NEOCOLONIALISM AND GLOBAL INEQUALITY IN:

Final Paper in the Course "Globalization and its critics"
Department of English, University of Hawaii at Manoa
Gitte du Plessis, Fall 2011.
# Table of Contents

**Introduction**  
Introduction to the concept of neocolonialism  3

**A short genealogy of the term neocolonialism**  
- *The history behind neocolonialism*  4
- *Definitions of neocolonialism*  7
- *Neocolonialism in practice*  8
- *Neocolonialism within globalization and post-colonial studies*  10

**Eat, Pray, Love**  
- *Colonial storytelling*  13
- *The white woman’s burden*  16
- *The western search for the "Other"*  20
- *Shopping for spirituality*  23

**Conclusion**  24

**Works cited**  26
Introduction

The place comes with a gardener, so all I have to do is look at the flowers. I don't know what any of these extraordinary equatorial flowers are called, so I make up new names for them. And why not? It's my Eden, is it not? (p. 235).

Contrary to the rhetoric, this was not written in the late 1700s by an English explorer who has recently conquered new lands for colonization. It was written in 2008 by a woman from New York who was spending time in Bali on her quest for personal peace and happiness. It would seem that not much has changed since explorers and conquerors set out to claim as much of the world as they pleased as theirs some two hundred and fifty years ago, but in these globalized times, living a summer in Bali would probably be labeled with benign words such as mobility, travel, tourism and cosmopolitanism.

This paper analyses the novel Eat, Pray, Love based on a genealogy of the term neocolonialism, a term that is closely linked with the excessive global inequality that still prevails in our modern whirlwind of communication, trading and traveling. An American woman living in a house owned by an English woman with a Balinese gardener in Bali is a situation completely based on this world inequality and the division between first and third world countries. When the situation is then described in words such as those in the opening quote, this paper argues that a critical analysis that goes beyond the discourse of globalization as a "happy chaos of an infinitely mobile citizenry" (Brennan, 2008) would be beneficial.

Neocolonialism is a term that explains and critiques how colonial relationships are somehow perpetuated even though the colonization is no longer formal, and is tied to a perception that world inequality is largely due to developed countries exploiting undeveloped countries. This paper asks under what circumstances the novel Eat, Pray, Love can be viewed as neocolonial. To answer this question, the paper begins with a critical genealogy of the term neocolonialism, historicizing and defining the term as well as discussing how neocolonialism is expressed. This is then the foundation for an analysis of Eat, Pray, Love with a specific focus on neocolonialism.
A short genealogy of the term neocolonialism

The history behind neocolonialism

Walter Rodney traces the underdevelopment of Africa back to the slave trade happening in the four centuries before colonial rule (Rodney, 1972). With that in mind, this very brief history of the emergence of neocolonialism begins with European colonization in the late nineteenth century that climaxed in the "Scramble for Africa". This is viewed as the epitome of "modern" colonialism; an era of "the imposition of a completely external power over people marked as primitive" (Burbank and Cooper, 2010, 312). Theorists of imperialism, most markedly Lenin, saw the rapid rise of colonization as a reflection of changes in the European economy during industrialization, and argued that imperialism marked capitalism in its highest stage, viewing exploitation and foreign investments as a necessary means to maintain the capitalist systems in Europe. Other theorists add the extraction of raw materials as well as competition between empires for strategic territory as additional explanations for colonization (Burbank and Cooper, 2010; Kerr-Ritchie, 2007); a competition that lead to World Wars (Burbank and Cooper, 2010; Nkrumah, 1965; Sebastian, 2007). The first such conflict was largely limited to the European Empires and their territories, the second also attracting the former USSR, Japan and the United States. During both wars and the two decades between of economic downturn, the colonies remained under external control despite rebellions and political demands (Burbank and Cooper, 2010).

After World War II, Britain and France recognized that selling commodities from their colonies might be crucial to recovering economically from destroyed infrastructure and huge debts following the war. At the same time, the pre-war acceptance of white men ruling people of other races in the understanding that they were primitive had been shaken by Hitler's excessively racist empire and by the fact that European empires had drawn heavily on troops from their colonies in order to destroy the Third Reich. Out of these experiences rose a new economic and social vision for the colonies of France and Britain in which "development" emerged as a new concept (Burbank and Cooper, 2010, 420). Finally, in the 1950s, after fermenting resistance intensified within several colonies, French and British cost-benefit analyses concluded that "cultivating friendly post-colonial relations with African leaders would cost less than trying to hang on to the colonies [by force]" (Burbank and Cooper, 2010, 425)
and formal decolonization took hold. Rich from providing technology and weapons during the war and not facing any destruction on its own soil, the United States emerged more powerful after World War II (Burbank and Cooper, 2010, 411). With "development" arising as a key term and the United States as world leader, it is not surprising that the World Bank (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) and IMF (International Monetary Fund) were created at this time with the United States as their foremost economic engine (Benjamin, 2007). President Harry Truman's 1949 inauguration speech has been said to mark the point when the world was formally divided into developed and undeveloped countries (Benjamin, 2007):

We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas. [...] The old imperialism—exploitation for foreign profit—has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair-dealing. [...] Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge. [...] In addition, we must carry out our plans for reducing the barriers to world trade and increasing its volume. Economic recovery and peace itself depend on increased world trade (Truman, 1949).

