Rebellious Individuality
in the Beats' Literature and Life

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Absrtact:
Individuality, which means stressing and according importance to some peculiarities of one's character and to a large extent ignoring collective obligations and considerations, is a characteristic of man that shares it with his Creator and therefore, according to the Beats, should be unconditioned and should not be suppressed or subdued. Although the Beats believed that individuality was crucial to society, America at that time gave it a dirty look and people in general were not kind to that which was different from societal criteria. So, the Beats felt unsafe in an anti-individualist society stamping on the individual's innovations, advancements, and difference. The Beats' life was in fact a battle between them and society, between conformity and individuality, between heterogeneity and homogeneity, between collective and individual norms. This paper is concerned with the effects of society on the Beats' awareness of themselves and how that awareness dominates their entire life including relationship with other people.

Keywords: American society, conformist, Beats, identity, individuality

1. Introduction

For the Beats individuality is so crucially important that Ginsberg understands it as a unique part of human sentience and identical in all men, which the individual shares with his Creator and claims that recent history has been the record of a vast conspiracy to suppress and exterminate contemplative individuality and instead, impose one level of mechanical consciousness on mankind and also accuses the system of mass communication of conducting this process during which it feeds to our senses the only immediate historical data that we can know and act on. These media, Ginsberg continues, prohibit, mock, and suppress the deepest and most personal sensitivities and those who support the organization of mass stereotype communication mock, misinterpret, and suppress any manifestation of unconditioned individuality (Schumacher, 2015: 112–13). Psychologically speaking, self and individual are used interchangeably and basically, an individual is a self or person, although according to Brissett, social psychologists more prefer the concept of self (Baumeister, 1986: 187). Bordens (2008) distinguishes between the 'individual self' and the 'collective self'. The former is the part of the

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self that refers to the ideas, thoughts, and information we have about ourselves or in brief, to our self-knowledge; it can answer the questions who we are and what we are. The latter is the part of the self that comes from membership in groups and can answer the question what relation we have to the group (35). Cultures do not accord equal importance to these selves; in some cultures like America the individual self is dominant and in some other cultures like Japan the collective self is given preference in such a way that cultures, family, religious community, or nation takes pride of place. Wodarski (2002) claims that Americans are even more individualistic than Europeans who put strong emphasis on family (3). In societies in which the individual self is primary people accord great importance to their own private needs and are rather independent of any set of social relations but in societies that the collective self takes priority over the individual self, meeting the expectations of others is given preference because people know themselves as part of the social context. Regardless of whether a society is individual self or collective self, sometimes the dominance of each self is determined by situational factors. When for example, Japan assaulted the American troops in Pearl Harbor, the whole country united against the enemy. Naturally, in a country which is individual self, people emphasize their differences and in a country which is collective self, people prioritize their similarities; hence, the Beats' great emphasis on difference. In a country which is individual self the individual wishes to stand out and therefore, he is happy if he is richer, more accomplished, and more successful than others and conversely, in a country which is collective self the individual wishes to blend in and not be noticeable. As Clarke (2005) reports, extensive research has proved that people in less industrialized countries are more collectivist and even more altruistic (50). Social psychologically speaking, the self-concept or the level of the individual's personal knowledge too much depends on the culture in which he lives. So, personal experiences, the individual's interaction with others, and cultural forces all play roles in shaping our self or individuality. In other words:

> The public self is the self that is manifested in the presence of others, that is formed when other people attribute traits and qualities to the individual, and that is communicated to other people in the process of self-presentation. The private self is the way the person understands himself or herself and is the way the person really is-even if other people fail to recognize it. (Baumeister, 1986: V)

Perhaps the reason behind the fact that most of white Americans see African Americans as responsible for their own plight is that they put great emphasis on individuality and do not consider society's role. It is interesting to say that autobiographical writing, the style that the Beats mostly used, abounds in individualistic societies like America.

According to a piece of research "as early as middle childhood, children from Western cultures tell more elaborated, more detailed, and more emotional narratives of their past than do children from Eastern cultures" (Fivush, 2004: 576). So, cultural differences in autobiographical memory mirror the distinction between individualism and collectivism.

