille knew what was going to happen. Apparently Dean had been quiet for a few months; now the angel had arrived and he was going mad again. (Kerouac 166)

The male identity in *On the Road* is often portrayed to be based on the men's sex drive and the ability to seduce women. When it comes to Dean, it is revealed in the very first encounter of Sal and Dean that for Dean "sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life" (Kerouac 4). Furthermore, the male identity is characterized by being mobile, being restless and leaving women and lovers behind on many occasions. Women are supposed to stay stationary and wait for their men to come home and, even more so, remain always available for their men to have sex with whenever they please. This notion goes hand in hand with "the dominant ideology of the United States which connects the women to the home and the men with the public arena outside the home" (Cresswell, *Resistance* 258). Sal's desire to get to know a woman with whom he could settle down and therefore also enter the "private" and "domestic sphere", is shown in his statement about his wish to get married.

All these years I was looking for the woman I wanted to marry. I couldn't meet a girl without saying to myself, What kind of wife would she make? [...] 'I want to marry a girl,' I told them, 'so I can rest my soul with her till we both get old. This can't go on all the time - all this frantiness and jumping around. We've got to go someplace, find something.' (Kerouac 105)

5.3.1. Interconnectedness of gender and mobility

The concept of mobility, traveling and being "on the road" has always been a male domain, the road itself a "primarily male territory" (Enevold 405). Enevold argues that the experience of travel becomes a pivotal "male identity project" (405) which enables the spatial marginalization and othering of minorities, especially women. *On the Road* in particular illustrates how men are mobile while women are made stationary and responsible for the domestic domain. Furthermore, it can be observed that "women are

othered" (409) by the presupposition that the road narrative reflects the "patriarchal world scheme" (409) where knowledge is passed from one male to another, often from father to son.

Birkin argues that the group of males on the road form "their own version of the nuclear family" (20) and therefore eliminate the need for females, and furthermore "preserve male dominance against the female-centered nuclear family and the effeminization of consumer culture" (Elmwood 342). According to Bell, the space of the road serves as a retreat for the men from normative, social life and provides freedom and possibilities without "conformity and the doldrums of an antiseptic life with the requisite housewife and picket fence" (Bell 142). The home, as the actual space and figuratively embodied by wives and mothers, represents one of "at least two Others" (Enevold 411) of which the traveling male subject is constituted by. The second Other, according to Enevold, is the "foreign, public, 'frontier Other'", which stands in contrast to the "wife or mother at home" representing "female pre- and post-travelling stability, which often is described as a negative stability [...] from which 'evolving men' should attempt to escape" (411). Female characters in *On the Road* embody either the domestic, stay-at-home mother (in the case of Sal's unnamed aunt), or the left-behind and discarded lover. The only female who joins the men on the road more often than others, is Marylou. According to Birkin, women are either praised for being domestic and embodying the stationary home, or are judged for not complying with these rules. As discussed before, Cresswell (1993) prominently represents the notion of a dualism between men, who live in the public sphere, and women, who represent the private, domestic sphere. Cresswell states that "Kerouac expresses resistance to the 'family values' of the fifties, he reinforces the dualism of private/public as a gendered distinction" (*Resistance* 257). Criticism against this notion, especially by Linda McDowell, was shown in the previous section.

Unlike women, men in the novel are almost constantly in the process of traveling, or at least contemplating their next journey and adventure. When Sal was living with Terry in California, cotton-picking on the field and taking care of her young son, after not too long, he "could feel the pull of [his] own life calling [him] back" (Kerouac 89), by which he means his life on the road and subsequently his life in New York. "Well, lackadaddy, I was on the road again" (91), Sal exclaims with joy after having left Terry and his life as a "Mexican" worker. Sal recounts that Dean has "the

same battered trunk stuck out from under the bed, ready to fly" (227), and is therefore always prepared to leave his lovers and continue his journey on the road. This underlines Dean's dislike of being sedentary and his constant restlessness.

