

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Abstract approved:

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This thesis examines the convergence of neoliberal rhetoric across popular media, academic, and institutional discourses, and draws connections between contemporary women's travel literature and common scripts in study abroad promotion. Finding such narratives to be freighted with ethnocentric constructs and tacit endorsements of market-based globalization, I critique the mainstreaming of neoliberal attitudes that depict travel as a commodity primarily valuable for its role in increasing the worth of U.S. American personhood. I question both the prevailing definitions of "global citizenship" and the ubiquitous claims that study abroad prepares students for "success in the global economy" as ideological signifiers of a higher education system that is increasingly corporatized.

Utilizing a postcolonial and transnational feminist theoretical framework, the thesis offers a literary analysis of contemporary women's travel memoirs, examining patterns of narcissism and "othering" in their depictions of cross-cultural encounter, and connects these neoliberal trends to consumerism in higher education, study abroad, and post-second wave feminism. Shared themes in the representation of

privileged U.S./Western women abroad and the student-consumer model in higher education bespeak a movement toward individual international engagements that reinforce corporate motives for travel and endorse the commodification of global environments, cultures, and people. In hopes of contesting this paradigm, I argue for the reassertion of a social justice-oriented definition of global citizenship and for educational models that foster self-criticism and the decolonization of knowledge.

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Global Citizen, Global Consumer: Study Abroad, Neoliberal Convergence, and the
Eat, Pray, Love Phenomenon

by
Nancy Barbour

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Nancy Barbour, Author

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To my mother,
Suzan Bennett Staton

Σ' αγαπώ.

Global Citizen, Global Consumer:
Study Abroad, Neoliberal Convergence, and the *Eat, Pray, Love* Phenomenon

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Travel literature since *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and *The Odyssey* has been a motivating force for exploration, adventure-seeking, and economic intervention in foreign lands. Edward Said claimed in *Orientalism*, “From travelers’ tales . . . colonies were created and ethnocentric perspectives secured” (117). While the heroic journeys and epics that became part of the mythology of early capitalist endeavors like the East India trading companies centered upon a male-dominant paradigm of cultural conquest, contemporary travel writing has given us a feminine archetype of the independent traveler, whose disposable income gives her the freedom to become a consumer of other cultures. She is the new face of leisure tourism and a role model for college women who study abroad.

Elizabeth Gilbert’s *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman’s Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia* (EPL) has gone beyond a bestseller to something of iconic status, bolstered by a juggernaut of cross-promotion. In 2010, *The Daily Beast* estimated that with branded merchandise, promotional movie tie-ins, and licensed package tours, the EPL phenomenon represented a \$350 million franchise (Streib, “Inside the *Eat Pray Love* Merchandising Machine”). Judiciously ignored by the corporate entities for which the book has been a sacred cash cow, the ironies attendant to EPL’s financial success have not gone unnoticed by critics. The Indian prayer beads offered by the Home Shopping Network as part of its “*Eat, Pray, Love* Shopping Experience” sold for \$350, which was at that time, according to Tarmo

Jüristo, “a sum that exceed[ed] the annual income for about one third of India’s population.” Yoga retreats pitched by tourism companies capitalizing on *EPL* fervor went for up to \$1200 per week, roughly equivalent to India’s per capita GDP (Jüristo 2). Another irony stemming from the commercial coup of *EPL* has been less examined: the model it projects for transnational encounter and the representation of self and other is at odds with its claims of enlightened multiculturalism. This model, I argue, is one that has become mainstreamed in U.S. popular culture and is prevalent in the university study abroad industry. Increasingly, travel abroad is framed as a self-centering activity for U.S. Americans, even as its promoters continue to proclaim its value in broadening cultural understanding and fostering a sense of global citizenship.

Gilbert’s memoir is not the first to present self-discovery as a primary motivation for travel abroad, but its fame has made it the most visible representative of a genre of contemporary women’s literature that *Bitch* magazine has aptly coined “priv-lit.” The label emphasizes the unacknowledged privilege of affluent Western authors who pose as average people doing extraordinary things, but it is also suggestive of the genre’s tendency to privilege the perspective of the writer, centering her experience and setting her assumptions as the norm for all readers. *Bitch* specifically defines priv-lit as texts “whose expressed goal is one of spiritual, existential, or philosophical enlightenment contingent upon women’s hard work, commitment, and patience, but whose actual barriers to entry are primarily financial” (Sanders and Barnes-Brown, “Eat, Pray, Spend”). The financial barrier is a strong and persistent one in college study abroad programs, in which economic privilege plays an

important role in determining who participates. Yet study abroad is promoted as an opportunity that all students can and should pursue in order to further their personal growth and future career prospects. The rhetoric of privilege is pervasive in study abroad marketing: central among its expressed goals are students' enlightenment and personal development, the attainment of which is represented as largely dependent upon students' desire and commitment, but in most cases is ultimately tied to their financial means.

Research Questions

In this thesis, I examine the connections between priv-lit—in the form of contemporary women's travel memoir—and common scripts used to promote U.S.-based study abroad programs. Finding both to be freighted with ethnocentric signifiers and tacit endorsements of market-based globalization, I critique the mainstreaming of neoliberal attitudes that depict travel as a commodity primarily valuable for its role in increasing the worth of U.S. American personhood. Among the questions central to my research are:

- How is neoliberalism normalized in rhetoric about travel, both in contemporary popular culture and in the practice of college study abroad?
- Are globalization and corporatization inseparable idea(l)s, and what agendas are served by the drive to “internationalize” universities?
- What is the substance behind the ubiquitous claims that study abroad prepares students for global citizenship and success in the global economy?

- What are the implications of conceptualizing travel and education as commodities and how is the study abroad experience being commodified?

Rationale

My focus on *Eat, Pray, Love* and other women's travel literature stems from my introduction to Gilbert's book while accompanying a group of U.S. undergraduates on a study abroad trip to Greece in 2010. As a guest lecturer in their travel writing course, I asked the students if any movies, television shows, books or other media had been influential in their decision to study abroad. All had been strongly influenced by pop culture representations of Greece, including the films *Troy*, *Mamma Mia!* and *My Life in Ruins*, and the book and movie versions of *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*. The most popular response, however, was *Eat, Pray, Love*, which was neither a movie (yet) nor set in Greece. With one exception, all of the students were either reading the book, had already read the book, or had read it more than once. The exception was the only male in the group. Among the female students, reaction to Gilbert's memoir was universally enthusiastic and in many cases passionate. They deeply identified with Gilbert, even though at the time of her narrative she was at least ten years their senior, already a college graduate, a working professional, and a divorcée. As I traveled with the students across Greece, I often heard them quoting passages from *EPL*. I also witnessed them acting out entire scenes from the movies that had been filmed at sites on our itinerary. I began to recognize not only the power of these popular depictions of travel, but also the particular authority invested in

Gilbert by her readers because her story was not fiction but a “real” account of her experience.

It is perhaps unsurprising that many students who go abroad identify with Gilbert because the majority occupy a similar social location or subject position. Over the past decade, women were twice as likely as men to study abroad during college, and more than 80% of all participants were white (Institute of International Education, “Profile of U.S. Study Abroad Students”). The data also show that more than half of study abroad students major in liberal arts, and, coincidentally, the institution sending the most students abroad each year is New York University—Gilbert’s alma mater. Collectively, these statistics point to a large college-age market for *EPL* and similar travel memoirs by women.

After reading the book myself and making the connection between the predominance of women in college study abroad and the cultural influence of *EPL*, I became concerned about Gilbert’s framing of the U.S. American woman as traveler. Freedom to travel, to move independently through the world, to write about one’s experiences and to publish are important rights that constitute a major development in the history of Western women’s liberation. But while Gilbert’s narrative explicitly stages the story of a woman’s self-liberation through travel, it implicitly articulates a postfeminist, neoliberal worldview that posits the female self as deriving empowerment through consumerist and entrepreneurial agency. Her subtitled “search for everything” is explained by Gilbert as a quest for “worldly enjoyment and divine

transcendence,” which is a rhetorical interpellation, couched in the language of spirituality, that endorses a Western capitalist ideology of “having it all.”

Gilbert’s popular appeal is in part due to her personal attributes. Entrepreneurial, attractive, white, affluent, and candid about her (hetero)sexuality, she presents a model performance of neoliberal, postfeminist womanhood. Gender and media scholar Rosalind Gill describes this idealized female subject as “empowered by the knowledge of her own sexual attractiveness” yet always “required to work on and transform the self” (Gill 438, 443). Gill points to the increased social pressure upon women to “self-manage” and “self-discipline,” particularly in terms of their physical appearance, and to affirm such efforts as autonomous lifestyle choices. Gill concludes that a kind of symbiosis exists between postfeminism and neoliberalism, contending that “both appear to be structured by a current of individualism that has almost entirely replaced notions of the social or political, or any idea of the individual as subject to pressures, constraints or influence from outside themselves” (443). I would further argue that the market-based ideology of neoliberalism informs postfeminist assumptions about women’s sexuality by placing high value upon heteronormative femininity: a woman’s attractiveness to men is like capital, a commodity that increases her self-worth and market value. Gilbert, like many of her contemporaries in the genre of women’s travel memoir, capitalizes on her success in both self-discipline (through her spiritual practice of yoga and meditation) and sexual desirability (through several relationships and one happily-ever-after with a wealthy man) to increase the marketability of her story.

Cross-listed in the self-help category, *EPL* is less a book about travel than about how to achieve the elusive “balance” of prosperity, spirituality, and love. It represents a formula for commercial success in a neoliberal, postfeminist world. Following a pattern already established by earlier travel writers like Alice Steinbach, its popularity has nevertheless made *EPL* a model for the wave of priv-lit travel memoirs that has ensued since its publication. What I find especially troubling about the mainstreaming of this genre is its subversion of its own overt ethos of women’s empowerment and cross-cultural understanding. *Bitch* magazine makes the case that:

Priv-lit tells women they must do expensive things that are good for the body, mind, or soul. But the hidden subtext, and perhaps the most alluring part of the genre for its avid consumers, is the antifeminist idea that women should become healthy so that people will like them, they will find partners, they’ll have money, and they’ll lose weight and be hot. God forbid a dumpy, lonely, single person should actually try to achieve happiness, health, and balance for its own sake. (Sanders and Barnes-Brown, “Eat, Pray, Spend”)

The genre’s fixation on self-improvement and self-fulfillment as the impetus for, and ultimate goal of, travel gives cover to a pervasive ethnocentrism in the narratives. Because the subject is the woman herself rather than her destination, other people and cultures become supporting characters and settings rather than the foci of sustained narrative interest.

As neoliberal rhetoric has become normalized in women’s travel writing, it has also gained acceptance in the context of university study abroad promotion and in articulating an imperative to internationalize college campuses. Beyond the more traditional claims of broadening minds and increasing cultural awareness and sensitivity, study abroad is now commonly pitched in ways that emphasize

individualism and entrepreneurship. Students are urged to study abroad in order to “discover” themselves and to improve their marketability as employees in the “global economy.” University study abroad websites often include a list of such statements under the heading “Why Study Abroad?” The following are just a few examples.

Why Study Abroad?

- “Find out more about yourself.” (University of Texas at Austin)¹
- “Students may gain an appreciation about what we have here in the U.S.; they often develop confidence, a strengthened sense of personal identity, flexibility, creativity, and so on.” (Michigan State)²
- “Develop a deeper understanding of our global marketplace.” (University of North Carolina at Charlotte)³
- “Your experience studying abroad will set you apart from other people in the job market. The skills you gain while living abroad will give you an advantage in just about any career field.” (Penn State)⁴
- “Just think about your interview at Global Company X, when you are asked about the range of your experience and training and whether you can interact with people from diverse backgrounds, and you get to say, ‘Well, I studied in India for a semester in college.’ Dude, you are so employed.” (University of Oregon)⁵

With growing numbers of college graduates unemployed and underemployed, the promise of a competitive edge in the job market is strong leverage for study abroad promotion. As in priv-lit travel memoirs, the idea of going abroad to explore the self and the imperative to spend money in order to increase one’s personal market value is

¹ <http://www.mcombs.utexas.edu/BBA/IP/Prospective/Why.aspx>

² <http://studyabroad.isp.msu.edu/shared/objectives.html>

³ http://www.edabroad.uncc.edu/why_study_abroad.asp

⁴ <http://www.outreach.psu.edu/summerabroad/reason.html>

⁵ http://studyabroad.uoregon.edu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=870:why-study-abroad&catid=213:interested-students&Itemid=113

deeply problematic. In both cases the assumed values of empowerment and multiculturalism are undermined by the cultivation of narcissistic ethnocentrism and by the neoliberal construction of travel abroad as a commodity necessary for self-improvement.

