



# JACLR

*Journal of Artistic  
Creation & Literary  
Research*

JACLR: Journal of Artistic Creation and Literary Research is a bi-annual, peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access Graduate Student Journal of the Universidad Complutense Madrid that publishes interdisciplinary research on literary studies, critical theory, applied linguistics and semiotics, and educational issues. The journal also publishes original contributions in artistic creation in order to promote these works.

---

**Volume 5 Issue 2 (December 2017) Article 5**

**Daniela Sandoval**

**Images of Mexico in Tom Wolfe and Jack Kerouac: A penance or a fleeting Eden?**

---

**Recommended Citation**

Sandoval, Daniela. "Images of Mexico in Tom Wolfe and Jack Kerouac: A penance or a fleeting Eden?" JACLR: Journal of Artistic Creation and Literary Research 5.2 (2017): 53-63 <<https://www.ucm.es/siim/journal-of-artistic-creation-and-literary-research>>

©Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain

---

**Abstract:** The following paper intends to compare *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* 1968 by Tom Wolfe and *On the road* 1957 by Jack Kerouac as two novels that portray a visit to Mexico that does not fulfill the characters' expectations by any means since the characters of the works under study engage their perception in stereotypical thinking. The trip to Mexico is approached as an escape and ends up in a complete disenchantment.

**Keywords:** Perception, Stereotypes, Mexican, Brown, Outlaw, Escape.

**Daniela SANDOVAL**

**Images of Mexico in Tom Wolfe and Jack Kerouac: A penance or a fleeting Eden?**

**0. Introduction: Stereotypes: Mexico portrayed in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* and *On the road***

In this paper, I intend to compare the main characters' visit to Mexico in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* 1968 by Tom Wolfe and *On the road* 1957 by Jack Kerouac to analyze the motives that drive them there, their expectations and perception of what they find and how their journeys finish in Mexico. I would like to study their experience there as observers and as subjects of observation by the Mexican residents as well. Kerouac's characters endure a mythical experience when it comes to approaching Mexican geography and Wolfe's live their time there as a complete mortification so my purpose in this paper is to compare these life lessons to show that both adventures, different as they are, merge in the fact that they have a similar ending that is a complete disenchantment. To develop these ideas, I did some

research on Mexico's image in Hollywood movies to understand some of the topics portrayed in the two novels and I reviewed *Brown: The last Discovery of America* 2002 a book by Richard Rodriguez where the brown color is approached as a pattern associated to the Mexican in North America. To start, I plan to make a quick review of the stereotyping process using Charles Ramirez Berg's ideas to pose this hypothesis: when humans face what is unknown, they engage in stereotypical thinking to try to make sense of what is unknown for them. I aspire to extrapolate these ideas to both trips to Mexico as it could be argued the characters of the novels stereotype to make sense of everything they find there.

In *Latino images in film stereotypes, subversion, resistance*, by Charles Ramirez Berg, stereotypical thinking is addressed. It aims to explain why we engage in stereotypical thinking and describes this mental procedure. Stereotyping should be a subject of study because it represents an automatic cognitive response to what surrounds us, stereotypes should be regarded as a powerful tool. Ramirez Berg states that "the power of stereotyping is demonstrated by our ability to summon up a fairly specific mental picture in our heads ..." (17). In Ramirez Berg's words: "For some cognitive psychologists, stereotyping describes a value-neutral psychological mechanism that creates categories and enables people to manage the swirl of data presented to them from their environment." (14) He brings up that "this categorizing function was recognized in 1922 by Walter Lippmann, who first coined the term "stereotyping."" (14)

Looking for an explanation on why we categorize the other and what nature of this process is, I found some light in Ramirez Berg's analysis of stereotypes as not conventionalized and ahistorical mental representations described by him as "... gross generalizations, stereotypes are conveniently ahistorical, selectively omitting the out-group's social, political, and economic group history." (17) What I am trying to analyze from this last quote is that they are powerful and have always existed.

Experiencing through a stereotypical thought is something presented in both novels, it poses a cognitive shortcut as the main characters of the two novels feel bombarded by many unknown places and people. The characters under study go to Mexico and some of the stereotypes they hold consciously or unconsciously blossom in a way that could be considered ideological. I base this perception on Ramirez Berg's idea that: "Stereotypes don't just derogatorily depict the Other- they also indicate a preferred power relation. One way of thinking about the ideological component of stereotyping is to consider stereotypes as vestiges of the colonial system." (21) This citation is to be considered when analyzing the scenario of the novels: North American citizens end up in Mexico and depict the other as inferior. They compare their previous knowledge to what they see. In Kerouac the streets are described as "Spanish" (251) because they feel bombarded by the new elements to cope with and feel the urge to classify all the new things they observe. This idea will be developed throughout this paper when I describe their social interactions with locals.