In this speech, Truman talks of the US as a world savior, preaching peace, democracy and wealth for everyone. However, for theorists of neocolonialism, the speech inaugurates not just a president, but a new Empire practiced through neocolonialism (and the early signs of what would become neoliberalism). As Masao Miyoshi puts it:


The title of Lenin's Imperialism, the last stage of capitalism is mirrored in Kwame Nkrumah's Neo-colonialism, the last stage of imperialism (Nkrumah, 1965), which is often mentioned as a crucial work in the uprising of neocolonialism theory (Oxford English Dictionary, International Encyclopedia of Human Geography). Nkrumah's theory of neocolonialism rests on Lenin's premise that capitalism, as a system, cannot function without exploitation in the form of unpaid or very low paid labor, and the creation of a small rich elite and huge masses of poor. Nkrumah states that "the developed countries succeeded in exporting their internal problem [masses of poor] and transferring the conflict between rich and poor from the national to the international
stage" (Nkrumah, 1965, 255), by substituting two of the corner stones in capitalism - subjugation of the working class and exclusion of the state from any control - with 'welfare states', creating high working class living standards based on a state-regulated capitalism in their home counties. For Nkrumah, neocolonialism is defined as "modern attempts to perpetuate colonialism while at the same time talking about 'freedom'" (Nkrumah, 1965, 239).1

The political situation emerging in post-colonial Africa was the arena in which an understanding of neocolonialism took hold. Perhaps the most significant outcome of a balkanization described by Nkrumah (1965) was that "the horizontal unity of third world nations did not replace vertical connections between the leaders of rich states with those of poor ones" (Burbank and Cooper, 2010, 427). This explanation was the focus of another significant pioneer of neocolonialism theory, Frantz Fanon, who in his 1963 The Wretched of the Earth argued that the generally western educated middle class that took power in Africa at the time of independence had personal interests in maintaining the colonial relationships that in many ways benefitted them (Falola & Heaton, 2005). Burbank and Cooper elaborate:

Ex-colonial states sought foreign aid or military assistance against internal or external enemies; their rulers often had personal ties to leaders of former colonial powers. Poor countries had an immediate need for relations of clientage with rich ones, more so than with countries with the same incapacities they faced themselves. The political deck was stacked against turning the asymmetries of empire into third world solidarity (Burbank and Cooper, 2010, 427).

Hence, the term neocolonialism reflects an understanding that as colonialism became politically incorrect, "development" and "aid" entered the vocabulary, allowing colonizers and imperialists to continue their resource extraction from foreign territories. As such, neocolonialism is a term coined in the third world, describing situations from a third world perspective. Under neocolonialism, the civilizing mission of traditional colonization in which Christianity played a large role, is perpetuated in communication such as Truman's speech and that of organizations like the World Bank and IMF, because it is still the rich countries educating and developing the poor through benevolence. The term seems to have had the greatest currency in the first decades after African colonialism, but is still used today in post-colonial and globalization studies to describe exploitive relationships among territories.

1 Note that the word "free" or "freedom" is repeated no less than 25 times throughout Truman's 1949 speech (Truman, 1949)
Definitions of neocolonialism

The prefix neo- refers to a "new, revived, or modified form of some doctrine, belief, [or] practice" (Oxford English Dictionary), which of course makes neocolonialism a modified form of colonialism. Definitions of neocolonialism often focus on economic influence in formerly colonized countries, as in this definition from the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology:

A term often applied to the economic situation of many former colonies after political independence has been secured. Neo-colonialist interpretations of economic development in the Third World suggest that, as a budget-saving and humanitarian act, political decolonization nevertheless left intact the West's monopolistic control over the production and marketing of goods in the former colonies. By using international law, corporate property rights, and the power of major commercial banks the former colonial powers could retain economic influence and control over their former dependent territories.

Falola and Heaton also focus on economics when they define neocolonialism as "the continuation of the economic model of colonialism after a colonized territory has achieved formal political independence" (Falola & Heaton, 2005, 1623). The term can describe an exploitive relationship between territories anywhere on the globe, regardless of the relational history of the territories (Nkrumah, 1965, xvii).

As Nkrumah's book-title Neo-colonialism, the last stage of imperialism points out, neocolonialism is a form of imperialism. Brennan is an example of an author who uses imperialism synonymously with what here has been described as neocolonialism:

Imperialism makes the process begun by colonialism more efficient and generalized, and it often (although not always) reduces the need for bald, direct confrontation. [...] Imperialism [...] grows out of colonialism, both by extending its logic but also by responding more subtly to the demands for political independence [...]. Imperialism is above all a structured system of economic disparity that places certain countries of the world in a position of dependence on those states whose economies are strongest, and whose strength is artificially (and coercively) maintained by unequal rates of exchange, punitive lending laws, and by other financial, commercial, and military means (Brennan, 2008, 47-48).

In this definition, military means are included within the scope of imperialism. While there is no mention of military means in any of the other definitions of neocolonialism, it is within Nkrumah's understanding of the term, that in extreme cases, the "troops of the imperial power may garrison the territory of the neo-colonial State and control the government of it" (Nkrumah, ix). The inclusion here of military occupation as a part of a neocolonial relationship perhaps serves to include the 2003 US invasion of Iraq with consequential extraction of oil and installation of a US controlled "democratic" government (Harvey, 2005, Steger, 2010b) into
the realm of a neocolonial relationship. Brennan (2008) further stresses that imperialism or colonialism entails the subjugation of people from some part of the world by people from another part of the world and does not therefore refer to individuals subjugating others. The key idea that motivates colonialism and imperialism is that everyone from the conquering country is civilizationally superior to the conquered people. Thus, it is one's race, nationality or cultural identity that makes one feel a part of a superior group or nation, for example a part of the West or a citizen of the United States (Brennan, 2008, 47).