Methodology

As an interdisciplinary project, this thesis draws upon multiple fields of research that have framed various issues relevant to the discussion of women's travel literature, higher education and study abroad. My theoretical standpoint has been influenced strongly by postcolonial, Marxist, socialist and transnational feminist critics, who provide useful frameworks for understanding the historical and geopolitical matters that should guide contemporary policies in U.S. higher education. In the second chapter, I consider pertinent theories of prominent postcolonial and transnational feminist scholars and sketch the ideologies of neoliberalism and postfeminism that inform contemporary travel writing and higher education policy. In light of these theories, in chapter three I review and critique the work of Elizabeth Gilbert and other women travel memoirists whose work inspires many students to go abroad. In the fourth chapter, I analyze promotional rhetoric in the study abroad industry, linking its framing of international experience as an opportunity for personal development to representations of travel in popular culture and to wider trends in higher education. My overall methodology, which brings together discourses from multiple media and disciplines, effects a rhetorical variant of "convergence analysis," a phrase informed in my usage by media scholar Henry Jenkins' *Convergence Culture*.

Ironically, perhaps, the term “convergence” is also used in economic theory to describe the hypothesis that, through global development, per capita incomes in currently-poor countries will ultimately approach parity with those in currently-rich countries. Such doctrines of neoliberal faith are among the objects of my critique in what follows.

CHAPTER 2: THEORIZING THE POSTFEMINIST SUBJECT

Representing “the Other”

The theoretical framework I apply to my analysis of contemporary women’s travel memoirs and study abroad promotion is grounded in postcolonial and transnational feminist criticism. I argue that encounters with, and representations of, “other” cultures and people are always, at some level, political—that, whether acknowledged or not, U.S. travelers abroad are biased by internalized social constructions about self and other, hierarchies of power, and systems of value that influence their interactions with the “other” and are reproduced in their narratives of encounter. To ignore or efface the political in these narratives tends to re-inscribe harmful stereotypes and to limit opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagement by reinforcing the dominance of Western voices and silencing the subaltern. Reviewing the critiques of prominent postcolonial and transnational feminist scholars and exploring connections between postfeminist and neoliberal ideologies, I highlight problematic assumptions and omissions in U.S. women’s travel literature and study abroad marketing that replicate colonialist motives for travel.

Postcolonialist theory has given critical scrutiny to sociocultural assumptions and representations of the “other.” Edward Said prefaces his influential 1978 book, *Orientalism*, with a quote from Karl Marx: “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.” In its original context, Marx refers to the political representation of the proletariat, who are kept subordinate by the ruling class that claims to represent

their interests. Said repurposes Marx's words in his epigraph to point to the similar imbalance of power between a Eurocentric Western discourse that controls the representation of non-Western peoples and cultures and a subaltern "Orient," which he claims is "almost a European invention" (1). Part of a narrative that serves to uphold the hegemony of Western knowledge, the Orient is "transformed from a very far distant and often threatening Otherness into figures that are relatively familiar" (21) and therefore available to be "transubstantiated from resistant hostility into obliging, and submissive, partnership" (92). Said redefines "orientalism" from a term that formerly suggested a less distasteful and invasive co-optation of Eastern cultures—in the form of artistic imitation and exoticized representations—to one that suggests a set of embedded prejudices against Eastern people and cultures. He attributes the rise of colonialism to Western internalization and reproduction of Orientalist attitudes: "To say simply that Orientalism was a rationalization of colonial rule is to ignore the extent to which colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact" (39). In other words, the normalization of rhetoric that centers Western interests and marginalizes non-Western production of knowledge works to advance colonialist behaviors.

The risk of reinscribing colonialist prejudices is strengthened at a time when globalization and neoliberalism are simultaneously framing the hegemonic discourse. Homi Bhabha criticizes Western colonialist discourse as representing the "other" through a concept of "fixity," rendering marginalized people as belonging to unchanging, primitive cultures. He points out that these exoticized representations are

both alluring and derisible to Western audiences. One of Bhabha's most influential books engaging postcolonial theory, *The Location of Culture* traces colonialist Western narratives about the "Third World" and the ways they perpetuate the subordination of Third World nations. He introduces the idea of "interstitial space"—a hybridization of cultures, people, and lands that have been in contact and conflict for generations—as a correction to the Western linear narrative of a static Third World as "fixed horizontal nation-space." But U.S. popular culture tends to mainstream these fixed ideas about non-Western cultures and people, and reproduces such attitudes through the stereotyping of Third World characters. As Bhabha contends, stereotype:

is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always "in place," already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated . . . as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. (*The Other Question* 94-95)

That such stereotypes seem self-evident yet demand repetition supplies both incentive and content for interpreting the "other." In subsequent chapters, I will examine the use of stereotyping in contemporary women's travel memoirs as a strategy that reinforces the authority of the subject Western narrator, and I will demonstrate the ways study abroad promotion contributes to the reproduction of marginalized representations of the other. In both cases, popular prejudices that have become mainstreamed in Western discourse are called upon to market travel as a means of self-empowerment and to posit the U.S. traveler as the archetypal global citizen.

In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak points to the silencing of “Other” voices by colonialism and colonialist discourse, labeling this suppression of knowledge and agency “epistemic violence” (280). Similarly, the economic, cultural, and discursive domination of the imperial West is branded “criminal” by renowned writer Jamaica Kincaid, and the western traveler is unmasked as a bad global citizen. Born in colonial Antigua, Kincaid remembers her childhood indoctrination in English culture and writes of her continuing anger at the legacy of slavery and the injustice of supplanting and suppressing native ways of knowing. In *A Small Place* (1988), she says:

nothing can erase my rage—not an apology, not a large sum of money,
not the death of the criminal—for this wrong can never be made right,
and only the impossible can make me still: can a way be found to
make what happened not have happened? (32)

Kincaid sees the tourists who visit formerly colonized places as “ugly” because they can visit “heaps of death and ruin and [feel] alive and inspired at the sight of it” (16). To those who can efface the awful history of colonialism while enjoying a vacation in a beautiful place and being served by native people whose labor is undervalued through geopolitical economic structures that benefit the Westerner, Kincaid says with irony, “[Y]ou needn’t let that slightly funny feeling you have from time to time about exploitation, oppression, domination develop into full-fledged unease, discomfort; you could ruin your holiday” (10). As she observes, every native is a potential tourist in need of a break from “the crushing banality and boredom” of everyday life. “But some natives—most natives in the world—cannot go anywhere . . . They are too poor

to escape the reality of their lives” (18-19). This reframing of the traveler as a decidedly unromantic figure aims to force the Westerner to see herself through the eyes of the other. Kincaid boldly returns the imperial gaze (theorized by Mary Louise Pratt and others) of the tourist/reader and demands recognition of the “criminal” legacy underwriting Western privilege.

A Transnational/Postcolonial Feminist Framework

If tourism and popular culture are guilty of re-imprinting colonialist narratives, the academy is not exempt from a similar tendency. Postcolonial and transnational feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues for a decolonizing of academic feminism. In *Feminism Without Borders*, she critiques Western feminist scholars for constructing an essentialized “Third World woman,” taking on such issues as identity politics and globalization and calling for an antiracist and anticolonialist reframing of scholarship and pedagogy. Importantly, she challenges “universal images” of women in the Third World/global South that serve to maintain the imbalance of power between the First and Third Worlds. Mohanty stresses that “the focus on questions of subjectivity and identity which is a hallmark of contemporary feminist theory has also had some problematic effects in the area of race and Third World/ postcolonial studies” (“Feminist Encounters” 460). Similarly, Uma Narayan exposes hypocrisies in the way Western feminists treat Third World women’s issues. She looks at supposed “cultural practices” such as sati and bride-burning and points out the lack of Western comparative analysis with issues such as domestic violence. She questions

why violence against women is seen as endemic to Third World but not Western cultures. The blaming of cultural traditions for the repression of non-Western women, a tactic often employed by Western women travel writers, is what Narayan calls the “death by culture” explanation (85). Third World women in particular are assumed to be victims of their culture in ways that do not apply to Western women: arranged marriages and dowry murders are seen as examples of how Indian culture oppresses women; domestic abuse and gun violence, while common in the U.S., are not viewed as tools of repression linked to American culture (Narayan 102-3). Such assumptions affirm the hegemony and perceived superiority of Western culture and support ethnocentric messages in the travel narratives of Western women, who present their own values and desires as normative.

Western feminist theory has often marginalized race and other categories of difference, and transnational feminists justly demand an end to ethnocentrism and advocate greater attention to issues of immediate concern to non-Western women. Yet unfortunately, as I will argue is the case in contemporary women’s travel memoirs, the new Western feminisms are increasingly framed by neoliberal ideologies that equate free-market capitalist values with liberation, and they tend to locate women’s power in their role as independent consumers—reaffirming a global hierarchy in which Western women generally command greater influence than non-Western women.

The merger between capitalism and Western culture exemplifies what Mohanty identifies as a “problematic ideolog[y]” in U.S. feminism. She critiques “the naturalization of capitalist values” in U.S. American culture, an increasing class division between academic and activist feminisms, and the marginalization of identity politics which acknowledge ethnic, racial, national and other identities as important foundations for the production of knowledge. Mohanty charges that the direction of Western feminism is toward a neoliberal model of freedom through consumerism that carries “the unstated assumption that U.S. corporate culture is the norm and ideal that feminists around the world strive for” (*Borders* 6). This assumption is evident in *Eat, Pray, Love* and other travel memoirs that encourage U.S. women to journey abroad as a means of self-empowerment. Such representations support a narrative of colonialist feminism, whereby Western women gain liberation through the reinforcement of cultural imperialism. As Caren Kaplan argues in *Late Imperial Culture* (1995):

[I]f colonial expansion brought unprecedented economic gain to the metropolitan centers of the West, a corresponding personal and political gain was won for Western women through the liberating activities and challenges of travel. It is worth exploring the costs and benefits of these gains. Celebratory treatment of Western women’s travels erases or suppresses resistance to colonial discourse. (33)

While the quantum increase in women’s freedom of movement looks like a positive development, so long as it privileges only certain groups who perpetuate their dominance by its practice, it remains problematic. Mohanty calls for a “radical decolonization” of feminism, which requires a critique of global capitalism and U.S./Eurocentrism. When Western feminists write about Third World women, “we

see how Western feminists alone become the true ‘subjects’ of this counterhistory. Third World women, in contrast, never rise above the debilitating generality of their ‘object’ status” (Mohanty 39). Both Narayan and Mohanty insist that any framework for transnational feminism must restore the history and politics of imperialism in order to make visible its “underlying exploitative social relations” (Narayan 78, Mohanty 124). Elizabeth Gilbert’s feminism in *EPL* is of the “neoliberal, consumerist (protocapitalist)” variety that Mohanty contends is premised on the equation of capitalism with freedom and the view of Third World women as monolithic. These reductive binaries, Mohanty argues, “result in the colonization of the specifics of daily existence and the complexities of political interests that women of different social classes and cultures represent and mobilize” (Mohanty 30). In the context of *EPL*, there are two kinds of women: liberated Western women who “have”—money, autonomy, freedom of movement—and repressed Third World women who don’t. A young Indian woman named Tulsi, as represented by Gilbert, is illustrative of the monolithic Third World woman—culturally oppressed, and therefore powerless to resist the “tradition” of arranged marriage that dooms her to an unfulfilled life. In contrast to Gilbert’s analysis of Tulsi’s circumstances, which Gilbert situates in the backwardness of Indian culture, Narayan frames her own cousin’s unhappy arranged marriage in terms of the geopolitical realities that structure the cultural practice, including “international distances, lack of income, dependent immigration status, and isolation in a foreign land” (Narayan 11).