Charles Ramirez Berg sheds some light on Hollywood's movies about the Mexican border and why would North Americans cross that line:

. . . the underlying assumption is that Americans must be compelled to cross the boundary line -why else would they opt to leave their perfect life in the U.S.A? People in the movies don't just go to Mexico, they have to be pushed into going there. Hollywood's "Mexi-go assumption," that Americans must be coerced into entering Mexico, means that in the movies there must always be an explicit reason for a character's heading for Mexico. (Ramirez Berg 199)

He tries to convey that Hollywood's assumption is that few visitors go to Mexico for cultural reasons but to run from the law or to just make the most of their time travelling: "Or they might be simply be looking for the kind of good time (alcohol in the days of Prohibition, gambling before Las Vegas, sex anytime) that can't be found in the United States." (Ramirez Berg 199)

Following Berg's analysis, I would like to mention that the stereotype of "the outlaw" is mentioned in both novels. The characters' Mexican experience in the novels could be

connected to these ideas as they explain the motives that took them there. In Wolfe's novel, Kesey is running from the law and Kerouac's characters are driven to go there to have a good time. Kesey has left no option but to escape to Mexico and the idea of the villain that flees to Mexico is fulfilled with him. In Kerouac, Sal and Dean show with some passages that they are aware of this stereotype. They describe that San Antonio: "... was the bottom and dregs of America where all the heavy villains sink, where disoriented people have to go to be near a specific elsewhere they can slip into unnoticed." (249) This perception is mentioned again on their way to Monterrey, they find snow-capped great mountains and Sal thinks about fugitives that ventured there in exile. "I looked up outside Monterrey and saw enormous weird twin peaks beyond Old Monterrey, beyond where the outlaws went." (254) Following this short introduction of possible motives that made them travel, I aim to review their time in Mexico. First, in Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-aid acid test* Mexico is just an ordeal to escape since Kesey had been convicted for possession of marijuana and then arrested in San Francisco. Secondly, Kerouac's *On the road* Mexico portrays a different experience but has a similar outcome.

### 1. Wolfe's novel: Mexico through Kesey's eyes

In Wolfe's novel, the reader is dragged to this experience in chapter twentyone, where Kesey, the fugitive is approached and lives on the west coast of Mexico on Paradise-blue Bandarias Bay, in Puerto Vallarta. He decides to run away to Mexico due to the legal persecution he endures. The first description provided of Mexico lists the things Mexico has or lacks:

A confetti of skulls and death in western Mexico, the Rat lands. Not one inch of its picturesque burros and shawls or nova Zapata hats or color-TV chunks of watermelon or water lilies or gold feathers or long eyelashes or high combs or tortillas and tacos and chili poder or fluty camote vendors or muletas or toreros or olés or mariachi bands or water lilies or blood of the dahlia or tinny cantinas or serapes or movie black marias with shiny black hair and steaming little high round pubescent bottoms. None of the old Mexico we know and love on the 21 day excursion fare. (258).

By reading these lines, the reader can come to a feeling that their expectations of Mexico are not fulfilled, it could be said that being there has destroyed their myths of "the Mexico the thought they knew and loved". What they expect does not match what it really is in their eyes and all turns into disenchantment. When Mexican music is heard, this comment is made: "Mariachi music at last, with the trumpets always breaking and dropping off the note and the struggling up again." (261) Finding a mariachi band complies with a stereotype so the words "at last" show some impatience towards completing what they expect to come across in Mexico and they do this based on the stereotypes they are aware of or might have grown up with.

The description of their experience shows disgust for Mexico. Not only the stereotypes they know are not fulfilled but their time there is narrated as highly disappointing and it gives the reader the perception that nothing positive might come out of it. It could be said that they perceive what they find comparing it to what is familiar to them instead of contemplating it with an open mind. They even try to rationalize what they see with what they know: "The border at Tijuana is like a huge super highway toll station . . . all plastic Green and concrete like part of suburban superhighway America." (257)

In one of Kesey's interactions with the locals we can analyze his attitude as an extremely unpleasant one as when trying to find a marketplace, he yells: "'EAT ALLEY! EAT ALLEY! TAKE ME TO EAT ALLEY!'" "You mean the market, señor? Then he grins and stares with an intensity at the poor mestizo as if he has just uttered the most penetrating remark in the history of all Mexico and says: 'Yeah! Yeah! Right! Right! Right!'" (277) Not only he finds his time there a nightmare but his attitude towards the local people is extremely negative.

