

Acknowledgements

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Berit Eid Sæter

**“The tourist” in Elizabeth Gilbert’s *Eat, Pray, Love* and Jamaica
Kincaid’s *A Small Place***

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“[T]ravelling is the one true love of my life...worth any cost or sacrifice”

—Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*

“A tourist is an ugly human being.”

—Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*

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Introduction

Tourism is now one of the world's biggest industries but it has gone through many transformations. What used to be a privilege and pursuit of the social elite (Jamal and Robinson 3) is now a widespread activity for white Westerners (Gonzalez and Lipman 507). Representation of tourist travel and tourists abound in literature and film, and this thesis follows the figure of "the tourist" in different texts. Specifically, I am interested in the ways in which Elizabeth Gilbert and Jamaica Kincaid offer different perspectives on the idea of tourism. While Gilbert promotes the idea that tourism is a form therapy and can be a liberatory feminist practice, Kincaid offers a scathing critique of tourism, as a form of blindness and violence. My project explores these radically different understandings of tourism that emerge from literary texts.

Using critical theory, I explore how a white Western privileged woman understands her tourism, through Elizabeth Gilbert's bestselling autobiography, *Eat, Pray, Love*, which is a typical example of a Western travelogue. I use this autobiography because of its extreme popularity and because it reveals some very prevalent notions about the function of tourism and the role of the Westerner in "exotic" post-colonial spaces in the twenty-first century. I will follow Gilbert throughout her international journey, and reflect on how she narrates her story and how she labels her experiences. I will discuss how her explorations in foreign land may offer many benefits for the Western "tourer," from psychotherapy to self-fulfillment, and reflect on why tourism is understood as a benign practice that offers opportunities for courageous, selfless acts of saving the "exotic Other."

In my work, I will pay special attention to different ways of "seeing" in tourism and propose that blindness is a form of violence towards the ones that are being visited on. I use the work of John Urry, Dean MacCannell and Edward Said as a critical lens to examine what Gilbert sees, and what she does not, emphasizing that being a tourist requires a certain amount of privilege that many social actors do not have. As Gilbert promotes herself as a white savior, she simultaneously stereotypes, caricatures and uses the Other. Despite being a bestselling autobiography, *Eat, Pray, Love* is also a cultural narrative, and ultimately a conservative, damaging and an imperial one.

Examining how tourism is presented in literature is important because it reveals particular ways of looking at spaces and people imagined as “exotic.” I explore this particularly tourist way of seeing, which is present in narratives like *Eat, Pray, Love*, and I focus on how travelogues often reproduce Western imaginations about cultural and racial superiority (Simmons 54). Tourism is commonly narrated in Western storytelling through Western eyes; hence, it is the visitor who tells stories about tourism. In the second chapter, I turn to *A Small Place*, a short collection by Jamaica Kincaid to focus on a different way of looking at tourism. I focus on how traveling has been a Western mode of both experiencing cultures but also of inflicting violence for centuries. Kincaid mocks the travelogue genre from the perspective of the Other, and I use her narrative to explore how tourism takes imperial and damaging forms to this day.

Chapter 1: Tourism as therapy and a liberatory feminist practice

*Eat, Pray Love*¹ is a travel memoir that chronicles Elizabeth Gilbert's one year journey around the world. Gilbert (referred in the book as Liz) is a modern, educated, middle-class American woman who works as a magazine journalist. In the opening chapters of the novel, we learn that she is at a stage in life where both society and her husband expect her to want kids. However, miserable, depressed, and in the midst of an existential crisis, she finds herself wanting a divorce, rather than kids. She abandons her partner and travels through Italy, India and Indonesia, indulging in food, spirituality, and, eventually, finding love. *Eat, Pray, Love* documents her physical and emotional journey.

What is interesting about this book is that while we can read it as an autobiographical story, a unique first-person memoir based on Gilbert's actual experiences as a curious globetrotter, we can also read it as a predictable cultural narrative, very similar to many other Western texts, full of clichés and stereotypes about the places Gilbert visits and the people she meets. Far from being a unique, documentary account of world travel, *Eat, Pray, Love* functions as a perfect example of a travel narrative written by a privileged Westerner, and speaks to the way the tourism, regardless of its environmental or social impact on the places visited, functions as a form of collective and individual psychological therapy. The book reaffirms the central position of the Western narrator as the "seer of the world" and shows that travel, even when done in the name of feminist liberation, can be a problematic practice.

This chapter examines the world as seen through Liz's eyes in Gilbert's bestselling *Eat, Pray, Love*, and reflects on what Gilbert allows Liz to see and what she does not. Moreover, I will explore why this extremely popular bestseller generated a massive female audience and created a huge commercial success. Thus, I will conclude by exploring how Gilbert's text is framed by the "white savior" narrative, to use Teju Cole's words (para. 1), a cultural narrative which prohibits her from actually seeing the people and places she encounters as agents of their own. Instead, they are presented merely as landscape, stereotypes and commodities for her own benefit. Gilbert, and her character, Liz, look, but their "tourist gaze" (Urry) makes them see "the toured" places and people in a romanticized, fetishized, and, ultimately, destructive ways. I elaborate on this destructive and damaging way of "seeing" in tourism,

¹ The travelogue was published in 2006, becoming a bestseller, and adapted into a star-studded movie in 2010. In my thesis, however, I will focus mainly on the book.

and focus on the violence it inflicts on the other subjects of the story in chapter 2.

Background

When *Eat, Pray, Love* was published in 2006, it became an instant success. It spent 155 weeks on the number one spot of the *New York Times* bestseller list, sold more than 8 million copies world-wide and was translated into thirty languages (Cantrell 47). It resonated with a huge female audience, who saw the book as sending out inspirational, “can-do” messages (Kingston para. 1) to other women like her. Gilbert’s travelogue thereby became a global success, and resulted in a spin-off, a film adaptation starring Julia Roberts, *Eat, Pray, Love* merchandise, such as a collection of fragrances, a clothing, jewellery and furniture line (Banet-Weiser 188). The memoir has inspired people to follow the footsteps of Gilbert and engage in similar travels. Newspapers (Lewak) and books (Various) report on how the novel has saved other women’s lives by showing them how to pursue their dreams. Eilene Zimmerman discusses an “*Eat, Pray, Love* effect” (para 2), and explore how the novel has inspired families to travel to escape career stress and societal pressures. Moreover, travel companies sell pre-planned *Eat, Pray, Love* tours and advertise trips to cities featured in the book and its film adaptation (Spirit Quest Tours; STA Travel; Goway Travel; Intrepid Travel; Bliss Sanctuary For Women). Needless to say, the memoir made an impact on many people’s lives and became a major success.

Tourism as feminist liberation

Eat, Pray, Love can be and was read as a story about a woman who successfully breaks free from society’s norms and expectations of being married to a man and having kids, and instead chases her own desires and dreams. With the purpose of trying to cure her depression, Gilbert and her character Liz start doing things that she has always wanted to learn; yoga and Italian. Liz realizes that she loves studying Italian, which inspires her to go live in Italy and learn the language properly. Furthermore, her yoga practice inspires her to go to India, and when her new boyfriend introduces her to his Guru who runs an Ashram in India, she decides to go “as quickly as possible” (Gilbert 26). Lastly, she decides to go to Indonesia, after meeting a Balinese medicine man on an earlier magazine assignment in Bali, who has invited her to come back to live with him, and argues that “I had to go back there” (Gilbert 30). Liz has several conflicting desires, and has problems choosing her destination. Eventually she finds out that she wants to travel to all three of them and that she will spend a year doing so.

Evidently, Liz attempts to break free from the neo-liberal system, as she quits her job, and sets out on a one year journey through Italy, India and Indonesia.

Interestingly, Gilbert's publisher bought the book that she was yet to write on her extravagant journey in advance. In other words, regardless of the huge commercial success the book generated, Gilbert was able to travel free from financial worries. Also, she was able to assume the identity both as an autonomous traveler and a writer, which Kate Cantrell points out as "two positions that have traditionally been cast as male roles" (46). From a feminist perspective, it is hard to criticize a woman who questions and rebels against society's norms and expectations to want marriage and kids, and who instead undergoes a solo journey around the world. The story speaks to the subordinate position of the woman in the West, which Gilbert attempts to break free from. However, while Gilbert certainly engages in a feminist fight, she loses sight of the price of her feminist liberation, and replicates instead the hierarchy of the system she attempts to break free from.