Postfeminism

While Western feminism has been fairly criticized for taking its own priorities as representative of all women's concerns, the "new" feminisms, or what I refer to collectively as "postfeminism," are less focused on common goals and problems than on the individual's right to further her own interests. The "'free-market' feminism" that Mohanty identifies as "grounded in the capitalist values of profit, competition, and accumulation" (*Borders* 6), I would argue is not feminist at all, precisely because it rejects the need for collective political action in order to support and defend shared interests among women. Rather than taking criticism by postcolonial, transnational, women-of-color, lesbian, queer, and other feminists as corrective and refocusing on theory and activism that engages, collaborates, and empowers other feminist voices, postfeminism has turned inward, taking an every-woman-for-herself approach modeled on neoliberalism.

Postfeminism, as I apply the term in this thesis, includes the many alternate designations for post-second wave feminism, sometimes known as 3rd wave feminism, power feminism, and others. All are distinguished as a move away from, or an all-out rejection of, the feminist political movement that began in the 1960s. These new feminisms accept the existing level of women's empowerment—hard-won through political struggle in prior generations—as a done deal, and there is little evidence of a political imperative to defend the rights currently enjoyed by women or to press for further gains. Stephanie Harzewski notes that "postfeminism retains second-wave feminism's desire for empowerment while distancing itself from the second wave's

rally for collective and public political action” (Harzewski 149). Michelle Jensen points to the “overwhelmingly personal tone of the contemporary feminism” and its lack of theorizing and political engagement (Jensen, “Riding the Third Wave”). Third wave feminist icons Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards recognize this failing in the movement, acknowledging in *Manifesta* that “[h]aving no sense of how we got here condemns women to reinvent the wheel and often blocks us from creating a political strategy” (Baumgardner and Richards 152). As I will argue, this retreat from political engagement has important consequences in the ways U.S. women are able to engage others abroad and confront issues of global concern.

Rosalind Gill links the individualist ideologies in postfeminism to neoliberalism (“Culture and Subjectivity in Neoliberal and Postfeminist Times”) and points to the ways neoliberalism entrenches socially constructed norms such that those ideals “are internalized and made our own” (Gill 436). The ideals of neoliberalism are individualist and, although grounded in free-market economics, have been widely adopted as a philosophy guiding personal ethics and social behavior. As explained by political philosopher Paul Treanor, neoliberal ideology forces individuals to “act in conformity with market forces,” and to behave like entrepreneurs:

[T]he general neoliberal vision is that every human being is **an entrepreneur managing their own life, and should act as such** [sic] . . . Individuals who choose their friends, hobbies, sports, and partners, to maximise their status with future employers, are ethically neoliberal. This attitude—not unusual among ambitious students—is unknown in any pre-existing moral philosophy, and is absent from early liberalism. Such social actions are not necessarily monetarised, but they represent an extension of the market principle into non-

economic area of life—again typical for neoliberalism.
 (“Neoliberalism: Origins, Theory, Definition”)

Personal marketability, a necessity for effective self-promotion, drives women both to compete and to conform to standards of femininity that command market value: in some cases, as Treanor observes, undergoing plastic surgery to enhance “employability.” The neoliberal philosophy of entrepreneurial self-management interprets such conformity as freely chosen, thereby depoliticizing processes of self-representation. As Gill argues, the neoliberal postfeminist insistence upon sexual “subjectivity”—claiming authority and choice in being sexually objectified—renders its constructions of gender relations “profoundly contradictory. On the one hand, young women are hailed through a discourse of ‘can-do’ girl power, yet on the other their bodies are powerfully re-inscribed as sexual objects” (442). As entrepreneurs, young women own their (hetero)sexual agency, and their sexual desirability serves as capital that they may use to advance their personal interests. A neoliberal postfeminist perspective equates this sexual subjectivity with empowerment, but it ignores the deeply problematic implications of substituting market values for human values.

Reproducing Neoliberalism

Henry Giroux and Susan Searls Giroux maintain that “the educational force of the culture actually works pedagogically to reproduce neoliberal ideology, values, identifications and consent” (“Beyond Bailouts: On the Politics of Education After Neoliberalism”). The strong public validation of those who exemplify entrepreneurial ideals—the “self-made” millionaire, the “job creator,” the glass ceiling smasher—

reinforces the high market value placed on certain types of people (who tend to be predominantly white, Western, and wealthy) and the devaluation of others. Giroux and Searls Giroux point in particular to:

refugees, jobless youth, the poor, immigrants, black and Latino communities—who came to exemplify all that was allegedly wrong with social safety nets that produced pathological forms of dependency . . . These, moreover, are populations increasingly rendered disposable not only because they exist outside any productive notion of what it means to be a citizen-consumer, but because of a decades-long racist campaign that invented cultural deficits and deficiencies raising the specter of contagion and threat. (“Beyond Bailouts”)

The neoliberal mythology of “self-made” entrepreneurs provides a rationale for the hegemony of a system which disproportionately rewards the already-privileged and for the disenfranchisement of underprivileged minorities. The interdependence of all people in a society is negated and the need for civic discourse dismissed because the free market is deemed inherently just, democratic—or at least meritocratic—and capable of arbitrating social disputes. Throughout their college experience, U.S. students receive messages that support this system of values and that weight individual profit—professional success, self-discovery, etc.—above social responsibility. Students internalize these messages and ultimately reproduce them. As I will argue in the following chapters, the convergence and normalization of neoliberal ideologies across various institutions—including higher education and broadcast, social, and other media—undermines civic engagement and efforts to promote global social justice.

CHAPTER 3: DISCOVERING THE SELF SOMEWHERE ELSE:
THE CULT OF COMMODIFICATION IN WOMEN'S TRAVEL LITERATURE

What They're Reading on College Campuses

Eat, Pray, Love spent nearly 4 years on the *New York Times* Bestseller list, was famously touted by Oprah Winfrey, is published in at least 30 languages, and has sold more than 10 million copies to date. In 2008, *Time* magazine listed Elizabeth Gilbert among “the world's most influential people.” The book was also a fixture in the *Chronicle of Higher Education's* “What They're Reading on College Campuses,” a list of the top ten books sold in university bookstores. In June 2011, the *Chronicle* reported that it would stop running the list based on aggregate sales because it had been increasingly dominated by titles “geared for adolescents.” (Troop, “What They're Reading”). Announcing the end of a more than 4 decade run, compiler Don Troop offered a “piece of advice to would-be authors: If you want your books to appeal to the college crowd, aim low.” Ron Charles of *The Washington Post* lamented that university students had turned from the politically charged and subversive books topping the list 40 years ago—including Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* and Abbie Hoffman's *Steal this Book*—to less intellectually stimulating fare. “Here we have a generation of young adults away from home for the first time, free to enjoy the most experimental period of their lives, yet they're choosing books like 13-year-old girls” (Charles, “On Campus, Vampires are Besting the Beats”). For her part, Gilbert bristles at accusations that her book is too “girly.”

Back in my twenties, people used to say that I wrote like a man, which I took as a compliment. And now, I'm often referred to as a chick lit writer, which I'm not even completely certain I know what that means

except that I'm pretty certain it is never intended as a compliment.
(Gilbert, "Elizabeth Gilbert Dissects the 'Chick Lit' Label")

While her recent work may be deemed nonacademic, Gilbert has made a big impact on college campuses. *EPL* is the book that launched a thousand branded products, package tours, and study abroad applications, and the mixed-genre comic-spiritual-autobiographical-travel tale is a formula that has proven to be highly lucrative and influential.

There has been a publishing boom for U.S. and Western women's travel memoirs since the early 2000s, yet among the positive, gushing praise for many of the books, most often deeming them "inspirational," there are also reviews for almost all which include complaints of navel-gazing, self-absorption, narcissism, and condescension. While one could rightly expect a memoir to be concerned predominantly with the self, the polarizing aspects of women's travel memoir stem from the hybridity of the genre. The most basic expectation of a traditional travel book is that it will inform the reader about another place, culture, people, or geopolitics. In the travel memoir, these presumable magnets of readers' curiosity often are reduced to a backdrop for the story a writer wants to tell about herself. In such narratives, travel becomes, as Kate Cantrell argues, "a metaphor for a spiritual journey . . . [T]he travel writing is less preoccupied with what is seen than with who is doing the seeing" (Cantrell, "Eat, Pray, Loathe"). These books set up and subsequently defy many readers' expectations by presenting "the seen" as an integral component of the story—typically an exotic destination prominently featured in the book's title and cover art—which is then marginalized in the text. But millions of readers, many of them college

students, are not only enjoying, but being strongly influenced to travel by, this genre of literature. So, where is the harm?

A Literature of Privilege

The books are appealing to college-aged women for whom “feminism” represents the freedom to defy expectations and to do so without explanation or apology. White, affluent women constitute a majority of participants in college study abroad programs, and the authors and target audiences of U.S. American women’s travel memoirs represent the same demographic. The stories are grounded in liberal feminism; solo travel, once dominated by men, is a demonstration of equality and independence for women, as is the ability to write about the experience and have it published. But most of the authors, like most college-aged women today, do not identify themselves as feminist at all (Alfano, “Poll: Women’s Movement”). In a critique of *EPL* and similar books, *Bitch* magazine’s “Eat, Pray, Spend: Priv-lit and the New, Enlightened American Dream” argues that such narratives in fact promote a kind of “antifeminism,” that “moves women away from political, economic, and emotional agency by promoting materialism and dependency masked as empowerment” (Sanders and Barnes-Brown). The “priv-lit” coinage designates a burgeoning literary subgenre that taps a consumer market for the spiritual and psychological tools needed to follow Oprah Winfrey’s advice to “live your best life.” That the prescribed tools are often only available to those who can afford to buy-in—for example, with an extended trip abroad—makes the flaunted self-actualization an exclusive commodity for those with privilege.

Bitch challenges the positioning of *EPL* as “an Everywoman’s guide to whole, empowered living” and points to “the genre’s destructive cacophony of insecurity, spending, and false wellness.” Adhering to the narratives of neoliberal postfeminism, Gilbert and other travel memoirists make the case for obligatory consumerism in the name of self-improvement, pushing the idea that women should focus on attaining the life they deserve rather than maintaining a lifestyle they can afford. Priv-lit harnesses the “chick-lit” genre—characterized by its focus on young women who demonstrate their independence through shopping and sex appeal—to the self-help industry, which promises to reveal the secrets of self-fulfillment. *EPL* implicitly sells itself as a how-to manual on achieving what Gilbert calls her “truth”: “worldly enjoyment and divine transcendence—the dual glories of a human life” (Gilbert 29).

The chick lit genre took off in the late 1990s as neoliberal postfeminism shaped the attitudes of educated U.S. women. In *Chick Lit and Postfeminism* (2011), Stephanie Harzewski observes that the genre “is best exemplified by HBO’s *Sex and the City* series and Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, both originally newspaper columns” (3). Many contemporary women travel writers also emerged from careers in journalism, including not only Elizabeth Gilbert, but also Alice Steinbach, Rita Golden Gelman, Laura Fraser, Sarah Macdonald, and Elisabeth Eaves. The convergence of postfeminist discourse across multiple media helped to create a popular market for chick lit. As Harzewski notes, the genre’s “mélange of narrative traditions carries over to its stance on feminism, as it adopts an à la carte tendency that selectively appropriates aspects of feminism into a primarily consumerist model” (10).

Chick lit predominantly takes the form of fictionalized autobiography, wherein the protagonists often physically resemble the author and work in journalism and media professions, and this has strengthened the postfeminist imperative for entrepreneurialism among writers. Competition for market share means that “not only do today’s authors have to be salespeople, but they also have to ‘be sexy’” (Harzewski 163). Priv-lit’s shift to nonfiction-memoir reinforces the glamour imperative and transfers it to the many readers who identify with the author and take her performance of commodified femininity as a model for successful living.