The word "rat" is used constantly to describe everything seen. It becomes a constant pattern in every reference made to the place and it has an extremely negative connotation as it could be framed in a racist tradition that perceives Mexican as "rats" that are animals commonly known as invaders that are filthy, live in overcrowded spaces, have a high birth rate and can potentially bring diseases. Kesey uses the term "rat" repeatedly and even mentions that everything has a "Rat aesthetic". In Kesey's own words: "... Rat cones, Rat sodas, Rat meat-salad sandwiches, Rat cheezis, Ratburgers- it is as if the Rat things of all the Rat lands of America had been looking for their country, their Cannan, their Is-ra-el, and they found it in Mexico." (260) This passage illustrates that he is under the impression that everything he finds repulsive in America is to be found in Mexico. This idea is shown as he lists the following revolting elements to describe the place:

Huaraches, which are the Rat shoe. It all synches. Mexico is the Rat Paradise ... It is as if the Rat things of all the Rat lands of America, all the drive-ins, mobile-home parks, Dairy Queens, superettes, Sunset strips, auto-accessory stores ... lay-away furniture stores ... raw concrete service station toilets with a head of urine in the bowl, Greyhound bus toilets with paper towels and vomit hanging over the hockey-puckblack rim ... (260).

The reader gets the feeling that Kesey is unable to find anything pleasant and that he feels like if he had been stranded on a desert island or in a desert. This dissatisfaction can be felt in the many descriptions given of the place: "Just the boogering brown dust and bloated rat corpses by the road, goats, cows, chickens with all four feet up in the air at the Tezctlipocan skull rot crossroads of Mexico. To Kesey it was a hopeless flea-bitten desert he was fleeing into." (258: ch. 21) The only resort to feel in peace that Kesey has when he arrives in Mexico is Boise. He believes that his presence made his time there bearable. Boise, a New Englander represents what he knows and tries to make him realize that it was "it is all the same, here as anywhere". (259)

Kesey's time there is a constant narrative of repellent elements until he reaches Mazatlan which he describes: "... not so unbearably Mexicali." (267) This just happens because it is a place of interest for them as it represents their acid central, a place for them to keep on running their acid experiences. It could be argued he finds it somewhat endurable just because of the fact that they could continue with their habits there.

The last thing I would like to mention that shows his tendency to think through stereotypes is that he meets a woman and gives her a "Prankster name" which comes from her Mexican roots even though she does not happen to be Mexican but had some type of Mexican heredity. This is explained in the following description:

And yet Black Maria is not completely a Prankster ... she wants to do this thing, but she does it without *belief*. It is like the Mexican part of her Black Maria thing. She has all the trappings of Mexican -she looks it, she speaks it, her grandfather was even Mexica- but she is not Mexican. She is Carolyn Hannah of San Jose, California ... (263).

Black Maria joins the Pranksters but never gets to be part of the "inner circle" and what is worst for her, when Mountain Girl and Gretch (Kesey's wife) arrive in Mexico she feels like a fish out of water. She constantly feels she does not belong with them. In conclusion, the trip is felt like a penance by Kesey, he detests the place and does not make the most of this time there. This is very different from Sal's and Dean's experience.

## **2. Kerouac's Paradise on earth: a case of magnification of perception**

In Kerouac's novel, the main characters find themselves longing for expansion, from their hometown to Mexico so they hit the road once again as they did before with this idea, expecting to find everything that is exotic and something completely different. They are

incapable of finding anything new even though they have repeatedly crossed their country from side to side. This is why they feel the urge to head to Mexico and they take off full of presuppositions and a myth in mind, the idea of geographical expansion, from their hometown to Mexico. The following quote shows their expectations and that they do not know what they are going to find: "Just beyond, you could feel the enormous presence of whole great Mexico and almost smell the billion tortillas frying and smoking in the night. We had no idea what Mexico would really be like. " (249) They even mention getting further, to South America. There had been a west bound fever until the second half of the XIX century in the US so a possible interpretation of this is that they might had been trying to prolong the Manifest Destiny unconsciously.

