

A Review of the Theoretical Bases of the Beats' Repudiation of Capitalism

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Abstract

The Beats perceived the ideals of corporate capitalism to be corrupting and destructive annihilating their individuality and freedom of choice. According to them, capitalism was as much of a dictatorship as communism. The Beats strived to introduce spirituality as an alternative to the materialism propagated by capitalism. They also believed that this system was so irrational that it led to wars and the invention and use of the nuclear bomb. They were discontented with American capitalism because it tried to socio-politically control the citizens. They claimed to have rejected or at least escaped capitalism which is debatable and the paper shows that in some cases they did not manage to do that.

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Introduction

Capitalism, also called the Market Economy and Free Enterprise Economy, came to the fore after the collapse of

feudalism and since then many thinkers have, on account of its negative effects, excoriated it severely and some others believe that it is still the best economic system in which a country's businesses and industry are controlled and run for profit. Some critics assert that capitalism auctions off nature and idealism (Burns 21) and some aver that it focuses only on profit and is not "sentimental over human life" (qtd. in Yannella, 15) and considers consumers as helpless sheep and still some others contend that in capitalism a group ethos is impossible to shape up; greed and corruption culminate; self-reliance and conscience will be at risk of loss and eventually "the game is fixed, the deck stacked against the weaker players" (McDonald 97). The Beats, in turn, were of course amongst those who criticized capitalism for its oppression, repression, alienation, and irrationality. Unanimously, they held capitalism responsible for the dire situation in which they lived. Ginsberg in *Howl*, for example, takes capitalism responsible for the destruction of the best minds of his generation: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, /dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix" (Schumacher 21). Capitalism, as a matter of fact, makes those who cannot conform or adjust themselves to the system consider themselves mad and different from the rest and deserving of bitter denunciation. In *Howl*, Moloch, a god in some ancient religions for whom children were sacrificed, is the capitalist system:

Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and
unobtainable dollars! Children screaming under the
stairways! Boys sobbing in armies! /Old men weeping
in the parks! /Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of

Moloch! Moloch the loveless! Mental Moloch!
Moloch the heavy judger of men! /Moloch the
incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone
soulless jailhouse and Congress of sorrows! Moloch
whose buildings are judgment! Moloch the vast stone
of war! Moloch the stunned governments! /Moloch
whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood
is running money! Moloch whose fingers are ten
armies! Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo!
Moloch whose ear is a smoking tomb (Schumacher
23)!

So, Moloch, as Ginsberg mentions, is “the vision of the mechanical feelingless inhuman world” in which we live and accept (Schumacher 240). In other words, he had discovered that Moloch was keen on “burying alive the curative power of the visionary imagination” (Roszak 128). Ginsberg also says that the key line in this section is “Moloch whom I abandon! Wake up in Moloch” (Schumacher 23)! Moloch is the god of Ginsberg’s parental generation that he claims to have abandoned or rejected. Here, Ginsberg purports that he has managed to extricate himself from the tangles of the capitalist society which is a highly debatable point and we will deal with it in this article as a claim made almost by all the Beats.

Old Capitalism VS. New Capitalism

Fromm makes a distinction between the nineteenth and twentieth-century capitalism. Capitalism in the former period was “truly private” (88) and the capitalist had a personal interest in possession and property. Oppression, discipline,

and obedience were the most important characteristics of the relation between the capitalist and his workforce. Briefly then, we can say that “the social character of the nineteenth century was essentially competitive, hoarding, exploitative, authoritarian, aggressive, individualistic” (96). Fromm continues that in the twentieth-century instead of competitiveness, we find a tendency toward teamwork; instead of ever increasing profit, a penchant for secure and steady income; and instead of exploitation, a wish to spread and share wealth. Far more important, overt authority in the nineteenth century, Fromm submits, changes into anonymous authority in the twentieth century; that is, the authority of public opinion and the market (96). But in the twentieth century, although industrial relations have become less exploitative, social relations less authoritative, and material conditions much better, and although oppression, in comparison with the nineteenth century, has been removed, man is not still free because as Fromm quotes Adlai Stevenson “we are not in danger of becoming slaves any more, but of becoming robots” (99). Fromm reiterates that

There is no overt authority which intimidates us, but we are governed by the fear of the anonymous authority of conformity. We do not submit to anyone personally; we do not go through conflicts with authority, but we have also no convictions of our own, almost no individuality, almost no sense of self (99-100).

In fact, autonomy has not replaced the nineteenth-century’s authoritarianism in the twentieth century but irrational subservience to the laws of the market has replaced it and “the

laws of the market, like God's will, are beyond the reach of your will and influence" (134) and from here loss of individuality exudes. The Beats, accordingly, felt a deep sense of revulsion against conformity and absence of individuality that capitalism firmly demanded.