Tourism, psycho-therapy and spirituality

The world seen by tourists is an interesting place and in this section, I use Gilbert's text to explore how tourists might explain, justify, and legitimize their tourism as a form of therapy they need and are entitled to. Liz articulates a desire to use travel as a sort of psycho-therapy, and argues that traveling helps her get out of the depression. It "mend[s] my soul," Liz says and it helps "[me] understand myself" (Gilbert 121). Interestingly, each country is given a distinct therapeutic function. In Italy, Liz seeks the pleasure of culture and body, she learns a new language and enjoys Italian food and wine. She argues that she has "been dying lately about going over to Italy to practice speaking Italian in context...and living for a while in a culture where pleasure and beauty are revered" (Gilbert 30). In India, she seeks a spiritual connection, and spends four months in devotion and meditation in an Ashram. In Indonesia, she seeks to find a balance between the pleasures of Italy and the religious devotion of India. These aims are part of her structured plan to find happiness, which sounds like a step-by-step plan to recover.

Each goal of her journey concerns herself, thus, the journey is very individualistic. Liz's journey can be understood through sociologists Ulrich Beck and Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim's analyses of modern society, where one of the characteristics is that it has become focused on

the individual, with its “individual wills” and “hunger of new experiences” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 22). As individualization has led to a desire to lead a “life of one’s own” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 22), we find increased mobility and powerful currents of individual self-fulfillment and achievement. Thus, an individual now can aspire to be “the author of his or her own life” by choosing, deciding and shaping their lives (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 23). As the individual is put responsible for her own choices, she is also responsible if things go wrong (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 24). The problem with this type of thinking is that it does not recognize how only some privileged social actors have the opportunity for such authoring. Such authoring requires access to institutions and resources that many may not have.

Eat, Pray, Love, however, shows how Gilbert, literally and figuratively, authors her own life and her book, so they are full of opportunities, choices, and adventures. Movement and mobility have become a crucial element of life, and a lifestyle choice for many modern people (Urry 190). For Gilbert, being mobile and “on the move” is part of her new feminist and liberated persona. Through her one year journey, we learn that both traveling and living in other places is a possibility for her. This is also evident from her earlier travel experience² and also in the way she talks about the future. For instance, while in India, she reflects on where she should go when her year of travelling is over, and finds that she does not want to “move back to New York just out of reflex” (Gilbert 180). She muses

Maybe a new town instead. Austin is supposed to be nice. And Chicago has all that beautiful architecture. Horrible winters though. Or maybe I’ll live abroad. I’ve heard good things about Sydney... If I lived somewhere cheaper than New York, maybe I could afford an extra bedroom and then I could have a special meditation room!
(Gilbert 180)

The doors always seem open for Liz to travel somewhere, to go and live in a different state, or even in a different country. As the weather and the architecture are two aspects she takes into account when deciding where to move, movement and border crossings seem like happy experiences to her³. When she talks about her change of location, she obtains a matter-of-

² She mentions for example earlier trips to Bali and Central America.

³ This can be contrasted to the travel experience of many other border crossers, such as refugees and economic migrants.

factly and carefree language, suggesting that this is not a complicated thing for her to do, but rather, something that can be done with ease.

Before she starts her one-year trip, she quits her job, divorces her husband and commits to a whole year of traveling. She anticipates that it will help her out of her depression and restore her mental health. Accordingly, Liz gives up her house and apartment, and “[a] few weeks later, I am living in Italy” (Gilbert 35-36). All of a sudden, Liz is “a resident of Rome”, having found “a quiet studio in a historic building” (Gilbert 36), and it all sounds like a rather smooth process. The way she writes about moving to Rome, this seems like an achievable and possible thing for everybody to do.

There are many scholars who confirm the therapeutic impact of tourism. John Urry argues that holidays are thought to generate pleasurable experiences and offer an escape from everyday life (12). Tourism is thought to be necessary for good health, as modern discourse is based on the idea that “people’s physical and mental health will be restored if only they can ‘get away’ from time to time” (Urry 5). Other scholars have explored how tourism offers self-development (Pearce 65), leisure (MacCannell 5), relaxation and escape (Mowforth and Munt 200; Pearce 65; Vandegrift 786). Small-scale tourism is idealised as an industry that offers autonomy and local culture (Vandegrift 795). Moreover, tourism is portrayed as a “a global vehicle for tolerance and understanding” (Gonzalez and Lipman 511), and seen as an important economic contributor for developing countries. Thus, the word “tourism” has positive connotations attached to it. Liz’s decision to employ travel as a means to achieve self-fulfilment reflects therefore a modern discourse of traveling as an effective and ethical therapeutic practice. Thus, there is legitimacy about using other places, people and cultures as some kind of therapy in order to restore or recover one’s health.

Liz implies that she wants her journey to stand out and be different when she claims that she does not necessarily go to see the places themselves; “this had been done. It was more that I wanted to thoroughly explore one aspect of myself set against the backdrop of each country” (Gilbert 31). Her desire to do something significant and commit to a journey that is out of the ordinary might come from the Western characteristic of individualization. Individualization puts the individual responsible to becoming successful and happy, which can lead to a self-culture with an increased consciousness of freedom and increased importance on the staging

of the self, where the goal is to make “one’s own life a work of art” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 43). Since people become responsible for their own success and happiness, people might shift their focus to themselves, and as a result they might get personal projects about self-exploration and -realization, like we see with Liz. She finds it amusing and a happy coincidence when she realizes that the three countries she plans to visit begins with “I” (Gilbert 31), thereby acknowledging that her journey of self-discovery is a self-centered one.

Liz’s therapy involves a pursuit of pleasures, and can be read as hedonism, a form of utilitarianism that argues that individuals aim to experience as much pleasure, and as little pain, as possible (Bentham, in Smith 621). In Italy, Liz’s journey and search for the good life is justified through hedonistic language and explanation:

...is it such a bad thing to live like this for just a little while? Just for a few months of one’s life, is it so awful to travel through time with no greater ambition than to find the next lovely meal? Or to learn how to speak a language for no higher purpose than that it pleases your ear to hear it? Or to nap in a garden, in a patch of sunlight, in the middle of the day, right next to your favorite fountain? And then do it again the next day? (Gilbert 119)

Relaxing in beautiful scenery, eating lovely local food, practicing Italian and napping in the sun bring Liz great pleasures. Though she admits that it might be “a little shallow to be thinking only about your next wonderful meal” while visiting one of the poorer sections of Italy (Gilbert 120), Liz’s pleasure-seeking life is legitimized by arguing that this luxurious state is not permanent. The Italian food is experienced as a beautiful pleasure, and she enjoys these goods for her spiritual and mental well-being and fulfillment (Olivier 38). She knows that they are temporal enjoyments, and not forever, thus it is okay for her to be selfish and do so “for just a little a little while” (Gilbert 119).

Hedonistic individuals can be understood as egoistic pleasure-seekers, which “resonates with modernist understandings of individualism” of autonomous beings with “individualistic presuppositions” (Smith 621-22). And it is certainly true that reclaiming the body through hedonism, and escaping her pains and responsibilities at home to seek pleasures in Italy, is seen as a valid feminist act in Gilbert’s travelogue. Her weeks and weekends of spontaneous

travel are “just the right amount of time to get the feel for a place, to look around, to ask people on the street where the good food is and then to go and eat it” (Gilbert 101). The language that Gilbert uses suggests some kind of carefree pleasurable existence; a state enabled by her extravagant journey where she can live for no one but herself. Chasing pleasures and happiness seemingly works out for her: “One night in the Mediterranean, in a hotel room by the ocean, the sound of my own laughter actually wakes me up...the realization that it is only me makes me laugh again” (Gilbert 102).

Gilbert’s journey is not only about seeking hedonistic bodily pleasures; it also has spiritual elements. Yoga, spirituality and meditation are to help her to achieve self-fulfillment, and are to save her from the commercialized life in the West. Undergoing a soul-seeking, spiritual journey in an Ashram in India is part of her achieving spiritual fulfillment. Note that in recent times, tourism that is religiously or spiritually motivated have increased, and now represents a significant sector of the global tourism industry, with India as one of the popular destinations for Western tourists (Sharply 237-38). You could even say that increasingly, Western tourists have begun to worship tourism itself and see it as an essential component of life.