The novel's narration undergoes a transformation as soon as they approach Mexico because they are fascinated by what is newly discovered. Their excitement is already high just by when approaching the border and they believe it is magical. They are driven by a burning desire to watch what surrounds them even from San Antonio, where they first feel the hot weather and they start noticing elements that made this city different to what they had previously known and they become avid observers in consequence. Dean constantly tells Sal to watch because they feel the Mexican presence all over the place. In Sal's words: "You had the feeling all this used to be Mexican territory indeed. " (247) They genuinely expect to fulfill their expectations of what they want to find and the trip is full of positive descriptions as they constantly feed this myth with the things they see. They would long to find new elements in life for the humankind, to understand the world as no others have because they are under the impression they are leaving their lives behind and starting a new phase of life. Their excitement can be seen when Sal describes the trip 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 world, the essential strain of the basic primitive, wailing humanity ..." (255) They are in search of a new conception of the world and feel Mexico as a wild place, populated by primitive people they consider to be pure and innocent. In their view, these people were just corrupted by civilization and they differ from the stereotype of "Mexican" they know. This idea can be portrayed in this description:

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

They live an episode while driving the Pan-American highway that gives them that feeling again. They are under the spell of having found purity and beauty in their souls. When they started climbing and the air grows cool a new perception arouses, they regard this territory as a wild world that was once civilized by the construction of the road (in an attempt perhaps to say that what is further from the road is savage): "Think of the wild chief they must have! They probably, off the road, over that bluff, miles back, must be even wilder and stranger, yeah, because the Pan-American Highway partially civilizes this nation on this road." (271) In connection to what has just been mentioned, it could be argued that a common perception is that in order to approach heaven, humans must ascend and in their eyes these people should have stayed where they were, not descending, and from the characters' lines we could understand they went down towards civilization and found sorrow. Their view is that: "They had come down from the back mountains and higher places to hold forth their hands for something they thought civilization could offer, and they never dreamed the sadness and the poor broken delusion of it. " (273) They came across some Indian girls on the road that came close to sell them pieces of rock crystal. Dean tells Sal: "'Look at those eyes!' breathed Dean. They were like the eyes of the Virgin Mary when she was a child. We saw in them the tender and forgiving gaze of Jesus."(272) They regard their glance as a symbol of purity and innocence but felt that spell was broken when they talked and sounded silly: "In their silence they were themselves. 'They've only *recently* learned to

sell these crystals, since the highway was built about ten years back- up until that time this entire nation must have been *silent!*"(272) From the previous lines, we could infer that in their eyes the state of innocence was altered by the highway, the girls left their silence when they started selling the crystals. This could imply that this would not have happened if the highway had not been built.

Sal's experience of Mexico is linked to his escapade with Dean. The reader could interpret this because the excitement he undergoes finishes with Dean's abandonment. But as long as the experience lasts, it is full of myth and they feel their senses are bombarded by amazing things so it could be argued that Sal idealizes the place thanks to Dean and even gets to see him as a "prophet", someone untouchable as long as their mystical experience lasts. I would like to develop this idea through two events:

The first night when they are all trying to sleep, he has a vision, the apparition of a white horse that sees Dean and trots right by his head. It is not mentioned in the text if it happens to be a dream (Sal himself sees it as myth, ghost or spirit) or something real. Real or dreamt, the event leaves room for interpreting the fact that Sal doesn't feel scared for Dean's security shows some type of idealization as if he had Dean in a pedestal and were sure nothing bad could potentially occur to him. The second event occurred in the highway episode mentioned some paragraphs above, Dean gives a wristwatch to one of the "little" girls as they describe them and they feel thankful and run after their car when they leave. In Sal's eyes, this episode is read in a religious tone, making a prophet out of Dean, prophets are commonly followed and so are they. In his words: "They stroked Dean and thanked him. He stood among them with his ragged face to the sky, looking for the next and highest and final pass, and seemed like the Prophet that had come to them." (272)

It is well described throughout the book that the young characters feel inclined to find female company so they are prone to find some and they do so. Dean who could be considered a womanizer that has been married three times is stunned because he feels it is easier to cope with ladies in Mexico. In their trip, they first approach them on the street and this provoked a reaction in Dean, captivated as he sees many of them and finds them more approachable. In Sal's own words: "He was knocked out, he didn't have to do the usual things he would have done in America. 'There's millions of them along the road!' he said." (253) They feel their experience at the whore house as something mystical. These lines unveil how they believe this is all a legendary event: "It was like a long, spectral Arabian dream in the afternoon in another life- Ali Baba and the alleys and the courtesans." (264) They find themselves in a mystical brothel but the text tells us they were charged a high amount of money in their stay, this fact shows that they have their own perception of what is going on. One of the girls they find there is different in Sal's eyes who describes her as the wildest of all the girls, half Indian, half white that came from Venezuela, and only eighteen. "She looked as if she came from a good family. What was she doing whoring in Mexico at that age and with that tender cheek and fair aspect, God knows. Some awful grief had driven her to it." (262) Sal Paradise is examining how she ended up there and by his description, trying to examine why, if she came from a good family, she could finish up in a brothel. As this fact is beyond his understanding (of what he knows) he somewhat takes for granted she must be undergoing some kind of sorrow because this girl escapes from his stereotypical thinking and he needs to make sense of what he sees.