Galatea Dunkel describes Dean's attitude when she tells him that "[y]ou have absolutely no regard for anybody but yourself and your damned kicks. All you think about is what's hanging between your legs and how much money or fun you can get out of people and then you throw them aside." (Kerouac 176). Most prominently, Dean's reckless, unscrupulous, almost egomaniacal behavior is directed at female characters, especially those with whom he has love affairs, but not exclusively. Dean also abandons some of his male friends and friendships whenever he feels like it. In the last part of the book, Dean abandons Sal in Mexico, who is sick with dysentery, to deal with his divorce from Camille and at the same time strengthen his new relationship with Inez. Dean's abandonment of Sal goes hand in hand with his many abandonments of women. In this specific moment, it is Sal who is weak and incapable of defending himself. It is precisely then when Dean presents him with the *fait accompli*, "Poor Sal, poor Sal, got sick. [...] I'm driving back to Inez in New York tonight if the car holds out. [...] Gotta get back to my life" (275). Similar to the breakups of his many romantic relationships, Dean leaves Sal in a moment of vulnerability, "standing with his old broken trunk and looking down at [him]" (275). Sal is incapable of moving. He is immobile. In this respect he is similar to the minorities who, like him, are stationary and constrained by their immobility. Conversely, Dean is eager to get back on the road, eager to get together with his woman again. By him, Sal being sick is perceived as a burden, as an obstacle for Dean's plans to keep moving, to stay on the road. Also this episode reflects Dean's constant restlessness, as Sal states one time that "[w]ith frantic Dean [he] was rushing through the world without a chance to see it" (187).

Dean is never satisfied with the current status, he is always on the move, eager to experience new sights and people he can "dig". He ends relationships with women as soon as feelings of distress or frustration arise in his mind and, most of the time, he immediately begins new relationships, or at least short affairs. Dean's marriages and even the fatherhood of his own children do not present exceptions. They are just as loose and short-lived. When he falls in love with Inez, "a big, sexy brunette" (Kerouac 224), as Sal describes her, Dean can not wait to divorce Camille, with whom he is still married, and subsequently marry Inez.

In a matter of days they were dickering with Camille in San Francisco by long-distance telephone for the necessary divorce papers so they could get married. Not only that, but a few months later Camille gave birth to Dean's second baby, the result of a few nights' rapport early in the year. And another matter of months and Inez had a baby. With one illegitimate child in the West somewhere, Dean then had four little ones and not a cent, and was all troubles and ecstasy and speed as ever. (Kerouac 224)

Dean's example illustrates the unconditional connection between masculinity and mobility. While for Sal and the other male characters, Dean's behavior and his perspective on such issues as his role as a father, as a husband or a lover might appear "crazy", they do nevertheless represent a manifestation of the freedom which is afforded to him by his manliness. The double standard, which, among other things, can be seen in the incongruence of gender roles between women and men becomes apparent in Dean's depiction. However, also with regard to the other male characters in *On the Road*, it can be said that men are portrayed as being free to go anywhere and to marry and break up with women whenever they want or feel dissatisfied with their current situation, while women are supposed to be loyal, domestic and submissive (see Enevold 405-406).

In this context, Sal serves as the observer of Dean's many relationships and affairs. By doing so, he provides Dean and by extension, this idea of masculinity, with the necessary visibility. In this manner, the narration reconstitutes traditional gender roles. While Sal does not engage in many love relationships himself - one of the longest relationships he has during the course of the story is the one with Terry - it quickly becomes clear for Sal that this relationship will not last forever and that he must go back to his own life again. It could be argued that Sal is on the lookout for a woman who he could marry and not merely have a short affair with. When he plans to marry Lucille, one of his first girlfriends in the story, he says that "[a]ll these years I was looking for the woman I wanted to marry" (Kerouac 105). With regard to the connection between mobility and masculinity, Sal serves as an observer and as foil against which Dean's radical mobility becomes all the more apparent. In addition, his longing for a woman who he can make his own, the right one who will be permanently at his side, reflects expectations present in the postwar society of the United States toward women to be steady, malleable, domestic, and passive.

