

JACK KEROUAC'S AND BRENDA FRAZER'S SHARED 'ROMANTIC PRIMITIVISM': A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF *ON THE ROAD* AND *FOR LOVE OF RAY*

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*I'm thinking I will be whatever he is, whatever he wants me to be.*¹

Brenda Frazer—Jack Kerouac. Two Beat writers. One long forgotten female author—one icon, whose picture even appeared on GAP ads some years ago, simply stating “Kerouac wore Khakis.” Both Frazer and Kerouac were disaffiliated young writers, yearning for a different life full of kicks outside the square world of the 1950s establishment. Both authors also shared a close affinity for Mexico, which presented great promise, safety, and freedom to them. Throughout Frazer’s *For Love of Ray* (1971) and Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957), the narrators identify with Mexico’s indigenous population, but very often these so-called fellahin peoples are depicted in over-romanticized ways as noble, suffering and victimized. Both authors, however, ignore the social and political reality by overlooking the poverty and violence of ghetto life. While Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise, the two heroes of *On the Road*, were free to explore the world, Brenda Frazer’s Mexican experiences were far from smooth.

Brenda Frazer’s/Bonnie Bremser’s² *For Love of Ray*³ (1971), first published in the U.S. under the title *Troia: Mexican Memoirs* (1969), is a largely unknown text of the Beat movement. The memoir has disappeared from the literary scene and is nearly unavailable nowadays, being out of print for 35 years. Through its melting of autobiography and literary construction, the memoir is similar to the works of Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, and Allen Ginsberg rather than to those of female Beat memoirists like Joyce Johnson, Hettie Jones, Diane di Prima, or Carolyn Cassady. In contrast to Kerouac’s exciting, chauvinistic road trips with his “boy gang”—the term was first used by Ginsberg—*For Love of Ray* presents both a shocking and violent narration of a year Frazer spent in Mexico together with her husband, Beat poet Ray Bremser, and their infant daughter, Rachel. The work is unusual among autobiographical writings by female Beats, because it shows the ambivalence between male sexual and creative freedom and women who are repressed by economic and bodily realities. *For Love of Ray* is an unbelievable, sad story in many ways: First, the family has to escape across the U.S. border, because Bremser is charged with armed robbery and wants to evade American law; drug-wrenched and high on magic mushrooms and other hallucinogenics, Frazer is finally forced into prostitution in order to survive the harsh Mexican life; she is continually degraded by Mexican city authorities, her pimps, customers, and husband, and eventually gives up her daughter for adoption to save her own battered life. Confrontational and confessional, *For Love of Ray* stands apart as a memoir that in form and content may be the most shocking, troubling, horrendous, and provocative of all female Beat life stories.

¹ Brenda Frazer quoted in Richard Peabody, *A Different Beat: Writings by Women of the Beat Generation* (New York: High Risk, 1997), 60.

² Bonnie Bremser was the author’s name when *For Love of Ray* was published.

³ In this article, all quotes are taken from Frazer’s British edition *For Love of Ray*, published in 1971 by Universal-Tandem Publishing Co.

Even though *For Love of Ray* tries to imitate Kerouac's groundbreaking novel *On the Road* in language and content, and to emulate his spontaneous prose style, Frazer clearly wants to break down the prevailing gender roles of the time — however, she fails in the end. Alix Kates Shulman points out that “Bonnie Bremser's memoir, for all its Beat syntax, language, and rhythm, tells a story of a woman less Beat than beaten,”⁴ as Frazer's text develops into a grotesque story which has the effects of a horror trip. She is “beaten down” in the extreme. *For Love of Ray* shows Beat men from their worst side and Beat women in their most oppressed state.

Frazer's memoir is as energetic and attentive concerning descriptions of places and people as Kerouac's *On the Road*, which Frazer used as a model for the text.⁵ Imitating Kerouac's heightened consciousness and spontaneous prose, Frazer also shares his romantic racist attitude, and both authors defend the containment culture's metanarrative of white supremacy. Frazer's prejudice and disapproval of homosexuality are similar to Kerouac's views,⁶ but her reinscription of the narrative of whiteness also shows that she is a victim of conservative U.S. 1950s culture.