The Depoliticizing of Contemporary Women’s Travel

In an essay on “The Politics of Travel Writing in 2006,” Bernard Schweizer observes that among 93 travel essays collected in 3 anthologies of mostly U.S. travel writers, those authored by men were “three times as likely to address political issues” as those written by women (Schweizer 28). He finds in the majority of women’s travel writing “an approach to traveling that neglects the opportunity to instruct readers about vital political and historical issues” and instead “instrumentalizes foreign places for narcissistic purposes” (27-28). It is not clear precisely when this trend became normative. In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Mary Louise Pratt notes that the discourse of women travelers of the 19th century “melds politics and the personal,” and “allegorize[s] the personal quest in highly political terms” (168). The history of Western women’s travel writing dates at least from *The Book of Margery Kempe* (c. 1450), and includes the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu from Turkey (1763), Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Letters Written in*

Sweden, Norway, and Denmark (1796), the first “modern” travel guide to the Western Continent by Mariana Starke (1820), Frances Trollope’s *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), the journalism of round-the-world record-breaker Nellie Bly (1889), *Baghdad Sketches* (1932) and numerous others by Freya Stark, and Rebecca West’s *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941). The last of these is described by Schweizer as a “hybrid vehicle of keen political and social analysis, mixed in with compelling narratives of travel, adventure, and discovery” (17). Sixty-five years later, however, the majority of women’s travel writing “avoided any political considerations whatsoever” (Schweizer 19).

While the apoliticism of U.S. women travelers seems to have been already entrenched as of 2006, when *EPL* was published, Schweizer notes a pervasive focus on “personal healing, self-discovery, and spiritual rebirth” in Gilbert’s contemporaries, and remarks that “[o]ne could call it Elizabeth-Gilbert-style of travel writing” (27). Among these depoliticized essays—all included in *The Best Travel Writing 2006* and *The Best Women’s Travel Writing 2006*—he cites Pamela Logan’s “To Lhasa” and Alison Wright’s “Postcard from the Edge,” both set in Tibet; Amy Wilson’s “What They Taught Me” about her work with AIDS education in Malawi; Laura Resau’s “Bees Born of Tears,” recounting her spiritual cleansing, and Ruth Kear’s recovery from a breakup in “Oaxaca Care,” both taking place in Mexico; D’lynne Plummer’s “Rudolph for Newlyweds” in Mongolia; Trici Venola’s “A Fine Kettle of Fish,” about a trip to Turkey to escape her “pleasant successful life;” and Melinda Misuraca’s “Blinded By Science,” detailing how she went to Thailand to “wash my sluttiness off

into the sea” (all qtd. in Schweizer 27). The travel memoirs reviewed in my investigation are representative of the many published in recent years that share elements of a depoliticized, dehistoricized literature of Western privilege. *Eat, Pray, Love* is of course the most salient example and an archetype for the contemporary genre of women’s travel memoir, so it seems useful to begin with a synopsis that will clarify my allusions to the book throughout this chapter.

The Tao of Elizabeth Gilbert

Gilbert’s memoir is numerologically constructed in imitation of a *japa mala*, a string of Hindu prayer beads used to count recitations of a mantra, with 108 “tales” to represent the 108 beads. This is characteristic of Gilbert’s tendency to assimilate and appropriate Eastern spirituality for her own—and her Western readers’—consumption. The entire book is a study in the modern U.S. consumerist lifestyle: a white woman who, in her mid-thirties, has already achieved most of what is still colloquially referred to as “the American Dream”—professional success, a handsome husband, a new house, and a high standard of living in New York City—and is utterly dissatisfied with what she has. Gilbert’s spirituality is grounded in a neoliberal ideology of self-realization through acts of consumerism. She surrounds herself with the accoutrements of spirituality: prayer beads, yoga mat, a framed photo of her guru—but she provides little indication that the spiritual practices and beliefs she collects are more than identity-building accessories.

After successfully circulating a petition to God (and garnering the “spiritual” signatures of everyone from Eleanor Roosevelt to the Dalai Lama) to make her

husband sign the divorce papers, Gilbert begins her journey to rediscover herself on a yearlong trip to Italy, India, and Indonesia. She claims, “my one mighty travel talent is that I can make friends with *anybody*. I can make friends with the dead” (41). The friends she makes, much like Eleanor Roosevelt, seem primarily to serve her immediate needs and they tend to drop from the story when Gilbert is ready to move along. In Italy, she receives tutoring in Italian from a young man named Giovanni, whom she sexually objectifies but resolves to admire but not touch because, as she reasons, “I have finally arrived at that age where a woman starts to question whether the wisest way to get over the loss of one beautiful brown-eyed young man is indeed to promptly invite another one into her bed” (7).

In India, Gilbert arrives and departs in the middle of the night, taking a taxi directly to and from her guru’s ashram in a remote village. Isolated from the world outside, she befriends other yoga disciples staying at the retreat, including Tulsi, a young Indian woman who is engaged to a man of her parents’ choosing. The person she most confides in is Richard From Texas, an older man who is interesting to Gilbert for his interest in her. Practically everything she reveals about Richard is self-referential, as though he is a character in her own solipsistic universe:

Richard from Texas has some cute habits. Whenever he passes me in the Ashram and notices by my distracted face that my thoughts are a million miles away, he says, “How’s David doing?”

“Mind your own business,” I always say. “You don’t know what I’m thinking about, mister.”

Of course, he’s always right. (158)

And in Bali, she befriends Wayan, a local healer woman for whom Gilbert ultimately raises money to buy a house—on the unspoken condition that Wayan accept a power

dynamic that gives the Western woman authority over her financial decisions. Gilbert also meets Felipe, the wealthy “handsome older Brazilian man” who becomes her lover and provides the romantic happy ending for her story. But, true to postfeminist neoliberal form, Gilbert claims autonomous ownership of her “ludicrously fairy-tale” conclusion: “I was not rescued by a prince; I was the administrator of my own rescue” (329). Perhaps for readers who share the privileged perspective of white postfeminist selfhood this claim does not beg the question of why Gilbert needed rescue in the first place.

The White, Western Woman as Traveling Subject

In many ways, Alice Steinbach’s *Without Reservations: The Travels of an Independent Woman* (2000) could be considered the Ur-*Eat, Pray, Love*. It follows a strikingly similar trajectory, albeit without the spirituality angle and lacking a gimmicky numerological construction. Steinbach, like Gilbert, is a successful journalist, divorced and restless, who decides to take a year off—supported by her publisher—and travel abroad. Like Gilbert, along the way she befriends a younger woman about to be married, begins a love affair with a wealthy international businessman, and even finds a guru of sorts when a friend gives her a book by Freya Stark. Stark, a prolific travel writer of the 1930s-50s, becomes an inspiration and ethereal companion to Steinbach, who regularly invokes her when in need of an apt aphorism or validation of her personal worldview. Every bit as introspective and preoccupied with self-discovery as Gilbert, Steinbach employs her own literary *japa mala* gimmick. Each chapter begins with a transcription of one of the postcards that

she sends to herself from overseas, all addressed, “Dear Alice,” and signed, “Love, Alice.”

The major difference between Steinbach and Gilbert is in their ages as writer-protagonists, which partly explains the surge in the genre’s popularity with the arrival of *EPL*. Steinbach and others (Gelman 2001, Watkins 2002) are in their fifties at the time of the events in their narratives—suddenly free to travel independently because they have divorced and their children are grown. The childless Gilbert, still in her sexual prime at thirty-four, speaks more directly to a *Sex and the City* audience and offers a more promising investment for her publisher and Columbia Pictures toward reaching the coveted 18-34 marketing demographic. Gilbert, as a protagonist, is reminiscent of Frances Mayes in the lucrative 2003 film adaptation of *Under the Tuscan Sun*. Mayes, portrayed by Diane Lane, is a thirty-something who rebounds from a divorce by traveling to Italy and starting a love affair with a younger Italian man. Based on Mayes’ memoir of the same name, the movie features a fictionalized version of the heroine, who is significantly altered to appeal to a younger popular audience. In her memoir, Mayes is 50 years old and moves to Italy with her husband.

Post-*EPL*, women’s travel memoirs have enjoyed a spike in interest, reviving the sales of many published earlier, including Mary Morris’ *Nothing to Declare: Memoirs of a Woman Traveling Alone* (1988), Frances Mayes’ *Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy* (1996), Laura Fraser’s *An Italian Affair* (2001), and Sarah Macdonald’s *Holy Cow: An Indian Adventure* (2003). The proliferation of new books, each trying to capture some of Gilbert’s overflow audience, includes Eve Brown-

Waite's *First Comes Love, Then Comes Malaria: How a Peace Corps Poster Boy Won My Heart and a Third-World Adventure Changed My Life* (2009), Laura Fraser's *All Over the Map* (2010), *The Lost Girls: Three Friends, Four Continents, One Unconventional Detour Around the World* by Jennifer Baggett, Holly C. Corbett and Amanda Pressner (2010), Elisabeth Eaves' *Wanderlust: A Love Affair With Five Continents* (2011), and Erin Reese's *The Adventures of Bindi Girl: Diving Deep Into the Heart of India* (2012). Many of the new wave of travel memoirs involve younger women as protagonists and story elements that closely parallel those in *EPL*. Common motifs include: a divorce or breakup with a male partner as the catalyst for travel; a privileged, white, heterosexual female subject; motivations for travel such as getting away from it all, discovering the self, hedonism and epicureanism, and acquiring new experiences; sexual encounters with non-U.S. men; and finding a new (male) romantic partner.

The overriding theme in these memoirs is of a postfeminist neoliberal value system in which the white, (hetero)sexualized female is idealized and privileged. Too often, the host culture and people are marginalized, disparaged, or made to seem ridiculous to add humor to the narrative, particularly when the story is set in the non-Western or "third" world. Ironically, in situations where the protagonist is visiting a country and has limited or no knowledge of its primary languages, the local people who do speak English are regularly lampooned for their accents, pronunciation, or eccentric forms of expression. Ketut, the Balinese medicine man in *EPL*, is described as bearing "resemblance in every way to the Star Wars character Yoda" and speaking

“a scattered and thoroughly entertaining kind of English” (26). In *Holy Cow*, a book full of condescending remarks about Indian people, one of the kinder descriptions is reserved for the author’s yoga teacher, “a pouting, flamboyant, slim hunk in a polyester body shirt and tight pants that show off a great little behind,” whose voice “is exactly the same as the gay salesman’s in *Are You Being Served?* but with an Indian accent” (Macdonald 46).

Other ethnocentric pronouncements frequently rehearsed involve the traveler’s perception of dark-skinned people as dirty. Macdonald, exaggerating the formality of the Hindu phrases she has been taught, exclaims, “I’ve been greeting filthy naked street urchins with ‘Excuse me, oh soul one, but I’m dreadfully sorry, I don’t appear to have any change, my most humble of apologies” (Macdonald 44). Eve Brown-Waite, in *First Comes Love, Then Comes Malaria*, complains incessantly about what she labels “that African smell” to describe an odor she attributes to lax bathing practices in Uganda but applies to the entire continent:

Some days it seemed to me that the whole damned country was funky. I know I should be politically correct here and say that there was a world of disparity between what was comfortable for my American nose and what was normal for Ugandans But to put it plainly, I was surrounded by people who smelled like sweat and old sex. (Brown-Waite 200)

During the dry season, as water becomes scarce and she is forced to wash her clothes less frequently, she quips that she finds herself “smelling more and more . . . well, African” (201). Apparently convinced that hygiene is a national pastime in the U.S., upon her return Brown-Waite observes that “[e]ven though New York City was hot and steamy, no one seemed to smell” (230).

Typically ignoring or even celebrating their own objectifying behavior (as in Michele Peterson's "Swooning for Swami"), these privileged memoirists are quick to bristle at being objectified. A common assumption is that they, being wealthy, white, Western, and usually U.S. American, can expect the intrusive and unwanted attention of those they encounter abroad. Beggars, hagglers, pickpockets, oglers and gropers seem to target them especially. In *Wanderlust*, Elisabeth Eaves contends that:

Academics have spent too much time trying to explain objectification, considering that there's an easy way to make white, Western men understand: You just have to go out in public somewhere poor. You become a thing. Your conscious and unique self becomes irrelevant, as a thousand eyes try to figure out how best to tap your wealth. (Eaves 44).