6. Discussion and Results

The present thesis explored the notions of race and gender regarding Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. Furthermore, the characters in the book were analyzed with regard to their attitudes, views and approaches concerning issues of race, racial inequalities as well as gender disparities and issues of sexism. The characters, their actions, utterances and opinions and moreover the manner in which the narrative progressed were analyzed with the historical and social background in mind. Although the novel is widely recognized as a story of rebellion and rejection of social and economic norms and conformism, it nevertheless, reveals common social conventions as well as internalized views of differences and disparities between different social groups (see Ganser 46). As has been shown, this is also the case for the categories of race and gender. From a contemporary point of view, *On the Road*, and especially its main characters, Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty, engage in numerous explicit and rather harsh acts of racism and sexism. The racist and misogynist attitudes toward groups of people belonging to racial minorities or those who by their behavior or preference do not conform to heteronormative expectations can be considered as common and usual behavior, keeping in mind that the novel was written in the early 1950s. Conversely, it has been demonstrated that *On the Road* breaks the stringent rules of conformism and depicts those who try to explore new and progressive approaches regarding racial and gender minorities.

6.1. Racial issues

In chapter 4, *On the Road* was analyzed with regard to the representation of the interaction between social minorities and the dominant population group. In this context, whiteness and racism as they are reflected in the novel were addressed. The two main characters in *On the Road* are Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty, two white young men who find themselves in the United States of the 1940s, a place where white young men had the freedom to travel, have sex, marry, work and the possibility for self-realization. Belonging to the racial group that was perceived as the dominant one, opened doors and granted freedom and safety equally.

While they differ in how they do so, Sal and Dean both engage in acts of racism throughout the book. While Dean seems to be unreflective of his own behavior, Sal gives the impression that he is aware of racism and racial inequalities. Nevertheless, he fails to move beyond the complex of values, conventions, and expectations he circumscribes with the notion of "being white". Both of them perceive African-Americans as the epitome of fun and carelessness while ignoring the hardships and the repression people of color faced. By idealizing and romanticising the lives of racial minorities, Sal and Dean shift the focus away from the fact that they are members of the dominant ethnic group. Only by doing so they can ignore the privileges and the advantages which are the consequence of their belonging to the white race. While this "white dominance" is never specifically mentioned or questioned throughout the novel, the absence of the assumed freedom, attributed to racial minorities, is mourned: Being white is seen as a disadvantage and a burden which seems impossible to overcome. It can be considered ironic that white privilege is the factor that offers Sal and Dean the opportunity to mourn and dismiss their whiteness in the first place (see Mikelli 58).

Sal, especially, struggles with the fact that he is white and laments the alleged burden it places upon him. Simultaneously, however, he fails to step out of a white man's perspective by opening himself up to the real conditions it means to belong to a racial minority. Without questioning it, he is in the privileged position to try on different identities and to assume the role of various racial minorities. Sal enjoys taking on the role of the Mexican field worker and playing the role of the surrogate father of a Mexican boy. At the same time, he compares himself to African-Americans who were working on the cotton fields during slavery. Quickly it becomes clear that Sal Paradise neither is a Mexican field worker, nor an African-American who relaxes after a hard day working. In truth, he is influenced and driven by his own white background and social norms and is not able to break out of this belonging to his own life. By mentioning his "white ambitions," Sal elucidates the notion of his implicit higher status vis-à-vis members of minorities. They position him above black people and culture in the hierarchy society has created. Although he claims to reject his whiteness, he still has access to the social status it entails (see Mikelli 62-64).

The voice of members of racial minorities was discussed, analyzed and set into context by comparing it to the depiction of members of the dominant social groups. Throughout the story of *On the Road*, it can be observed that racial minorities do

neither have a voice of their own nor the power to express their opinions and, thereby, make themselves heard. *On the Road* contrasts agents and non-agents, subjects and objects: Especially Sal and Dean talk *about* and *to* members of racial minority groups, rather than listening to them or talking *with* them. They do not realize that these people also have voices, opinions and ideologies themselves. As has been shown, the novel, however, uses exceptions to this in order to — as a result of the ensuing contrast — highlight the general tendency portrayed by the actions and thoughts of Sal and Dean. The most prominent exception is the character of Victor, whom Sal and Dean meet in Mexico. Victor is given a voice. Unlike other members of racial minorities, he is portrayed with a considerable amount of attention and sincerity.