According to Marcuse, the capitalist system promises to bring about an increasingly comfortable life for the people who "cannot imagine a ... different universe of discourse and action" (*Dimensional* 26) because this society basically tends to contain and manipulate subversive imagination and this is exactly what happened to the Beats. In other words, as C. Wright Mills emphasizes, those who hold power in this democratic state "are moving from authority to manipulation" (110). Edward Sanders in his book about Ginsberg's life has printed a secret document sent out by the CIA which declares that Ginsberg is "potentially dangerous" (53) and therefore should be manipulated. Or Ginsberg himself had once seen an FBI document indicating that the Bureau had kept him under surveillance for some time and "described how once I left the house & entered an automobile" (119). Holton, Skerl reports, believes that capitalism even manipulates wars. At the time of World War II for example, all the intellectual and industrial resources were mobilized for the war effort. Being inattentive to the critical intellectual, capitalism drew everybody into supporting the struggle against fascism; social criticism was disappeared or was transformed into organs of the war effort (*Reconstructing* 13-14). Like Fromm, Marcuse also believes that people become subservient to the system but he argues, too, that society, in the process of production, fulfills the need for liberation by satisfying the needs which make subservience

palatable and even unnoticeable (26). The twentieth-century capitalism, Marcuse mentions, is a world to which the individual must adapt himself. This world is not essentially hostile and does not necessarily deny his innermost needs but instead, preconditions him to spontaneously accept what the system offers to him (*Dimensional* 77). Riesman takes manipulation as positive. Saying that no one prefers to return to the nineteenth century brutalization of early industrial revolution, he concludes that manipulative persuasion, which characterizes the twentieth-century capitalism, is to be preferred to force (159-60). However, the Beats were dead set against such a persuasion because they regarded American society as intelligent but not reasonable. Accordingly, reason implies understanding and intelligence does manipulation and control and they really preferred the former.

Alienation

Alienation perhaps is the most deleterious effect of capitalism and according to Fromm touches “upon the deepest level of the modern personality” (107). Edgar defines alienation as “the estrangement of humanity from its society, and its essential or potential nature” and identifies four consequences of it: powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self-estrangement (9-10). Gold submits that when you believe your actions are not altogether willed, you are, in fact, alienated (152). Capitalism, according to Marxists, alienates labourers from themselves and from each other by considering them in terms of production, as objects rather than human beings. As a matter of fact, the ownership by one class of the objectified labour of another, leads to alienation;

there is a conflict of interest between capitalist and worker because both the means of production and the product produced by labourers are controlled by the capitalist system. Labourers become powerless, as Edgar says, because they feel that they cannot influence the production process and they experience meaninglessness because they feel that they are unable to identify their contribution to the product. So, Marxism refers to alienation mostly as an economic consequence of capitalism but conversely, in case of the Beats who were alienated from American society, alienation, as Skerl quotes Holton, was “a cultural position, a consequence of the homogeneity of modernity” (*Reconstructing* 13). To bring about homogeneity or sameness, American society demanded conformity and in this process stifled visionary imagination and any difference or heterogeneity. The Beats, as a result, did not feel comfortable in their own country, hence their itchy feet and many trips to other countries. Or having recourse to Jazz, Eyerman contends, they expressed their alienation from the mainstream American culture (135). It is not accidental, too, that Sal in *On the Road* instead of the modern consumer culture, identifies himself with its garbage (Kerouac, 142) or in general the Beats, fascinated themselves with the ‘social dregs’ of American society such as Herbert Huncke. The primary aim of political activity “must therefore be to eliminate alienation, to achieve a society in which there is no conflict between private and public interest, a society in which men will be really free” (Harrison-Barbet 265) and this was what the Beats actually wanted.

The Beats objected to American society’s materialism; most of them did not have steady jobs and ran a hand-to-mouth life via writing (Burroughs might be an exception). They had

realized that, as Roszak reiterates, wherever non-human entities assume more importance than human beings, alienation comes into existence and paves the way for self-righteous misuse of others as sole objects (58). By the same token, Marcuse and Brown emphasize that alienation is mainly psychic not sociological and is a disease rooted inside all people and if a revolution is supposed to free mankind from alienation, it must be therapeutic in character and not solely institutional (Roszak 95-7). It is not accidental then that Fromm speaks of an affinity between alienation and insanity: 'aliênê' and 'alienado' are respectively French and Spanish older words for the psychotic and 'alienist' in English is still used for the doctor who deals with the insane (117). The word 'mad' that Kerouac uses in *On the Road* multiple times implies the concept of alienation. Because of its materialist essence, capitalism "*puts man in second place ... he is alienated from his nature and his true needs*" (Fromm xxxi). In his discussion of alienation, Fromm speaks of *quantification* and *abstractification*. Each man is referred to as an abstract phenomenon and a figure; people have only different quantities but not different qualities; the concrete reality of an individual and their uniqueness are lost; we should say 'something' instead of 'someone' (108-11). Marcuse suggests that individuals in a capitalist society identify themselves with the existence which is imposed upon them. This identification is not illusion but reality, or absorption of ideology into reality. Marcuse, then, concludes that this reality constitutes a more progressive stage of alienation (*Dimensional* 13) which in turn, as Skerl quotes Holton, is conducive to "a loss of the ability to imagine alternatives" (*Reconstructing* 15). The Beats purported to have known this old trick of capitalism and tried to "Wake up in

Moloch” (Schumacher 23), constitute their own alternatives of reality, subjectivity, or consciousness in order to abandon or flee from Moloch.