I expect to show their senses are at their peak providing some examples of the things they discover and how they regard them as mystical elements the world is laying before their eyes. Their senses are overwhelmed so everything they approach feels intense. I will try to analyze the perceptions of what they smell, hear, touch and taste. (Sight will be analyzed in a following section that covers what the novels have in common as many of the things they observe follow a similar pattern.)

When it comes to smell, they feel wrapped in a wild cinnamon smell that they feel in the air which they believe is softer even from San Antonio. "... Dean and I went out to dig the streets of Mexican San Antonio. It was fragrant and soft -the softest air I'd ever known- and dark, and mysterious, and buzzing." (248) Their amazement can be seen in these lines too: "We are in a new tropic! No wonder the smell! Smell it!" (267) They even wore their t-shirts

longer than they usually did in on purpose to impregnate themselves with "the smell" they found until the point they think they can't smell themselves anymore.

Their sense of hearing is boosted too. When driving they hear insects cry when they smashed against the windshield, they heard mambo extremely loud: "The trumpets seemed so loud I thought they could hear them clear out in the desert ..." (262) Thus, not only they heard it louder than they ever did back home but feel it different and everlasting: "The mambo never let up for a moment, it frenzied on like an endless journey in the jungle." (264) The idea suggested throughout this last citation is that they link the beating music to their own experience and the beat magnifies it.

When touch is under study, it could be said that they are experimenters through touch too. To start, it comes to the reader's attention that they feel like if they were inside an oven in a pod of sweat. There are repeated allusions to the hot weather and even though they feel the high temperature; they find it soft: "We stopped in the unimaginable softness. It was as hot as the inside of a baker's oven on a June night in New Orleans" (268). In their first night Sal goes through a connection with what he considers tropical heat, he feels somehow touched by it- Sal describes this sensation when he sleeps on the steel roof of the car because he feels the roof cool and to put his experience in his own words: "For the first time in my life the weather was not something that touched me, that caressed me, froze or sweated me, but became me". (268) It feels as if Sal wanted to taste all this as he opens his mouth and tries to taste the environment: "I opened my mouth to it and drew deep breaths of jungle atmosphere." (269) There is a transition in their perception, they go from seeing the jungle to breathing it.

They come to believe they are being transformed by their quest. They are shaken profoundly by all their experience, something in them connects with what they see as a lost jungle and they indulge themselves to become wild: "We took off our T-shirts and roared through the jungle, bare-chested" (267) Even regular elements found in the landscape are changed dogs go from regular dogs to ". . . dirty old jungle dogs" (269) Sal gets to believe he smells of the jungle and he ends up barefoot as the locals. This experience can be seen here: "I began to tingle all over and to smell of the Rank, hot, rotten jungle, all over from hair and face to feet and toes -Of course I was barefoot." (268)

To wrap up, I would like to outline the main elements I have analyzed in Kerouac's characters' experience. They find themselves restless as they have a high disposition to find new elements in life and when they do, they start seeing what surrounds them in a mystical facet. They believe they have come to found the origins of mankind in the mountains and interpret that "that innocent state" has been corrupted by the construction of the highway. Following that, I mentioned I have the perception that Dean's allegorical perception of the place could be connected to Dean providing two events to support that assumption, I offered a quick review of how their senses are moved by the things they come across and to finish, I made a quick review of their experience with female company as it is a motif that is constantly repeated throughout the novel.

As has been suggested throughout this essay, the characters from both novels live completely different stays in Mexico. I aim to study the main thing I have found that differs in both narratives and that is: their perception of the geographical space. I intend to analyze both views in a binary conception as if they were both ends of the spectrum: Dean and Sal go through the experience of their lives and Kesey and his pranksters endure a torment, there are two feelings of movement: fast motion in Kerouac and stillness in Wolfe. In this analysis of the opposite experiences, we could interpret that Mexico is either taken as paradise or as hell. In Wolfe, Kesey refers to Mexico as the devil's island: ". . . who the fuck knows; here on Devil's island, us fugitives; no sense of time at all..." (280). Kesey, not only does not get the "paradise" feeling but regards the place as the "Rat lands" as was described some paragraphs above. Dean and Sal even happen to believe they belong there. In their own words: "Still no air, no breeze, no dew, but the same Tropic of Cancer heaviness held us all pinned to earth, where we belonged and tingled." (269).