The difference between positive and negative objectification is most often delineated by economics. In a "wealthy" country, sexual propositions from men are considered flattering and easily laughed off if unwanted: "What a beautiful body, so nice from so much swimming, so strong, so curvy. *Bella, bella*. Yeah, yeah. He is, of course, saying all the things a Blonde American Divorcée is dying to hear, and in soft Italian" (Fraser, *An Italian Affair* 29). In a "poor" country, however, the attention of men is usually deemed vulgar or threatening: "The assault on my sense of self felt violent, even when no physical contact was involved . . . It never went away, not as long as I traveled in places that were Arab or Muslim or poor or oppressed. It's the way of half the world" (Eaves 43).

In the case of sexual objectification, the white female subject is at complete liberty to exercise it upon male objects of attention. Of her Indian yoga master, one author writes, "His butt was impressive even upside down" (Peterson 161). Gilbert

describes herself as being “overcome with lust” in Italy. Italian men, we are told, are “like show poodles. Sometimes they look so good I want to applaud” (Gilbert 66-67). The eponymous young women in *The Lost Girls* (2010) dream of spending time in South America so that “we’d have lean and chiseled bodies from 24/7 hiking” and “hot Brazilian men would magically appear and fall in love with us” (Baggett 14). Yet even when the memoirist openly reveals her interest in “hooking up” with “exotic men,” she is shocked and offended to learn that U.S. women abroad have a reputation for being sexually available. One of the “lost girls” recounts this encounter with a man she meets at a club in Peru:

“But you’re an *American*,” he sputtered, as if that should explain everything. “I thought you are, how do you say—touch-and-go?”

“What? What does that even mean?” I spun around.

“You know—you touch,” he said, making an explicitly sexual gesture with his hands. “And then you go. Right?” (Baggett 120)

It is the narrator’s prerogative to frame her relationships with others in a way that maintains her sexual subjectivity, privileging her desirability over the desires of the “other.”

The Narcissism Problem

Among my aims in this investigation is to consider ways to counteract the problems inherent to priv-lit in order to equip students who study abroad to resist replicating ethnocentric narratives. Central among the potential positive outcomes, I believe, are the following: to move from the personal to the political in a responsible manner; to induce both social and self-criticism in the process; and to optimize one’s agency as a writer and a traveler, to become both the author and the insightful reader

of one's life. But memoir as a genre has a tendency toward narcissism that becomes more problematic in the context of travel abroad and representation of "other." For college students trying to become global citizens, an uncritical approach to such narratives may prove counterproductive.

Exhibitionism is de rigeur in the social networking age, and the confessional mode of contemporary memoir is an extension of the 21st century trend of tell-all that is a common discourse of talk shows, reality television, blogging, and tweeting. In a review of Ben Yagoda's *Memoir: A History* (2010), Daniel Mendelsohn notes that "[t]his experience of being constantly exposed to other people's life stories is matched only by the inexhaustible eagerness of people to tell their life stories." Hearing the chronicles of friends and strangers alike is all but unavoidable thanks to cell phones and the internet, the latter having spawned what Mendelsohn calls "The greatest outpouring of personal narratives in the history of the planet." Likewise, Yagoda finds in contemporary culture "more narcissism overall, less concern for privacy, a strong interest in victimhood, and a therapeutic culture." It is in the context of these cultural trends and the accessibility of digital self-publishing that a flood of popular memoirs has crested. Everyone, it seems, has a life story worth the world's attention. Oprah Winfrey has been a salient force in the popularization of public confessional and, with her book recommendations, the mainstreaming of personal memoirs. Guests have taken to substituting Oprah's sofa for a therapist's couch. While this makes for high ratings on television, it can also turn narcissism, materialism, and ethnocentrism into a performance targeted for audience stimulation that focuses on the self and downplays

real social and self-criticism. Somehow, educators and study abroad practitioners must resist the institutionalization of these narcissistic trends in order to generate a politically responsible praxis for students who go abroad.

In *The Narcissism Epidemic* (2009), psychologists Jean Twenge and W. Keith Campbell report:

In data from 37,000 college students, narcissistic personality traits rose just as fast as obesity from the 1980s to the present, with the shift especially pronounced for women. The rise in narcissism is accelerating, with scores rising faster in the 2000s than in previous decades. By 2006, 1 out of 4 college students agreed with the majority of items on a standard measure of narcissistic traits. (2)

Among the problems inherent to memoirs that double as travel literature is that they may reinforce already strong narcissistic tendencies in college-aged students. The nearly ubiquitous trend of self-discovery in contemporary memoirs is particularly troubling in that it stands in for self-reflection. It is an ethos that insists upon the primary importance of recognizing and celebrating the self and dismisses the need to critically examine or question one's motivations and assumptions. In a critique of one narcissistic memoir, Lee Siegel corrects the author's claim that:

“A memoir, at its heart, is written in order to figure out who you are.”
In fact, a memoir written so that the memoirist can figure himself out is not meant to be read by anyone besides the author, with the exception of people who either love him or have a professional obligation to help him. (Siegel, “The Unexamined Life”)

Siegel likens the unreflective memoirist to “the literary equivalent of ... a color-blind painter.” What is missing is the context and framing that would turn the self-portrait into a bigger picture: the ability to connect personal experiences to the political and

theoretical in ways that demonstrate a critical understanding of social institutions and global systems of privilege and oppression.

Unfortunately, the postfeminist neoliberal separation of the personal and the political tends to result in memoirs that trade in egocentrism over activism. Another narrative phenomenon reproduced in contemporary popular culture is the “redemption narrative.” Redemption stories grew fashionable along with twelve-step programs: “Those people in AA in the late 40s and early 50s can be said to have reinvented American narrative style . . . All the terrible, terrible things that had ever happened to them just made for a great pitch” (See, qtd. in Yagoda 238). In the redemptive arc, readers expect an uplifting trajectory and authors regularly provide it, satisfying audiences with tales of trauma that build to a cathartic release and redefinition. Indulgence and self-destructive behavior is turned around and the confessor now speaks from position of success over the demons s/he has battled. U.S. Americans, as consumers, devour such stories of triumph over adversity that typically end on a self-congratulatory, feel-good note. Essayist Barrie Jean Borich observes, “The too simple redemption narrative might sell well, but is work that entertains rather than elucidates, and so fails to contribute to a lasting literature that breaks open the truths of women’s lives” (Borich, “Where We Bump and Grind It”). The redemption story, even when genuine, does not necessarily conduce to activism: These stories typically remain triumphs of *the individual* over hardship, with little acknowledgement that personal success does not resolve social problems or precipitate an end to social strife. As

global citizens, however, we must strive to understand how our own agency might redound to a collective benefit.

Colonialist Feminism and the Consumption of Cultures

“It’s not like I consciously went shopping for a Guru,” Gilbert writes, explaining how she came to be a follower of the “radiantly beautiful Indian woman” who became her Guru. However unconsciously, her rhetoric suggests that the relationship is deliberate and transactional. Gilbert first sees a photograph of the Indian woman on the bedroom dresser of a man with whom she is sexually infatuated. She asks him who the woman is and, being told that it is a portrait of the man’s “spiritual teacher,” Gilbert claims that her “heart stood up, brushed itself off, took a deep breath and announced: “I want a spiritual teacher.”⁶ She dreams of being able to purchase the Indian woman’s services, if not the woman herself:

My God, but I wanted a spiritual teacher. I immediately began constructing a fantasy of what it would be like to have one. I imagined that this radiantly beautiful Indian woman would come to my apartment a few evenings a week and we would sit and drink tea and talk about divinity, and she would give me reading assignments and explain the significance of the strange sensations I was feeling during meditation . . . (Gilbert 25)

Gilbert’s understanding of this scene as a constructed fantasy is limited to her subsequent realization that the Guru enjoys international renown and her followers number in the “tens of thousands.” The Indian woman is a commodity that Gilbert can’t (yet) afford. She seems deaf to the implicit exoticism and the patronizing racial

⁶ Now in her early 40s, Gilbert is likely familiar with the 1971 film *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*, in which a spoiled, wealthy American girl demands that her father purchase her an exotic slave laborer (“I want an Oompa Loompa!”). If Gilbert hears the echo in her own statement, she does not discern its ironic implications.

implications of her imagined role for this woman. Despite the other woman's ostensible position as the possessor of superior knowledge, Gilbert envisions the guru visiting her apartment three times a week as though she were providing spiritual cleaning services.

Globalization and the individualist ideology of corporate culture support the sales pitch that is thinly cloaked in Gilbert's book: personal enlightenment is a product that can be purchased, and that product is likely to be manufactured in the Third World. The Guru, then, can be viewed as analogous to a factory worker—a Third World laborer in the production of goods to be consumed by affluent Westerners. Illustrating Mohanty's point about the problematic nature of normalized capitalist ideology, Gilbert and her devotees do not travel to the Third World to learn about places or people. They travel to try a country on as an accessory, to see themselves in the context of an exotic location. If it fits well enough, they might buy a piece of it to take home. Gilbert writes, with a surprising lack of irony:

It wasn't so much that I wanted to thoroughly explore the countries themselves; this has been done. It was more that I wanted to thoroughly explore one aspect of myself set against the backdrop of each country, in a place that has traditionally done that one thing very well. (Gilbert 30-31)

Gilbert views herself as a multifaceted individual, but she essentializes countries outside the U.S. as places that are good at "one thing." This construction exemplifies a Western feminist paradigm that equates self-indulgence with self-realization and equates both of these with liberation.

The construct maintains ethnocentric assumptions that Mohanty associates with colonialist feminism. Gilbert is unquestionably the subject of her own story. *EPL* is centered upon her actions—eating, praying, loving—and her agency. The women she encounters in India and Bali are peripheral figures, not agents in their own life stories. Tulsi, a young Indian woman—“girl” to Gilbert—is described as “just about the cutest little bookworm of an Indian girl you ever saw” (Gilbert 179). Gilbert claims to have “made good friends with” Tulsi, who occupies just over two of the 300-plus pages in the book. The young woman describes herself as headstrong and “needing to be told a good reason to do something before [she] will do it.” She and Gilbert talk mostly about the likelihood that Tulsi will be forced into an arranged marriage. Gilbert reports that Tulsi resents the tradition but that it is important to her family. Tulsi says she wants to “roam” like Gilbert, and she admires Gilbert for having the courage to end her marriage. As for her own life, Tulsi says (according to Gilbert), “Why was I born an Indian girl? It’s outrageous! Why did I come into this family? . . . I want to live in Hawaii!!!” (Gilbert 181-182). In *EPL*’s narrative of individualist white selfhood, it seems natural that the young Indian woman wants to be American, i.e. “liberated,” like Gilbert.

Arranged marriage is an issue that confronts Tulsi, not Gilbert, and yet Gilbert casually considers her own prospects within this exotic patriarchal institution. She concludes that based upon most criteria she would be unmarriageable in India: “I’m definitely too old and I’m way too educated.” But she recognizes one advantageous attribute: “At least my skin is fair. I have only this in my favor” (Gilbert 180). This is

less an acknowledgment of white privilege on Gilbert's part than a shifting of the blame for racist attitudes from the Western individual to the backwardness of Third World cultures which value light skin above dark. Her understanding of Indian culture as the source of Tulsi's problems is what Uma Narayan describes as a "colonialist stance" (59). From Gilbert's perspective, poor Tulsi desires to imitate her, to be free to roam the world and to marry or not marry as she sees fit, but she is trapped by her repressive culture. As Narayan demonstrates, this interpretation effaces the influence of colonialism on Third World "traditions." Gilbert expunges the geopolitical history behind the privileging of female whiteness in the Indian marriage market. Inscribing race onto Third World bodies is an agenda of global capitalism that serves to reinforce hegemonic structures of mobility that keep some women exploitable for cheap labor and grant others the freedom to travel abroad and to enjoy the products of cheap labor at home.⁷

Tulsi, hereafter referred to by Gilbert as "the Indian teenage tomboy," is mentioned only twice more before Gilbert leaves India, and the young woman's fate is not alluded to again. The last we hear of her is when Gilbert is dealing with an irate ashram guest, an Indian man whom she depicts as being ridiculously concerned over the ominous portent of a broken statue of Ganesh in his room: "I comfort him and listen to his anger, then send my teenage tomboy friend Tulsi over to the guy's room to get rid of the statue while he's at lunch." Gilbert then commends herself for the brilliant (read Western) handling of the situation: dismissing the man's request for a

⁷ Carolyn McSherry (University of New Mexico) made this connection in a paper delivered at the 2010 NWSA conference.