Neocolonialism in practice
For theorists of neocolonialism, poverty and unequal development is not only perpetuated but strengthened through neocolonial relationships of exploitation in such a way that neocolonialism becomes an explanation for third world poverty and hunger (Sirisena, 2001, Sebastian, 2007). How is the economic model of colonialism carried out in neocolonial relationships? It seems this has remained predominantly the same since Nkrumah's descriptions. First and foremost, the practicality of the relationship comes about because the direct control exercised in colonialism has been handed over to the local, educated, but still "native" political and/or economic elite. These people have the values of the West completely internalized - most importantly neoliberal values of individualism, personal freedom, inevitable and acceptable inequality, capitalism and consumerism - and hereby help to carry out the wishes of the neocolonial power out of personal interest (Mhone, 2005, Brennan, 2008). Aspects of the ideology of civilizationally superiority inherent in slavery and colonialism is completely internalized and therefore no longer controversial in this neocolonial model (Brennan, 2008). Secondly, the neocolonial relationships are enabled through the presence of transnational corporations. With few trade-barriers and few local laws concerning environment or the rights of workers, these corporations "profit excessively from low wages and corrupt governments in resource-rich ex-colonial states" (Burbank and Cooper, 2010, 454). Transnational corporations take advantage of raw materials and unique agricultural opportunities in the third world. The resources are extracted from the territory and processed by western means, and then exported to other developed countries - a process that creates jobs, wealth and tax-revenues in the neocolonial center. Simultaneously, a part of the neocolonial relationship is the creation of a market for western products in the third world country itself, again enabled by the infiltration of western values and ideals, hereby creating the need for
western products. This way, the extracted resources can be sold back in third world countries at a much higher price. Masao Miyoshi describes transnational corporatism as this era's colonialism and sees the heightening of neoliberalism under Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher as the time transnational corporations boomed - along with further poverty. In Miyoshi's words, "TNCs rationalize and execute the objectives of colonialism with greater efficiency and rationalism (Miyoshi, 1993, 749). The "civilization" of the third world brought about by the internalization of western values also brings about a need for modernization, or what is still described as development. The third world needs schools, roads, buildings, etc., and the transnational corporations present in the third world need infrastructure in order to do their business. Since the local elites have an interest in the presence of the transnational corporations, they are prone to loans offered by institutions such as the World Bank. The third World country then borrows money to build infrastructure, but spends the majority of these funds hiring expertise as well as buying equipment and materials from the neocolonial center. As Nkrumah puts it:

Before the decline of colonialism what today is known as aid was simply foreign investment. (Nkrumah, 1965, 51).

The economic control is completed once the third world country is fixed in debt to the neocolonial center. Hence, the financial aid delivered (with discourses of fighting poverty) in reality only contributes to furthering poverty:

The West has choked Africa with an onerous debt regime, forcing many nations to pay more in interest on debts to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) than on health care, education, infrastructure, and other vital services combined (Weinstein, 2008).

In summary, the neocolonial relationship is carried out through collaboration with the local elite, indoctrination and internalization of western values, creation of a market for western products, transnational corporations benefitting from free trade, and financial aid. On the basis of this description it is no surprise that neocolonialism is tightly intertwined with notions of globalization and neoliberalism.
Neocolonialism within globalization and post-colonial studies

The use of the word neocolonialism is a critique in itself - a display of the discourse that world inequality is created by western exploitation of third world countries. While one can identify as a neoliberal or a cosmopolitan who welcomes globalization, I think no one would identify as a neocolonial. It seems writers today seldom build their entire work on the word, rather they put it in somewhere as if to say "by the way, what I have described here, in my opinion is a new form of colonialism". This seems to be the case when authors use neocolonialism synonymously with globalization and a heightened form of capitalism:

Even to a casual observer of the economic geography of the world, it is obvious that there are few centers of wealth and prosperity amidst vast areas of poverty and misery. Globalization, being a continuation of the global capitalist development, is furthering this division by widening and intensifying the uneven development (Sebastian, 2007, 1).

So starts Sebastian's book *Globalization and Uneven Development* (2007), in a sentence where both "globalization" and "the global capitalist development" could easily be replaced with "neocolonialism". Here is another example of the word neocolonialism used on par with globalization and economic policies:

There is hunger and poverty in the third world because the affluent nations exploit their resources. They exploited the third world some time back under colonialism. Now they exploit them under neocolonialism called market economy and globalization (Sirisena, 2001, preface).

When Masao Miyoshi writes "colonialism is even more active now in the form of transnational corporatism" (Miyoshi, 1993, 728), he is equating contemporary transnational corporatism with neocolonialism. Ileana Rodriguez writes that "Miyoshi does a superb job in viewing globalization as the new form of colonialism" (Rodriguez, 2008, 282). In her view, globalization is "the name used to define the logic of high capitalism and the effect transnational corporations have in the governance of the world" (Rodriguez, 2008, 276). She views neocolonialism as the poverty-perpetuating "underside of globalization" (Rodriguez, 2008, 276). Again, neocolonialism almost merges with globalization as well as a heightened form of capitalism. What is to be made of these theoretical equations?

According to Steger, "globalization" emerged "as a rather amorphous buzzword in the 1980s" (Steger, 2010a, 1), so perhaps it is no surprise that neocolonialism will easily fit under its umbrella. Brennan also stresses that the term globalization is heavily discursive. Some view
globalization as a promise of a new "world state", "a happy chaos of infinitely mobile citizenry" (Brennan, 2008, 40), the development of trade and finance and the unleashing of a global free market, an American ideology, new modes of communication across the globe, or - as seen with the examples of Sebastian, Sirisena and Rodriguez - a form of neocolonialism. Depending on the chosen discourse and one's understanding of it, globalization can be viewed positively and be welcomed, or it can be perceived as a threat (Brennan, 2008). Brennan writes that "globalization is [...] not a description, but a projection; or more properly, it is a projection that passes itself off as a description" (Brennan, 2008, 42). In contrast to this description of globalization as something mainly taking place in language, what he calls "imperialism" is described as reality (Brennan, 2008).

Using the word neocolonialism in one's description of globalization thus becomes a critique of discourses of globalization as inevitable and irreversible and with nobody in charge of the process (Steger, 2010b), as well as of the views of globalization as a "happy chaos" benefiting everyone.

Within globalization studies, neoliberalism is an important term to analyze and consider. In the case of neocolonialism, neoliberalism is often viewed as a vehicle from which colonial relationships are upheld, regardless if one calls neoliberalism "high capitalism" (Rodriguez), "market economy" (Sirisena), or "continuation of the global capitalist development" (Sebastian). Neoliberalism is at once a utopian "all-embracing economic and political ideology that advocates the supremacy of the market over any alternative social arrangements" (Mhone, 2005, 1626), and a set of policies that have yet to be proven successful:

In developing economies, particularly those in Africa, the pursuit of structural adjustment and stabilization programs has not yielded the desired benefits in either inclusive or equitable growth, which should be the aim of development. In these countries neoliberalism has had the consequence of jettisoning any semblance of development or strategic planning that those countries had attempted prior to the adoption of the recent economic reforms, so that the economies are currently in disarray (Mhone, 1627).