For Liz, traveling is described as “the great true love of [her] life...worth any cost or sacrifice” (Gilbert 43). Thus, she presents travelling as important to her, meaningful, worth costs and sacrifices⁴. As a modern subject she anticipates that she will appreciate traveling, no matter what challenges she will face from it: “I just don’t care what it puts me through” (Gilbert 43). Other scholars have also explored similarities between tourism and religion (MacCannell; Urry), and argued that, like the religious pilgrim, the tourist worship sacred objects (or tourist attractions) and get some kind of uplifting experience from it (Urry 11). Thus, tourism becomes a “modern ritual”, “translated into the individual consciousness as a sense of duty, though it is a duty lovingly preformed” (MacCannell 42).

Though Gilbert tries to distinguish herself from the mass tourist, by focusing on exploring herself and her spirituality instead of exploring typical tourist attractions, neither her type of traveling nor her narrative is unique. In fact, what she takes to be an individual, personal

⁴ She mentions, for instance, a “digestive emergency...explosively ill...bowel affliction...back pain...spider bites...sunburn” (Gilbert 43)

project has been the common genre in travel memoirs for decades⁵. There is therefore nothing extraordinary about the travel of someone who is middle class and white, and in search of him or herself in “exotic” locations. Gilbert’s writing is reminiscent of modernist and New Age travel writing. Kate Cantrell argues that tales about inward journeys have become common and that “What we are finding repeatedly in the work of Western women travel writers, is a resurgence in the obsession with the self which has less interest in the other” (48). Cantrell finds this type of travel writing to be “self-obsessive and self-important” (48), and Gilbert’s text is certainly both.

Others in Eat, Pray, Love

The messages that Gilbert sends out to her audience—that tourism is an innocuous, harmless activity where one can achieve therapy, spiritual fulfilment and enlightenment—need to be addressed. Many of the people she meets on her journey to self-fulfillment become stereotypes, background, landscape and commodities for her own benefit. In a taxi ride in India, Liz sees “strange haunted shapes of thin women in saris walking alongside the road with bundles of firewood on their heads. *At this hour?*” she asks (Gilbert 125). Later, she observes hardworking women doing road work barefoot in under the boiling sun. “They give us dazzling smiles which I can’t begin to understand – how can they be happy doing this rough work under such terrible conditions?” (Gilbert 168). Gilbert does not understand (or does not want to understand) why they are out working day and night, nor how they can smile at her while doing it. When a tailor replies “people in this part of the world were born to do this kind of hard labor and work is all they are used to” (Gilbert 168), Liz does not question this statement as she writes nothing more about it. She therefore seems to accept the man’s explanation that some people are “born to do...hard labor,” showing trust in racial thinking, refusing to see, and denying her own privilege at the same time. Gilbert describes these hard-working women in India as “strangely beautiful in their jewel-colored saris” (Gilbert 168). Though the descriptions are milder, the Other is still represented as exotic, foreign, different, and as someone born to do hard labour. Moreover, they are not beautiful, but “strangely beautiful”, as if only white, Western people can fit the social construct of “beautiful”, whereas this “exotic” crowd of Others instead must be labelled as “strangely beautiful”.

⁵ Examples are Anne Mc.Clintock’s *Imperial Leather*, Scott Fitzgerald’s “One Trip Abroad” and Woody Allen’s romantic comedy, *Midnight in Paris*.

Edward Said argues how the West has created its own image of the East. Those that do not fit under the ideological construct of the West are seen as exotic, strange (Said 40), even underdeveloped, violent and barbaric (Mowforth and Munt 59). European colonialism⁶ took part in creating this discourse where everything non-white and non-Western became the Other, and Western cultures became the “norm” or the “standard” that everything else is seen in relation to. The West became “the familiar” (Said 40), “rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion” (Said 49), thus, the West has created a legitimacy about their travels, and a “shared world view” (MacCannell 30) on the Other in the places they travel. Gilbert reinforces the power of such constructed images of the Other in the encounter with Indian women, whom she sees only as poor, degenerate, or exotic Others. As such she consciously or not draws on a long literary history of “othering” Others⁷. *Eat, Pray, Love* shows how, even in a non-fiction book, this type of “othering” is still prevalent and how appealing it is to mass audiences.

Elsewhere in the book, Nyomo, an Indonesian woman who lives in Ketut’s house, seems to dislike Gilbert’s daily visits. She is described as having “strained red teeth from tobacco”, “crooked toes from arthritis”, a “shrewd eye”, and is “scary from the first sight” (Gilbert 255), and stands “in the shadow of her kitchen door, glaring at me like she’s not sure if she should shoot me, or poison me first and then shoot me” (Gilbert 234) or “chase me out with a broomstick” (Gilbert 256). Instead of reflecting on why Nyomo does not want her at her house every day, Gilbert miraculously manages to earn her trust with modern technology, when she makes copies of Ketut’s handwritten papers, leaving her and Ketut astonished and delighted. Like with the Indian women earlier Gilbert reduces her to a woman who does not speak, a strange, mystical character who stares at her, whereas the innocent Gilbert courageously tries to “wave” (Gilbert 234) and “smile” (Gilbert 256) at her.

With these types of descriptions, Gilbert distances herself from the Other, and presents the Westerner as the appropriate way of living. Beverly Ann Simmons (51) argues that the traveler often adopts the position of the colonial elite, and do not interact with the locals,

⁶ European colonialism was a period initiated by Christopher Columbus and other travelers who set out on journeys to explore the world in the late 1400s - lasting for almost 500 years. The colonizers explored, conquered and appropriated huge parts of the world with an assimilationist policy. Colonization became a project that several European countries took part in for economic reasons, by subjugating and exploiting countries and groups of people.

⁷ Mark Twain’s *The Innocents Abroad* is a classic example, as the Other is represented as beggars and veiled women (Gonzalez and Lipman 509).

declaring themselves inferior. Some of this seems true in Gilbert's memoir, and as a result, Gilbert reduces the Other to stereotypes; mystical and exotic Asian women, and annoying Indian traders who "try to unload their wares on us" (Gilbert 168).

Another stereotypical character is Ketut; a sage, described as "small", "toothless" (Gilbert 230), "merry eyed", looking like a "Star Wars character", and speaking "a scattered and thoroughly entertaining kind of English" (Gilbert 27), emphasizing that he is exotic, Other, and not like the West. Her evenings in Bali are spent with Ketut "talking and drinking coffee". Moreover, her days are spent "with Wayan at her shop, laughing and drinking", and evenings in her "lovely garden, reading a book, meditating" (Gilbert 271-72). Ketut and Wayan are two locals who struggle to make ends meet⁸, and are commodified characters in Gilbert's book. They become commodities that can be bought through tourism, offering local culture and exotic encounters with the Other. Gilbert uses them and their everyday life as an escape from her own life. She relaxes in these people's homes, watches their routines, and their "exotic" lives and culture become a rewarding sight for her. Ketut serves the function to help Gilbert find balance between enjoyment of pleasures and spiritual devotion through his teachings and wisdom, and seems to be an important part of Gilbert's trip, whereas Wayan serves as the image of the divorced, abused woman, who like Gilbert, got out of a problematic marriage. The people Gilbert meets are types if not caricatures that fit perfectly into her predictable, cultural narrative.

Problematically, Gilbert has to go into this neo-colonial context and stereotype the entire environment in order to feel free and achieve self-realization, and ends up using other countries and people without critically reflecting on her role as a tourist and the signals she sends out to her female audience: that the only way for her to feel good, is when she uses the Other to feel that she is not at the bottom of the social ladder. The problem of seeing Gilbert's journey as feminist liberation then, is that she tries to do the liberation on the backs of others. Although the story speaks to the subordinate position of the woman in the West, which she attempts to break free from, she does not break free from social or cultural ties, but travels and does exactly what the system allows for. As tourism is "linked to the subordination of other people" (MacCannell 13), Gilbert instead climbs the social ladder and replicates this hierarchy

⁸ At several times Ketut points out that he is "empty in my bank" (Gilbert 234-35, 242, 330), whereas Wayan at one point says "Why must everything be repeat and repeat, never finish, never resting? You work hard one day, but the next, you must only work again" (Gilbert 283-84).

of subordination in the places she travels to. In the following section, I explore how she legitimizes her privilege and uses the environment to become a white saviour.