“‘traditionally appropriate’ cleansing ceremony” and sending her friend/servant girl over to make the problem disappear. Clearly expecting the man’s gratitude in return, she sends him a condescending note saying, “I hope [you’re] feeling better now that the broken statue is gone.” She is not disappointed. The man “rewards” her with a huge smile, and she observes, “He’s just afraid” (Gilbert 195). Gilbert’s stated purpose in visiting India is not to get to know any Indian people but to view herself with them as a backdrop. With her backdrop painted as a nation of fearful superstitions, backward traditions, and oppressive culture, the image she constructs for herself is that of a competent, liberated woman who enjoys exoticizing her inward search for truth. Tulsi is not an equal, but merely a foil against which Gilbert’s value as a white Western woman is reinforced and reified.

Gilbert not only fails to politicize Tulsi’s experience, she reinscribes the marginalization of Indian women by representing her as a cute supporting character, the kind of girl the privileged white woman can casually befriend and quickly forget. The only framework offered for understanding Tulsi’s culture is Gilbert’s colonial-capitalist personal comparative: Tulsi’s value as a bride versus hers. Within the context of contemporary travel memoir, there are no political analyses to be made because the main character is unaffected by the geopolitical realities that she interprets as fixed in time and place. Tulsi, because she is part of a fixed culture, can simply disappear from the story, which remains focused on its mobile Western subject.

Edward Said wrote about a “textual attitude” which he described as the “human tendency to fall back on a text when the uncertainties of travel in strange parts

seem to threaten one's equanimity" (93). The authors of guide books and travel narratives like *EPL* set up (often unrealistic) expectations for those who follow them, potentially leading to disappointment and disenchantment with a place, culture, or people.

Many travelers find themselves saying of an experience in a new country that it wasn't what they expected, meaning that it wasn't what a book said it would be. And of course many writers of travel books or guidebooks compose them in order to say that a country *is* like this, or better, that it *is* colorful, expensive, interesting, and so forth. The idea in either case is that people, places, and experiences can always be described by a book, so much so that the book (or text) acquires a greater authority, and use, even than the actuality it describes. (Said 93)

Gilbert's book similarly presents her as an authority on Eastern cultures, and women who follow in her footsteps to Bali will be likely to distrust the Balinese people, thanks to her pronouncements on their behavior in *EPL*. A woman named Wayan, who treated Gilbert's bladder infection (brought on by too much sex) and to whom Gilbert refers as "my best friend in Bali," is also referred to by Gilbert as "this banana-massaging, bladder-infection-treating, dildo-peddling, small-time-pimp." After soliciting her rich New York friends to raise money for Wayan to buy some property and build a house, Gilbert gets miffed at the audacity of the woman for wanting to delay the purchase. Wayan might be an expert in native healing techniques, but when it comes to money Gilbert is the expert and she denies Wayan the agency of making her own economic decisions. Her "experience" in dealing with Wayan validates her authority in labeling the Balinese as people who "bullshit each other a dozen times before breakfast, where bullshitting is a sport, an art, a habit, and a desperate survival

tactic” (Gilbert 322). The story reinscribes the colonialist discourse of ambivalence that Homi Bhabha argues “needs no proof.” The stereotype of “the essential duplicity of the Asiatic” is invoked flawlessly if somewhat uncomfortably by Gilbert. The trope is colonialist knowledge that is “always ‘in place,’ already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated” (Bhabha 312). Gilbert loves Wayan, but she slips easily into positioning herself as the colonizer and Wayan the colonized.

Gilbert has received her share of criticism for narcissism and for making travel and consumerism into a kind of new age religion, but she also has won millions of fans who are loyal to her brand. According to the “gurus” of consumerism, “building a committed ‘brand community’ may be the surest means of expanding consumer loyalty and that product placements will allow brands to tap some of the affective force of the affiliated entertainment properties” (Jenkins 63). Not to be outdone by STA Travel, which offers the \$19,795 “Eat, Pray, Fall in Love with Inspirational India Tour,” or the Home Shopping Network’s exclusive “Eat, Pray, Love Shopping Experience,” Gilbert has tapped the affective force of her own brand to start up a South Asian import business. Capitalizing on the emotional attachment her readers and fans of the movie have invested in her personal story, she employs what Jenkins calls “transmedia storytelling” to cash in yet again on the romance and cultural appropriation of Third-World travel. Because she has “no self-control whatsoever when it comes to beauty,” she claims to have purchased a warehouse-full of what are either genuinely valuable antiquities or were at least sold to her by dubious but “charming” people who swore to their authenticity “(often swearing upon their many

ancient gods).” Her “problem” is that she has purchased so many beautiful things that they no longer fit in her home. With the same circularity employed by corporate branding experts who use one property to promote another and vice-versa, Gilbert appeals to her “beloved customers” to help solve her problem, “by buying lots of beautiful things, thereby giving us money that we will use to go traveling again and buy more beautiful things, which we will then bring back home and sell to you...and so on” (twobuttons.com). Her business story and her bestseller exploit a synergistic narrative: one serves to advertise the other and both appeal to a neoliberal mythology that makes a commodity of travel and culture. Like the brick and mortar storefront it made possible, *Eat, Pray, Love* is in many ways a vessel of global capitalism. It allows the subject Westerner to visit exotic lands and to purchase the labor, knowledge, and spiritual “wisdom” of Third World people as goods to be exported and sold to other Westerners at a tidy profit.

CHAPTER 4: GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AND THE STUDENT-CONSUMER

From Gilgamesh to Elizabeth Gilbert: The Feminization of the Traveling Subject

Surviving works of classical literature—*The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *The Odyssey*, *The Aeneid*, etc.—present a paradigm of the male traveler as a heroic figure, with women—Ariadne, Circe, Dido, and others—typically functioning as stationary and temporary facilitators to the male protagonists’ journeys. According to Eric J. Leed, author of *The Mind of the Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism*, the gendering of travel remained constant from the second millennium BCE through 1991. As if to ground his argument in human biology, Leed presents a chapter called “The Spermatic Traveler,” which argues:

In a vast portion of human history, men have been the travelers; and travel literature is—with a few significant, and often modern, exceptions—a male literature reflecting a masculine point of view. This comes as no surprise to those who have digested the insistence of modern feminists that men have generated and monopolized representational realities in which the voice of women is silent, undercut, or assumed. In the history of patriarchal civilizations—and, as yet, there are no other kinds—humanity has worn the mask of masculinity, and travel has been a performance of this persona. (220)

This observation acknowledges only to reinforce a phallogentric attitude towards travel, implying that little has changed between the time of Gilgamesh and the age of global tourism. Leed’s use of the present perfect rather than past tense suggests that, at the cusp of the 21st century, Western ideas about travel and travelers were still directly informed by patriarchal assumptions of travel as a masculine endeavor. In fact, it is Leed himself who imposes a sense of masculine nostalgia for an age of travel “when there were boundaries between known and unknown, civilized and

uncivilized,” a time he refers to as “the heroic age of European discovery” (285-286). What he deems “real” travel is “individualizing”— “a method of extending the male persona in time and space, as conqueror, crusader, explorer, merchant-adventurer, naturalist, anthropologist” (286).

Leed certainly does not anticipate the 21st century feminized individualism of Elizabeth Gilbert and her contemporaries, but he also fails to acknowledge the significance of women’s travel and women’s travel writing—a genre already well-established by the late 20th century. He prefers to think of women as predominantly sessile figures who provide (mainly in a sexual sense) welcome to the male traveler abroad and a happy homecoming upon his return. The shift from sessility to mobility for women marked the regrettable decline of the “heroic age” of travel for men, according to Leed. “Travel as tourism has become like the activity of a prisoner pacing a cell much crossed and grooved by other equally mobile and ‘free’ captives,” he writes (286). But if the age of tourism has indeed liberated many women (and others for whom the economic divide has lowered enough to grant access) to travel, then this, I suggest, should provoke questions about whose liberties have not yet been attained and whose have been curtailed in the process. Leed and others would have us believe that greater participation by others tends to disenfranchise white European males. I would argue that the accessibility question leads to a more interesting set of inquiries about race, class, gender, economics, and geopolitics of greater concern to the internationalization of higher education than whether women are displacing men as recreational travelers.

The female majority in study abroad participation is a phenomenon that has persisted among college student populations for a long time. In the frontispiece to Joan Gore's *Dominant Beliefs*, a seminal treatise on study abroad, two images demonstrate how quickly women rose in the ranks of participants. One photograph shows members of the first official U.S. college study abroad program. The University of Delaware Foreign Study Group, led by Assistant Professor Raymond Kirkbride, comprised eight men in 1923. The second image features the same program's 1933 group: eleven men and thirty-one women. Roughly the same gender ratio has obtained among U.S. study abroad programs ever since. Despite the stability of these figures, education professionals tend to greet each year's statistical report from the Institute of International Education (IIE) with a sense of alarm, and they are seemingly more concerned about the female hegemony "problem" than the fact that study abroad participants are also 81% white. Thus Ross Lewin, director of study abroad at the University of Connecticut, addresses what he perceives to be a gendered accessibility crisis:

[C]olleges and universities should strive to make quality study abroad programming accessible to everyone. Accessibility is not merely a moral issue but also a practical one. Currently, too few science, engineering, and agriculture students study abroad, when we may need them most to graduate with international experience. Males study abroad in significantly lower rates than females, in part due to the entrenched narrative of study abroad in the United States as an extension of a kind of Swiss finishing school that has little to do with serious academic work. If we do not rewrite this story and get more men abroad, we face a serious gap among our graduates as compared to other rich countries ("Transforming the Study Abroad Experience into a Collective Priority," 10)

In an otherwise cogent and persuasive argument for increased attention to opportunities for global civic engagement and humanist collaboration in study abroad programs, Lewin inserts this antifeminist, neoliberal rhetoric implying that: 1) Science, engineering, and agriculture constitute “serious academic” disciplines, while liberal arts, humanities, and social sciences are apparently “finishing school” disciplines; 2) Women are less interested in “serious academic work” than men; and 3) A greater ratio of male participants in study abroad is necessary in order to maintain the U.S.’s status among “rich countries.” Insofar as study abroad appeals predominantly to women, in other words, it makes itself irrelevant to the “real world” of men. Universities, driven increasingly by market imperatives and focused upon the “internationalization” of campuses, are seeking to boost study abroad enrollments by targeting what they see as an under-tapped demographic: men in “serious” disciplines. Thus study abroad is rhetorically envisioned as a tool of modern-day imperial capitalism, and men are deemed the proper agents to perform this narrative.

Recent efforts to broaden its appeal to men by offering more programs in science and engineering have nevertheless failed to generate significantly higher proportions of male participants (IIE, “Open Doors Data”), perhaps intensifying the professional angst over women's dominance in study abroad. Joan Gore documents the recent zeitgeist of study abroad professionals decrying as too woman-friendly the programs they purport to champion. She traces a series of “associated beliefs” that have marginalized the value of study abroad programs as academically lax curricula, intended mainly for the cultural enhancement of wealthy women (*Dominant Beliefs*,

44). Such beliefs echo the “Swiss finishing school” paradigm of frivolous, academically lax diversions that appeal primarily to women in the liberal arts who are more interested in “broadening cultural horizons” (33) than contributing to the global capitalist economy. However, Gore argues that the careers of educated U.S. women have often grown out of the “liberal education tradition” (128). In the liberal tradition, women’s participation in study abroad would be viewed as a positive reflection of equal access to higher education. But current postfeminist neoliberal attitudes assume the equal rights of women as a given and focus instead on individualism and self-promotion. As evidenced by commercial successes in women’s travel memoir like *EPL*, there has been a transition from the liberal to the neoliberal in the way women engage and communicate the experience of travel. While this model appeals to college-aged women and influences many to study abroad, it is easily dismissed by critics as “chick lit” and of less value than “serious academic work.” The problem, in my estimation, is not that the genre and the programs cater specifically to women’s interests, but that they are both so steeped in individualist ideology that they tend to efface geopolitical histories and suppress global issues that lie outside the subject U.S. American’s frame of interest.