The indigenous people of Mexico, who are perceived and portrayed as uneducated, stationary and silent represent a special case. As discussed in chapter 4.3, they are perceived to have an even lower status than other racial minority groups by the main characters. Dean and Sal gaze at them and it can be argued that they look at them as if they were exhibits being on display. Dean's description of a little indigenous girl, who they come across on the side of the road, reflects the racism and dismissal Native Americans faced throughout the history of the United States. Native Americans do not have a voice. Throughout the story they are portrayed as powerless. The depiction of the encounter with indigenous people of Mexico demonstrates a lack of individualization. By this, the novel represents the lack of recognition which Native Americans faced, in this example, by the narrator Sal Paradise, and in a broader sense by society. It has been shown that in *On the Road* indigenous people are denied individual identities. The way they are portrayed and treated by Sal and Dean suggests that their sole purpose is to entertain travelers and sell crystals on the side of the road. Dean takes pleasure in speculating about their history and personal life by assuming that Native Americans do not see anything else of the world besides their own limited territory thereby implicitly judging the latter as unimportant and inconsequential. By failing to represent what Native Americans do say, Dean and Sal express a lack of interest in the real stories these indigenous people have to tell. In the same spirit, Sal mentions his previous encounters with Native Americans in the United States and describes them as being foolish and clowns (Kerouac 255).

In addition to the voice of members of racial minorities, the notion of mobility in connection with racial minorities was analyzed. As illustrated previously, it is apparent

that racial minorities represented in the novel do not have the same opportunities of travel and freedom as members of the white community do. Unlike white people, Mexicans are portrayed as having to do hard, low-paid, physical labor. For example, they have to work in the fields. African-Americans are often represented as poor or, like the Mexicans, employed in low-income jobs which limit the scope of their choices as well as their mobility on a daily basis. By contrasting the fact that traveling freely was not possible for racial minority groups with the central motif of the novel, i.e. being on the road, it reconstructs and underlines this narrative which is, at times, even made explicit, as exemplified by the encounter with indigenous people in Mexico.

6.2. Gender issues

In addition to matters of race, this thesis also explored issues of gender, gender roles and inequalities regarding gender in *On the Road*. The main characters in the book are men and the story is told by one of the male characters. Therefore, the reader experiences the story through the narrator's male eyes. The narration itself is shaped by his background and perspectives. As exemplified in chapter 5, female characters in the novel are depicted as being treated differently than their male counterparts. Women are either considered lovers and sex-partners and, by extension, also as some sort of diversion for men. When they fail to comply with the expectations of the patriarchal society which the United States of the postwar period represented, women are portrayed as being mistreated, called "whores", abandoned and exploited. While the male protagonists are staged as being on the road and living the life of travelers and hobos, women are characterized as belonging to the domestic, stationary side of life. As has been shown, women only rarely join the men on the road, except for Marylou, who is the only one joining them for a longer period of time. Arguably, this description of an exception to the norm serves the narration as a point of reference with regard to which it can re-constitute the truth and permanence of the "proper" feminine ideal. Most of the other women are represented as stationary. They take care of the household and raise children. Sal's aunt is depicted as the caring substitute mother for Sal, providing a home and financial support. Thereby, she embodies the social expectation that women should be kind, agreeable, nurturing and forgiving. She

also lives up to gender norms in that she is described as hospitable, for example when Sal brings friends home and she cooks breakfast for everyone. Since she lives in accordance with gender conventions, it is not surprising that Sal sees her as a respectable woman. In spite of this respect, Sal does go beyond contemporary notions of women's position in society: He refers to her only as "his aunt". The reader does neither get to know her name nor any biographical information with respect to her. In addition to describing the prevalent beliefs with regard to the interaction of the genders in the postwar period, this can be seen as an example of a general, derogatory theme towards women in *On the Road*.