Tourism as privilege

For some characters of her story, mobility is impossible⁹, whereas for Gilbert, it is perfectly possible. Gilbert's mobility is tied to other people's immobility, who are "increasingly projected into the role as hosts *for* tourists" (Jamal and Robinson 2). This contrast is displayed in *Eat, Pray, Love*, for example with the example of Yudhi, her Indonesian gardener in Bali used to live and work in New York, but was kicked out after 9/11, due to new rules and suspiciousness towards Muslims. He longs back to his wife in New York, but is denied access to the country, and has instead become a suspected jihadist¹⁰. Instead, he now works as a gardener for the British woman who owns the house that Gilbert rents. He is therefore an example of a man who is projected into the role as host for tourists in Bali.

Whereas border crossers like Yudhi are discriminated against, deemed illegal due to racial politics and seen as a threat in the United States, tourists like Gilbert can travel with the utmost luxury. Even when she arrives in Bali and realises that the tourist visa only allows her to stay there for one month, staying and traveling around in Bali turns out to still be possible for her. It had not occurred to Gilbert that "the Indonesian government would be anything less than delighted to host me in their country for just as long as I pleased to stay" (Gilbert 225). That she expects to be welcomed, and even appreciated when arriving there, suggests that she takes her white privilege for granted. Gilbert notices that "there is corruption all over the place in Bali, just like the rest of Indonesia" (Gilbert 248), and she takes an advantage of that when in Bali, a corrupt guard lets later lets her stay "when I passed a ... few hundred bucks of under-the-table cash to illegally extend my visa so I could stay in Bali for four months after all" (Gilbert 249). Thus, Gilbert finds a way to overstay her visa which allows her to stay in Bali for four months as planned. Money and a corrupt system allow her to buy herself out of having to leave, again indicating power. Gilbert justifies her actions by pointing out that Indonesia is corrupt, thus, this is just the way the country is. She is never judged as "illegal"

⁹ Like Yudhi, Tulsi, Wayan and Ketut.

¹⁰ Yudhi's story reminds me of Mohamedou Ould Slahi's *Guantanamo Diary*; the story of another Muslim border crosser, who despite his innocence, was framed for the 9/11 attacks and forced to spend 14 years in Guantanamo.

and never feels that way, and she can wander around carelessly, even when she stays there illegally, which contrasts with Yudhi's situation.

Gilbert never critically reflects around her white privilege, yet, it is evident from the things that she writes. She observes that after the terrorist bombings that happened in Bali two years earlier "it's even easier to get around...everyone is desperate to help you, desperate for work" (Gilbert 226). This is why Gilbert finds Bali "a fairly simple place to navigate" (Gilbert 226). Though she arrives in Bali without a plan, Gilbert reports that people are polite and "gracious...without exception" (Gilbert 249). As a small island and a popular tourist destination, she explains that "The whole place has arranged itself to help you", that "the Westerner with the credit cards, get around with ease", and that "You can change your money at the airport, find a taxi with a nice driver who will suggest to you a lovely hotel – none of this is hard to arrange" (Gilbert 226). Traveling is presented as accessible and unproblematic when you are a Westerner with money, which is why Gilbert notes that "everyone" in Bali wants to help her. This shows that white, Western tourists hold a powerful position in this society. Since the local people are "desperate for work," tourists hold the power when they negotiate prices and services. In other words; it is easy to be a tourist in a place where the local people are poor, as there is always an inter-relatedness between some people's privilege and someone else's poverty.

But, Gilbert feels welcomed and appreciated in most of the places she visits. In Italy, people welcome her and accept that she stays there with no other intention than to enjoy life, "when I told my Italian friends I had come to experience four months of pure pleasure, they didn't have any hangups about it"...congratulations they would say. Go ahead. Knock yourself out. Be our guest..." (Gilbert 65). Before coming to Italy, she thought she would meet more opposition to the fact that she is American for example, because of Bush and the ongoing Iraq war, but she is relieved that she "received instead sympathy" (Gilbert 113). Moreover, when she arrives at the Ashram in India, "a young man in Western clothes" (Gilbert 125) welcomes her, making a "be-my-guest gesture" (Gilbert 126), as she joins a small gathering of mostly Indian women who are singing in a temple, and she soon feels "as if I have been here in this flock forever" (Gilbert 127). Gilbert never feels alienated or out of place.

Ironically, Gilbert presents the privilege of being a tourist as an entitlement, and claims that feelings attained through extravagant journeys are a right every people deserve. As she travels to recover from an existential crisis, she argues that coming to Italy was not “selfishness, but an obligation” (Gilbert 121). She also claims that it is a “duty (and also your entitlement as a human being) to find something beautiful within life” (Gilbert 121), and argues that “when you sense a faint potentiality for happiness after such dark times you must grab onto the ankles of that happiness and not let go” (Gilbert 121). Her journey means more than just escaping harsh realities at home; it also means finding happiness, thus, the trip is justified as a pursuit of happiness project. She claims that such a happiness search is a right as she rhetorically asks questions such as: “Is this lifetime supposed to be only about duty?” (Gilbert 24) and “Don’t we each have the right to not stop seeking until we get as close to the source of wonder as possible? Even if it means coming to India and kissing trees in the moonlight for a while?” (Gilbert 219), thereby seeing the world as hers and claiming that she deserves to travel because she deserves to be happy.

Thus, happiness is presented as something that one can search for through exotic travels, and this happiness search is presented both as an obligation, a duty, an entitlement and a right. Liz also claims that “happiness is a consequence of own personal effort” (Gilbert 271), implying that the individual is responsible for putting in the work necessary to achieve happiness, as “you can travel around looking for [happiness]” (Gilbert 271). Liz thus prescribes travelling as a method to achieve happiness. Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that Ulrich Beck and Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim argued that that this type of thinking is a characteristic of Western society, where the individual become more and more responsible for their own success and happiness. This view is shared by Gilbert and by people in her Italian language class, who “come to Rome for the same reason – to study Italian because they feel like it” (Gilbert 46). A Russian woman has traveled to Italy because “I think I deserve something beautiful” (Gilbert 46), supporting Gilbert’s view that happiness is an entitlement. A German engineer reasons that “we love the way it [speaking Italian] makes us feel” (Gilbert 46). These tourists cannot identify any practical reasons to go to Italy and learn Italian. It is the beauty of Italy and the language that motivates them to go abroad, and they expect that this beauty will bring them pleasures and be good for them. Like with Gilbert, we see examples of journeys legitimized as their own individualistic personal projects where they go abroad to search for happiness through the enjoyment of pleasure and beauty, because they feel like it or deserve it.

For Gilbert, her happiness search is a successful project, and in Bali she feels “mission accomplished”, as she “can feel [her] own peace”. Gilbert finds the balance she was looking for. Traveling thus seems to be a way to release her from the pain of the past, through finding back the joy for life that she had lost, moving on and becoming happy again. Her journey involves emphasis on pleasures and freedom; pleasure through delicious food, love and friendships, and freedom through living in a carefree existence of travelling left and right, without obligations and duties.

Ironically, Gilbert’s amount of traveling amuses others, for example when she writes that a friend of her sister “was always hearing stories about the sister that was in Africa, the sister who was working on a ranch in Wyoming, the sister who was a bartender in New York [...] surely this could not be the same person?” (Gilbert 161). As a travel magazine journalist she has had the opportunity to visit several places, she presents herself as an experienced traveler (Gilbert 43). Moreover, publishing *Eat, Pray, Love*, Gilbert was celebrated as an independent feminist woman who makes admirable choices for herself. The stories tourists can tell when they come improve their social status, which enables them to distinguish themselves from those who are less travelled (Smith 614). Being a tourist has become a marker of status in the West (Urry 5), gives you cultural capital at home (Simmons 48), and the uplifting experience that tourism supposedly offers to Western people may therefore be admired by other modern people. Tourism is thus a means for getting admiration and approval among other Western people who share the same culture.

Gonzalez and Lipman note that “Tourism implies a certain type of privilege —one of movement and border crossing often enabled by a degree of economic security or the advantages of geopolitical power” (515). Thus, Gilbert’s biography, which is admired by so many, is not a result of successful “authoring” of individual hard work or good life choices, but a result of Gilbert’s socio-economic status and geo-political power, and status as white, straight middle class Westerner. People with the opportunity to be a tourist and leave their everyday life for at least a short period of time have money and resources and that many others do not have. The notion that extravagant holidays are a symbol of one’s personal success, as well as an entitlement one deserves, therefore need reconsideration (Weaver 797).