Extrication from or Entanglement in Capitalism

As mentioned above, the Beats claimed to have abandoned capitalism or have extricated themselves from it. This is highly debatable and many thinkers and critics have dealt with it and posed this basic question: is it possible to entirely transcend the umbrella of capitalist authority? Without question, cultural diversity or pluralism is a central feature of modern American society that is still encouraging it and as time goes by more cultural groups stake a claim to win respect and understanding from others. But we should not forget that all this diversity and pluralism take place within the scope of an overriding and dominant culture: capitalism with its strong discourses. Ratner submits that capitalism may allow individuals to repudiate particular instances of cultural concepts and behaviours but the overall patterns will remain intact (49). However, Jacoby questions this claim for diversity and enunciates that it is not real diversity but its opposite. In actuality, staking such a claim shows that capitalism is going to homogenize and standardize society and by the same token, cultural groups tend to resist: “as people feel threatened by standardization, they search out and cultivate differences” (159). Philip Slater also points out that when there is a prevailing view in a society, at opposite end of the spectrum there will be a human attitude or penchant that tends to refute, contort, or depart from it (Saleebey 177). And perhaps, as Lukacs argues, this is the same “process by which

life moulds men into members of a class” (*Studies* 209) and the result is class conflict because psychologically speaking, social dominance orientation (SDO), as a prejudicial attitude, causes one to desire “that one’s in-group dominate or be superior to out-groups” (Bordens 116). This homogeneity or standardization that American society strived to impose was the main reason of the Beats’ resistance or revolution. Many native voices and experiences have been stymied by this prevailing view and it is a great pity that social science knowledge and organizations instead of liberating people from the dominant institutional discourses, often support or at best, do not challenge them. Even psychotherapy is no exception. Doctor Benway’s organization in *Naked Lunch* is a good example. Saari criticizes psychotherapy claiming that it has only helped the poor and the oppressed to adjust to a sick society and thereby cooperate with the institution in oppressing them (49). Social constructionism, in general, Ratner asserts, supports and justifies the status quo of capitalism (228).

In a capitalist society, as Marcuse mentions, freedom from want which is the concrete substance of all freedom becomes a real possibility and accordingly, in a society which seems capable of satisfying the needs of individuals, autonomy, independence of thought, and the right to opposition lose their critical function. Such a society has the faculty of, on the one hand, demanding acceptance of its principles and institutions and on the other, reducing the opposition to the promotion of alternative policies but only *within* the status quo. Additionally, Marcuse concludes, when living standards rise, non-conformity with the system becomes socially useless, and “the more so when it entails tangible economic and

political disadvantages and threatens the smooth operation of the whole” (*Dimensional* 4). The same thing happened to the Beats although we cannot say that their non-conformity was completely useless. Many people in American society of that time accused the Beats of laziness and therefore being disadvantageous to society. Kerouac and Burroughs consecutively changed their jobs and could not join the army to serve their country at the time of war. Dean, too, in *On the Road*, repeatedly changes jobs and chooses “freedom over work ... a hobo, a wanderer, taking a job only when necessary” (Foster 40). “We’re really all of us bottomry broke. I haven’t had time to work in weeks” Dean says (Kerouac 29). Simpson reports that Ginsberg, once working in a company, pointed out how much they could save by having an IBM machine to replace him and as a result, he was fired (70). But this is not the full story, of course. Fromm complains that the relationship between work and pleasure in modern societies is mechanical; work is not a mode of self-realization and satisfaction but a means to make money (xxxiv) and this is the true reason of the Beats’ problem with work and jobs. Being examined by psychiatrists in the navy after he suddenly dropped his rifle and went to the library, Kerouac explained: “It’s not that I *will* not accept discipline, it’s that I *cannot*. I’m not a warrior, I’m a scholar” (Nicosia 104).

Marcuse reiterates that in this modern society mass production and mass distribution claim the *entire* individual and the corollary is not adjustment but *mimesis*, that is, an immediate identification of the individual with his society which leads to complete loss of individuality. This is a mental process during which, Marcuse points out, the inner dimension of the mind in which opposition to the status quo

can take shape is reduced (*Dimensional* 12-13) and at last thought is conquered by society (108). Such a society accords great importance to group activity and group decision-making. Organizations are therefore formed to prioritize the needs of groups and this “would stifle the individual” (Whyte 48). So, the organization man comes into existence and this existence, as Whyte understands, is based on a central fallacy called false collectivism (49); this is a type of man for whom

the search for better group techniques is something of a crusade—a crusade against authoritarianism, a crusade for more freedom, for more recognition of the man in the middle. The key word is “democratic”; with some justification the organization man argues that the old-style individualist was often far more of a bar to individualism in other people ... (Whyte 48).

In spite of all this, American culture has a “nominalist psychological” bias, Weigert believes, which tends to take atomistic individuals responsible for their happiness, success, failure, and in general, for their fate (57) and, as a result, conceal or ignore the role of society.