KEROUAC AND FRAZER TRACING OSWALD SPENGLER'S *DECLINE OF THE WEST*

When reading the works of Kerouac and Frazer, it becomes obvious that both are companions in their outlaw status. Both escaped the American white middle class in search of a non-conformity which included drugs, adventures and sexual deviation. To join the fellahin population of Mexico, the two authors had to become outlaws. They were able to imagine an alliance with oppressed natives living in poverty by putting themselves into positions that were scorned by the dominant containment culture. Thus, Frazer literally becomes an outlaw by joining her criminal husband when escaping the U.S., while Sal Paradise only imagines himself to be one. “This road,” he tells Dean, “is also the route of old American outlaws who used to skip over the border and go down to old Monterey, so if you'll look out on that graying desert and picture the ghost of old Tombstone hellcat making his lonely exile gallop into the unknown.”⁷ Sal ponders over his connection with American outlaws while he is driving “beyond where the outlaws went”⁸ with Dean. Together, both Sal and Frazer disappointedly realize that their status as outlaws is not pleasant, but rather hard and shattering. Sal, as a male hedonistic macho, is much better off than Frazer, even though he is left behind sick and lonely by Dean Moriarty. With the help of his aunt, he gets home safely. Frazer, in contrast, does not have the chance to call her mother for help and money. Her family falls apart, and prostitution and hallucinogenics almost drive her to suicide. For Kerouac, the life of the outsider seemed to be the last place where authenticity survived, and therefore his quest was closely connected to living

⁴ Alix K. Shulman, “The Beat Queens. Boho Chicks Stand by their Men,” Village Voice Literary Supplement (June 1989), 19.

⁵ Nancy M. Grace and Ronna C. Johnson, *Breaking the Rule of Cool. Interviewing and Reading Women Beat Writers* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 112.

⁶ Even though Kerouac, Ginsberg, Cassady and Burroughs were exploring tangled and shifting homosocialities, Kerouac fought against the label ‘queer’ all his life time: “It wasn't just a matter of defending his masculinity; for when drunk he often boasted of the men who had “blown” him, invited other men to do so, or challenged men to let him fuck them. But he believed in man's role as the head of the family, as the ruggedly honest, stoically suffering breadwinner [...], the role personified by his father, as well as countless film heroes from Jean Gabin to Gary Cooper. The ‘queer’ stance – sniffing, sardonic, dissembling—seemed the very opposite of this.” Gerald Nicosia, *Memory Babe: A Critical Biography of Jack Kerouac* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 155.

⁷ Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (London: Penguin, 1991), 276-277.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 279.

with societal outsiders. His interest in the “underdog” was profound, as he himself, a Franco-Canadian, was also a cultural outsider in the United States.

Frazer and Kerouac reinscribe the containment narrative of whiteness. Throughout *For Love of Ray*, the Bremers' conflicting attitude concerning racial prejudice is apparent. In one scene, while hiding from the police in Veracruz, the Bremers enjoy ice cream sodas on a sidewalk café of the Hotel D. “Ray is wearing white trousers and a blue shirt with tails out and tucks and puckers in front of it, he does not look jive like a Mexican,” Frazer writes about her husband, “though dressed as they do, he looks like a movie star, and I no doubt too, in the skirt with slits up the side I have premeditatively fashioned to entice eyes, the tightness of it shows the bikini I wear underneath, still wet and full of sand.”⁹ Frazer sees herself and her husband as white expatriate Hollywood movie stars. Life in Mexico is like playing parts in a film where the magnificent film stars are white, surrounded by the dark Mexican fellahin population. Native Mexicans are depicted as “jive”¹⁰ or “phoney”¹¹; the Bremers, however, are real white American movie stars. They decide to see *Tarzan and Jane* in the cinema, and—similar to the main protagonists of the film—they have to live far away from home in an exotic jungle of hostile darkness. Just as U.S. popular culture of the time equated white skin with security and dark skin with disorder and chaos, Frazer equates her own image and that of her white, immaculate child with the concept of purity. As the story continues, Frazer frantically tries to maintain Rachel's outstanding whiteness, while the author herself metaphorically loses her whiteness/purity to join the outlaws populating the streets of Veracruz and ‘Mexcity.’ She realizes that the child's pale skin gives Rachel cultural capital in Mexico: “Rachel greets the morning light squinty-eyed, the babe in all its encompassing beauty and complete expression draws all open hearts to it, an object of worship, our white baby. Moreso later, to my circumstantial chagrin, I find that intrigues of stealth surround the worship of this white baby.” Fearing for the baby's security due to its skin color, the author swears, “oh my soul, my Rachel, I will turn black to get you back.”¹² The baby's beauty is directly connected with the child's skin colour. Often, Mexican mothers offer to look after the baby in the afternoon or evening, “they had begged to be allowed to take care of her, a thing I couldn't understand yet.” According to Frazer, Mexicans were totally drawn towards the child and “worshipped her because she was so white.”¹³ Rachel gradually develops into Frazer's “the little me.”¹⁴ The baby symbolizes everything Frazer cannot be or reach herself. In contrast to the pure, untouched child, Frazer loses her symbolic whiteness to hustling and her literal whiteness to the glowing Mexican sun. In one scene of the book, which was quoted before, Frazer holds Rachel on her lap and they sit down on the beach, but suddenly, a wave reaches the baby's feet and “gets her little pure cunt in a wash of foamy come.”¹⁵ Here, Frazer implies that the baby is so pure that even nature is enthusiastic about Rachel, symbolically deflowering her. Moreover, in Frazer's words, the baby even brings nature to orgasm. Rachel represents everything natural, white and pure, while her mother gets darker and darker by offering her sexual services under the fiery Mexican sun. She borrows