Presenting extravagant and pleasure-seeking holidays and as a right, is the same as saying that being privileged is a right. In India, a fellow traveler and friend of Gilbert points out how she is “a powerful woman and you’re used to getting what you want out of life” (Gilbert 159). Journeys like Gilbert’s are only possible, because there are people that are poorer than them. This is what enables Gilbert to go on trips that are “such a glorious twirl of time, some of the loosest days of my life, running to the train station and buying tickets left and right” (Gilbert 101-02). Wherever Gilbert goes, she can always afford a hotel, taxi and food, she always feels welcome and at place, is never directly affected by poverty, nor is she forced to experience it. For instance, she describes Sicily as “the most third-world section of Italy” (Gilbert 117), yet, she is able to eat “the most amazing meal I’ve eaten yet in all of Italy” (Gilbert 118). This happens after she does not care to see the menu and just asks to get the “best food possible” at this restaurant that she was recommended, indicating that the price of the meal is not essential. Thus she can travel to “third world” places without having to feel the poverty on her body. *Eat, Pray, Love* advertises tourism as a tool for women’s personal growth and empowerment that is “only available to those with the power to buy” (Williams 4), and Gilbert fails to recognize that her type of tourism is embedded in global inequalities between the modern world and the developing world (Vandegrift 795).

In *Eat, Pray, Love*, however, Gilbert’s status and privilege are further legitimized because eventually she presents herself as a helper, contributor and humanitarian. Her tourism is then presented as beneficial, and almost as a gift to the locals who will only benefit from the presence of tourists. In India, for example, Gilbert writes that the village that she visits is “a poor village, of course, but not desperate by the standards of India; the presence (and charity) of the Ashram and some Western currency floating around makes a significant difference” (Gilbert 168). Here we see that tourists are presented as the reason that this rural village is not “desperately” poor and that their presence and charity makes a “significant difference.” That tourism is presented in such positive terms is in agreement with the Western discourse which frames tourism as a benign practice and economically beneficial for the country that is visited. These beliefs are strengthened and reinforced through Western writings such as Gilbert’s travelogue, where tourism is positive for everyone, and tourists are beneficial guests, both due to their generosity and economic contribution.

Gilbert's life in rural India contrasts immensely with the local people who live there, as she illustrates this contrast in the following way, "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" (Gilbert 132). The walls of the Ashram physically separate the local population and the visitors. The visitors are free to cross this border whenever they feel like it. The possibility to cross the border is, however, denied the local Indian people living in the village. They cannot cross the border and go inside the Ashram, as it "is not a place you can casually drop by and visit" (Gilbert 132). The "general public" can access one temple in the Ashram, but the rest of the Ashram is for students only. This is an example of how the tourist that can "sometimes traverse geographies...that are denied to local populations" (Gonzalez and Lipman 514). Gilbert informs that approximately half of the students come to study at the Ashram from other parts of India, whereas the other half is either American or European. The Ashram is a place which is therefore only accessible to a privileged few¹¹, and a place where the people who actually live in that village cannot access. These walls create a border between them, symbolizing class difference and inequality in wealth. However, as Gilbert argues that the village would be worse off without the visitors that leave some money there and think that they are part of making a "significant difference", she legitimizes the different living standards between the visitors and the local people, and can therefore feel good about herself.

Though Gilbert's quest in *Eat, Pray, Love* is self-absorbed, and she does not have any plans to "rescue" anyone else than herself. She does not set out to change the world, but to change and save herself. However, there are also parts where the Western protagonist presents herself as a white savior, a narrative trope where a white character rescues people of color from their problem. While scrubbing floors as part of the selfless service that everyone partakes in at the Ashram in India, a woman comes and tells her that her schedule has been changed: "Due to a special request from management, I was no longer to be part of the floor-scrubbing team. They had a new position in mind for me at the Ashram. And the title of my new job was...Key Hostess" (Gilbert 201). The job requirement is "to be social and bubbly and smiling all the time", and her role is to take care of people during their stay (Gilbert 203). The participants of the retreats that the Ashram is hosting will be in silence, meaning that the only

¹¹ In order to be admitted as a student at the Ashram, one must apply by writing an essay with references and be financially and emotionally stable. Thus, one must be literate, have contacts, be wealthy, healthy, and additionally, "show that you've been studying this Yoga seriously for a good long while" (Gilbert 134).

person they are allowed to speak with is Gilbert, the Key Hostess. This gives her the authority and power to help the people who come there, and puts her in a key role/position of this Ashram in India. The title implies that she is important and above others, and her presence in India is presented as a resource and helpful for those who are there. Gilbert never question her ability to help out, and claims that she is “made for this job” (Gilbert 204). “I can help them. I am so equipped to help....I see them coming from Mexico,...the Philippines,...Africa,...Denmark,...Detroit” (Gilbert 204). She becomes a helper of the community, privileged and important enough to be “Key Hostess”, a volunteer and a savior at the same time. She finds her job meaningful, as she is “concerned about their comfort, paying careful attention to see if anyone is in trouble or need” (Gilbert 207).

Gilbert’s role as a superior white savior is reinforced in Bali. Her original “quest” in Bali was to find a balance between devotion and pleasure, but early on she feels that she has already achieved this goal. She gets herself a new mission after she meets Wayan. As mentioned earlier, Wayan is divorced like Gilbert, which is both socially and economically difficult in Balinese society, and particularly so when you also provide for a child and two adopted orphans. At one point, Gilbert takes Wayan’s hands and assures her that “The hardest part of your life is behind you now” (Gilbert 271), suggesting that she will make sure that her life changes for the better. Gilbert comes to the realization that “I want to help them” (Gilbert 185) and “I wanted to valet-park them into a better life” (Gilbert 185), and starts sending e-mails to all her friends, asking them, instead of giving her a present on her upcoming birthday, to make a donation to help Wayan so that Gilbert can buy her a house in Indonesia. “Everyone gave”, and she even begins to “receive donations from perfect strangers” (Gilbert 287). Though Gilbert is not part of an organized volunteer project, she creates her own, where she is able to “save” Wayan and her children by treating a surface problem (poverty), while Wayan becomes the passive recipient, left speechless and crying of Gilbert’s generosity. Gilbert, however, is never critical of the role that she is playing as a white savior in Bali (Williams 20). Her final lesson to her white savior episodes is that “When you set out in the world to help yourself, you inevitably end up helping... Tutti” (Gilbert 287), which is not only the name of Wayan’s daughter, but, as Gilbert points out, also the Italian word for “everybody” (287).

Despite stereotyping and using the entire environment, Gilbert falls into the white savior narrative, becoming the protagonist and a hero of her own story. Teju Cole confronts the white savior narrative, when he in a seven-part tweet, argues that “the fastest growth industry in the US is the White Savior Industrial Complex” (para. 1), in which developing countries serve as a setting where “white fantasies of conquest and heroism” can take place (para. 14). Such white savior narratives may reinforce the belief that the Other can only be rescued by heroic white people; the same belief that legitimized the colonial project.

Blindness

In this chapter I have argued that the functions of tourism are upheld by a specific way of seeing. Gilbert travels, and enjoys the positive experiences of being a tourist, as she achieves therapy, pleasures, happiness, liberation, increased status and spirituality, self-realization. However, in order to achieve these things, she avoids seeing several uncomfortable truths. Gilbert adopts what Urry has termed “the tourist gaze” in his seminal work. The tourist gaze involves seeing places, people and objects a certain romanticized way, and the journey is made because of the anticipation of great pleasures and extraordinary experiences (Urry 3).

In travelogues like Gilbert’s, the primary focus is one’s own mental and spiritual growth. When the gaze is turned inwards, it evades reflection around the negative impacts of one’s travels. As a result, Gilbert fails to see the realities and the consequences of her tourism, as “her gaze is distracted by her pursuit of self-discovery” (Williams 18). As the travelogue does not include any critical analysis on the role of tourism but instead contains blurry visions, gaps and misinterpreted experiences (Williams 18), Gilbert sees what she wants to see, which is similar to what Adam Weaver suggests; that tourism may present “meticulously fabricated versions of reality”¹² (795).

The tourist gaze involves, in other words, a blindness. Travel journalists reproduce the current discourse in texts, as they “camouflage political and economic demands and favor fantasy illusions of escape and freedom” (Simmons 53). As a result, tourists are encouraged to adapt to a romanticized view of their experiences, rather than being made aware of the different impacts their travel has on the people who are being visited (Williams 10-11).