In contrast to Kesey's trip, Kerouac's characters believe they see Paradise when they are ascending towards the heights of the Sierra Madre Oriental. They approach the landscape

and it could be interpreted that they do not only feel they are ascending the mountains but approaching what they could consider as the Garden of Eden, their own heaven on earth: "Now the sun was golden, the air keen blue ... hot space and sudden Biblical tree shade ... The shepherds appeared, dressed as in first times, in long flowing robes, the women carrying Golden bundles of flax, the men staves. " (273) This perception of being in a mythical area is repeated when they arrive in Mexico City: "We'd made it, a total of nineteen hundred miles from the afternoon yards of Denver to these vast and Biblical areas of the world, and now we were about to reach the end of the road." (274)

As was mentioned in the introduction, two patterns of motion can be appreciated. In Wolfe's novel there is inactivity, the reader is told the Pranksters just sit there to wait for something to happen: "It wasn't a cool thing for them to just sit there by the beach in this lurid freak of a bus ... and they sat there, beat, and let the hours tool by." (274: ch. 22) In contrast, Kerouac's characters are all movement, they are like a typhoon on their way to Mexico City. Tim Cresswell addresses this question in his article: *Mobility as Resistance: A Geographical Reading of Kerouac's 'On the Road'*. He links their mobility to a counter cultural behavior, he states that:

This mobility, expressed in the content and structure of the novel, was a geographical expression of discontent with the hegemonic culture of the United States in the nineteen fifties –a culture ensconced in the family/small-town/home-ownership nexus of the 'American Dream.' (257)

He brings up another interesting topic, that this mobility affects and determines their sentimental relationships, he states that "One theme connected to the mobility of Sal and Dean is lack of commitment to traditional forms of sexual relationship." (257) After having reviewed some elements that differ in two binary systems (hell-heaven and stillness-motion) I would like to focus on similar elements in both novels. Despite the fact that both trips to Mexico portray a different experience, the visitors observe the locals in a similar way and are observed by them too. They are kept under observation by the locals and they share somehow a similar perception of the locals as people who are doomed to have a sad life, limited by birth to know anything better or different. In spite of the fact that they perceive the place differently (as was mentioned in the previous point) their view of the residents quite merges. This view is full of references to brown color and dirt elements. The last fact to mention is that the descriptions of the police officers are somewhat similar too.

### **3. A game of perception: Observers and observed**

When some foreigners arrive in a new place it just a natural tendency for the locals to observe them, just out of curiosity, intrigued by the way they look like or to rationalize their actions. This takes places in both novels. In Kerouac, the main characters are aware of this, the following lines show they feel viewed but in their point of view they are observed with a special mystery: "... those dozens of Mexican cats watched us from under their secret hatbrims in the night." (250) They felt observed by girls and it has a tone of mysticism: "Strange Young girls, dark, as the moon, stared from mysterious verdant doorways." (255) It is mentioned how they felt observed by men too, just watching what they did as mere spectators of a show, at the whore house, it is described there were twenty men leaned in that window watching their actions.

In Wolfe's novel, it is indicated that they received the locals' attention as well. It does not carry the mystical tone that has Kerouac's novel though. The pranksters are regarded with awe. From this quote we perceive they not only were observed but created an impact: "They were a hell of a hit with the Mexicans, however. They never saw anything like it. '¡Diablo!' they kept saying. Women hid their children with their skirts. A whole bunch of locals gathered around the bus and grinned and stared at the crazies." (275) From these lines we could conclude they represent some type of novelty that the locals may find scary. We find the same thing in the following citation: "RED TIDE! And old woman and children

say, '¡Diablo!', and cross themselves, which the American crazies think is very funny." (277) The fact that they crossed themselves denotes superstition towards the pranksters, it could be understood as a religious outcome when humans face what can feel frightening and unknown.

There is another fact to mention from the locals' perceptiveness present in both works. In Wolfe's novel, it is mentioned that Kesey and his gang of pranksters were taken to be Germans refugees because of the way they talked and that others think they were American gangsters hiding. This fact supports the hypothesis mentioned previously. When humans face what is unknown, they engage in stereotypical thinking to try to make sense of what is not understood or unknown to them. In Kerouac, we find the word "ALEMAN!" in the middle of the narration, in part four when they are on the way to Monterrey. It is not specified who utters this exclamation but as it is in capital letters the reader could understand it is addressed to the main characters. One last thing that could be mentioned about the interaction with the residents in both novels is that the main characters receive assistance from them. Sal and Dean find Victor's guidance when they arrive and Kesey gets help from Mario after the Mexican bust in chapter twenty-four.