Greenblatt in his article “Towards Poetics of Culture”, expounds on the disagreement between Jameson and Lyotard over the function of capitalism. Jameson distinguishes between ‘individuals’ and ‘individual subjects’. Before capitalism arose, Jameson submits, we were integrated, whole, and agile because we were in fact, individual subjects and not individuals. Then, capitalism emerged and shattered this luminous and benign totality. So, he celebrates the materialist integration of all discourses but unfortunately, Jameson

complains, capitalism destroyed this integration and instead, brought about privatization and differentiation. According to Jameson, therefore, integration, unification, totalization, wholeness, and individual subjects are positive terms. Lyotard, as Greenblatt says, conversely, argues that capitalism wants a single language and a single network and destroys proper names. In other words, he celebrates the differentiation of all discourses but unfortunately, Lyotard complains, capitalism tends to destroy such a differentiation and instead, brings about totalization and integration. So, according to Lyotard, therefore, individuals, privatization, and differentiation are positive terms. Simultaneously and contradictorily, Greenblatt explains, capitalism is blamed for being both the agent of privacy and differentiation by Jameson and the destroyer of privacy and differentiation by Lyotard. Greenblatt, without fear of contradiction, refers to the distinct power of capitalism and enunciates that capitalism instead of the securing of a particular fixed position, has the ability to oscillate restlessly between these two modes: unification and differentiation. Other economic and social systems may ossify one of these two modes but capitalism, as Greenblatt uses Derrida's term, *circulates* inexhaustibly between the two (Veese 3-8). As a matter of fact, by circulation or oscillation Greenblatt means that capitalism is so extremely flexible that can adapt itself to every situation. Then, it is not accidental that many critics point out to the impossibility of extrication from capitalism and some go beyond this and conclude that the Beats who firmly claimed to have abandoned or escaped from capitalism and wanted to bring about difference in American society had in fact been digested in the system and were not cognizant of the peculiarities of capitalism. However, the Beats supported

Liotard's idea and like Bakhtin who preferred heteroglossia or multiplicity of dialogic art over the homogeneity and uniformity of monologic expression in the modern novel (60, 264, and 270), they preferred the same for America and by the same token, reflected a variety of different voices in their novels.

The goods and services that capitalism puts forward and its productive apparatus, Marcuse believes, 'sell' or impose the social system as a whole. Everything in the system including the means of mass transportation and mass communication, the commodities of lodging, clothing, food, and the entertainment and information industry propagate prescribed attitudes, habits, certain emotional, and intellectual reactions and all these bind the consumers to the producers and via the latter to the whole system. Marcuse continues that this system permeates "a pattern of *one-dimensional thought and behavior* in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe. They are redefined by the rationality of the given system and of its quantitative extension" (*Dimensional* 14). Not to mention of course that the Beats had already discovered one-dimensionality of American society and also its incapability of being rational. Marcuse emphasizes that the system's 'higher culture' has always been accommodating not through the rejection or denial of other cultural values but via their wholesale incorporation into its established order (*Dimensional* 60) and this is the confirmation of the flexibility to which Greenblatt points out. To exploit new markets and sell new lifestyles, capitalism appropriated the rebellion of all sixties movements (Echols 48) and the Beat movement was

no exception according to Marcuse. He reiterates that the reign of such a one-dimensional reality does not mean that other modes do not find the opportunity to emerge but due to capitalism's high flexibility and its capability of adaptation, these modes of protest and transcendence, including the Beat, are not contradictory to the status quo any longer; they are not negative or harmful and therefore are gradually digested by the system (*Dimensional* 16). Accordingly, the Beats "are no longer images of another way of life but rather freaks or types of the same life, serving as an affirmation rather than negation of the established order" (62).

The highest civilization that mankind enjoys at the time of capitalism, Marcuse argues, by no means guarantees freedom. The intellectual and material achievements of mankind seem to create a truly free world for him but, in fact, the more intensified progress he makes the more he seems to be bound up with intensified unfreedom so that the most effective subjugation and destruction of him, Marcuse purports, comes about at the height of civilization. He counts mass extermination, atom bombs, world wars, and concentration camps not as relapse into barbarism but as the inevitable result of man's technological development and domination (Roszak 102). Lukacs also stresses this unfreedom in capitalism: "... in imagination, individuals seem more free under the dominance of the *bourgeoisie* than before, because their conditions of life seem accidental, in reality, of course, they are less free ..." (*Studies* 208). According to Freud, as Fromm explains, man in society is torn between two alternatives. He can find happiness via unrestricted satisfaction of his instincts or enjoy cultural achievements and security based on instinctual frustration. Freud concludes that

civilization is actually the result of man's instinctual frustration. His basic concept is that of a 'homo sexualis'. There is a similar concept, too: that of a 'homo economicus'. Fromm reports that economists like Ricardo and the Manchester school translated Darwin's theory of 'struggle for survival' into the sphere of economy. Accordingly, both the economic and sexual man have the same characteristics in common: asocial, competitive, greedy, and isolated. This kind of alleged temperament makes capitalism seem a system that perfectly corresponds to human nature and as a result, places it beyond the reach of criticism (74). Fromm concludes that in the East Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* and in the West Huxley's *Brave New World* describe the direction of civilization. In both worlds man is like robots and lives in a robotic system in which he simply dies. According to Fromm, man has only two alternatives: total destruction or a rediscovery of his humanity (351). Famously, the Beats firmly repudiated instinctual frustration and conversely, believed in the free play of the unconscious; Dean in *On the Road* beautifully exemplifies a character who prioritizes his libidinal activities: "to him sex was the one and only holy and important thing in life, although he had to sweat and curse to make a living and so on" (Kerouac 4). In addition, many critics almost unanimously say that the Beats were in quest of a humanity apart from the one that the twentieth-century civilization had put forward but whether they were successful is another matter.