This discrepancy between ideology and policy gets masked in the strength of the discourse of neoliberalism that passes itself off as unquestionable common sense amongst the masses. As a discourse, it is very hard to contradict or fight "because it is behind all the powers of a world of power relations" (Bourdieu, 1998 cited in Brennan, 2008, 44). As Brennan puts it:
It is a faith rather than an analysis, which creates its own truth by imposing itself on the supposedly free agents of economic choice (Brennan, 2008, 44).

Hence, neoliberalism as a vehicle for neocolonialism is not just the implementation of neoliberal policies in third world countries, rather a pathway for these policies is created by the strong ideology of neoliberalism that promises freedom, dignity and prosperity for all. The World Bank and IMF are good examples (Mhone, 2005). The neoliberal ideology is behind the "development/fight poverty"-discourses distributed, which then opens the way for neoliberal/neocolonial practices. Just as with the case of globalization, describing neoliberalism as neocolonial prompts a critique of the discourse, policies, and ultimately of the ideology behind neoliberalism.

Since the end of Hitler and the second World War it has not been politically correct to view some people or races as lesser than others and to blatantly exploit "primitive" people. However exploitation is still viewed as necessary to maintain power and high living standards in developed capitalist areas. Neocolonialism describes how the developed countries manage to keep extracting resources from underdeveloped countries, covering up this process with humanitarian discourses of aid and independence that the politically correct masses can easily swallow. The exploitation and cynicism at the obvious forefront of raw colonialism is thus masked in the neocolonial variant. Because of its functioning without formal territorial control, neocolonialism can be viewed as a 'hidden' form of colonialism. Nkrumah describes neocolonialism as "the worst form of imperialism" precisely because it is 'hidden':

For those who practice it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress (Nkrumah, xi).

Neocolonialism is also hidden because it is engulfed by strong discourses of the wonders of globalization and neoliberal ideology. Because of the strength of these discourses, it can be difficult to "reveal" neocolonialism in reality - or to uphold a strong counter-discourse of what is going on. If, then, the intention is to maintain a critique, neocolonialism is an important term to keep in the vocabulary of globalization and postcolonial studies. For the latter, neocolonialism can also function to specify the often criticized prefix of "post".
Eat, Pray, Love

Colonial storytelling

Elizabeth Gilbert's novel *Eat, Pray, Love* from 2006 has sold over 7 million copies, has topped the New York Times bestseller list, been included in Oprah's book club and been turned into a major motion picture with Julia Roberts in the leading role. In other words, the view of the world presented in this book is very widely distributed. The novel is a travel memoir and self-help book (Gilmore, 2010) and is about Elizabeth Gilbert's one year of soul- and happiness-searching in Italy "in the pursuit of pleasure", India "in the pursuit of devotion" and Bali "in the pursuit of balance". In Italy she learns to speak (and eat!) Italian, in India she meditates in an Ashram and in Bali she "has so much free time you could measure it in metric tons" (234), spending her days meditating and spending time with her new friends Ketut and Wayan. What prompts her to go on this travel is a crisis with the life she is living in New York:

Wasn't I proud of all we'd accumulated - the prestigious home in the Hudson Valley, the apartment in Manhattan, the eight phone lines, the friends, and the picnics and the parties, the weekends spent roaming the aisles of some box-shaped superstore of our choice, buying ever more appliances on credit? I had actively participated in every moment of the creation of this life - so why did I feel like none of it resembled me? [...] *I don't want to be married anymore.* (11).

This problem of not being able to find herself is solved - first through a tough divorce and consequential suicidal depression - by travelling to far away places in a search for peace and happiness within. As Leigh Gilmore writes, Gilbert's suffering might be compelling to an overstressed Westerner firmly immersed in the "wonders" of capitalism, but is none the less thin, because Gilbert has received her hardships "while standing fully in the social and psychic space of white privilege" (665). Hence, both the articulation and proposed solution of Gilbert's problem depends on a high degree of material security and social privilege. Gilbert was even so privileged that it had been determined that she would get paid for her year of soul searching travel before she went away:

I can actually afford to do this because of a staggering personal miracle: in advance, my publisher has purchased the book I shall write about my travels (35).
Here, the phrase "a staggering personal miracle" hides all issues of class, making it seem as though this solution is available to everyone. The privileged economical status of Gilbert is also hidden behind magic in this passage:

A few nights ago, on the top of one lovely rise of forest I was in was a sign: "Artists House for Rent, with Kitchen." Because the universe is generous, three days later I am living there. (235).

Gilbert does not get to travel around the world because of personal miracles and the universe being generous. Rather, she gets to travel around the world because she is in the specific situation of being an already acclaimed author. Travelling and being paid for it is not only privileged compared to millions of disadvantaged people around the world, it is also privileged compared to people who have vocations that cannot be performed in far-away places, who would have to quit their job - and their pay - in order to solve a problem of Western identity crisis the way Gilbert solves it. Sam Anderson in the New York Times describes Gilbert's year of healing and self-discovery as "manufactured":

When Gilbert howls to the universe about her solitude, for instance — “I am alone, I am all alone, I am completely alone” [p.9] — it’s a paradox: she’s self-consciously performing that aloneness for hundreds of thousands of readers.

Saving yourself in this fashion therefore costs a lot of money, and in Gilbert's case also earns you a lot of money. This superiority from which the novel is written is important to keep in mind, because it becomes very obvious in the way the gulf between developed and undeveloped countries is described. In the Italy part of the book, Gilbert early on makes it clear that Rome where she is staying is still in the "Western world", which is set apart from other parts:

In every major city in the Western World, some things are always the same. The same African men are always selling knockoffs of the same designer handbags and sunglasses, and the same Guatemalan musicians are always playing "I'd rather be a sparrow than a snail" on their bamboo windpipes. But some things are only in Rome. Like the sandwich counterman so comfortably calling me "beautiful" every time we speak (36).