If the goal of internationalizing U.S. universities is, as Lewin usefully articulates, to produce “masses of individuals capable of understanding, analyzing and actually helping to ameliorate the challenging problems confronting humanity,” then I submit that greater priority should be given to eliminating economic barriers for all students and providing opportunities for students of all genders and social and ethnic

identities, regardless of academic discipline. Further, respecting the role of non-Western people as producers of knowledge, more emphasis should be placed on collaborative engagement and collective problem-solving with non-U.S. students and others abroad. In the remainder of this chapter, I examine the content of study abroad program descriptions and representations and explore how neoliberal themes and imagery function rhetorically to market study abroad as a commodity in ways that reinforce expectations of cultural dominance and appropriation by U.S. students. A discourse analysis of study abroad promotion suggests that the values trumpeted by universities and providers—such as CIEE’s (Council on International Educational Exchange) claim, “we can help make the world a better place for all and share a collective sense of fulfillment in our contributions to society”—are routinely contradicted by messages that prioritize self-discovery and personal fulfillment over global social justice.

Convergence Culture, Consumerism, and College Study Abroad

Education scholars have been largely reluctant to challenge the neoliberal ideology of egocentric individualism. The discipline maintains a strong investment in student development theory and numerous studies explore how students formulate their identities (Chickering 1993, Komives 2003, Evans et al. 2009). Much of the existing research surrounding study abroad involves students’ sense of national identity (Dolby 2007, Souders 2009) and their intellectual development (Magolda 1992, Jessup-Anger 2008, McKeown 2009). Dolby argues for increased interrogation of “the ways in which study-abroad produces identities” (144). McKeown claims that

women “tend to value educational lessons that grow out of personal relationships . . . over traditional academic work and pedagogical techniques” (23). Magolda focuses on students’ “ways of knowing,” formulating a qualitative interview model reminiscent of *Women’s Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al. 1986) and finding that “[i]ntellectual empowerment, from the standpoint of ways of knowing, translates into students developing a voice” (Magolda 269). In an interesting observation of internalized postfeminist neoliberal attitudes, Jessup-Anger (2008) examined students’ perceptions of gender relations in the context of an overseas environment—in this case U.S. students in Australia and New Zealand. In interview sessions, students revealed very little conscious observation of gender roles in the host culture. While several participants witnessed or were involved in encounters they later deemed harassing or sexist, they tended to downplay the significance of those experiences. Students were reluctant to analyze their observations of gender roles in New Zealand and Australia, preferring to dismiss them as no different from the norms in the United States. Jessup-Anger concludes that “students’ embedded sociocultural assumptions influence the way that they make meaning of the world” (371). As in the examples from women’s travel memoirs cited in the previous chapter, the meaning of such encounters is based upon internalized neoliberal value systems. In “What Students Don’t Learn Abroad” (2002), Ben Freinberg advises study abroad administrators to revise practices in pre- and post-travel orientations that tend to emphasize personal growth over cultural interaction. He argues that U.S. students abroad view the world as a reflection of their own culture—a homogenous, English-speaking representation

of global postmodern capitalism—and ignore the people and situations they encounter that contradict that narrative. The focus on personal growth in study abroad is, however, part of a deeply entrenched industry script that is called upon repeatedly to assess, justify, and promote overseas education as an integral part of the college experience.

Neoliberal rhetoric of globalization has permeated the language of university mission statements across the U.S. Like numerous other state colleges and private institutions, Oregon State University identifies among its primary goals the need to produce students who are “competitive in the global economy” (OSU Mission Statement, 2010). The exigencies of “internationalization” on college campuses are manifested in drives to recruit more overseas students and the promotion of study abroad as a commodity. The World Trade Organization’s General Agreement on Trade in Services recognizes higher education as “one of twelve multibillion dollar service industries” (Biles and Lindley 150). As student-consumers go into debt to purchase postsecondary education in hopes of securing better jobs and strong economic futures, they are being told that study abroad will give their résumés a competitive edge. In a time of diminishing employment opportunities for new college graduates, the promise of gaining that edge—and having a good time in the process—is a strong enticement to take on the additional financial burden of a term abroad. But universities and study abroad program providers also have a powerful marketing tool in contemporary popular culture. Steeped in a variety of media, college students receive messages from books, music, movies, television, and the internet that converge

to create socially constructed narratives about other places that reinforce and are reinforced by the consumerist discourse of study abroad promotion. This chapter explores the links between media and education abroad and the ways “convergence culture” supports the marketing of travel as a consumer product through the social construction of neocolonialist mythologies.

Books like *Eat, Pray, Love*, television shows like *Globe Trekker*, movies, magazines, advertisements, blogs and other websites, and entertainment news programs that track celebrity movements across the globe all converge to build fantasies about places and support greater consumer access to them. Media scholar Henry Jenkins locates this culture of convergence “within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others” (Jenkins 3-4). Information gathered from various media sources is used to construct personal and social mythologies that shape popular culture and influence our perceptions of the world (Jenkins). “New” media provide enhanced access and cultural relevance for college students, opening up new avenues for participation in the social production of knowledge, but new media also overlap and engage with “old” media—as in the case of electronic book readers like Kindles and iPads. Books, whether analog or digital, remain an important medium for interpreting and defining culture, situating the self within the context of one’s own culture, and encapsulating the culture of others within a discourse of difference.

It would be difficult to quantify Elizabeth Gilbert’s influence on study abroad participation, which has risen steadily for decades, but the frequency of *EPL*’s

appearance on the *Chronicle's* “What They’re Reading on College Campuses” list demonstrates that her book has been very influential among college students. The most recent data collected by the Institute of International Education (IIE) show that the number of U. S. students studying overseas has increased 400% over the last twenty years and that women in study abroad continue to outnumber men. (IIE, 2011). It is clear that college women are reading books like *EPL*, and they are going abroad in record numbers. Many students who study abroad can identify with Gilbert’s brand of narcissistic self-promotion, and they often reveal similar tendencies in their own travel writing when blogging about their experiences or responding to “re-entry” questionnaires. Anthropology professor Ben Feinberg relates of reading student-returnee statements:

After reading through transcript after transcript of stories of self-discovery by a heroic individual or a team of heroes, I recognized the not-so-exotic source—Nike commercials and the other televised exaltations of the “extreme” lifestyle, in which advertisers encourage us to play extreme sports and consume extreme hamburgers. (Feinberg 20)

Feinberg notes that students predominantly speak of their cultural encounters abroad in the first person, many omitting any mention of people native to the host country. Students tend to interpret their overseas experiences in the context of a neoliberal narrative that, like Gilbert’s, casts them—the consumers of study abroad—as the central subjects.

That the experience of study abroad has been commodified is evident in the proliferation of for-profit organizations that often contract with universities to sell international education as a packaged product. Digital technology has enhanced

access to information about study abroad and facilitated a consumer-driven market for international programs, which has led to a proliferation of study abroad enterprises competing for student dollars. Universities rely more and more on these third-party providers, which often give free travel, perks, and kickbacks to university administrators for exclusive partnerships or volume enrollment (Redden). While such backroom deals are invisible to prospective students, they ensure high visibility for certain providers' programs and direct links to their sites from university webpages. Study abroad providers want to maximize their share of students' tuition dollars, and their web marketing is directed toward their target audience: students with money. Images displayed feature predominantly white, middle class students disporting themselves in exotic locations. Images and language employed by study abroad program websites tend to project a commodified travel experience wherein U.S. students are invited to imagine other countries as their virtual backdrops and to appropriate other cultures as part of their personal growth. As less traditional "Third World" countries become more popular study abroad destinations, such promotional rhetoric begins to echo imperialist discourse, reinscribing Western narratives of dominant and subaltern cultures and identities. The implicit colonialist nostalgia invoked by such images appeals openly to a privileged white student population.

Study abroad purports not only to increase student's global competency, but also to provide a transformative personal awakening of the kind Elizabeth Gilbert experienced. These dual outcomes, like Gilbert's "dual glories" of consumerism and appropriated spiritual practice, facilitate colonialist and neoliberal attitudes.

Universities, in their effort to commodify international education, promote “geographic awareness and global understanding” (Michigan State) as a marketable skill that will give students who study abroad a leg up in the professional world. A common claim is that, “as businesses become realigned globally, having employees with an awareness of space, . . . social and cultural geographic movement, as well as dominant physical assets of a region will be critical to a company’s vitality” (Michigan State). But in the context of the cultural awareness and personal growth that study abroad is supposed to further, this language seems contradictory. Any meaningful acquisition of “geographic awareness and global understanding” would require U.S. students to question their cultural assumptions and confront any colonialist messages they may have internalized. To demand such self-examination on the part of students, however, would undermine university and program provider messages that explicitly situate the value of global competency in corporate vitality and employ colonialist messages to sell programs to students.

Although not universal, there is an industry bias toward promotional images that romanticize the study abroad host country, privileging its (sometimes ancient) history over its present, and staging it as a backdrop of monuments that students can imagine themselves posing in front of for their own keepsake photographs. Native people, especially if “brown,” are rarely represented, unless in the context of local “color”: entertainers, market salespeople, exotic “others,” and occasionally very old

people or young children.⁸ Removed from most scenes entirely, when the host country's productive adult people do appear, they are presented as servile or non-threatening.⁹ There is often no evidence of large, urban populations.¹⁰ In many cases, there are scenes of completely empty city streets or monuments devoid of tourists.¹¹ The only people appearing in numerous photographs are U.S. students, usually female, almost always white. While the textual language in program descriptions typically features claims about challenging classes and cultural immersion, the photos rarely depict students studying or interacting with local people who are not host families, faculty, or otherwise in service to them. What emerges in these representations is a semiotic display of cultural dominance. The images support a travel fantasy of exotic landscapes and monuments that are available for appropriation by the Western visitor and of people who exist to serve or to be gazed upon.

The images deliver subliminal messages that the text at once suppresses and justifies with aspirational educative rationale. The Rome program website of IES Abroad, the largest U.S. provider of study abroad programs, declares that “while the past is inescapable, the contemporary city is a vibrant, bustling metropolis,” yet the corresponding images include two female students in an otherwise empty Coliseum, one blonde student in front of Trevi Fountain with other people cropped out of the

⁸ See CIEE's Hyderabad, India photo album: <http://www.ciee.org/study-abroad/india/hyderabad/arts-sciences/experience/#1photos>

⁹ See CIEE's Gaborone, Botswana photo album: <http://www.ciee.org/study-abroad/botswana/gaborone/arts-sciences/experience/#1photos>

¹⁰ See IES's Rio de Janeiro photo album:

<https://www.iesabroad.org/IES/Programs/Brazil/RiodeJaneiro/rioPhotoGallery.jsp>

¹¹ See SIT's Modern Cairo, Urban Development, and Social Change program page: http://www.sit.edu/studyabroad/overview_egd.cfm?cp=2012SFA

frame, and three shots of Vatican City in which no people are visible.¹² Other images on the site show students on various field trips, overlooking the blue Mediterranean, and dining in Italian restaurants; none includes anyone other than students and program faculty. The gaze depicted in such photographs is based upon the projection of “signs,” visual signifiers that convey a socially agreed upon concept or idea. John Urry identifies a “tourist gaze” that is constructed through signs and claims that tourism is essentially “the collection of such signs.” He argues that when tourists see a couple kissing in Paris, “what they are gazing upon is ‘timeless, romantic Paris’” (Urry 133). Because the people sharing the kiss are situated visually in Paris, they become signifiers for the stereotypical impression of Paris as the city of lovers. Tourists expect to see these signs in order to authenticate their experience of another place. By displaying photographs that incorporate signs, study abroad program websites validate a particular construct of authenticity.