2. The Beats and Their Individual Identities

From the point of view of social psychology, when an individual surrenders to the authority and turns in to the instructions issued by it, he actually enters into an 'agentic state' that weakens his individuality. Conversely, when an individual feels discomfort in an obedience situation, he experiences 'role strain' that makes him question the legitimacy of the authority and therefore, strengthens his individuality (Bordens, 2008: 269) and this is the same thing that happened to the Beats. Cote (2002) presents a typology of five identity strategies and claims that they "capture the range of contemporary life-course trajectories" (3). He names these strategies as follows: Refusers, Drifters, Searchers, Guardians, and Resolvers (3). Refusers, Drifters, and Searchers are anomic meaning that like the Beats they are alienated, loosely rooted, and disconnected from others. Guardians and Resolvers are nomic (do not come within the scope of our discussion in this paper) meaning that unlike the Beats they are committed, connected, integrated, and rooted with others (60). Refusers to refuse entry into adulthood, as Cote contends, develop a series of defences. Characterized by a dependency on someone or something, for example, they lock themselves into child-like behaviour patterns and they may live with their parents for a long time or for their lives (3). Kerouac is very akin to Refusers. He remained with his mother to his dying day and was heavily dependent on her. Or using Freud's words, his psychic energy had become fixated on his mother (Wormer, 2007: 23). When a reporter asked about his plans, Kerouac told him: "Always go back to my mother" (qtd. in Creighton, 2007: 198). In his mother "he already had an almost perfect camp follower. Although she couldn't satisfy his sexual needs, she supported him economically and emotionally" (Nicosia, 1983: 209). When Joan Haverty and Kerouac married, Kerouac still desired to live with his mother again because he wished for her care and nurturing. So, they moved to her mother's house in Richmond Hill. According to Fromm (2002), this relationship may be neurotic or even schizophrenic and it is not surprising to find this behaviour in the average adult because after such a person is born, he is afraid to take the next step of birth, that is, to be weaned from mother's breasts. These kinds of people desire to be nursed, protected, and mothered by a

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motherly figure. If this motherly protection is withdrawn, they are frightened and insecure but when it is provided they are active and optimistic (38–39). This fixation with the mother, as Fromm argues, is rather incestuous (39). It is not accidental, then, that Jones, a Kerouac critic, suggests that the relationship between Kerouac and his mother "borders on the Oedipal" (Theado, 2000: 21). Or McKee (2004) describes him as "a guilt ridden omni-sexual and, as his mother's darling, the object of incestuous ministrations (she bathed him until he was twelve) and an enmeshment with her that lasted until his death" (VIII). In *On the Road*, Sal lives with her aunt as his mother figure and is very dependent on her: "I sent my aunt an airmail letter asking her for fifty dollars" (Kerouac, 1959: 36), "I shot my aunt a penny postcard across the land and asked for another fifty" (58), "The money was in; my aunt had saved my lazy butt again" (60), or in this one that his child-like dependence is more obvious: "My aunt got up and looked at me. 'Poor little Salvatore', she said in Italian. 'You're thin, you're thin. Where have you been all this time?'" (63), "We were waiting for my next GI check to come through; my aunt was forwarding it" (91).

Cote (2002) also says that Refusers may commit crimes (3) and this happens to be true for Sal and Dean (Kerouac and Cassady respectively in real life) in *On the Road*: "I took bread and cheese and slipped out the door" (Kerouac, 1959: 92), "At Sonora I again helped myself to free bread and cheese while the proprietor chatted" (94), "Dean rushed out the next moment and stole a car right from the driveway and took a dash to downtown Denver and came back with a newer, better one (128), "Dean … set a Denver record for stealing cars and went to the reformatory" (25). Refusers, as Cote (2002) describes them, may refuse to acquire occupational skills (3) and it can be a reason for their dependence on others. None of the Beats had permanent jobs. Sal depends on his aunt and has no skill; Dean, too, never has a steady job because their "relationship to work and pleasure is mechanical: work is a means to make money, not a mode of self-realization, and satisfaction must be instant and passively enjoyed" (Fromm, 2002: XXXIV). Cote (2002) also adds that Refusers usually find a mate or a group of friends who enables them to stay permanently in a pre-adult status (3). The so called Beat Generation or Dean in *On the Road* played this role and Kerouac followed them on the road – especially Burroughs in real life – in their travels to Mexico or other places instead of taking on adulthood responsibilities. It was not accidental, then, that Kerouac's father "attributed Jack's shiftlessness to the bad influence of Burroughs and Ginsberg" (Nicosia, 1983: 137). Regarding engagements with their social environments, Cote (2002) argues, Refusers are perhaps given little encouragement, guidance, and structure as children (3). Accordingly, Nicosia (1983) reports that Kerouac's father "bequeathed