Although the Beats purported to have abandoned or escaped from capitalism, Marcuse, considering capitalism's flexibility and the capabilities of its apparatus, decides that it blocks all escape and as mentioned above, it "takes place on a material

ground of increased satisfaction” (*Dimensional* 75). In accordance with Marcuse, Sterritt believes that although the Beats are regarded as a source of ornery and flamboyant criticism of American dream, they fell prey to the temptation to reinforce and reproduce the hegemonic assumptions (3). Althusser, too, enunciates that authorities and establishments reproduce themselves:

self-empowered authorities, establishments, and systems have consolidated the power to reproduce themselves and their effects by seizing the attention of individuals ... through what he calls Ideological State Apparatuses, social institutions that seduce the inherently fragmented self with the illusion of monadic coherence, upon which further illusions may be built for the benefit of the entrenched power system (Sterritt 80).

Of course, it is true that the Beats sometimes fell prey to capitalism but it should be elaborated that they at least destroyed the established hierarchy of America’s values and mixed high and low cultures in negation of capitalism. They also brought about “new meaning, a new place for human corporeality” (Bakhtin, 170). Accordingly, Eyerman complains that “responsibility for change is usually attributed either to anonymous, universal forces, such as modernization, capitalism, or imperialism, or to charismatic leaders and powerful individuals” and strives to give pride of place to social movements, like the Beat, which act as “central catalyst of broader changes in values, ideas, and ways of life” and in this way, gives social movements “the recognition they deserve as key agents of cultural transformation” (7).

Roszak reiterates that those who dissent must be resourceful enough to avoid being digested in this society. He exemplifies Bob Dylan, Vanessa Redgrave, and even Herbert Marcuse who, as dissenters, fell prey to capitalism. He quotes Marcuse who had accepted this: "I'm very much worried about this ... At the same time it is a beautiful verification of my philosophy, which is that in this society everything can be co-opted, everything can be digested" (70-1). As mentioned above, Marcuse had the same idea about the Beats and rejected them completely and claimed that instead of presenting a different way of life, they only produced freaks whose corollary was affirmation of the status quo rather than its negation. Van den Haag and Brustein state that the Beats, in actuality, were conformists and only masqueraded as rebels (Belgrad 239). Max Weber, too, sees the bureaucratic capitalism as an 'iron cage' within which man is caught and to which he can only resign himself with stoicism (Riesman xxxv). According to Eagleton's one definition of ideology as "the ways in which what we say and believe connects with the power-structure and power-relations of the society we live in" (*Theory* 13), Sal Paradise in *On the Road* is suffering from ideology, a false consciousness imposed upon him by society and "feeling that everything was dead" (Kerouac 4), but the difference is that Sal, as opposed to many others, has waked up in Moloch and therefore, is cognizant of this situation and goes the extra mile to extricate himself from it and the result is nothing but fatigue and despair and eventually his return to the sedentary life of his aunt. Enunciating the same idea, Barthes, instead of ideology, uses the word 'myths':

For the very end of myths is to immobilize the world: they must suggest and mimic a universal order which has fixated once and for all the hierarchy of possessions. Thus, every day and everywhere, man is stopped by myths, referred by them to this motionless prototype which lives in his place, stifles him in the manner of a huge internal parasite and assigns to his activity the narrow limits within which he is allowed to suffer without upsetting the world (156).

D'Angelo, Elkholy reports, points out to Ginsberg's idea that the state should be rejected. The state, in fact, is not real because it is not a person. Only persons are real and exist through their private consciousness. So, Ginsberg continues, the Beats came to the conclusion that they were in the midst of a vast American hallucination brought about by American media and paid for by the CIA. When we compete and struggle for wealth, when we do not have any natural feeling of tenderness for each other and are separated, the state seems to be necessary. Perhaps the only way to overcome the state, Ginsberg thought, was through a revolution in consciousness (237-38) and it is not accidental that the Beat movement has often been called a revolutionary movement.

Having recourse to social psychology, Reich observes that the oppressed and exploited often identify with oppressive and repressive forces. Out of insecurity or a desire to get themselves rid of the burden of independent thought, these groups and individuals accept external domination (King 71). Perhaps this can be held true for Sal in *On the Road* but not for Dean. Sal finds no security outside American institution and at last gives up and again adopts a sedentary life and

marries a girl, both of which are approved by society; Larson calls this a “reassertion of traditional normative relationships and stable social structures” (Holladay 54). Goodman complains about the capitalist system, too. The system, he says, “muffles the voices of dissent” and purports that itself is the only possible society and nothing else is thinkable. When there are no alternatives people put up with a system (x-xi). Goodman also states something that perhaps justifies the Beats’ behaviour:

If an organized society perfects itself, there is less “open” environment ... if society becomes too tightly integrated and pre-empts all the available space, materials, and methods, then it is failing to provide ... real risk, novelty, spontaneity, that makes growth possible. This ... drives young people out of the organized system altogether and makes creative adults loath to co-operate with it. When time, clothes, opinions, and goals become so regulated that people feel that they cannot be “themselves” or create something new, they bolt and look for fringes and margins, loopholes, holes in the wall, or they just run (129).