⁹ Bonnie Bremer, *For Love of Ray* (London: Universal-Tandem Publishing Co, 1971), 45.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 38, 76.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 98, 99.

¹² *Ibid.*, 22.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

the neighbour's sewing machine and sews a dress that will clearly identify her as a prostitute. Her "suntan is getting very fine and voluptuous which is a help also," because now everyone in the streets clearly sees that she sells her body for money. Ray also likes her dark appearance and says she looks "melon colored."¹⁶ She is shockingly frank about her destitute situation, and even acknowledges that her dark sunburned skin is "impressive in contrast to the yellow sheets."¹⁷ Darkness becomes a symbol for her plight and misery, but through entering the dark, she can experience both kicks and misery. Frazer contradicts herself by, on the one hand, favouring, but on the other hand refusing the idea of white supremacy that the conservative U.S. containment culture of the time suggested. The paradox is that for her, darkness is indispensable in her dreadful adult world where purity has long been lost, but this darkness has to be kept from "the beautiful blonde American baby."¹⁸ Rachel's whiteness is depicted in an over-romanticized way, and Frazer eventually loses her own whiteness to maintain that of the baby.

However, even if Frazer has open prejudice against the Mexican people, she is at the same time wishing to be closely connected with the oppressed indigenous population. In her so-called 'romantic primitivism,' Frazer shares many ideas with Jack Kerouac and his contemporaries, who totally overlooked the misery and poverty of the Mexican 'fellahins' by depicting them in an oversimplified way as authentic, primitive, truly happy, and nature-loving. By bridging the gap between herself and the Native Mexicans, Frazer writes in true Kerouacian tradition. Kerouac embraced Oswald Spengler's notion of the 'fellahin' he described in *The Decline of the West* (1926), and thought he found it realized in Mexico. The Beats were enthusiastic about Spengler's controversial theory that all civilizations inevitably cease to exist and that the apocalypse of Western civilization was close. Originally signifying Arab peasantry, the term 'fellahin' is extended to include one of the three groups in his historical "morphology of peoples." The first stage, the primitive, refers to early stages of culture; the second group includes those hegemonic empires which rise to control the historical stage. The 'fellahin' is the third term, and refers to those largely "primitive" groups who are marginalized by "civilization" because of Western dominance and who survive nearly unchanged when the empire is finally completely destroyed.¹⁹ This new and better world which follows, however, would finally have to give way to a new dominant civilization which will rule out the cultureless fellahin. Spengler contrasts the "historical peoples, the peoples whose existence is world history" and the fellahin, whose lives are post-historical and post-civilization. While the "civilized" people lead meaningful lives, legitimated by the imperial culture, "Life as experienced by fellaheen peoples is just a planless happening without a goal wherein occurrences are many, but, in the last analysis, devoid of signification."²⁰

Spengler's pessimistic predictions were enormously influential and can be found echoed in many cultural documents of the first half of the 20th century. After the trauma of the Second World War, Kerouac and other Beat writers felt civilization would finally come to an end. This view manifests itself in his spontaneous prose style and the emphasis on the here and now. Jack Kerouac uses the term 'fellahin' very generally, meaning all peoples—in North America and throughout the world—who he thought to be situated outside the structures and categories of modern Western life. Throughout his works, his fellahin

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁹ Robert Holton, *On the Road*. Kerouac's Ragged American Journey (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999), 57.