to his son a social animosity, a feeling that the civilized world was arranged for the exploitation of poor minorities … and this sense of injustice led to a rebelliousness against the standing order (37). That is why Refusers, Cote (2002) reiterates, cannot be actively engaged in a community of adults (3). Cote also continues that Refusers in their adult years, in their twenties and thirties for example, conduct themselves so irresponsibly that they sabotage their own position in any adult community; for instance, they may engage in heavy alcohol or drug use (3): "Jack drank himself to death at age forty-seven" (McKee, 2004: X). Alcoholism was called "the writer's black lung disease" (qtd. in McKee, 2004: X). Theado (2000) goes even further than this and connects his death to his heavy use of alcohol: "he died an early alcoholic's death" (26).

Burroughs fits the description of Drifters given by Cote. Drifters at their disposal, according to Cote (2002), have more personal resources. For example, they show higher levels of intelligence (4). Burroughs was older than Kerouac and Ginsberg and so intelligent that they accepted him as their mentor. He had already obtained a BA in English Literature from Harvard University, went to the University of Chicago to conduct research into Egyptian hieroglyphics, and had a lot of information about all types of drugs. It was Burroughs who introduced the inspiring book Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* to Kerouac. Family wealth is another resource that Drifters may have at their disposal on the list made by Cote (4). Burroughs' grandfather William Seward whom our young Burroughs was named after him invented the famous Burroughs adding machine and courtesy of this invention, it is reputed that Burroughs each month was provided with one hundred and fifty dollars that during the Depression gave him security; something that the other Beats were completely deprived of. Then, it could be said that if not wealthy, his family was comfortably off. The other resource that Cote mentions is occupational skills (4). Burroughs had a short-lived factory job, worked as a private detective, and most famously as an exterminator. In *Naked Lunch* he says: "They call me the Exterminator. At one brief point of intersection I did exercise that function and witnessed the belly dance of roaches suffocating in yellow pyretheum … Sluiced fat bedbugs from rose wall paper in shabby theatrical hotels on North Clark and poisoned the purposeful Rat, occasional eater of human babies" (Burroughs, 1959: 102). Because of their lack of integration into the community, Drifters, as Cote (2002) submits, are usually unable or uninterested to apply their resources in a continuous and consistent way: "The Drifter may feel that conforming may be a 'cop out', or may be 'selling out'; or the Drifter may simply feel that he or she is 'too good' to 'toe the line'" (4). Accordingly, Burroughs applied all his skills 'at

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one brief point of intersection' as mentioned in the above quotation. He used his resources in spending time with pushers, pimps, and hoodlums; in leading him through the hospitals, prisons, and slums of three continents; in cultivating perverts; in exiling himself from civilization; and in using different types of drugs. Cote (2002) believes that shallow interpersonal relationship, poor impulse control, and lack of commitment to an adult community are the reasons behind this pre-adult behaviour pattern (4).