According to Martinez, this marginalization is, of course, a defensive self-marginalization against attacks of society targeting individualist mobilities (111). In some cases, if the Beats felt that they could not change capitalism’s cultural homogeneity, at least they could evade it and accordingly, as Holton points out, “provided the site for a centrifugal cultural space in the midst of a centripetal cultural moment” (Holladay 61); hence their many trips to other countries such

as Mexico. As Goodman stresses, American society puts forward an either/or choice; either the individual accepts the system or dissents totally from it and stands as a lonely human being (134). Dean, as opposed to Sal, does not give up and at the end of the novel, loneliness is his fate.

Adorno asserts that those who criticize society are part of it and cannot escape from it; the implication is that the Beats' escape from capitalism is only a boast on their part: "The cultural critic is not happy with civilization, to which alone he owes his discontent. He speaks as if he represented either unadulterated nature or a higher historical stage. Yet he is necessarily of the same essence as that to which he fancies himself superior" (19). The Beats knew power relations but according to Foucault, knowing does not lead to a total escape from power relations (Gutting 51). In fact, they knew that what society imposed upon them were not universal truths but "contingencies masked as necessities" (Gutting 60) or as Eagleton avers "socially necessary illusion" (*ideology* 2). It is axiomatic that Sal's escape from capitalism is not permanent. His life seems stuck in limbo; he cannot go forward and he cannot go back at least for some time. Swartz mentions the idea of liminality derived from the anthropologist Victor Turner. According to Turner, young people in tribal communities, to become full-fledged members, should pass through three stages of 'preliminary', 'liminal', and 'post liminal'. In the liminal stage, young people go beyond their pubescent and community consciousness and step into an 'other' world which breaks from their culture but at last, they get back to their community and assume a more structured role in society. Sal in *On the Road* is stuck in the second stage; he neither joins

Dean's world nor the world of the *fellahin* (Terry's world in *On the Road* for example). In other words, Sal neither belongs to the old or rejected reality nor to the new consciousness that he is striving to receive from Dean. So, Sal is in a liminal stage and loses his identity. However, this marginality does not last for a long time and the result is Sal's reaggregation or his tender embrace of the normative capitalist system. The visionary world that Sal and Dean experience in the liminal stage is completely at odds with the social reality (95-8). In the following excerpt from *On the Road*, Sal refers to this disparity when Dean shows him a photo of a recent adventure:

Dean took out other pictures. I realized these were all the snapshots which our children would look at someday with wonder, thinking their parents had lived smooth, well-ordered, stabilized-within-the-photo lives and got up in the morning to walk proudly on the sidewalks of life, never dreaming the raggedy madness and riot of our actual lives, our actual night, the hell of it, the senseless nightmare road. All of it inside endless and beginningless emptiness. Pitiful forms of ignorance (147).

Of course, Swartz confesses that Dean's position is different from Sal's (95). As opposed to Sal, Dean remains in the 'other' world to his dying day and doing this he, in fact, defeats capitalism. Swartz reiterates too, that through the use of drugs and alcohol, Sal and Dean or respectively in their real life, Kerouac and Cassady insisted on remaining in their liminal states (97). Dean emphasizes this: "Now dammit, look here, all of you, we all must admit that everything is fine

and there's no need in the world to worry, and in fact we should realize what it would mean to us to UNDERSTAND that we're not REALLY worried about ANYTHING. Am I right?" (80).

Defeat of Capitalism?

Using other methods, too, Dean Moriarty manages to defeat capitalism. For Dean, Carden enunciates, "the free exercise of masculinity means consumption without cost" and opposing the system in which financial relations are very highly regarded, Dean consumes cars and women as "the ultimate icons of a capitalist economy based in male dominance" without paying any money (Holladay 83). In *On the Road*, Dean professionally steals cars: "Man, that's a detective's car and every precinct in town knows my fingerprints from the year that I stole five hundred cars. You see what I do with them, I just wanta ride, man! I gotta go" (130) or "he set a Denver record for stealing cars and went to the reformatory" (25). And "when I was working for the New Era Laundry ... hiking by day and stealing cars by night to make time (25). Or "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). Women, Carden continues, are representatives of the bourgeois household and the centre of capitalist consumption. If this is so, conquering women, as a matter of fact, Dean Moriarty overcomes the society that has punished and humiliated him (Holladay 83). In *On the Road* there are many instances that illuminate Dean's relations with women. "His specialty was stealing cars, gunning for girls coming out of high school in the afternoon,

driving them out to the mountains, making them, and coming back to sleep in any available hotel bathtub in town” (25). Dean simultaneously conquers two or three women and have relations with them; to do this he is working to a tight schedule:

Dean is balling Marylou at the hotel ... At one sharp he rushes from Marylou to Camille--of course neither one of them knows what's going on--and bangs her once ... Then at six he goes back to Marylou--and he's going to spend all day tomorrow running around to get the necessary papers for their divorce. Marylou's all for it, but she insists on banging in the interim. She says she loves him--so does Camille (28).