Furthermore, it was shown that women hardly have a voice of their own. For the most part, their representation, mediated by Sal, does not include the expression of their own opinions. On the rare occasions when they do express themselves, women are deprecated and dismissed. The example of Galatea Dunkel was used to demonstrate that women who assess, characterize, or criticize men are not taken seriously. Also incidents with other women, of whom some are engaged in relationships with Dean, serve to illustrate how comments by female speakers are dismissed and ridiculed. The fact that women are deprived of their own voice is represented as a self-evident fact throughout most of the novel. At one point, however, it is made explicit when in a rare moment of insight, Sal becomes aware that women have lives of their own and talk to each other, while the men are on the road pursuing their freedom and "kicks".

A number of examples were used to illustrate that women are depicted as "sweet" and loving. In addition, most women are referred to as "girls", regardless of their age. This infantilization of the female characters serves to highlight the supposed superiority of men. In this context, it was emphasized that the act of judging women is presented as a self-evident fact in *On the Road*. In a society, the role of judge falls to authority figures, i.e. persons of particularly high status or reputation. The representation of the realities presented in the novel, never questions that this prestigious role rightfully belongs to men and not to women.

From the point of view of the male protagonists, women must meet a clearly defined set of requirements in order to be considered as a longer-term partner or spouse. For example, Sal demands that a woman he deems marriageable needs to be "pure" and have "innocent dear eyes". From the male perspective, mediated by Sal,

these requirements are something typically female. While they apply to women, they have no validity for men. This circumstance becomes obvious by the way men's promiscuity is celebrated while women who do not adhere to the predominant expectations regarding their gender are called "whores". The obvious hypocrisy resulting from this contradiction remains unchallenged in *On the Road*. In this manner, the novel reaffirms the validity of traditional, conventional notions of gender.

Despite the fact that homosexuality was denied during the mid-twentieth century, it plays a part in *On the Road*. Homosexual men are generally depicted as being viewed with suspicion and as kept at a distance by the central male characters of the story. Dean, more so than Sal engages in homophobic comments and denounces homosexual men. Sal, on the other hand, stresses that he knows homosexuals all over the country and he can not explain to himself why he sometimes harasses them in bars. Here again, Sal is portrayed as an individual whose actions are determined by his social background. Although he condemns his own actions which leads him into self-discontent and causes him to struggle with his own identity, he is not capable of manifesting his own values and ideas. As shown by Bell (2015), Sal identifies the culture and lifestyle of homosexual as a rebellion against cultural expectations and dominant ideologies. In addition, homosexuals are portrayed as the targets of verbal and physical violence: As has been put forward, Dean repeatedly expresses homophobic comments. In addition, he attempts to get money from a specific homosexual man, with whom he and Sal traveled in the same car. In order to exploit him and to use him for his own advantage, Dean listens to him and acts friendly. By withholding even the bare minimum of respect towards this fellow human being, he illustrates that he does not regard homosexuals as subjects. As soon as the man becomes suspicious, Dean falls back to his attitude of dismissal and denunciation. Despite the fact that homosexuality and the culture around it, is presented as an interesting idea as well as a revolutionary force, *On the Road* does not oppose heteronormativity which was an unquestioned reality during the 1940s and 1950s (see Rubin qtd. in Evans 118).

Friendships among men play a large role in the novel and are portrayed as more resistant and fulfilling than romantic relationships between men and women. Most of the time, men are depicted as staying among themselves, as interacting with one another with mutual respect and understanding. Exceptions apply, most prominently,

when Dean leaves sick Sal alone behind in Mexico to pursue his divorce and subsequent new love relationship back in New York. With respect to this exception, it has been argued that by developing dysentery, Sal enters the realm which society expects women to occupy: the stationary, the domestic and the vulnerable. Similar to the female characters in the story, he is perceived as a burden and hindrance with regard to Dean's never-ending desire to move and stay on the road.