Ginsberg fits the description of Searchers given by Cote. According to Cote (2002), Searchers do not give up finding a valid adult community but their high criteria are so unrealistic that nothing can satisfy them; they are always dissatisfied with themselves and they may project this satisfaction onto others. They are usually unable to find perfection in themselves and in communities and this is the reason behind their travels for which there can be no end (4). In case of Ginsberg, we can refer to his travels to Japan in search of Buddhism and India in search of yogis and holy men. Searchers, Cote adds, may seek out perfect role models but if they prove to be imperfect, Searchers may grow tired of them or in comparison with those of the role models, Searchers' own imperfections may create a sense of despair (4). For Ginsberg (2006), it is impossible to achieve perfection: "Endless cycles of conflict happening in nothingness/make it impossible to grasp for the perfection/which does not exist" (231); he finds perfection only in nature: "No imperfection in the budded mountain … no imperfection in the grass" (515); he even complains about his behaviour as a searcher of perfection: "Why've I wanted to appear heroic, why/strain to accomplish what no mortal could –/ Heaven on earth, self perfection, household/security, & the accomplishment of changing the World" (971). And also his dissatisfaction: "Under the burden/of solitude, /under the burden/of dissatisfaction" (148), "illumined by machine eyes, screaming drumbeats, /passionate voices of Oklahoma City/chanting No Satisfaction" (427), "Last night almost broke my heart dancing to/Cant Get No Satisfaction" (446).

Individualization has become a natural characteristic of late modern societies in which people prefer to develop their individuality rather than be a cog in the machine. However, Cote (2002) speaks of two types of selves or individuals: the independent self and the interdependent self. The independent self that is more common in Western industrial societies emphasizes his sense of autonomy and separateness from others and his choice of duties and obligations as the basis of allegiances with others. The independent self is considered as 'whole unto itself' comprising his own feelings, beliefs, and thoughts that are regarded as being outside him. The interdependent self, on the other hand, that is more common in cultures of the Orient is more duty-bound and attentive

to the needs and expectations of others. The interdependent self is more likely to utilize and experience 'other focused' emotions such as shame, sympathy, and empathy which are the result of relationship with the other. The interdependent self, Cote continues, places himself in the context of accommodating and cooperating with others whereas the independent self tries to avoid, manipulate, or control others; he sees duties and obligations as matters of individual choice (85–86). Dean in *On the Road* is an independent self who is criticized by Galatea:

> "You 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 just throw them aside. Not only that but you're silly about it. It never occurs to you that life is serious and there are people trying to make something decent out of it instead of just goofing all the time." (113)

For this type of character "a man must have and must preserve and defend the freedom of the step and the right to make a choice and grasp opportunities … It is the free choice that counts and the conviction that nobody can either 'fence you in' or 'push you around'" (Erikson 1987: 36–37) and this is the same thing that Kerouac experienced in the navy when he realized that it went against the grain to do the military. The Beats, however, believed that in America instead of individualization, "a mass-produced mask of individuality", a phrase used by Erikson (1987), had been created (267).

3. Views on Individuality

Freire (1993) contends that preventing an individual from their own decision making, you actually change them into objects and simultaneously, believes that only in fellowship and solidarity the pursuit of full humanity is carried out not in isolation or individualism: "Attempting *to be more* human, individualistically, leads to *having more,* egotistically, a form of dehumanization" (85–86). On the other hand, Fromm (2002) argues that in the twentieth century, the alienated individual, as an impoverished 'thing', depends on powers outside himself and has forgotten his own powers and richness and all this has led to a loss of sense of self and of individual identity (121). He reiterates that "no institution and no thing is higher than any human individual" and if this is not so, human life will not be ethical (168). In his moral ideas Fromm emphasizes love and "universal brotherliness" (59) that most of the Beats' characters, according to the above-mentioned quotation, lack. So, it should be noted that the Beats' unrestricted individualism would not be completely confirmed by Fromm and Freire.

According to Lecky, individuality or self-concept as a social creation is only possible within the scope of the value system and any resistance, too, will be put up within it:

> The individual sees the world from his own viewpoint, with himself as the center. Any value entering the [value) system which is inconsistent with the individual's valuation of himself cannot be assimilated; it meets with resistance and is, unless a general reorganization occurs, to be rejected. This resistance is a natural phenomenon; it is essential for the maintenance of individuality. (qtd. in Delamater, 2006: 209)