He is not ready to pay the cost even when his wife, Camille, gives birth to a baby:

I learned that Dean had lived happily with Camille in San Francisco ever since that fall of 1947; he got a job on the railroad and made a lot of money. He became the father of a cute little girl, Amy Moriarty. Then suddenly he blew his top while walking down the street one day. He saw a '49 Hudson for sale and rushed to the bank for his entire roll. He bought the car on the spot. Ed Dunkel was with him. Now they were broke. Dean calmed Camille's fears and told her he'd be back in a month (65).

Or when Inez gives birth to an illegitimate child of Dean: “Camille gave birth to Dean's second baby ... and Inez had a baby. With one illegitimate child ... Dean then had four little

ones and not a cent, and was all troubles and ecstasy and speed as ever" (143). In another excerpt, Dean and his friend Ed meet a girl who is living on her savings in San Francisco. To pay the cost of the journey they decide to bring her along. She says she will not go unless Ed marries her. For the sake of the money Ed marries her but as soon as the money is run out they leave her in a motel and give her the slip with no qualms. Or Dean wants Sal to have sex with Marylou because as Sal conjectures he wants to see what she was like with another man.

Marriage, formal education, work, traditional religion, and the military, as the cornerstones of American society and culture, are rejected in *On the Road*. In the first lines of the novel the narrator, Sal Paradise, speaks of failure in marriage, illness, weariness, and death: "I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up. I had just gotten over a serious illness that I won't bother to talk about, except that it had something to do with the miserably weary split-up and my feeling that everything was dead" (4). Introducing Dean, Sal repudiates the old life and promises a new beginning, a new life: "With the coming of Dean Moriarty began the part of my life you could call my life on the road" (4). In actuality, Sal is fed up with the old system of life and is going to bring about a new one. Swartz, as Bloom reports, states that Kerouac, to oppose the old system, broke all loyalties to parents, country, and God. These loyalties, as a matter of fact, placed discourses on young people forcing them to think and feel in certain ways (*Road* 171). The 1950s were the time of Cold War and American society suspected anything that was different. The United States government feared communism and started mass witch hunts accusing many Americans of

protecting the American political Left; the Beats were considered as dangerous communists and derogatively were called Beatniks, a name derived from Sputnik, the Russian spacecraft. The government constantly reminded people that the American way of life was at risk and about to end; it was threatened by many things but the most important menace was plurality propagated especially by the Beats. So, to maintain the status quo, the government had to control and manipulate people. Despite being threatened by the status quo, the Beats called for plurality; they were not communists or socialists of course; they insisted on the satisfaction of corporeal desires and having novel experiences. Without question, what the Beats' works suggested were completely different from what the young people received from their parents, schools, churches, and the government. The Beats inculcated that it was not communism that was the enemy of American society; the real threat was the institution that imposed social limitations and pressures on people.

The Beats were also at odds with their capitalist society concerning the idea of utopianism. They saw utopianism in individuality and American society saw it in collectivism. "The former ... celebrates pluralism, diversity, individual ... the latter ... desires uniformity, harmony, conformity and stasis" (qtd in Elkholy 37). Burroughs in *Naked Lunch* lampoons capitalism or "Naked Mr. America" who shouts: "My asshole confounds the Louvre! I fart ambrosia and shit pure gold turds! My cock spurts soft diamonds in the morning sunlight" (41). Swartz describes the capitalist society of that time in this way: "The dominant culture of commercialism and suburbia was reified and grounded in myths and rationalizations that served two purposes: they

limited thought by making it seem as if the world as *presented* was the world as it *has to be*, and they helped to obscure the terrible price paid for corporate and commercial America among the disenfranchised” (29-30). It, in fact, justified the status quo. In general, capitalism “always represents above all a reign of ‘reification’, of fragmentation of humanity ...” (Slaughter 141). American society, Swartz continues, defined safety and security in accordance with the notion that what was necessarily good for America was what was good for corporations (30). In the 1950s and especially ‘60s those who had been long-ignored in American society formed liberation movements and severely called into question many norms, ideas, and expectations that had been considered as highly important. ‘Big houses’, ‘new cars’, ‘trips to warmer areas in the winter’, and ‘life insurances’ (Wilson 10) were values that all contributed to the capitalist system and these movements, of course, criticized them as corporate values. The Beats were no exception; they “questioned the mythology of the American Holy Trinity—Progress, Money, Science” (Swartz 30). Harris believes that *Junkie* is an ironic critic of capitalist relations. The book’s preface, as Harris says, emphasizes that Lee’s descent into addiction is determined by the *anomie* of his economic freedom. During the war Lee becomes an addict which is a turning point in his life and Harris quotes the following lines from the novel that clearly depict the relation between Lee and money: “It was at this time and under these circumstances that I came in contact with junk, became an addict, and thereby gained the motivation, the real need for money I had never had before” (*Fascination* 62). Harris maintains that addiction becomes a positive gain because it teaches Lee the real value and necessity of money. It is to be accepted that the only meaningful economy is the one in

which the need for money is real and of value; money is the only source of satisfaction and motivation. Although junk contests social norms through deviance, “the addict simply sees no legal or moral difference in the life cycle of capital” (62). In fact, junk represents another business economy “where spiritual needs are translated into material forms that can be satisfied by the consumption of commodities” (62) and as Lukacs contends “it becomes the way of life, the decisive determinant of thoughts and emotions (*Studies* 163) and causes human beings to be “transformed into parts of an inhuman machine” (*Studies* 163). Lukacs even goes beyond this and reiterates that such conditions that capitalism brings about turn man into a beast (*Meaning* 35).