²⁰ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 170.

depictions are out of touch with reality. For example, Kerouac writes of the fellahin as the “basic primitive, wailing humanity that stretches in a belt around the equatorial belly of the world from Malaya to India to Arabia to Morocco to Mexico to Polynesia to Thailand, and so on.”²¹ He also speaks of the music of the fellahin as “the world beat.”²² Kerouac began thinking of Mexico as the land of the fellahin that would survive the collapse of Western civilization. William Burroughs was worried about his friend, who was romanticizing the country too naively according to his opinion. He reminded Kerouac that “Mexico is not simple or gay or idyllic. It is nothing like a French Canadian naborhood [sic]. [...] Mexico is sinister and gloomy and chaotic with the special chaos of a dream. I like it myself, but it isn't everybody's taste, and don't expect to find anything like Lowell down here.”²³ Like his friends Burroughs and Ginsberg, Kerouac also dreamed of buying farmland in the American South and building a ranch on it, where he could live with his mother, sister, his brother-in-law, nephew, and the Cassadys. Cassidy's and Kerouac's letters give details of what the farm would look like. After some time, Kerouac's domestic fantasies shifted from buying land in the U.S. to Mexico, which was cheaper. In the South, the so-called 'new frontier,' Kerouac desired to create a commune-like home:

We'd hang on to every cent, give the Mexicans no quarter, let em get sullen at the cheap Americans and stand side by side in defense, and make friends in the end when they saw we was poor too. Comes another Mexican revolution, we stands them off with our Burroughsian arsenal bought cheap on Madros St. and dash to big city in car for safety shooting and pissing as we go; whole Mexican army follows hi on weed; now no worries any more. Just sit on roof hi enjoying hot dry sun and sound of kids yelling and have us wives and American talk of our own as well as exotic kicks and regular old honest Indian kicks.²⁴

For Kerouac, Mexico is a place where he and his friends simultaneously enjoy being among the fellahin while keeping their status as U.S. citizens. Like in many popular westerns of the 1950s, Kerouac is torn between the wish to settle down and the urge to continue traveling in order to avoid domesticity.

Enthusiastic about the “dark, barefoot Native Mexicans who walked the streets, their heads hung down, in silent prayer, as they walked into the churches of Roman Catholicism,”²⁵ many of Kerouac's novels and short stories depict the lives of Mexico's fellahin people. While Frazer's body of works is small, consisting of *For Love of Ray* and the internet publication *Poets and Oddfellows* (1996), Kerouac wrote several texts centering on Mexico and its people. Terry, a Mexican Chicana and Kerouac's lover, is not only portrayed in *On the Road*, but also in the short story “The Mexican Girl.” In *Mexico City Blues*, ancient Aztecan images and hallucinations start flowing in his mind. Comparing his own Canadian background with the fellahin Native Mexicans, he writes “Indian songs in Mexico/(the folk Chanties of Children/at dusk jumprope-/at Saturday Night power failure-)/are like the little French Canuckian/songs my mother

²¹ Kerouac, *On the Road*, 280.

²² *Ibid.*, 287.

²³ William Burroughs, *Letters of William S. Burroughs, 1945- 1959*, ed. Oliver Harris (New York: Penguin, 1994), 91.

²⁴ Ann Charters, ed., *The Portable Beat Reader* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 211.

²⁵ Joe Olvera, “A Review of Jack Kerouac's *Tristessa*,” *Moody Street Irregulars. A Jack Kerouac Magazine* 4 (1991), 12-13.

sings.”²⁶ Later in the book, he continues, “And I am only an Apache/Smoking Hashi/In old Cabashy/By the Lamp.”²⁷ Similar to Frazer’s impressions, Kerouac’s Mexico was one of simultaneous danger and freedom. For him, Mexico City was the center of the fellahin civilization, a land separated from the prevalent social hierarchies in the United States, a virginal country of great expectations and hopes. In *On the Road*, Kerouac calls Mexico the only place in the world where we “will finally learn ourselves.”²⁸ In *Tristessa*, Kerouac’s pejorative depiction of a shattered, morphine-addicted prostitute, he concludes that white, Western society has failed in all respects.