Asch submits that people create macro cultural factors – social organizations (institutions), conceptual organizations (cultural concepts), and physical organizations (artifacts) – and reciprocally and automatically they take on the characteristics of the same factors and this, as a matter of fact, gives them support, stability, and strength (Ranter, 2008: 43). Although society is composed by and of individuals, Durkheim explains, what preserves their individuality is not an aggregate of individuals. In other words, society is, of course, individuals but individuals so organized together in a structure that changes their individuality (Ranter, 2008: 43). Conversely, because of man's alienation, Sullivan, a famous psychiatrist, even rejects the common view that there exists a unique individual self and instead, calls Lecky and Durkheim's concept the "delusion of unique individuality" (Fromm, 2002: 187–188). It is not accidental, then, that the Beats strived to bring about real individuality because they did not believe in Lecky's concept, too; in fact, they knew that a society devoid of individuality produces only two types of people: "the conditioners and the conditioned; the active and the passive barbarians" (Fromm, 2002: 215). Marcuse (2007) complains that American society suppresses individuality; it not only determines the socially needed occupations and attitudes but also individual needs and aspirations (XLV-VI). It is only the individual who has the right to decide what are true and false needs and any tribunal that arrogate to itself the right to decide is reprehensible (8). In *Desolation Angels* Kerouac proves that both Sullivan and Marcuse are right. Duluoz in this novel is stopped by both the police and media and asked where he is going and his answer is that he is looking for peace which, as Johnson contends, implies that "the celebrity can preserve no private life, no real" and they have "nowhere to hide from the coercive social" (Myrsiades, 2002: 49). In general, "Modern persons find themselves 'between public and private' with no undoubted, satisfying public definition of self, nor secure and convincing private sense of self-identity" (Weigert, 2006: 55). Depriving people of their individuality, the developed industrial civilization change them into things and instruments and as a result, they become slaves because, as

Marcuse (2007) reports, in Perroux's view, slavery is not determined by obedience or hardness of labour but by the reduction of man to the state of a mere instrument or thing (36). It should be mentioned that Marcuse and Fromm's opinions do not correspond exactly to the Beats' ideas, behaviour, and activities, especially Marcuse who rejected them because in his view, they had resorted to passive resistance and at last fell prey to capitalism. Riesman (1989), another sociologist, without naming them said that in the 1950s many educated people considered only two roles for themselves: the role of an organization man, that is, other-directed and the role of a well-shod cowboy, that is, inner-directed. In this period, Riesman contends, "togetherness" and "do-gooder" were terms of contempt and a solipsistic lack of concern for others (as we saw it in what Galatea said to Dean in the above-mentioned quotation) often masqueraded as autonomy and individuality had degenerated into eccentricity and egocentrism (IVI).

However, Whyte (2002) asserts that in the 1950s the large corporation was systematically stamping out individuality and people foolishly allowed this to occur, although that loss of individuality would at last be detrimental to both the individual and the corporation (VII). Whyte defines the term Social Ethic as "contemporary body of thought which makes morally legitimate the pressures of society against the individual" (7). Whyte believes that the reason behind this thought are threefold: firstly the group is more creative than the individual, secondly the individual needs belongingness and thirdly this belongingness could be achieved through the application of science. Man's isolation, as a unit of society, is meaningless. So, if he collaborates with others, he helps produce a whole which is, of course, greater than the sum of its parts. Therefore, conflict between man and society is not natural and if there are conflicts they are, in fact, misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication. Science, can remove all these obstacles and bring about consensus and equilibrium and make society and the individual's needs one and the same. But in the Social Ethic Whyte is differently describing, however, man's "duty is not so much to the community in a broad sense but to the actual, physical one about him, and the idea that in isolation from it – or active rebellion against it – he might eventually discharge the greater service is little considered" (8). Whyte reiterates that an ideal of individualism, like Dean's, which denies the obligation of man to others is impossible and simultaneously, he confirms that there always must be a conflict between the individual and society and that this conflict is the price of being an individual whose fight against society enables him to wrench his destiny into his own hands because organization has been made by man and could be changed by him and accidently, the fault is not in organization but it is in man's worship of it

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(13–14). Stamping out individuality in favour of organization destroys self-reliance because it implies that "The man of the future … is not the individualist but the man who works through others for others" (18). Ranter (2008) suggests that individualism should not be entirely renounced; only its dysfunctional aspects should be repudiated. For example, the individual's responsibility and autonomy should not be exaggerated and social influences, too, should not be obscured. A complete rejection of individualism deprives us of valuable tools for psychological fulfillment and total collectivism is one-sided and unsatisfactory. "This is why we need a balanced view of self that recognizes a person's weaknesses and responsibility for self-improvement, along with recognizing the social sources of these weaknesses" (177).