Here, the stage is set - the Western world is separated from the third world and Western countries are portrayed as superior to those who only produce citizens who scramble for their living by performing commoditized aspects of their native culture or selling cheap crap. However, even though Italy is cast as being a part of the privileged West, it is still described as more primitive than the U.S.:
So I ask around, and everybody agrees that, yes, there has been a true shift in Italy in the last ten to fifteen years. Maybe it's a victory of feminism, or an evolution of culture, or the inevitable modernizing effects of having joined the European Union. [...] Whatever the cause, though, it seems that Italy has decided as a society that this sort of stalking, pestering behavior toward women is no longer acceptable. (67).

The mystery of my missing box prompts a long discussion one night between me, my American friend Maria and her husband, Giulio. Maria thinks that in a civilized society one should be able to rely on such things as the post office delivering one's mail in a prompt manner, but Giulio begs to differ. He submits that the post office belongs not to man, but to the fates [...] (76).

These descriptions of Italy come with descriptions of the author's experiences from the viewpoint of someone "owning" the world, or in this case, Rome:

It's like somebody invented a city just to suit my specifications [...] (38).

The framing of Italy as slightly more primitive than the U.S. coupled with the rhetoric that Italy exists for Gilbert's pleasure gives the novel a viewpoint of U.S. civilizational superiority. The viewpoint of a division between the West and "the rest" continues through the India part of the book, where Gilbert lives in an Ashram in rural India and influx of Western money upholds the Ashram and gives pride to the otherwise poor and dirty town:

The students here are about equally divided between Indians and Westerners (and the Westerners are about equally divided between Americans and Europeans) (127).

The Ashram essentially creates the local economy, such as it is, and also stands as the town's pride. Outside the walls of the Ashram, it is all dust and poverty. Inside, it's all irrigated gardens, beds of flowers, hidden orchids, birdsong, mango trees, jackfruit trees, cashew trees, palm trees, magnolias, banyans. The buildings are nice, though not extravagant (126).

Here, the Ashram is described as a paradise, albeit a slightly primitive paradise. The rhetoric of civilizational superiority is however most apparent in the Bali part of the book. Here, the local people are described on par with monkeys:

The town is sort of like a small Pacific version of Santa Fe, only with monkeys walking around and Balinese families in traditional dress all over the place (217).

This coupling of examples highlights the civilizational inferiority of the Balinese. Also the Islamic aspects of culture is framed as primitive:
As idyllic as Bali seems, the wise keep in mind that this is, in fact, Indonesia - the largest Islamic nation on earth, unstable at its core, corrupt from the highest ministers of justice all the way down to the guy who pumps gas into your car (and who only pretends to fill it all the way up (308).

It is also portrayed how cheap it is for a Westerner to live and get around in a Bali that is dependent on money from the West:

The whole place has arranged itself to help you, the Westerner with the credit card, get around with ease. English is spoken here widely and happily (216).

And since the tourism industry collapsed in the wake of the terrorist bombing here two years ago (which happened a few weeks after I'd left Bali the first time), it's even easier to get around now; everyone is desperate to help you, desperate for work (216).

In short, it's one of the nicest places I've ever stayed and it's costing me less than ten dollars a day. It's good to be back (217).

And again, to reprint the opening quote of the paper, Bali is framed as though Gilbert has conquered it and now owns it, living comfortably in a house owned by an English woman who is away for the summer:

The place comes with a gardener, so all I have to do is look at the flowers. I don't know what any of these extraordinary equatorial flowers are called, so I make up new names for them. And why not? It's my Eden, is it not? (p. 235).

The framing of a very deep division between the developed and undeveloped countries and the U.S. as civilizationally superior makes it safe to conclude that the novel is marked by a colonial rhetoric.

The white woman's burden

During her time in Bali, Gilbert makes friends with Wayan, a medicine woman who is divorced and living alone with her daughter and two otherwise homeless children she has adopted into her little family. Wayan does traditional Balinese medicine and serves healthy food. Gilbert and Wayan have in common that they are divorcees, but this is worse for Wayan than for Gilbert, who writes, "to exit a marriage in Bali leaves a person alone and unprotected in ways that are almost impossible for a Westerner to imagine" (256). Furthermore, Wayan is about to be evicted from the place she is staying. One day, Gilbert decides to step into Wayan and her childrens' lives:
I want to help them. That was it. This is what that trembling feeling was, which I'd experienced so profoundly after meeting Wayan for the first time. I wanted to help this single mother with her daughter and her extra orphans. I wanted to valet-park them into a better life (272).

The decision to step in is framed as a spiritual one rather than a rational conclusion. Again, spirituality or "magic" functions to hide or depoliticize the broader societal frame of the event. One could wonder if the phrase "a better life" here implies that Gilbert wants to give Wayan a life more like her own, which she describes at the start of the book as "turned to smash" (20). The logic here is that more money gives you a better life, which is contradictory to the notion that Bali has a culture and a wisdom that allows Balinese people to be happy and balanced in a way Western people have lost - the notion behind Gilbert's motivation to travel there in the first place. There is also an element of "white man's burden" rhetoric:

And I excused myself from the shop to go take care of this intolerable state of affairs once and for all (272).