In the previous paragraphs I have tried to describe how they felt observed and now I would like to describe a common perception in both novels: the descriptions the main characters provide give the reader the feeling that the residents are condemned to live a miserable life in Mexico. I hope to approach this idea through some examples. In Kerouac's novel we have the episode of the Indian girls that in their eyes were just civilized and corrupted by the highway. A similar thing happens when they approach a three-year-old Indian girl. They perceive she sweats differently from them as if she had a different sweat because she was born and bound to live a different type of a life. In Dean's words: "It's not the kind of sweat we have, it's oily and it's *always there* ... and she knows nothing of non-sweat, she was born with sweat and dies with sweat." (271) Dean promised Victor to take him to the US. This promise could imply that Dean, in his reasoning took for granted that Victor wanted to go, that he wanted to leave his country.

In Wolfe's novel, describing the locals with scorn is a constant narrative tendency so I would like to approach something else that I found interesting:

... It is truly a sad thing when an American boho says fuck this and picks up and leaves this fucking tailfin and shopping plaza, and ... goes to live among real people, the honest folk-type folk, in the land of Earth feelings, Mexico, and the hell with tile baths- and then he sits there, in Mexico, amid the hunkering hardcheese mestizos, and, man, it is honest and real here... and just as miserable as hell, and he is a miserable aging fuckup with no place to go. (267)

It could be understood in this passage that the general opinion is that if someone moves to Mexico that person might have a sad limiting condition and will age "trapped" there. If we analyze the sentence "and then he sits there" it represents a paralysis, an immobility that shows boredom, how dull life is in Mexico for them. This point was analyzed in the previous section, the two ways of movement found in the works.

To continue my analysis of what they find as observers, brown color is everywhere. Richard Rodriguez studies brown color in his book *Brown: The last Discovery of America*. He argues that: "Brown is the color most people in the United States associate with Latin America." (1605) This can describe why both authors under review link the color as motif in their description of the Mexican experience. Brown color is everywhere in Kerouac's novel, it is a constant pattern, they see brown eyes, brown lights and little brown kids everywhere. Brown color is provided for some descriptions in Wolfe's novel too but it is done with less intensity than in Kerouac's. For instance, when the narration is focused on Kesey's escape through the window in chapter twenty one, the word "BROWN" pops out in capital letters.

Richard Rodriguez brings up that the adjective "dirty" has been associated to the Mexican population and we can see this in Wolfe's constant allusion to rats and in Kerouac in the descriptions of the locals too which he see dirty and barefooted. Richard Rodriguez states

that: "No adjective has attached itself more often to the Mexican in America than "dirty"- which I assume gropes toward the simile "dirt-like", indicating dense concentrations of melanin." (1605)

To finish the comparisons, I want to embrace that in both novels under study, the main characters undergo experiences with the police in Mexico. It could be argued that they have in common a reception of uselessness when it comes to the police force, described as not being serious enough, relaxed, bored and there is a lack of respect towards them, disregarding them as figures of authority. The experiences just differ a bit because in Kerouac's novel the characters find them tender even though they are lazy in their eyes, in Sal's words: "They weren't like officials at all. They were lazy and tender. Dean felt he was dreaming." (250) The reader may soon interpret Dean's fascination because he has always bounced in and out of prison and all of a sudden he comes across a new type of officials that do not pose a threat for him. Therefore, it could be interpreted that some type of idealization of the officers is made because of Dean's growing background since they even describe the officer has a tender voice when he addresses them: "Such lovely policemen God hath never wrought in America. No suspicions, no fuss, no bother: he was the guardian of the sleeping town, period." (269)

Even though they have the tendency of idealizing most of the things they approach, they engage in criminal behavior when they bribe two police men advised by Victor, the local guiding them through Gregoria: "... and leaning on the windowsill that opened into the whorehouse, were two cops, saggy-trousered, drowsy, bored ... and at Victor's bidding gave them the equivalent of twenty-four cents each, just for the sake of the form." (261) This bribe shows disrespectfulness. Bribing is mentioned in Wolfe's novel as well. Kesey believes: "... Mexicans were always ready to make a deal." (293)