7. Conclusion

The present thesis has addressed the question of what attitudes are reflected in the representation of gender and race in Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road*, both in terms of form and content. The findings show that the cultural assumptions present during the historical and social timeframe of the novel, the late 1940s and early 1950s, played a significant role in regards to attitudes toward racial and gender minorities portrayed in the novel. Both with respect to form and content, the analysis shows a striking ambivalence: Despite the progressive perspective they assume against conservative views and ideas, the protagonists reflect and reproduce the common socio-political narratives of their time. The ambivalence between rejection and reproduction of common conventions, ideas and ideologies forms the basis for this thesis.

The historical overview showed that the postwar era was a particularly difficult time for the United States, but it also was a time of change and upheaval. Traditional roles regarding race and gender were still omnipresent. Nevertheless, a group of novelists, poets and dropouts of a conventional lifestyle contradicted the prevailing conformism and fought traditional roles. Members of the Beat Generation wanted to live a life on the margins of society and counter to conventional and traditional ways of life. Assuming that the novel can be considered a representative reflection of that era, the analysis of *On the Road* shows that reality painted a different picture, insofar as the characters in the novel, who were loosely based on actual members of the Beat Generation, engaged in acts of racism and sexism. Despite their intention to break up the rules of conventional, traditional lives and engage in acts of rebellion, members of the Beats fall back into their internalized, appropriated behavioral patterns.

As was shown in the analysis, Sal Paradise, the first person narrator of the story, is conflicted between his openness toward racial minorities and homosexuals, and his social background, the conventions it entails as well as privileges granted to him as a result of belonging to the white majority. Sal struggles with his "white ambitions" (Kerouac 164) and yearns for a better, easier life, he believes would be the result of belonging to a racial minority group. He considers his "white ambitions" responsible for his decision to leave Terry, a Mexican woman, with whom he engages in a temporary romantic relationship, until he "could feel the pull of [his] own life calling [him] back"

(89). "His own life" here, refers to his life as a white male, including the freedom to choose his identity and the ability to quit his work on the cotton-fields. The analysis further shows that Sal, on the one hand, mourns his alleged disadvantages of being white, and on the other hand, is not aware of the underlying privilege this same thought signifies. The mere ability to consider changing one's identity already presupposes power, a noteworthy source of which the membership in a dominant group of society is represented. In contrast, racial minority groups do not usually have the freedom and capability to aspire to a different identity or the opportunity to terminate their job in order to travel the country.

Another striking characteristic of the representation of the protagonist's interactions with racial minorities has been the romanticization of the lives and social environment especially of African-Americans. Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty depict members of the African-American community and their lifestyle as hip, joyful and as the epitome of carelessness. Dean constantly "digs" African-Americans and celebrates their assumed joyfulness and "otherness", albeit ignoring any personal traits. Considering this romanticized depiction, it seems obvious that Sal and Dean do not demonstrate any awareness of the obstacles, oppression and history which members of the African-American community had to deal with. The analysis shows that Sal and Dean treat members of racial minorities according to their own personal interests in them, respectively their personal connection to them, whether emotional or regional. For Sal, Mexicans are the ones which are depicted using the most character traits and individuality. Mexicans in the novel are called by their actual names and are considered individual human beings who are treated with more respect than members of other racial minority groups. African-Americans are mostly depicted as a group without individual personality traits or biographical details. Nevertheless, they appear to be closer to Sal and Dean than members of indigenous peoples. As illustrated in the analysis of Native Americans, it can be seen that members of the indigenous peoples, Sal and Dean come across during their trip through Mexico, are portrayed as intangible entities who are wild, savage and stationary. Especially the immobility of these Natives is emphasized, which is in stark contrast to Sal and Dean's own restlessness and their opportunity of mobility.