According to Burroughs, junk is very akin to capitalism and “Like capitalism, it is the ultimate control system and the one on which, for Burroughs at least, all others are modelled. Ruthlessly exposing the workings of consumer culture, junk reveals the lie behind the commodity’s promise of bliss” (Savran 100). In *Naked Lunch* Burroughs describes junk in capitalistic terms:

Junk is the ideal product ... the ultimate merchandise. No sales talk necessary. The client will crawl through a sewer and beg to buy ... The junk merchant does not sell his product to the consumer, he sells the consumer to his product. He does not improve and simplify his merchandise. He degrades and simplifies the client ... Junk yields a basic formula of evil virus: *The Algebra of Need*. The face of evil is always the face of total need ... You would lie, cheat, inform on your friends, steal, do *anything* to satisfy total need (3-40).

In this excerpt Burroughs truly realizes that the power of both junk and commodity is “addictive” (Savran 99). Junk, just like capitalism produces a ‘need’ in the consumer that can never be satiated and the consumer is always in total need. Even the authorities, Burroughs symbolically theorizes, cannot extricate themselves from capitalism and become its victims: “The President is a junky but can’t take it direct because of his position. So he gets fixed through me” (36). However, the Beats, like Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*, were aiming for “a whole life of noninterference with the wishes of others, including politicians and the rich, and nobody bothers you and you cut along and make it your own way” (Kerouac 146). In other words, they wished to go beyond the scope of capitalism and claimed to have escaped from it but this claim is still in question. Mentioning the idea of masculinity in Burroughs’ works, Russell, for example, argues that Burroughs was unable to free himself from the restrictions of American society (15). Burroughs’ model of homosexuality in which the two sides must be masculine gives no place to women or even effeminate gay men and masculinity has always had pride of place in American culture. Accordingly “Burroughs’ post-Stonewall gay characters are always prepared to defend their sexuality and prove their status as men through violence” (Russell 91). Frank asserts that the counterculture of the 1950s and ‘60s enhanced capitalism’s efficiency:

rebel youth culture remains the cultural mode of the corporate moment, used to promote not only specific products but the general idea of life in the cyber-revolution. Commercial fantasies of rebellion,

liberation, and outright "revolution" against the stultifying demands of mass society are commonplace almost to the point of invisibility in advertising, movies, and television programming. For some, Ken Kesey's parti-colored bus may be a hideous reminder of national unraveling, but for Coca-Cola it seemed a perfect promotional instrument for its "Fruitopia" line, and the company has proceeded to send replicas of the bus around the country to generate interest in the counterculturally themed beverage. Nike shoes are sold to the accompaniment of words delivered by William S. Burroughs ... (4).

So, it could be said that, "business dogged the counterculture with a fake counterculture, a commercial replica that seemed to ape its every move for the titillation of the TV-watching millions and the nation's corporate sponsors" (Frank 7).

Conclusion

Some critics point out that in their relation to the underprivileged and marginalized groups the Beats fell prey to capitalism. Although they resisted the official thought and main discourses of American society, "these putative nonconformists hardly escaped the monologizing tendencies of the sociocultural ethos surrounding them" (Sterritt 15). Nicosia refers to Kerouac's anti-Semitism and his memories of being humiliated by some rich Jews (415). Dittman, too, refers to Kerouac's appalling anti-Semitism (90). Once Kerouac's mother opined that "Hitler should have finished the job [on the Jews]" (qtd. in Dittman 103) and he

concurred with her. In 1961, he complained of “the Jew Talk of critics” who criticized his works and sometimes insulted him and their “Jewish conspiracy against him” (qtd. in Dittman 103). It is reputed that Kerouac insulted the Jews in front of Ginsberg, himself a Jew. Also in Burroughs’ works there are some streaks of anti-Semitism: “He look like Jewish owl with black glasses” (69) or “all a Jew wants to do is doodle a Christian girl” (87). Once Brion Gysin, his friend and collaborator, objected to such sentences in some of his novels and Burroughs’ interesting answer was that these ideas were not expressed by him but by his characters. Additionally, Kerouac supported Hitler. Charters reports that he eagerly corroborated Ann Morrow Lindbergh’s book *The Wave of the Future: A Confession of Faith* (1940) in which she had enunciated that Nazism would be one of the forces of the future and not one of the forces of evil. Kerouac justified that Hitlerism had promised economic freedom; that all shall eat (28). Although African Americans almost have a better situation in the Beats’ works and the Beats mixed with and befriended them and used their accent and jazz music, some people believe that the Beats were insensitive to the black’s struggle against oppression and accordingly, did not take action at all to change their dire situation and in this case, they again contributed to a society that put the white on a pedestal and oppressed the black. However, within or without capitalism, the Beats foregrounded the economic inequalities and political domination in America and above all, criticized their society in order to make it a better place to live in. It is not of course easy to say that the Beats completely fell prey to capitalism because in this case, some questions should be raised: why did the capitalist system strive to efface the counterculture and its resistance to society? Why were the

Beats, just because they resisted the system, treated as enemies by it?

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