There is no doubt that the Westerner with the credit card is in power in Bali - a power far beyond that of the Balinese people. Gilbert's mini version of the World Bank does not offer loans but a generous donation of $18,000 Gilbert raises after writing an email and asking for donations from every privileged person she knows. Now Wayan can buy a house for herself and her children, because "if she had a home, she could finally be listed in Lonely Planet, who keep wanting to mention her services, but never can do so, because she never has a permanent address that they can print" (280). Here, a better life means becoming a part of the tourism industry. Wayan's business of buying a house, however, gets tricky. After a month, Wayan has not purchased a house with the money that have been put into her account. "Felipe and I have stepped in now" (306), Gilbert states in a somewhat condescending manner, because as Felipe, who has lived in Bali for five years says, "sometimes it's hard to get the truth of what's actually happening" (303). Felipe is her newly found expatriate Brazilian gemstone businessman love, and what the reader is being told here, is that doing business with primitive people is a hassle. Buying a home for Wayan is also tricky because the land in Ubud, the town where Felipe, Wayan and now Gilbert live, is expensive:

To buy land in Bali - especially in Ubud - can get almost as expensive as buying land in Westchester Country, in Tokyo, or on Rodeo Drive. Which is completely illogical because once you own the
property you can't make your money back on it in any traditionally logical way. You may pay approximately $25,000 for an *aro* of land (an *aro* is a land measurement roughly translating into English as: "Slightly bigger than the parking spot for an SUV"), and then you can build a little shop there where you will sell one batik sarong a day to one tourist a day for the rest of your life, for a profit of about seventy-five cents a hit. It's senseless (307).

Gilbert does not wonder what impact all the "Western expatriates" as she calls them, who live and do business in Bali, have had on the prices of land. The effect of the infiltration of Western money into Bali is portrayed but not discussed. Moreover, it is portrayed from a very superior state of mind, portraying someone else's home as a parking space and someone else's life's work as meaningless. Two weeks before Gilbert is to travel back to the US, Wayan has still not bought a house, but instead tries to ask Gilbert for more money, and Gilbert says to herself that "SHE'S FUCKING WITH YOU" (319). Felipe is not surprised and tells her that "you need to understand the thinking in Bali. It's a way of life here for people to try to get the most money they can out of visitors. It's how everyone survives" (320). Gilbert cringes:

First of all, I hate to think this could be true of Wayan. Second, I hate the cultural implications under his speech [Felipe's], the whiff of colonial White Man's Burden stuff, the patronizing "this-is-what-these-people-are-like" argument. But Felipe isn't a colonialist; he's a Brazilian. "You think I don't understand the culture of this kind of poverty? You've given Wayan more money than she's ever seen in her life and now she's thinking crazy. As far as she's concerned, you're her miracle benefactor and this might be her last chance to ever get a break" (320).

Again, the world " miracle" hides that this benevolence is enabled by global inequality. This passage is very interesting in the light of the rest of this analysis that has found Gilbert's novel to both have a colonial whiff, white mans burden rhetoric and an understanding of a division of people due to their level of civilization. Gilbert is apparently only able to realize this when her lover is practicing it, and obviously sees herself as different and somehow removed from it. In her eyes, Felipe cannot be a colonial because he is from a non-western country. As a gem-stone dealing expatriate living in Bali, Felipe however does see himself as able to speak on behalf of the westerner:

What happens with Westerners who live here for a long time is that they usually end up falling into one of two camps. Half of them keep playing the tourist, saying, 'Oh, those lovely Balinese, so sweet, so gracious.....,' and getting ripped off like crazy. The other half get so frustrated with being ripped off all the time, they start to hate the Balinese. And that's a shame, because then you've lost all these wonderful friends." (320).
So the task for the Westerner is to stay friends despite the inequality that marks the relationship. Gilbert manages to do this with her other friend, the medicine man Ketut, who in the novel often says to Gilbert "I am very empty in my bank since the bomb, bring more people". Gilbert practices English with him and takes his precious but worn out books of ancient Balinese knowledge to be photocopied. However a third Indonesian friend Gilbert makes in Bali she does not help, even though he used to live in the U.S. and misses it. When telling his story, Gilbert very quickly points out that Yudhi is Christian, not muslim (247). He found work on a cruise ship from Indonesia and got off in New York, living there as an undocumented immigrant, worked, met an American woman whom he married, and was deported as a result of the post 9/11 Patriot Act:

After a period of detention, the U.S. government sent my Christian friend Yudhi - now an Islamic terrorist suspect, apparently - back to Indonesia (250).

Gilbert describes Yudhi as very much at home in American culture, and goes on a road-trip around the island of Bali, "pretending that we are in America and that both of us are free" (290). While she buys a house for Wayan, Gilbert does not attempt to use her Western power and money to help Yudhi in his situation. Remembering how Gilbert herself framed Muslims earlier in the book - as corrupt and constantly at the verge of war - it is telling that she does not dive further into the political issue she describes here. Apparently the biggest crime of the U.S. government was to mistake Yudhi for a Muslim. In the appendix of the novel, Gilbert instead ends Yudhi's story writing that "Yudhi had recently taken work playing guitar in some fancy local resort and was doing well" (333).

The name of the medicine-woman Wayan's daughter is Tutti, which means "everyone" in Italian. Bob in Utah, one of the donors, points out to Gilbert: "So this is the final lesson, isn't it? When you set out in the world to help yourself, you end up helping... Tutti" (274). This however is far from the case. She lifts one woman and her family out of poverty, as well as a medicine man who is doing quite all right already, leaving other Balinese in poverty and swiftly avoiding benevolence that would require a serious questioning of U.S. policies.

In a study of volunteer tourism, broadly defined as activity in which people pay to volunteer in development or conservation projects, Mary Conran has found that the main goal for the travelers is intimacy, but argues that "intimacy in volunteer tourism contributes to a
cultural politics that normalizes structural inequality on which the experience is based" and that "intimacy tends to evade cultural critique" (Conran, 2011, 6). This critique of volunteer tourism is also very relevant in a critique of *Eat, Pray, Love*. The intimacy Gilbert shared with people like Wayan and Ketut functions in exactly this way. The uniqueness of the encounter is based on inequality and would not be the same without the inequality. At the same time, this focus on two individuals enables a broader societal critique to be completely overlooked. Grewal and Kaplan discuss transnational feminist practices of aid similar to the example of Gilbert helping a single mother in Bali buy a house, and stress that "without an analysis of transnational scattered hegemonies that reveal themselves in gender relations, feminist movements will remain isolated and prone to reproducing the universalizing gestures of dominant Western cultures (2). In other words, an act of aid like Gilbert carries out here is not necessarily helpful when looked at in a broader societal perspective.