Whyte (2002) continues to say that by the time of the World War I, organization in American society set aside the Protestant Ethic that success was due to the individual's natural qualities and so, the social became the dominant current of thought in this country because accordingly, if man might not be perfectible, society might be (22). We are still told by the running elite that the individual is so nonlogical that he cannot recognize his problems let alone solve them. As a result, the individual should sacrifice himself for the group and believe that what is good for the group is good for him, too. Then, adjustment – to which the Beats were dead set against – rather than change becomes the desideratum and the group becomes the rock and maladjustment will be disharmony with it (36–37). Whyte expounds on the ideas of a member of the intellectual elite, anthropologist Lloyd Warner, who enunciates that rootedness in a stable group guarantees man's happiness and every individual should avoid change, fluidity, and conflict as social evils and should grow an unconscious desire for belongingness (39). In Whyte's view, to see the group as a creative vehicle is 'false collectivization' because people very rarely think in groups and the belief that the individual could be taught to create in concert rather than as an individual is impossible. As a group member, the individual seeks common ground with the others and does not take seriously what would go against the grain because new ideas really affront current agreement (51–52). Whyte complains that "the whole tendency of modern organization life is to muffle the importance of individual leadership … In group doctrine the strong personality is viewed with overwhelming suspicion" (53). Considering that "All creative advances are essentially a departure from agreed-upon ways of looking at things", Whyte poses the question of why should there be consensus in the group? Individualism, he suggests, should not be taken as antagonism. Upholding organization, we, in fact, make the individual distrust himself and "there is none more pathetic than that in which the human individual

demands that in the vital relationships of life he be treated not as an individual but as a member of some organization" (58–59). Ranter (2008) recommends that we should retain positive aspects of current macro cultural factors and negate their negative aspects and all this requires us to restructure our social institutions so that they are able to create new forms of competition, materialism, and individualism (177).

4. Individuality in the Beats

The Beat Generation aimed to resuscitate individuality in America. Kerouac spoke nostalgically of American individuality: "Like my grandfather this America was invested with selfbelieving individuality and this had begun to disappear around the end of World War II with so many great guys dead … when suddenly it began to emerge again, the hipsters began to appear gliding around saying, 'Crazy, man'" (qtd. in Creighton, 2007: 200). One of these great dead guys is undoubtedly Emerson, one of the Beats' mentors, who had said: "individuality is not only not inconsistent with culture, but is the basis of it" (Atkinson, 1950: 719). However, perhaps the Beats were not as individualistic as some people think. Holton, Skerl (2004) reports, quoting John Clellon Holmes and Diane di Prima shows that the Beats, in actuality, wanted to bring about a subculture or a new collective space. Holmes begins his essay "This Is the Beat Generation" with a teenage dope smoker who claims to be "part of a whole new culture" (18) and Diane di Prima speaks about the sense of collective experience this way:

> As far as we knew, there was only a small handful of us – perhaps forty or fifty in the city – who knew what we knew: who raced about in Levis and work shirts, made art, smoked dope, dug the new jazz, and spoke a bastardization of the black argot. We surmised that there might be another fifty living in San Francisco, and perhaps a hundred more scattered throughout the country. (18)

As a matter of fact, the dope, the art, the jazz, the work shirts, the Levis, and the mixture of different people separated the Beats from the conformist society of the 1950s and simultaneously established a new subculture. In constructing this new subculture African Americans, of course, played a crucial part as Sal shows it in *On the Road*:

> wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night … I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I was so drearily, a "white man" disillusioned. All my life I'd had white ambitions; that was why I'd abandoned a good woman like Terry. (Kerouac, 1959: 105)