While they are in Mexico, both Frazer and Kerouac have identification problems. Both can be compared if the reader considers their implied racist attitudes concerning Mexicans, who are seen as inferior due to their skin color. On the one hand, Frazer was closely connected to the Mexican people by sharing their oppression. On the other hand, unlike white, male Beat writers who saw both the oppression of ethnic minorities and women only as a mirror for their own sense of alienation, Frazer is much more honest and sensitive about her own prejudice. In a 1999 interview, Frazer openly talked about her racial fears: “When I left Rachel with Jovita and then came back and they had this smoke-filled room and were doing the rituals—that was a different kind of blackness. That was my paranoia against black magic.”²⁹ Frazer admits that her response is rooted in the general Western prejudice towards dark-skinned exoticized people. Yet while she was in Mexico, she also identified with the misery of the Native Mexicans and believes she had achieved empathy, first, because as a light-skinned U.S. citizen, she was part of a minority, and second, because she lived a life in poverty. She was linked to the Mexican people who were “so open to their poverty, or so open to the oppression of being down-trodden”. Furthermore, she points out that she had gradually become Mexican and black: “That’s what I was identifying with, that darkness in myself, as, okay, now the worst has happened to me, yet these people can accept me. And being a prostitute in Mexico, I was accepted.”³⁰ Both Sal Paradise and Brenda Frazer imagine themselves as Mexicans. “They thought I was a Mexican, of course, and in a way I am,” Sal says in *On the Road*. Feeling to be part of the fellahin, he imagines, “I was a man of the earth, precisely as I had dreamed I would be.”³¹ The similarity to Frazer’s accounts is striking: She aims “to make some claim to Indian heritage.”³² “I know that I am as much Mexican as I am New Yorker or even spade, Negro, Veracruzana, I have undergone the metamorphosis complete and my heart is warm and happy,”³³ she writes about her transformation from white to dark. In *On the Road*, Sal is being perceived as “Mexican” in the United States, but as “white” in Mexico. When in California picking cotton with his “Mexican girl,” Terry, Sal does not see the unromantic reality of a life in poverty. He is convinced that he is Mexican, but in Mexico such an approach is not useful. To identify with the marginalized Mexican people is no longer necessary for Sal, because in a fellahin nation, Americans have to demonstrate strength in order to show their request to conquer the Wild West. Ker-

²⁶ Jack Kerouac, *Mexico City Blues* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.

²⁸ Kerouac, *On the Road*, 280.

²⁹ Grace, *Breaking the Rule of Cool*, 125.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

³¹ Kerouac, *On the Road*, 97.

³² Bremser, *For Love of Ray*, 187.

³³ *Ibid.*, 40.

ouac intends his quest narrative to be a sort of western, especially when Sal and Dean stay in an all-night Mexican movie house:

The Picture was Singing Cowboy Eddie Dean and his gallant white horse Bloop, that was number one; number two [...] was a picture about Istanbul. We saw both of these things six times during the night. We saw them waking, we heard them sleeping, we sensed them dreaming, we were permeated completely with the strange Gray Myth of the West and weird dark Myth of the East when morning came. All my actions since then have been dictated automatically to my subconscious by this horrible osmotic experience.³⁴

This scene is an example of how imperialist demands are solidified in the subconscious. Through absorbing the great myths dealing with crossing various frontiers all night, Kerouac justifies his behaviour which is caused by unconscious forces according to his mind. Yet Kerouac does not hide his colonialist plans, even if he knows about their dangerous effects on his behaviour. Sal considers the movies as founding myths. When Sal and Dean come to the Mexican border, they are exuberant not only because they are tourists, but they also have another adventure in mind: "Do you know there's a road that goes down Mexico and all the way to Panama?," Dean asks Sal. "Yes! You and I, Sal, we'd dig the whole world with a car like this because, man, the road must eventually lead to the whole world."³⁵ In Mexico, it is no longer useful to look/feel like a fellahin, because in Mexico, marginality only leads to further problems. In Mexico, Sal becomes an American.