The western search for the "Other"
The framing of the U.S. as civilizationally superior in the novel comes along with the understanding that the primitive countries Gilbert pays a visit to still possess something the U.S. has lost in its intense modernization. For the case of Italy, Americans can learn that it is okay to do nothing:

Generally speaking, though, Americans have an inability to relax into sheer pleasure. Ours is an entertainment-seeking nation, but not necessarily a pleasure-seeking one. [...] Americans don't really know how to do nothing. This is the cause of that great sad American stereotype - the overstressed executive who goes on vacation, but who cannot relax. [...] For me, though, a major obstacle in my pursuit of pleasure was my ingrained sense of Puritan guilt. Do I really deserve this pleasure? This is very American, too - the insecurity about whether we have earned our happiness (61-62).

Here, Americans are portrayed as stressed out and burdened by guilt because of their superior stance in the world. The American culture almost becomes "the white man's burden", and the moral is that it is okay for Americans to be lazy and enjoy life just like simpler people do. In India, the stressed American is to learn meditation and Buddhism. Again, the foreign people to learn it from are different, here almost reduced to an object:

I was talking to this monk the other day and he told me to go ahead and use *Ham-sa* [in my meditation chant] if it helped my meditation (142).
In Bali, the American author completes her quest for internal peace, happiness and balance by learning from the medicine man Ketut who teaches her Balinese meditation and the medicine woman Wayan who cures her urinal tract infection with herbs only. The focus is again on the simple life with ancient knowledge that has now been lost in the West:

I was drawn to the idea of living for a while in a culture where pleasure and beauty are revered (29).

This search for lost spiritual knowledge answers the question why Gilbert couldn't stay in the U.S. and find pleasure, devotion and balance. Slavoj Žižek uses the example of Tibet as a place Westerners turn to in search of their spirituality, but; the lesson to our followers of Tibetan Wisdom is thus that, if we want to be Tibetans, we should forget about Tibet and do it HERE. Therein resides the ultimate paradox: the more Europeans try to penetrate the "true" Tibet, the more the very FORM of their endeavor undermines their goal. We should appreciate the full scope of this paradox, especially with regard to "Eurocentrism." (2001, 67).

If one wants to be spiritual like the Tibetans or Balinese, one should also adopt their self-centeredness. As Žižek describes, Tibet was the center of civilization for Tibetans, they didn't bother to look for it anywhere else. In contrast to this, the European civilization is "ex-centered" and always searches for what it has somehow lost outside of itself. This ex-centered character is:

..the notion that the ultimate pillar of Wisdom, the secret agalma, the spiritual treasure, the lost object-cause of desire, which we in the West long ago betrayed, could be recuperated out there, in the forbidden exotic place. Colonization was never simply the imposition of Western values, the assimilation of the Oriental and other Others to the European Sameness: it was also always a search for the lost spiritual innocence of OUR OWN civilization. (2001, 68.).

This is exactly the ideology behind Gilbert's travels. The idea that we have to learn or take from the uncivilized societies in order to save ourselves from our own development.

Žižek describes what he calls "tolerant multiculturalists" as marked by a preoccupation with the "Other":

[... ] the multiculturalists tolerance of the Other's Otherness is also more twisted than it may appear - it is sustained by a secret desire for the Other to REMAIN "other," not to become too much like us (2001, 69).
Thus, the Westerner travels out to search for lost Wisdom - in Gilbert's case how to escape the pain and suffering of living in New York and being married (and divorced), and in so doing fundamentally effects and changes the places she meets, at the same time wanting these places to continue to contain the wisdom that set her free. This notion is further displayed in the examples of "Eat, Pray, Love tours" to Bali, where one meets the people Gilbert met and can trace her footsteps to find the same wisdom she found. Of course Bali - and especially the people Gilbert met who have now become a part of the industry of Gilbert herself - have changed dramatically:

Ketut's bank account is not empty anymore. The medicine man charges $25 for a palm-reading, not far off from what the average Balinese makes in a week. Wayan, an outspoken Indonesian healer of dark beauty and another of Eat, Pray, Love's personalities, was, with her young daughter and two adopted orphans, once on the verge of eviction. Now a staff of well-built men churns out her healthful Vitamin Lunches for calling travelers (Brenhouse, 2010).

In another article, it seems Wayan's new and better life does indeed resemble Gilbert's more, when the journalist who has visited Wayan's shop after the release of the book writes that "Wayan, the Balinese traditional healer of the fantastically popular book, Eat, Pray, Love, could use one of her own treatments. She is stressed out" (Palmer, 2008). Later in the article, an American living part-time in Bali (who offers Eat, Pray, Love tours) "recalls walking past Wayan's "Traditional Balinese Healing" after the book was published and noticing Wayan's prices had increased: someone had very gingerly painted a "1" in front of each listing." (Palmer 2008). Thus Gilbert, as well as the hundreds of tourists now exploring her footsteps, want the "otherness" of Bali, and by virtue of this change the otherness quite substantially. Gilbert has acted like a missionary, guided Wayan into a modern, capitalist, stressed-out world.

Changing a culture while at the same time wanting its otherness fits into a framework of "imperialist nostalgia" as described by Renato Rosaldo (1989), who uses the term to describe how agents of colonialism - be they officials, missionaries, and for this example I will add travelers - display nostalgia for the colonized culture as it was "traditionally", or before they encountered it. Within imperialist nostalgia, agents of colonialism long for the very ways of life they intentionally destroyed or altered. This nostalgia functions to hide the inequality and racial stratification of colonial relationships:

In any of its versions, imperialist nostalgia uses a pose of "innocent yearning" both to capture people's imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination. Imperialist nostalgia occurs
alongside a peculiar sense of mission, the white man's burden, where civilized nations stand duty-bound to uplift so-called savage ones (Rosaldo, 108).

We do not know if Gilbert yearns for the Bali, Ketut and Wayan she visited. My guess would be that at least some of the tourists who are tracing her footsteps do.