¹² As a consequence, Weaver argues that tourism’s link to broader societal issues such as environmental degradation and economic development are suppressed (794). Gilbert’s sense of escape and self-discovery which she eagerly seeks in faraway places has also enormous costs for climate change, for example.

Gilbert fails to reflect on her privilege and why everyone is so eager to help, and we see that some things are preferred to not be seen or understood by her. Larasati (95) criticises Gilbert for not recognizing or talking to the women that allow her to enjoy her self-exploration and luxuries. She does not *see* these women. Instead, the labour produced for her is presented as “an extension of culture or an expression of friendliness” (Williams 18). When she questions the genuineness of the Balinese politeness, she reveals a resentment to see when she writes that the place is “probably far more complex than I will ever understand” (Gilbert 249). Moreover, in India, Gilbert notes “if there’s anything skinnier than an Indian teenage boy, I’d be afraid to see it” (Gilbert 133), which shows that she would rather not see such uncomfortable truths about the world. Right after four months of doing not much else than consuming great amounts of Italian food (she gains quite a few pounds in Italy), it would be uncomfortable to see other people’s starvation. As they are under the influence of the tourist gaze, tourists might try to avoid seeing or understanding realities of inequality and unfairness. Brian Holmes questions “how people can vacation in conditions of such severe inequality without being deeply troubled” (para. 11), and calls it “the urbanisation of blindness” (para. 11). He observes tourist complexes being built right next to where undocumented African laborers lives and are employed under conditions of extreme exploitation, and claims that some dark glasses must be put on not to see this.

If tourists choose to not see these facts, they can enjoy the comforts of good food, beautiful architecture and nice weather, without disturbance. This means avoiding uncomfortable truths about some people’s deprived circumstances and one’s own privilege in the world. When you are on a therapeutic journey of self-discovery and self-exploration, it might be inconvenient to discover that some people in the place that you are visiting are underprivileged.

Larasati warns about how the narration of traveling is frequently told in the “imperialist mood of the whitened voice through media” (91), and recognises the tropes of Gilbert’s story, but not her home (she is Balinese). John Urry and Jonas Larsen argue that the world’s largest industry has become “industrialised, commercialised and scripted” (96). Hence, the tourist, or the gazer, holds the power to narrate texts on tourism and travel a certain way that fits this script. Western storytelling, and not representation from the ones being gazed upon, ensures that these discourses remain. Narration from the gazer’s point of view (the ones subject to the

gaze), are rarely heard, and thus they become inferior to the guest. It is therefore important to reflect on what the tourist gaze distracts us from seeing.

In this chapter I have focused on how tourism is commonly experienced and narrated in the West. Overall, *Eat, Pray, Love* builds her feminist white character, but she also falls into this pattern of the white savior narrative. In the following chapter, I will explore a different way of seeing tourism, by first reversing the gaze and exploring how the tourist and the white saviour complex is actually experienced a form of violence by the people that are being visited.

Chapter 2: Tourism, blindness and violence

“A tourist is an ugly human being” says Jamaica Kincaid in her claimed collection, *A Small Place* (14). *A Small Place* is set in Antigua, the Caribbean Island where Kincaid grew up, and the narrative addresses Western tourists, who want to travel to some exotic place to relax and escape the “banality” of their everyday lives. In the second person narrative, Kincaid mocks self-absorbed, wealthy Western tourists who use this exotic place for their own enjoyment, without critically reflecting on the role they play in someone else’s land. Kincaid sees tourism, colonialism and slavery as intimately related, and her book reveals many uncomfortable connections among these practices.

Thus, Kincaid disagrees vehemently with Gilbert’s account that a white tourist can be both a feminist hero and savior for the Other. When in her mock tourist guidebook to Antigua (or antiguidebook) says that the tourist is “ugly,” Kincaid does not mean to say that tourists like Gilbert are ugly, of course. Instead, by using the genre of a Western travelogue and focusing on the typical characteristics of the Western tourist, she reveals the ugly role they play (consciously or not) in the lives of the islanders whom they visit.

In this chapter, I am turning to Kincaid’s book therefore to represent a different worldview, which differs from how tourism and travel are narrated by writers like Gilbert to this day. Kincaid’s literary narrative offers a counter-look on tourism, which seems more relevant than ever. It still needs to be read. And while her text is in many ways a satire of Western travel guides and travelogues, Kincaid actually allows the world of Antigua to emerge out of *A Small Place*. The place is unlike anything one can find in Western travelogues or in popular guide books and travel sites such as Lonely Planet, Rough Guides and DK Eyewitness Travel.

I will explore how Kincaid mocks the tourist and its tourist gaze, and then, how she demolishes that gaze with humor. Kincaid uses her work to attack and dismantle a certain way of seeing, a way of seeing which is central to Gilbert’s book. In this chapter, I therefore focus on how tourism and the “White Savior Industrial Complex” (Cole para. 1) are actually experienced by people who are being visited. What I am also interested in is how Kincaid reverses the roles of the observer and the observed, by scrutinizing the tourist. I will explore how Kincaid sees the figure of the tourist from the perspective of the ones that are being

visited on. I will conclude that Kincaid's text is a real postcolonial liberatory piece, in which she refuses to be subjugated, dominated and controlled by the white traveller.

Reversing the gaze

At first glance *A Small Place* appears almost as a tour guide book. It is a short text about a small place; a tiny book of a suitable size for a tourist to carry around in a purse. The opening line, "If you go to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see," echoes other tour book texts, promising the reader a list of attractions she may expect if traveling to Antigua (Kincaid 3)¹³. As an Antiguan woman, however, Kincaid addresses tourists and the tourism industry from the perspective of the Other. Her text, written in the second person narrative addresses an unnamed white Western tourist, from "North America...(Or worse, Europe)" (Kincaid 4). As the tourist's nationality is unspecified, the narrator targets all tourists together, and mocks the tourist figure. The narrator imagines how the tourist will act, speak and think if deciding to make the trip, and builds this characteristic image of the Western tourist in an exotic tourist place:

"Oh, what beauty!" the tourist exclaims at the sight of Antigua (Kincaid 13). It is "more beautiful than any other island you have seen,...the sun always shines...[and]...the climate is deliciously hot and dry" (Kincaid 4). Moreover, "the water is pale, silvery, clear, so clear that you can see its pinkish-white sand bottom", and the look of Antigua makes the tourist "so excited" (Kincaid 13). Upon arrival, the tourist is driven to her hotel by a taxi driver and feels "wonderful", claiming that the "bad roads" are a "marvelous change...from the splendid highways" she is used to at home (Kincaid 5). The tourist sees a romanticized version of the place and its people, and enjoys the poor conditions of the road. Clearly under the influence of the tourist gaze, the tourist watches out the window of the taxi to "get [her] money's worth" (Kincaid 6), and embraces the "authentic" views and experiences that the place may offer her. Kincaid ridicules how modern people tend to think that authenticity and reality are thought to be found in other cultures and "in purer, simpler lifestyles" (MacCannell 3), as the tourist claims to feel "alive and inspired" by the sight of "heaps of death and ruins" (Kincaid 16).

Kincaid mocks how Westerners believe that traveling to the developing world to relax is

¹³ As Lesley Larkin (207) has pointed out, a conditional "if" is replaced by the more common "when" in the opening line. Thus, the narrator signals (and later, strongly recommends) to the reader that she could also cancel the trip.

something that they deserve. Like Gilbert in *Eat, Pray, Love*, Kincaid's unnamed tourist sees the trip to this small, exotic place as an entitlement, as she "is thinking of the *hard and cold and dark and long days*" (Kincaid 4, emphasis mine) she spent working at home, "earning some money so that you could stay in this place" (Kincaid 4), emphasizing also three pages later that she is someone "who has to work...hard...and...[watch] every penny you earn so that you can afford this holiday you are on" (Kincaid 7). The hard, cold, dark and long days suggest that the tourist sees tourism as a right, and justifies the holiday by claiming that it is something she has worked hard, strived for, and therefore deserves.