Sal Paradise's and Brenda Frazer's ways cross in a border city called Laredo. Frazer comes there, because her husband is imprisoned. Being afraid of the American police, she feels safer in Nuevo Laredo on the Mexican side of the border. The weeks she spends there living in various hotels are desperate. With the baby in her arms, she crosses the border every day to talk to her husband through the window of his cell. She writes: "I am in a perpetual state of sweat [...] I do not look or wish for pleasant weather, have no prospects of pleasure and so continue this soul drive in the withering heat, but do not wither."³⁶ In Laredo, "the end of America," Sal gets the feeling that rules and order are totally falling away, as the country is free of authoritarian and hierarchical structures. Mexico incites their imagination and is depicted in an over-romanticized, but also feminized way: weak, inviting, and seductive. Crossing the border into a fellahin country, Sal and Dean start into their new lives, and their road trip changes from adventure/kicks to exploration:

'Now, Sal, we're leaving everything behind us and entering a new and unknown phase of things. All the years and troubles and kicks—and now this! so that we can safely think of nothing else and just go on ahead with our faces stuck out like this, you see, and understand the world as, really and genuinely speaking, other Americans haven't done before us—they were here, weren't they? The Mexican war. Cutting across here with cannon.'³⁷

³⁴ Kerouac, *On the Road*, 244.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 230.

³⁶ Bremser, *For Love of Ray*, 87.

³⁷ Kerouac, *On the Road*, 276.

Critics argue that Kerouac's imperialist, expansionist drive plays a crucial role in *On the Road*. Sal's exploration of Mexico is safe, because as an American he finds himself in social and financial security. Brenda Frazer, in contrast, is not safe in Mexico, because she is a woman with no money and a baby on her lap. She cannot call her mother to send money, because she gets no support from her side of her family. For Mexican standards, Sal and Dean are relatively rich Americans: they can even afford to rent a Mexican brothel including all of the prostitutes therein for a whole afternoon. It seems like masculinity is on the move: in Mexico, the 'real American' can be compared to an explorer, but back in the United States, the 'real American' is a total outcast. Feeling like conquerors, traveling through Mexico is "not like driving across Carolina, or Texas, or Arizona, or Illinois; but like driving across the world and into the places where we would finally learn ourselves among the Fellahin Indians of the world, the essential strain of the basic primitive, wailing humanity that stretches in a belt around the equatorial belly of the world."³⁸ Sal comes to the conclusion, "For when destruction comes to the world of 'history' and the Apocalypse of the Fellahin returns once more as so many times before, people will stare with the same eyes from the caves of Mexico as well as from the caves of Bali, where it all began and where Adam was suckled and taught to know."³⁹ Due to the fear of the atomic bomb in the postwar years, it is encouraging for Sal to imagine the infinite existence of the fellahin peoples. Primitivism, colour, earth, authenticity, and sexual vigour seem to be the keywords for Sal and Dean on their Mexican road trips.

Similarly, Brenda Frazer is also convinced that only the Native fellahin peoples will eventually survive. For her, Mexico City is a terrible "place of germ nurture." The only ones who are immune against various germs are the Native Mexicans: "Flu germs once set loose into that air spread in hopelessness of complete take over, and everybody gets sick and stays that way, except for the Indians, who have some built in resistance—that had become traditional by killing off the unfit."⁴⁰ In true male Beats' fashion, Frazer believes that the fellahin will survive destruction. While Kerouac talks of Indians' "primitive, wailing humanity," Frazer uses similar words to describe the Native Mexicans in Acapulco, where she visits her sister.

I delight in the Indians must live somewhere and I find them though the way is tortured and hidden on secret hillside entrances. I walk up gutters of rainflow from impoverished backyards over someone living above to another chicken-coop up higher—a troop of little boys follows me—the gringa is better known here than any other city in the country [...].⁴¹

Frazer not only copies Kerouac's style, but like him, she also ignores the social realities of many poverty-struck Mexicans. She writes: "I feel a great compassion and want to live in one of those hillside houses of wicker branches propping someone precariously on his neighbor—and once or twice I see a house so ghettoed isolate that it would be like a Chinese puzzle to gain entrance."⁴² The reality of living in a wicker branch shack is probably not as romantic as it might seem. Furthermore, Frazer compares

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 280.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 280-281.