**Shopping for spirituality**

It is interesting how the word "freedom" is a key word for both neoliberalism and the spirituality presented in the novel, and how both are "freedom from suffering". In the neoliberal understanding, freedom from suffering means freedom from being governed, freedom to make one's own decisions and prosper and freedom to lift oneself out of poverty. Within the spirituality prompted in the book, freedom means freedom from stress, depression and guilt - the cure for the Westerner seems to be to "let go". It is a note written by a fellow Ashram visitor that sets Gilbert free from her pain and suffering as she meditates and has a transcending experience on a rooftop over the Ashram. The note is titled; "Instructions for freedom", and consists of statements like "You have just climbed up and above the roof. There is nothing between you and the Infinite. Now, let go." and "The day is ending. It is time for something that was beautiful to turn into something else that is beautiful. Now, let go" (184-85). As is also the case with the freedom at the ideological core of neoliberalism, a focus on a "rational" individual also enables the spiritual freedom presented in the novel. As Gilbert writes from the Ashram:

> You might just as well hang it up and kiss God good-bye if you really need to keep blaming somebody else for your own life's limitations (186).

Just as in neoliberalism, the view of individuals as rational comes along with the view that it is the responsibility of the (rational) individual to be wealthy/happy. It is then not okay to blame discrimination, coercion, exploitation, inequality or the like for the troubles one encounters. As Leigh Gilmore writes, "in the packaging of the redemption narrative in neoliberal times, the individual becomes tasked with her own redemption" (Gilmore, 660). This is very clear in the novel:
Happiness is the consequence of personal effort. You fight for it, strive for it, insist upon it, and sometimes even travel around the world looking for it. You have to participate relentlessly in the manifestations of your own blessings (260).

This kind of spiritualism is what Žižek calls "Western Buddhism":

Instead of trying to cope with the accelerating rhythm of technological progress and social change, one should rather renounce the very endeavor to retain control over what goes on, rejecting it as the expression of the modern logic of domination - one should, instead, "let oneself go," drift along, while retaining an inner distance and indifference towards the mad dance of this accelerated process, a distance based on the insight that all the social and technological upheaval is ultimately just an unsubstantial proliferation of semblances which do not really concern the innermost kernel of our being" (Žižek, 2001, 13).

According to Žižek, this "Western Buddhism" is "establishing itself as the hegemonic ideology of global capitalism":

Although "Western Buddhism" presents itself as a remedy against the stressful tension of the capitalist dynamics, allowing us to uncouple and retain inner peace and Gelassenheit, it actually functions as its perfect ideological supplement" (2001, 12).

For this analysis, I equate what Žižek calls "capitalist dynamics" with neoliberal dynamics. Subjects who believe they are responsible for their own freedom/happiness/wealth and who do not seek any reason or ask critical questions are ideal subjects for expansion of neoliberalism. Thus, Gilbert's traveling around the world "shopping" for her own spirituality to cure her western depression does not critique the system that caused her such agony, but rather paradoxically ends up further promoting it.

Conclusion

The subtitle of the novel is "one woman's search for everything across Italy, India and Indonesia", and although this can be compared to the travel of colonial explorers, Gilbert is not travelling on behalf of her country in order to conquer more land - her travel is strictly individual, she is trying to save only herself. The novel does therefore not fit into the definition of neocolonialism as a relationship between different countries or within Brennan's description of imperialism and colonialism as a whole country subjugating another rather than different individuals. However what Brennan describes as the key idea motivating colonialism and imperialism is at the forefront of the novel. This is the idea that everyone from the conquering
country is civilizationaly superior to the conquered people. Here, one's race, nationality or cultural identity makes one feel a part of a superior group or nation. Mignolo and Tlostanova describe this as "imperial discourse":

Imperial discourses are built on the bases of the differences with people, language, religions, economies, and political organizations of the colonies. In order to exploit, it is necessary to dominate, and in order to dominate, it is necessary to build discourses and belief systems that produce the imperial image as the locus of the right and unavoidable march of history and the colonies as the locus of the erroneous, the inferior, the weak, the barbarians, the primitives, and so on. To conflate differences with values in human beings' hierarchical order is not just to identify "cultural" differences but to build "colonial" differences justified in a "racial" configuration of human being in the planet, their language and religions, their economies and their social organizations (Mignolo and Tlostanova, 110).

Gilbert's descriptions of herself as a westerner and as an American heavily support this key idea behind imperialism and colonialism. The situation that makes it possible to write a book like *Eat, Pray, Love* is based on a colonial history of the world. As Mignolo and Tlostanova put it, "there are no modern achievements without engendering colonial wounds" (112). This is also true for Gilbert's achievements.

Along with a rhetoric that perpetuates the idea behind colonialism, the novel also displays a search for lost wisdom in primitive cultures which is also a colonial idea, as is the idea that privileged people are to help not so privileged people get a life more like their own. This paper has also discussed how the spirituality prompted in the book as something that will set the Western individual free can be very closely linked to neoliberalism, and that the solution proposed in the book actually perpetuates neoliberalism and the global inequality that neoliberalism helps to continue (Harvey, 2005; Mhone, 2005).

Neocolonialism often gets hidden in discourses of aid and development as well as in the strong ideology of neoliberalism. These discourses as well as the ideology of neoliberalism also hide the neocolonial aspects of the novel. Also the use of "magic" terms, spirituality, and nostalgia continuously efface the material and political realities within the novel, making any critique of these unfeasible. Engaging the term neocolonialism in an analysis like this, just as engaging the term in a broader political analysis, thus offers a critique of the discourses of globalization that are marked by innocence and benign words such as cosmopolitanism. The rhetoric in the novel supports colonial ideas and the division between undeveloped and developed countries, and promotes what I will call "individual imperialism" in an American traveler seeking redemption. This all makes sense in a neocolonial framework.
Works cited


Internet Dictionary Resources:

Oxford English Dictionary:

imperialism, n.

neo-, comb. form

neocolonialism, n.

Oxford Dictionary of Sociology:

<http://www.enotes.com/oxsoc-encyclopedia/neo-colonialism>

<http://www.enotes.com/oxsoc-encyclopedia/neo-imperialism>

*International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*