Kincaid's tourist gets an almost spiritual sensation the moment she becomes a tourist and emerges from customs into the "hot, clean air" (5). Kincaid says that "immediately you feel cleansed, immediately you feel blessed (which is to say special); you feel free" (5). Going on holiday makes the tourist feel "cleansed", "blessed" and "free"; words that have religious or spiritual connotations, indicating that the journey is valuable and important. She mocks the romanticized imaginations of tourism' and the important role it plays in Western peoples' lives. Far from being represented as important, she describes the tourist that is "lying on some faraway beach" with its "stilled body stinking and glistening in the sand looking like something first forgotten, then remembered, then not important to go back for (Kincaid 16). Other tourists are described as "fat" and "pastrylike" (Kincaid 13). They are the ones who "buy all those awful things that tourists always buy" and "put in their attics" (Kincaid 48). The ingenious thing about Kincaid's narrative is that she takes the genre Gilbert and other travel writers use, and she uses it to reverse the tourist gaze, and to attack and dismantle a certain way of seeing.

We can find more similarities between the trips of Gilbert's and Kincaid's character. They both appear as modern and self-absorbed individuals. While Liz in *Eat, Pray, Love* naps in a garden "in a patch of sunlight" (Gilbert 119), Kincaid's unnamed tourist lies on a beach in "the amazing sun" (Kincaid 13). And while Liz searches for "the next lovely meal" (Gilbert 119), Kincaid's tourist enjoys "deliciously, locally grown food" (Kincaid 13). They both romanticize over local food and the beautiful scenery of the place. However, whereas Gilbert's travelogue is a proclamation that living a fulfilling life and chasing dreams that make you happy is a right that every woman deserves, Kincaid's book is a criticism of how self-obsessed tourists, and their tourist gaze prohibits them from reflecting around their

surroundings and the role they play in foreign land. Ultimately, Gilbert ends up sounding like this caricature of a tourist that Kincaid mocked 18 years earlier.

In addition, Kincaid's tourist becomes "tired of all this looking" (12), and longs for her hotel room, where she can "refresh", "take a bath" and "brush [her] teeth." (12), and ends up fantasizing about the things she will do on the trip

you see yourself lying on the beach, enjoying the amazing sun... You see yourself taking a walk on that beach, you see yourself meeting new people... You see yourself eating some deliciously, locally grown food. You see yourself, you see yourself...
(Kincaid 13)

The repetitive phrase "You see yourself" (Kincaid 13) emphasizes how preoccupied the tourist is with actually looking at and seeing herself. Like John Urry and Brian Holmes, Kincaid implies that the tourist puts on some "dark glasses" (Holmes para. 11) that makes her see romanticized versions of reality that distracts her from "seeing".

A Small Place informs its readers that they must *not* actually see the people and the place, if they are to visit Antigua as tourists. Kincaid warns, "the thought of what it might be like for someone who had to live day in day out in a place that suffers constantly from drought... must never cross your mind" (4); "You must not wonder" she continues, "what exactly happened to the contents of your lavatory when you flushed it... where your bathwater went when you pulled out the stopper... what happened when you brushed your teeth" (13-14). Thus, in order to be a tourist, one should suppress the "slightly funny feeling" one may feel "from time to time"; that Antiguans are actual people, so it does not "ruin the holiday" (Kincaid 10). Rather than seeing poverty, or feeling guilty over other people's deprived circumstances Kincaid says, you should enjoy "the hot, clean air" (5).

This selective seeing is the type of "blindness" that Brian Holmes explores in his work, and it is a form of violence towards the ones who are being visited. Tough ethical issues linked to the role of tourism is suppressed by the tourist character in Kincaid's narrative, they are at the same time addressed by the narrative voice which challenges the tourist gaze. "The slight funny feeling" refers to "feelings about their exploitation, oppression and domination"

(Kincaid 10) and the actual role the tourist plays in foreign land, which in many ways, can be tied to British colonialism. Kincaid allows the reader to see what the tourist cannot see. Antigua, the place the tourist visits to enjoy the sun and water, suffers from draught and water shortage and pollution. There is no proper sewage-disposal system in Antigua. Moreover, the amazing local meals tourists enjoys has travelled as much as the tourist. It may have “come from a place like Antigua first, where it was grown dirt-cheap, [then it] went to Miami, and came back” (Kincaid 14).

Tourism and colonialism

Kincaid explores tourism’s ties to European colonialism. Ironically, she argues, what drove the colonisers to Antigua in the colonial times is the same that drives tourists there today: a desire to feel like a superior human being. The contemporary tourist has a similar superiority complex. “You have always felt people like me cannot run things,” Kincaid says, that locals cannot “grasp the idea of Gross National Product, . . . take command of the things that the most simpleminded among you can master, . . . understand the notion of rule by law, . . . think in abstractions, . . . be objective” (36). She thus argues that racialized thinking underlies such damaging stereotypes, which can make some Western tourists think that the country *needed* the “ruthless” but “clever” colonizers in the past (Kincaid 17), and that they are doing the visited country “a big favor” in contemporary times (Kincaid 10). “If it were not for you they would not have Government House, and Prime Minister’s Office, and Parliament Building and embassy of powerful country” (Kincaid 10). In reality, these buildings are symbols of the British colonizers desire to “civilize” and Westernize the locals ¹⁴.

As the book progresses, Kincaid brings to the forefront the character of the Western tourist who sees herself as a white savior and is unaware and ignorant of the damage inflicted by Western economic and military interventions and the increased mobility of Western tourists in the present. She writes how Antigua was “discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1493. Not too long after, it was settled by human rubbish from Europe” (Kincaid 80). The assimilationist policy of the colonizers, she writes, is destructive: “everywhere they [colonizers] went they turned into English” (Kincaid 24), and as a result, making the Antiguan “orphans” with “no motherland, no fatherland. . . no tongue” (Kincaid 31). Kincaid powerfully and poetically states that “the only language I have to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who

¹⁴ As Gilmartin (117) points out, European colonialism was legitimized by seeing tropical environments as producing less civilized, more degenerate people in the need of help.

committed the crime” (31). This is one of the self-reflective moments in her narrative, in which she reflects not only on why she writes in English but, why she also writes in an inherited genre of the colonial travel narrative. As the colonizers assumed responsibility of education and government, they built schools and libraries, “and in both places erased my history and glorified your own” (Kincaid 36). Kincaid explains how an English headmistress of a school in Antigua “told these girls over and over again to stop behaving as if they were monkeys just out of trees” (29). Kincaid explores how Antiguan saw the English people who invaded the place:

Let me just tell you how you looked to us. You came. You took things that were not yours, and you did not even, for appearances’ sake, ask first” (35)...”You murdered people. You imprisoned people. You robbed people. You opened your own banks and put our money in it... There must have been some good people among you, but they stayed at home (35)

A Small Place reverses the racial thinking behind the constructs “us” and “them”. Kincaid proposes a different, less Western-centric version, of tourism, in which the Antiguan are “noble”, “exalted” (80) but Westerners described as “ugly, piggish individuals” (31), “rubbish” humans (80) “ill-mannered,...un-Christian-like,...small-minded...animals,...a bit below human standards as we understood those standards to be” (29). She does not think that Westerners are inherently rubbish but they are described in her narrative as such because “all masters of every stripe are rubbish, and all slaves of every stripe are noble and exalted; there can be no question about this” (Kincaid 80). “We felt superior, for we were so much better behaved and we were full of grace”, whereas the English were “so badly behaved and...completely out of grace” (Kincaid 30).

European colonialism was motivated by the West’s desire for “wealth and power” and by the desire to escape their own “miserable existence” (Kincaid 80). Similarly, Kincaid explores how also the tourist is someone who wants to feel their superiority, because “being ordinary takes you all you have out of you” (16). The tourist, who “walk[s] down a busy street in the large modern and prosperous city in which you work and live”, is “dismayed, puzzled... at how alone you feel in this crowd, how awful it is to go unnoticed, how awful it is to go unloved” (Kincaid 15). That “awful feeling” is really what drives her to escape her “amniotic

sac of modern experience” (Kincaid 15-16). Kincaid criticises how Western tourists come to Antigua and are able to use native people to escape their own life’s “banality and boredom” and turn it into “into a source of pleasure” (Kincaid 19), thereby Kincaid reminds that the place where the tourist pursues beautiful scenery, relaxation and escape is the home of other human beings, who are subjugated to host tourists, pointing out that tourists are self-invited guests who use other locations and people for to feel good about themselves¹⁵.