Kesey's Mexican experience starts presenting him sitting down being one hundred percent aware that two police officers, a local officer who is described as a brown dumpy mex and an FBI agent are close to capturing him, that they were synchronized with some fake telephone linesmen outside but he sits still and it takes him some seconds that could be crucial for him to react. When the danger is just too much of a threat, he jumps outside the window. At the moment of his getaway it is described that: "the brown Mex holds gold gun but the brain behind that face too brown moldering Mex earth to worry about couldn't hit a peeing dog". (265) From these lines it could be interpreted that Kesey does not hold any esteem or respect for the local officer who is not considered as a threat even though he is holding a gun. Kesey manages to escape into the jungle and the North American agent is not criticized so severely, in this event it looks like just the local one is the inept or incompetent one. Kesey manages to flee from them in two occasions and this reinforces his perception of "incapability" about the police. He is so aware of it that he even sees his situation as a game, "The Cops and Robbers game" as it is described in chapter twenty six of the novel. It is later said that Kesey is just worried about the FBI body-snatchers and not about the local police as he has in mind they could be bribed, just like in Kerouac's novel.

#### **4. Conclusion: The end of the journey**

To conclude, I would like to mention that in both works, the characters' trip end up in disillusionment, the trips prove to be a failed escape route and the characters' expectations are never fulfilled. Kesey's purgatory concludes when he returns to San Francisco, he is seen as if he had returned from exile and Sal feels a profound loss of hope when he is abandoned by Dean, after they arrive in Mexico City where they are surrounded again by all the elements that have been present along the road: adobe neighborhoods, mambo, whores but do not feel as mystical as they did before, on top of that, Dean's desertion puts an end to the trip and Sal has to endure it from his sick bed. Sal says "... he was driving back alone through those banana mountains ..." (276) Those mountains are the same ones that took them to Mexico City in the first place but at the end of the Mexican experience they have a different nature, all that was idyllic has vanished his mind and the once seen as "sublime mountains" turn into regular mountains, they become: "those banana mountains." My initial

analysis of stereotypes can be applied to everything mentioned in this paper, the characters can only approach Mexico from their own stereotypes and stereotypical thinking determines and marks their experiences in the end.

### **Works Cited**

- Cresswell, Tim. "Mobility as Resistance: A Geographical Reading of Kerouac's 'On the Road'." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 18.2 (1993): 249-262.
- Kerouac, Jack. *On the road*. 2011 Edition. England: Penguin essentials, 1957.
- Ramírez Berg, Charles. *Latino images in film: Stereotypes, subversion, resistance*. Third paperback printing, 2006. University of Texas P., 2002
- Rodriguez, Richard. "From brown: The last Discovery of America" *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature* Eds. Reidhead, Julia and Carly Fraser, Norton & Company, Inc 2011. 1604-1605.
- Wolfe, Tom. *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. Black Swan edition 1989. London: Black Swan, 1968.

### **Bioprofile of the author:**

Daniela Sandoval Fierro [Daniela.sandoval@estumail.ucm.es] was born in 1988 in Bogota Colombia. She studied in the bilingual Buckingham School where she learnt to focus her schooling through amiability, quality, excellence, innovation and transcendence. These values have influenced her to approach her life and studies. She moved to Spain in 1999. She holds a Degree in English Studies and a Master's in Literary Studies, both from the Complutense University of Madrid where she continues studying a PhD in Literary Studies. In addition to this, she studies a degree in Psychology with UNED to complement her research field. From a professional point of view, she has been teaching English since 2007. She started her professional experience working at several schools and schools of languages as Berlitz and Vaughan Systems. These teaching positions have provided her with the opportunity to coordinate academic plans since she feels a great vocation regarding the innovation of teaching. **Contact:** [danna\\_daniela@hotmail.com](mailto:danna_daniela@hotmail.com)

Daniela Sandoval Fierro [Daniela.sandoval@estumail.ucm.es] nacida en 1988 en Bogotá, Colombia estudió en el colegio bilingüe Buckingham donde aprendió a enfocar la vida de la enseñanza a través de la calidez, la calidad, la excelencia, la innovación y la trascendencia. Estos valores le han enseñado a abordar su vida y estudios. Se trasladó a España en 1999. Daniela es graduada en Estudios Ingleses y tiene un master en Estudios Literarios, ambos por la Universidad Complutense de Madrid donde continúa estudiando el Doctorado en Estudios Literarios. Como complemento a esto, estudia el Grado en Psicología ofrecido por la UNED para complementar su campo de investigación. Profesionalmente, ha trabajado como profesora de lengua Inglesa desde 2007. Inició su trayectoria profesional trabajando en varios colegios, después estuvo enseñando en Vaughan Systems y en Berlitz. En ambas academias ha coordinado planes de innovación de currículo académico pues siente una gran vocación por crear e innovar en la enseñanza del inglés como segunda lengua. **Contacto:** [danna\\_daniela@hotmail.com](mailto:danna_daniela@hotmail.com)