⁴⁰ Bremser, *For Love of Ray*, 180.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴² *Ibid.*

the Native fellahin Mexicans, whom she adores, with the American Spanish whom she detests: "I delight in glee in the Indians all around the hill [...] give it back to yourselves Indians! It is as easy as that—how I hate the American Spanish."⁴³ Several times throughout the book, she speaks of the incorruptness and beauty of the "barefoot Indians" who are the only ones who know about the essence of life. These lines remind the reader of Kerouac's views. Sal's individual expansion across racial and societal borders does not make him open-minded, as he also loses himself in stereotypical assumptions:

What a contrast between the well-clad, reading, writing, thinking American, with a watch, a pencil, and a bill of exchange in his pocket, and the naked New Zealander, whose property is a club, a spear, a mat, and an undivided twentieth of a shed to sleep under! But compare the health of the two men, and you shall see that the white man has lost his aboriginal strength. If the travelers tell us truly, strike the savage with a broad axe, and in a day or two the flesh shall unite and heal as if you struck the blow into soft pitch, and the same blow shall send the white to his grave.⁴⁴

Being black and savage are uncorrupted human conditions, but being white finally leads to decline and breakdown of the established order.

In *For Love of Ray*, Native Mexicans and Americans are similarly presented in stark contrast to each other. For Frazer, the fellahin population is natural and authentic, while she gradually starts to hate all Americans and the United States. Frazer does not want to sell her body to Americans on Mexican streets and states, "everyone on the streets is busy hustling the Americans and I am not interested or able to try them yet, (my prejudices)."⁴⁵ In Laredo, Frazer becomes aware that "Texas is the most vicious atmosphere I have ever suffered."⁴⁶ Frazer's view is that whites, and especially the United States, are decadent, whereas Native Mexicans stand for "the Indian continuation of life."⁴⁷ The author also distinguishes between the Native Mexicans and the Spanish Mexicans who are a dying society for her. In the past, "Mexicity is a nightmare of the dream it must have been of lakes and straight solid standing rock houses simple with the primal worshipping fervor." However, she continues, "it has now become Spanish trash and dust and shame."⁴⁸ Additionally, she gets angry about Mexicans who "are almost Americans, who have sold out to the States, and retain none of their heritage."⁴⁹ Another scene in which she angrily shows her affinity towards Native Mexicans occurs when she reacts toward an arrogant Spanish Mexican customer named Ernesto Z: "[...] one Indian footstep on those hills out there was worth more than all his Spano-Mexican properties multiplied by years of tradition."⁵⁰ Frazer's 'primitive romanticism,' her supremacist attitude towards racial minorities, and her racial prejudice are strikingly similar to Kerouac's attitudes. Frazer,

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

⁴⁴ Kerouac, *On the Road*, 279.

⁴⁵ Bremser, *For Love of Ray*, 95.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 185.

who regretfully faces the Americanization of Mexico, is comforted by her belief in an eventual “final revolution in Mexico City, the Indian overthrow.”⁵¹ Her wish to be part of this breakdown of established orders mirrors Kerouac’s assumption that the Beat Generation is definitely an “Indian Uprising.”⁵² For both authors, it is important to be part of the indigenous population, which survives in the end. Yet, even though Frazer yearns to unite spiritually with the Native Mexican population, she is unsuccessful in the end. She cannot bridge the gap between herself and the fellahin due to the Kerouacian ‘romantic primitivism’ she embraces.

To oversimplify the issue of the Beats’ racial prejudices, however, is to ignore that multiculturalism, as we know it today, was non-existent in the postwar years. The 1950s and 1960s were a time of increased racial tensions: It was considered to be immoral for a white person to have an interracial relationship or children with a coloured person. In the early 1950s, when Kerouac wrote books like *On the Road*, *The Subterraneans*, or *Tristessa*, anti-miscegenation laws still existed in more than fifteen U.S. states. Despite white middle class domesticity, Jack Kerouac and Brenda Frazer made attempts to—at least—gaze across the borders into a multicultural society. They—at least—tried to fight a battle between their need for embracing openness and their need for writing through the fracturing of their prejudice. Even if they explored Mexico’s cultural diversity very superficially, they—at least—tried to get an insight into the lives of society’s outsiders.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁵² Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Cody* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 51.

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