The quotation reiterates that Sal separates himself from the white conformists and joins the black nonconformists. He even blames himself

that if he had not had white ambitions, he would not have abandoned Terry. As Skerl (2004) quotes Herbert Huncke, mixing with others even gave Huncke security: "It was the first place I'd found where I felt secure.... I felt as though I blended in" (24). In Burroughs' (1953) view, even the world of the junkies or homosexuals is a subcultural alternative to which he refers in *Junkie*: "By accident I met some rich homosexuals, of the international queer set who cruise around the world, bumping into each other in queer joints from New York to Cairo. I saw a way of life, a vocabulary, references, a whole symbol system, as the sociologists say" (XIII) or "Junk is not a kick. It is a way of life" (xvi). The Beats as a matter of fact, instead of mere individuality, created a sense of new community or subculture that challenged "at a symbolic level the 'inevitability', the 'naturalness'" of the dominant culture (Hebdige, 2002: 89).

Charters (1995) mentions a Kerouac's letter to Carolyn Cassady in which Kerouac denies individuality and ego-centrality which, as he believes, leads to selfishness:

> There are really no Neals, Carolyns, Allens or Jacks, but figments in a dream, believing themselves to have fundamental selfhood and yet they are buried and their flesh melts away . . . Biggest trouble is hangup on self, on ego-personality. I am not Jack . . . I am only Jack when I act myself, which is mean, silly, narrow, selfish. (428)

Self-centrality, according to Kerouac, prevents the individual from connecting to others. Seemingly, he sees no contradiction between individuality and interconnectedness and the bridge between these two is built by improvisation or impulse so that in connecting to others he does not consider difference if he feels affection towards somebody as he says in a letter recorded by Charters (117). Quinn, as Skerl (2004) mentions, contends that for Kerouac "improvisation dissolves the individual personality … improvisational processes subvert the organizing self in order to further intersubjectivity. Improvisational activity removes the process of meaning-making from the isolated individual and hands it to an interactive collectivity" (156). So, Kerouac (1959) was interested in a collectivity like this depicted in *On the Road*: "young heroes of all kinds, white, colored, Mexican, pure Indian, were on the field … Near me sat an old Negro who apparently watched the games every night. Next to him was an old white bum; then a Mexican family, then some girls, some boys – all humanity, the lot" (105). If this self-denial is true, Quinn, according to Skerl (2004) believes that it should not be called individuality or self-assertion but self-abandonment (156). Perhaps it is better to say that the Beats experienced both individuality and self-abandonment simultaneously and sometimes went to extremes. As it is clear in the above-mentioned quotation, Dean

abandons others and asserts only himself. The Beats, in general, fulfilled their individuality at the expense of their health as both Cassady and Kerouac died young and also at the expense of their whole life via wasting it. In other words, they had an irresponsible attitude both towards themselves and others. In *On the Road* Carlo criticizes others for the same thing:

> "I want to know what all this sitting around the house all day is intended to mean. What all this talk is and what you propose to do. Dean, why did you leave Camille and pick up Marylou?" No answer--giggles. "Marylou, why are you traveling around the country like this and what are your womanly intentions concerning the shroud?" Same answer. "Ed Dunkel, why did you abandon your new wife in Tucson and what are you doing here sitting on your big fat ass? Where's your home? What's your job?" Ed Dunkel bowed his head in genuine befuddlement. "Sal-- how comes it you've fallen on such sloppy days and what have you done with Lucille?" He adjusted his bathrobe and sat facing us all. "The days of wrath are yet to come. The balloon won't sustain you much longer. And not only that, but it's an abstract balloon. You'll all go flying to the West Coast and come staggering back in search of your stone." (Kerouac, 1959: 77)

Buddhism in which the Beats were interested is another reason behind this self-denial. The Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, himself practiced self-denial but advised his followers to avoid extremes of behaviour (Wangu, 2009: 10–11). Albahari (2006) explains that there is no sense of individual or self in Buddhism. In other words, self-sense is an illusion (xi). According to Lott, as Skerl (2004) mentions, Kerouac was absorbed by Buddhism's recommendation that the followers give up the sense of individualism and have compassion for all that exists (171). Lott expounds on Kerouac's paradox of Buddhist inclinations:

> In this trek called life, the single entity (the lone) is inextricably connected to and transformed by the plurality (the some). Such a connection in no way removes the typical denotation from Kerouac's *lonesome*. However, when Kerouac feels a part of, rather than apart from, his community he minimizes and, at times, eliminates his sense of estrangement, transforming a sense of being out-of-place into a trust in the cosmic chaos. The moments in which Kerouac can accept calmly his lonesomeness reflect his explorations into Buddhist philosophy; and his writings, including his nature writings, demonstrate his efforts to understand and to live that philosophy. (172)

Lott also argues that the Buddhist influences in Kerouac's works help him condemn the values of his fellow Americans (178) including their sense of collectivity without receptivity towards difference.

In American literature the exploitation of people's individuality has always been a major theme. Concerning individuality, Adamo refers to a contradiction in dealing with this problematic concept. Any collective answer to the question 'how are we to live?' robs man of his individuality and to answer it individually we will be condemned

(Elkholy, 2012: 33). So, Burroughs's answer that "Your private life is your own, to act exactly as you please" (qtd. in Baker, 2010: 85) was not acceptable to American society because according to Tanner, as Skerl (1991) mentions, "To say that the individual is 'free' is dangerously untrue in a society in which so much is done to shape our tastes, appetites, and fantasies" (106). In other words, people were seen as "abstractions in a bureaucratized system" (Foster, 1992: 100) not as individuals. However, in *Naked Lunch* Factualists, like Burroughs himself, fight against Liquefactionists, Divisionists, and Senders who intend to destroy individuality and bring about sameness. Individuality brings independence. In *Naked Lunch* "A. J. claims to be an 'independent', which is to say: 'Mind your own business'. There are no independents any more" (Burroughs, 1959: 77). "Men were expected to be logical, efficient, and cool-headed, organizing their lives according to their employers' needs. There was no place for the excitable, intense, and independent personality exemplified by frontier America. That older hero survived in movies and popular fiction" (Foster, 1992: 8); like Dean Moriarty, the only character who displays complete individuality in *On the Road*. Foucault somewhere says, Rabinow (1984) reports, that his objective is "to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects" (7) meaning that their individuality is taken away from them or they have become objectified. In fact, he examines "the technologies of 'subjection' by which individuals are formed as individuals" (During, 2005: 6). Although the system always strives to suppress individuality, Foucault (1991) simultaneously believes that individuality is precisely produced by disciplinary power itself and we by no means should think that the only function of power is to suppress it because seeking differences, eccentricities, peculiarities, and deviance, power throws light on them, too, and especially "as power becomes more anonymous and more functional, those on whom it is exercised tend to be more strongly individualized" (193). So, as Foucault contends:

> The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike, and in so doing subdues or crushes individuals. In fact, it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals. The individual, that is, is not the vis-a-vis of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects. The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle. (Gordon, 1980: 98)

Additionally, instead of being formed by the social apparatus, Foucault invites us to form ourselves as individuals (During, 2005: 118).

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5. Conclusion

The Beats had become battered and frustrated with American society's continuous crushing of people's freedom and individuality but opposing society, they did not regard individuality as the root of its problems but inversely as 'the answer' to them. Although some critics believed that individuality could cause divisiveness, selfishness, and alienation, the Beats cultivating individuality had enormous success in realizing and growing their potential and inner depths, autonomy, and self-exploration. In fact, they believed that not only individuality was not selfish, but also it was not really less than humanity's quest for accountable self-expression and personal freedom. Forming individuality, the Beats achieved a kind of psychological growth that enabled them to flatly turn down the tendency to conform to the collective, to shape a unique type of personality, and to go through a process of growing a liberal democracy. As individuals, the Beats' thinking was not bound by doctrines and rules and to justify their ideas they tried to use emotions because they truly knew that many commonly accepted ideas were not, in fact, truth and by the same token, they did not take anything at face value, that right and wrong were concepts whose nature was transitory and subject to change, that every right opinion should have its opposing wrong opinion which tends to nullify it.

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