As the analysis with respect to issues of gender and sexism in *On the Road* has demonstrated, the representation of women and men deviating from the heterosexual

norm portrayed in the novel shows similarities with that of members of racial minorities. As has been stated in Chapter 3.3.1, the Beat Generation's stance in matters of gender roles and gender equality were, in contrast to their assumed anti-conformism, rather conservative and misogynist. *On the Road* reflects those attitudes and shows many instances of sexism and the reproduction of misogynist mindsets. The very first sentence in the novel sets the scene for the whole story: "I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up" (Kerouac 3). The story begins with the departure of a woman and the coming of a male friendship. Women in the novel are depicted as underdeveloped characters, often portrayed as a burden and side-lined. They are, moreover, objectified, mistreated and the target of the male gaze and infantilization, as manifested in Sal's repeated references to women as "girls". The analysis of the novel shows that female characters only serve certain purposes in the novel, from being reduced to their physical appearances and the mere existence "for the male characters to have sex with" (Birkin 18), to being exploited for the men's financial benefit. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrated the extent to which women are depicted as being degraded and insulted. In *On the Road*, women live on the fine line between being lovers and being insulted and dismissed. In rapid succession, female characters go from being called "a sweet little girl" (Kerouac 4) to "the whore" (5). Such assertions confirm that women are represented as objects of desire but not as subjects with legitimate needs for their own sake. Compliance with the conventional requirements of gender is the main criterion which determines the value of a woman: Only if a woman can be described as having "[...] pure and innocent dear eyes [...]" (277) and "domesticated", she is considered a marriageable woman.

Similar to racial minorities, also women and homosexual men do not have much of a voice in the novel and lack comprehensive representation. Women are either portrayed as quiet bystanders, whose statements and thoughts are not considered relevant enough as to being described using more than a few words, or they are considered killjoys and "tenacious loser[s]" (Kerouac 106) in the rare cases they raise their voices and state their opinions openly. Galatea Dunkel is portrayed as a woman who speaks her mind openly in the novel. Her rather direct and unfiltered criticism, especially toward Dean, is very uncharacteristic for a woman living in the 1940s, and also a rare example of criticism toward men within the novel. Sal's aunt, another side character, is not even granted a proper name but only referred to as "my aunt" (5)

throughout the novel, although she is the one who makes Sal's travels, and subsequently his experiences along the road, possible in the first place by providing financial support and offering him a home.

Furthermore, the notion of mobility in connection with gender inequalities has been analyzed. The result of the analysis shows that while men are "on the road", women are expected to be stationary and to take care of the household and the children. This goes hand in hand with the general conception of gender roles in the United States after World War II, where men were considered the sole breadwinners who worked outside the home and provided financially for the whole family, while women represented the stay-at-home mothers, responsible for the nuclear family, and housewives, who were not considered working outside the home and were therefore immobile (see Pursell 34). In the course of the story, male characters engage in many ephemeral romantic relationships with various women, who seem to be stationed in the various cities the men visit along the trip. "[Dean] had a new girl in all the cities he visited" (Lujano 144). Only in very rare instances do women join men on their journeys, and most of the time these joint road trips do not last for long. Moreover, women on these trips are described as complainers and hindrances for the men's journeys.

Male relationships are depicted as being much more straightforward and solid than (romantic) relationships between men and women. At the end of the novel, however, this general picture is subverted by Sal's sickness and Dean's reaction to it. After getting sick in Mexico, Sal is unable to move. Similar to members of racial minorities, he is stationary and constrained by his immobility. Subsequently, he is abandoned by Dean, similarly to how Dean's many ephemeral romantic relationships ended.

As the analysis showed, the male characters created "their own version of the nuclear family" (Birkin 20) on the road. By leaving out the aspects of a home, men also eliminate the need for women and create their own space on the road, which serves as a retreat from domesticity. The novel depicts men as being constantly on the road and restless. Whenever Sal tries to settle down for a longer period of time, he always feels as if he and his life belonged on the road.

The analysis of the topics race and gender could be extended to books or poems by other writers of the Beat Generation. In particular, Carolyn Cassady's autobiographical book *Off the Road: Twenty Years with Cassady, Kerouac and*

Ginsberg should be mentioned and taken into consideration here. The character of Camille in *On the Road* is based on Carolyn Cassady, who wrote this book starting with the initial stages of Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady's friendship. Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady were the models for the characters Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty. The characters are at least partially based on the real-life individuals.