Servants and saviors

A Small Place is a criticism of the Western traveller and of a Western writer. Several scholars have commented on the complex relationship between hosts and guests in the tourism industry (Bell; Vandegrift; Wearing and Ponting 255; Urry and Larsen 96; MacCannell; Mowforth and Munt). Workers who are employed under the gaze of tourists are expected to provide experiences of authenticity (MacCannell) and leisure (Urry). The production of this leisure requires hospitality, and that someone to clean rooms, cook meals, and create comfort and pleasure for tourists (Vandegrift 779). Tourism workers of the global South must therefore daily face the “symbolic representation of their servility – the tourist” (Mowforth and Munt 71). Furthermore, the tourism industry is reported to offer “poor workplace conditions” for its employees (Weaver 797). For instance, Darice Vandegrift’s study shows how women are offered low wages, denied labour protections and benefits (795). While some voluntarily give their hospitality to tourists, others are compelled to do so, and Bell argues that members of host communities are increasingly expected to welcome valued guests (23-24). Because of the demand for hospitality and friendly labour, employees in one of the world’s biggest sectors need to project that they are happy, as part of their job requires that they seem content about working and performing services for tourists.

Kincaid states that most people are “too poor to escape the reality of their lives; and... too poor to live properly in the place... you, the tourist, want to go” (19). She claims that everyone would like “to find a way out”, “a rest” and “a tour”, because “Every native everywhere lives a life of overwhelming and crushing banality and boredom and desperation

¹⁵ A critique may point out that *A Small Place* was written a long time ago, argue that that perceptions are completely different now, and argue that there is nothing exploitative about Gilbert’s journey in *Eat, Pray, Love*. However, Hubert Sauper’s 2014 documentary, *We Come As Friends* documents the same kind of experiences that Kincaid wrote about 26 years later. The documentary is filmed at the time when Sudan is being divided into two countries and shows how Western domination shapes tourist, military and humanitarian travel in foreign land to this day.

and depression” (Kincaid 18). Thus, she argues that everyone would like a pause or escape from the life they are living. However, Kincaid points out that, unlike tourists, the native people in Antigua are unable to escape their own everyday lives, and do not have the financial means to travel like those white Westerners who come to Antigua, confirming how tourism is a “symptom...of global inequality” (Mowforth and Munt 70) that some, including the writer I discussed in the previous chapter, feel entitled to take advantage of.

Thus, tourism comes off as a new form of imperialism that “feeds on the legacies of colonial past” (Gonzalez and Lipman 511), as it involves using the Other who is less privileged, less mobile and projected into the role as host. Several scholars have explored the connection between the tourist and the coloniser, or tourism and European colonialism (Tucker and Akama; Gonzalez and Lipman; Simmons). Tourism relationships echo colonial relationships, and the continued colonial power relations in tourism preserve colonial relationships of oppression, domination and exploitation (Tucker and Akama 516). Like the coloniser, the tourist invades and uses the space of Others. As tourism has become part of the modern experience, modern culture and modernization is “establishing its empire on a global basis” (MacCannell xv).

Both tourism and colonialism rely on unequal power relationships and are framed by the white savior narrative. Kincaid writes how people that are visited see tourists who come and try to be white saviors. First, she laughs at them: “collapse helpless from laughter, mimicking the way they imagine you must look as you carry out some everyday bodily function” (Kincaid 16), and “behind their close doors they laugh at your strangeness” (Kincaid 17). Then, she attacks them and sees the tourist as “An ugly thing,” and “the physical sight of you does not please them, you have bad manners,...you look silly” (Kincaid 17). “Though, that thought never occurs to you[,]...They do not like you” (Kincaid 17). Thus, the narrative voice far from identifies tourists as white saviors, but rather as “an ugly, empty thing, a stupid thing, a piece of rubbish pausing here and there to gaze at this and taste that” (Kincaid 17), and stated that “the people who inhabit the place in which you have just paused cannot stand you” (Kincaid 17).

Kincaid does not claim that these descriptions are true for all tourists, but she criticises how Western people who come there see themselves as above the people that actually live there.

Mowforth and Munt state that “tourism in the Third World will remain a special form of domination and control”, offering “sun, sand, sea and sex” for the travelling explorers, but “subjugation, servility and subservience” for the local inhabitants (71). Airlines, tour operators and hotel chains in the developing world are “largely owned and controlled from the First World” (Mowforth and Munt 71).

Kincaid mentions “the Mill Reef Club” as an example to show how domination of the land still exists (27). The Mill Reef Club is a private resort in Antigua - “an exclusive vacation paradise” - according to its website (Mill Reef Club para. 1). The “only Antiguan (black people) allowed to go there were servants” (Kincaid 27). Thus, Antiguan became “strangers in someone else’s home”, while tourists “refuse to talk to their hosts or have anything human, anything intimate, to do with them”, showing that tourists are more than friendly visitors (Kincaid 27). They come and take over the space of the natives, like the “colonial...explorer who captured and controlled the space of others” (Simmons 51).

The people at this club gave “money to children’s charities; these things must have made them seem to themselves very big and good” (Kincaid 28), sounding like Gilbert in *Eat, Pray, Love*, who legitimizes her privilege because of her role as white savior. Kincaid attacks the way tourists dominate and control in disguise of the white savior narrative, and refuses to take part in sharing misleading images and narratives of tourists as white saviors. “To us they were pigs, living in that sty (the Mill Reef Club),” she emphasizes (Kincaid 28). In her book Kincaid challenges the narrative figure of the Western tourist-narrator, and she challenges such narrator’s and tourist’s right to consume the Other. Ultimately, Kincaid refuses to be subjugated, downgraded and dominated by white tourists and Western writers. Thus, hers is a real liberatory narrative of a place, as she shows what looking at and narrating locals can become in the hands of a thoughtful local host.

Conclusion

In my project, I have explored the figure of “the tourist” as narrated by Elizabeth Gilbert and Jamaica Kincaid. To Westerners, tourism is important, if not necessary. It can turn you into an attractive storyteller and boost your social status at home. Gilbert’s text is a classic example of a Western tourist narrative, and her *Eat, Pray, Love* cured her depression, made her money and turned her into a celebrated feminist author. However, as I have pointed out, her narrator can only see tourism as something equally positive, empowering, and economically enriching, both for the traveling subject, but also for the places and people visited. Gilbert’s predictable cultural narrative of the Western explorer and seer of the world is in many ways damaging because it fails to actually see those her character encounters on her journey. Gilbert’s tourist is an economic contributor, a good-hearted humanitarian, a white savior. So, although Gilbert creates a powerful protagonist and narrator, a white feminist rule breaker in *Eat, Pray, Love*, she simultaneously revives the white savior narrative, which legitimizes the ultimately disempowering way of seeing those who live elsewhere. Gilbert fails to acknowledge her privilege as a Western writer, seer, and traveler, and she uses her privileged position to discover and empower herself.

The white savior complex she suffers from is however experienced as destructive, exploitative, and colonial. Like colonizers before them, *A Small Place* reveals how Western tourists use, explore and exploit a place in the disguise of being contributors and white saviors. As the Other is seen as degenerate and in the need of help by white saviors, it legitimizes white supremacy and gives license to intervene. The Western sense of power, status and domination over the Other allow tourists to travel and feel good about themselves.

The topic of tourism should be of scholarly interest, as it has consequences for other people and populations than just those who practice it (Jamal and Robinson). Since Western-centric perspectives with positive associations to tourism have traditionally has been dominant in both tourism research (Jennings 685) and tourism literature, I argue for the continued importance of reading narratives like *A Small Place*. This type of narrative contributes with new perspectives, which may help increase people’s awareness of the role they play in foreign “exotic” spaces, as it stands in contrast to conventional, predictable and Western-centric narratives like *Eat, Pray, Love*.

Usefulness to the teaching profession

The work behind this project is in many ways useful to the teaching profession. *Eat, Pray, Love* may be a story pupils are familiar with, and *A Small Place* could be used to work on the contrasts of the representation of the tourist in these two literary works. As *A Small Place* reverses the racial thinking behind the constructs “us” and the Other, Kincaid’s narrative could be a useful tool to develop critical thinking. Reading and working with Kincaid’s perspective can be relevant in several subjects, such as English, history and social sciences.

A Small Place offers a counter-narrative to dominating representations of Western mobility and Western-centric perspectives. Stephen Wearing and Jess Ponting argue that when the Other is recognized and given credibility and a voice, it can provide alternative views and “a counter-discourse to current hegemonic modes of interaction” (263). The perspective of the Other have different frames and is equally important (Jennings 685). Thus, Kincaid’s book could be useful for educational purposes, in the teaching of colonialism, literature and culture, and have the potential to offer pupils a broader understanding of the West’s position in history and an increased awareness of dominating Western-centric narratives.

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