The present document explored the notion of gender issues and sexism in Kerouac's novel mainly on the basis of the perspective of its characters. Since women were mostly excluded from the inner circle of Beat writers and the present analysis shows that women were not granted much of a voice for themselves, an analysis into Cassady's autobiographical insights could prove fruitful. Furthermore, analyses of other novels written by Jack Kerouac, in connection with the research subject and questions presented in this paper, would bring new insights in this area of research. Subsequently, the life and living conditions of Kerouac, and the Beat Generation in general, should be taken into consideration in an analysis concerning race and gender issues. How was the Beat Generation and their members influenced by the general notions of race and gender in the 1940s and 1950s, and how are these notions represented in the works of the Beats at large?

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Appendix

Abstract

Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road* is considered a classic example of road narratives. The story, which is loosely based on the travels of the author between 1947 and 1950, exhibits a variety of thematic and stylistic choices which are of great significance with respect to the issues of race and gender. Using these features, the representation of issues in the context of race and gender presented in the novel can be analyzed in terms of the historical and cultural background the story is set in. In addition, the roles of men and women in the novel are analyzed as well as the question how gender roles influence the course of the story. A clear distinction between male and female characters can be observed: Male characters are mobile, active and adventurous and represent the free, unattached and often carefree part of society, while female characters are non-mobile and domestic and take the role of passive and silent bystanders. In addition to gender inequalities, also racial disparities are depicted. Whiteness is represented as the dominant and desired form of being, although the novel also contains the notion that being white can be a burden which is difficult to overcome. While there are instances of rebellion and the rejection of racism and sexism throughout the novel, the characters fail to prevail against the conventions and social conditions. Instead, they adhere to these social norms and engage in acts of racism and sexism themselves. The identification and analysis of the ambivalence of rejection and reproduction of social conventions with regards to gender and race contained in *On the Road* is the central element of the present thesis.

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Jack Kerouacs Roman *On the Road* wurde 1951 geschrieben und gilt allgemein als ein Klassiker im Bereich der "road novels" und als ein wichtiges Werk der Beat Generation. Die Aspekte des Rassismus sowie der Geschlechterdarstellung in Hinblick auf den Roman und dessen Charaktere gilt es zu untersuchen. Der Roman zeichnet ein eindeutiges Bild der Ungleichheiten sowohl zwischen Männern und Frauen, als auch zwischen Angehörigen der weißen Mehrheit und ethnischen Minderheiten. Es ist eine klare Unterscheidung zwischen männlichen und weiblichen Charakteren zu beobachten: Männliche Charaktere sind mobil, aktiv und abenteuerlustig und repräsentieren den freien, ungebundenen und oft sorglosen Teil der Gesellschaft, während weibliche Charaktere stationär und häuslich sind und die Rolle der passiven und stillen Zuschauerinnen einnehmen. Diese ungleiche Rollen- und Machtverteilung war typisch für die Vereinigten Staaten in der Mitte des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts und spiegelt sich in vielen Beispielen von Alltagsrassismus, die Teil der Handlung sind, wider. Rassismus spielt eine bedeutende Rolle für die Entwicklung der Geschichte: "Weiß" scheint die dominante und erwünschte Daseinsweise zu sein, wobei im Verlauf der Geschichte deutlich wird, dass die Zugehörigkeit zur Gruppe der Weißen auch eine schwer zu überwindende Last sein kann. Obwohl es im Verlauf des Romans immer wieder Momente des Aufbegehrens gegen und der Ablehnung von Rassismus und Sexismus gibt, gelingt es den Figuren nicht, sich gegen die Konventionen und gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse durchzusetzen. Indem sie es versäumen, diesen Konventionen und Bedingungen zu widersprechen, beteiligen sie sich an der Konstruktion und Verifizierung dieser sozialen Normen. Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit zeigt auf, dass *On the Road* von einer Ambivalenz zwischen dem Aufbegehren gegen sozio-politische Konventionen und der gleichzeitigen Reproduktion derselben geprägt ist.