Visual representations function rhetorically to sell study abroad by promising to center the student-consumer within a constructed social narrative that is signified by the promotional image. As argued by cultural critic Dean MacCannell, a photograph “permits the tourist to create his own touristic imagery with himself . . . at the center, or just off to the side of the great sight or moment” (MacCannell 147). The image of a group of young American women eating gelato in front of Trevi Fountain sends an audience of potential study abroad participants semiotic messages that recall the mythology of Rome created through a convergence of media representations including

¹² <https://www.iesabroad.org/IES/Programs/Italy/Rome/rome.html>

EPL, *La Dolce Vita*, and *The Lizzie McGuire Movie*. A movie poster and the cover of the movie-tie-in edition of *EPL* depict Julia Roberts as Gilbert, sitting alone on a bench in Rome relishing a gelato. The scene signifies part of the narrative in Gilbert's memoir about indulging oneself with the pleasures of life and gratifying all of the senses—through language, music, beautiful fountains, gorgeous men, and of course delicious food. Gilbert's narrative relies upon long-established signs and a variety of pop culture predecessors such as Audrey Hepburn in *Roman Holiday*, and her story perpetuates the social mythology that turns Rome into a place that is consumed by tourists.

The rhetoric of representation of “other” places is more gravely complicated when the place being represented was formerly colonized by the West. Study abroad programs in India and Indonesia often feature images that reflect a neocolonialist gaze. Homi Bhabha has pointed out the complexities involved in “modes of representation of otherness.” He argues that “the colonial stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself” (Bhabha 316). Study abroad providers offering programs in the Global South should question how they situate the student and/or the U.S. vis-à-vis the host country, especially in terms of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and national identity. But in current practice, most visual constructs of the “other” culture suggest a colonialist relationship between U.S. students and host countries and

normalize the imaginative appropriation of “foreign” countries for the benefit and enjoyment of U.S. Americans.

A case in point, the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) program in Hyderabad, India features a photo album on its website that plays up exotic difference and economic disparity in its depictions of student encounters abroad, constructing the “other” as both exotic and marginalized. One image shows a red-haired male student giving a “thumbs-up” to a group of Indian children, some of whom are half-naked, others carrying water jugs on their heads, and another holding a smaller naked child. The photo is captioned “CIEE student makes some new friends.” Another image shows “two girls and a mother receiving tonsure at the entrance of a Hindu folk temple,” the dark-skinned, grave looking mother and child in the photo both with their heads shockingly bald and covered in bright yellow powdered dye. There are several group shots of CIEE students, often with the white female students clad in saris, and one with the entire group displaying red bindis on their foreheads. There is one very colorful photograph of “an Indian woman selling bangles.”¹³ While such photos thematize exotic encounters and the allure and pathos of “otherness,” they also represent a semiotic display of cultural appropriation. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill study abroad website features a picture of UNC students in Indian dress “show[ing] their Carolina fever at the Taj Mahal” by leaping into the air in front of the famous mausoleum.¹⁴ Loyola University’s web page also highlights the

¹³ <http://www.ciee.org/study-abroad/india/hyderabad/arts-sciences/experience>

¹⁴ http://www.unc.edu/discover-unc/CCM1_030089

Taj Mahal, with its group of students likewise clad in Indian-style garments and spelling out “Loyola” with their arms.¹⁵

As travel is commodified and more opportunities open up for students and tourists to purchase themed vacations and choose from a wide array of destinations, there is increased expectation for programs to provide a specific experience. Western travelers demand modern services overseas, but they also expect a cultural experience. In order to foster an “authentic” cultural experience for the visitor, native people are expected to “perform” culture. Tourists enjoy having satellite television and wi-fi in their hotel rooms, but are loathe to see people in the Third World adapting to modern technologies. A Lonely Planet guidebook to Bali from 1984 laments:

It's not so much that the content of the TV programming threatens to undermine traditional beliefs—but when you see a whole warung-full of people watching a sit-com (even a Balinese sit-com; there is such a thing) with obvious enjoyment, you wonder if there will ever be enough time for practising traditional dances, playing the gamelan or attending to the business of the banjar. (Wheeler 101)

In other words, the Western traveler is ill-served by Balinese people behaving like Westerners. Their duty is to maintain a sense of authentic traditional culture in order to satisfy Western expectations of the touristic experience. In this construct, the tourist sees colonialism in the Balinese assimilation of television, but not in his or her desire to reduce a nation of people to a cultural sideshow.

The study abroad industry relies upon the appeal of West-East and First World/Third World binaries to those who are in the privileged position of defining these differences and situating their own culture as dominant and the other culture as

¹⁵ <http://www.loyola.edu/Undergraduate/Academics-and-Student-Life/Academics/Study-Abroad.aspx>

appropriable. This dynamic is evident in study abroad promotion's penchant for employing the metaphor of "discovery," as in the Alliance for Global Education's invitation to "Discover Shanghai" in a YouTube video.¹⁶ Talya Zemach-Bersin highlights the imperialism in such rhetoric. In "Selling the World: Study Abroad Marketing and the Privatization of Global Citizenship" she argues:

Framing study abroad within the language of discovery grants the experience a status of mythlike proportion and glory with roots in frequently violent and destructive histories. Accordingly, indulging in the discourse of "discovery" has the effect of disregarding the lives, achievements and histories of those who already inhabit host nations.
(308)

To build up expectations of Western cultural hegemony abroad is to set students up to be unreflective travelers who may unconsciously contribute to neololonialist agendas. However, educating students to analyze promotional images and language, to recognize biased cultural framing, and to contextualize global issues within "historically constituted relationships of power between different groups" (Narayan 182), will better prepare them to engage productively in cross-cultural dialogues. If study abroad is to be effective in developing U.S. students as global citizens, the emphasis must be on promoting greater understanding of international issues, solidarity with people worldwide on issues of social justice, and recognition of the impact of U.S. and Western policies on the land, the environment, and the bodies of others.

¹⁶ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l24aSmvZ0is>

The College Student as Global Citizen

A rhetorical contradiction is posed by the “global,” or “internationalized,” university: both humanistic and corporate understandings of the terms are simultaneously applied. The internationalization of higher education refers both to increased scholarly communication and collaboration between cultures and nation-states and to a new understanding of the university as a competitor and vital enabler in the capitalist global economy. Study abroad promotion tends to echo the language of academic globalization: both civic and commercial definitions are implied and both are assumed to be positive. Students are encouraged to participate in education abroad to broaden their cultural awareness and to increase their likelihood of employment in a private sector dominated by multinational corporations: to become a dichotomously idealized “global citizen.” In an increasingly neoliberal corporate university system, this is not cognitive dissonance but normalized doublethink. As part of the effort to internationalize U.S. colleges, a federal commission has proposed spending \$50 million per year to boost study abroad enrollments. The bipartisan Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program aims to place 1 million U.S. undergraduate students in overseas programs by 2017 (Brummer 2005). Tellingly, among those appointed to the Lincoln Commission were heads of international business and investment organizations as well as CEOs and presidents of independent study abroad corporations. Two years later, several such study abroad providers were the subject of investigation by the New York State Attorney’s office for providing kickbacks and perks to university administrators who directed students to their programs. The

chairman of the Lincoln Commission, M. Peter McPherson, who at the time of his appointment in 2005 was the president of Michigan State University, became president of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges in 2006, and was named chairman of Dow Jones in 2007. The multiple and overlapping commitments of these leaders demonstrate a convergence between multinational business interests, government, and higher education. Transnational higher education scholar Rajani Naidoo observes:

Restructuring and cross-border interactions in higher education are increasingly characterized by governance mechanisms and rationales that aim to deploy higher education as a lever to enhance the competitive edge of the nation-state in the global economy and to assert political influence in the regional and global context. (40)

Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues that the new model is of a corporatized university “in the business of naturalizing capitalist, privatized citizenship.” (*Feminism Without Borders* 173). She sees irony in the marketing of “global competency” in universities because, Mohanty claims, “the most powerful push to globalize comes from outside the academy—from business and government critiques of the (ir)relevance of U.S. higher education” (186).

As public colleges receive less and less funding from government, the links between higher education and private business become more deeply entrenched. Public higher education has been transforming from a largely state-supported system into one that is financed increasingly by private donations and overwhelmingly by student loan-funded tuition (Martin and Lehren A20). Some colleges have used study abroad to boost revenue by charging students full local tuition that is considerably

higher than the cost of programs abroad (Schworm, “College Sued over Study-Abroad Cost”). As New York’s State Attorney in 2007-08, Andrew Cuomo launched an investigation of colleges and study abroad providers that revealed ethically questionable arrangements including vendors offering money back to universities and all-expense-paid overseas trips for administrators in exchange for student enrollments—the same kinds of incentives that were uncovered in an earlier exposé of college relationships with the student loan industry (Schemo, “In Study Abroad, Gifts and Money for Universities”). The competition for student dollars has established a higher education model that courts students as consumers and markets study abroad as a commodity, a résumé-enhancing international experience that offers a competitive edge to those who are willing or able to leverage themselves further in order to purchase a stronger economic future.

When college administrators tout the internationalization of student bodies and campuses, what many are really promoting are the neoliberal, market-driven imperatives that have crept in as state funding has dried up. Universities are aggressively and unabashedly recruiting international students, not only for the higher tuition rates they pay, but also for their legitimizing effect on administrative claims about building “diversity” and fostering the internationalization of campuses. Prospective students and their families are plied with assurances that higher education in general—and study abroad in particular—produces graduates who will “succeed in

a technology-rich, information-driven global economy.”¹⁷ By outsourcing study abroad programs to private, third-party providers, universities are allowing corporations to package other countries, cultures, and the study abroad experience in order to sell a product to student-consumers.

Marketing Global Citizenship

World affairs activist Professor Richard Falk elaborates on the competing understandings of global citizenship noted above. In addition to those concerned with resource management and environmental imperatives, he theorizes as two separate categories the components of the dichotomous global citizen depicted in study abroad promotion. There are those who value “the ultimate unity of human experience . . . a politics of desire that posits for the planet as a whole a set of conditions of peace and justice and sustainability” (131). And then there are the “global capitalists”—multinational corporations and those who support their interests—who tend to define citizenship in economic terms. The latter, according to Falk, represent “a denationalized global elite that . . . lacks any global civic sense of responsibility” (135). A capitalist view of global citizenship, in other words, is one of private citizenship, defined by market relationships between producers and consumers rather than civic relationships between government agencies and people with shared interests. But some higher education and study abroad professionals are finding an argument for framing civic responsibility within the discourse of global capitalism. Ross Lewin (quoted above on the “Swiss finishing school” problem) and Greg Van

¹⁷ Macon State College, “Mission Statement.”
<http://www.maconstate.edu/about/missionstatement.aspx>

Kirk, cofounder of the Social Entrepreneur Corps, envision a model of global citizenship “in which the university, as well as faculty and the students are engaged in improving the public good around the world through an entrepreneurial spirit” (553). Highlighting the partnership between the University of Connecticut and Social Entrepreneur Corps as a success story contrasting other study abroad programs affiliated with community service organizations (CSOs), the authors—with no trace of irony—see entrepreneurialism as the antidote to colonialism:

Developing the student subject on the home campus makes perfect sense. Yet when we change the context to an international one marked by poverty, and when the program is focused mainly on helping communities in need, developing the student subject as a primary goal transforms itself into an act of colonialism, which, of course, contradicts the very goals of the program. (550)

Lewin and Van Kirk suggest that student subject development “makes perfect sense” on the home campus—assuming perhaps that students in the U.S. rarely encounter difference or that communities of color and impoverished neighborhoods do not exist—in some cases just beyond the ivied walls that separate the high-technology classrooms and spa-like workout centers from the mean streets of inner cities. Students, encouraged to develop their subject positions on the home campus, are evidently more likely to relinquish their self-interest if they are doing “development work” rather than “relief work,” but the authors do not clearly articulate how the models produce different attitudes in students. Duly noting the problems inherent to the student-consumer archetype and the marketing of study abroad as a commodity, they observe that students often consider their participation in programs abroad as a contract for experiences and course credits. The authors recognize that:

if [students] are not disabused of their fantasies, they will extend the assumptions of this contractual relationship into their relationships with members of the host communities. That is, students may treat the poor people with whom they are working as commodities for their consumption. (550)

Lewin and Van Kirk maintain that the Social Entrepreneur Corps has found a solution to the commodification of education and people—evidently through the production and sale of actual commodities.

“Social Entrepreneurship,” the UConn School of Business website explains, “is a process of lifting people out of poverty by empowering them with the skills and resources to create and run their own businesses.”¹⁸ The program, which fronts poor would-be entrepreneurs with low-cost goods like cheap reading glasses to sell to other poor people, is “focused on helping rural Guatemalans earn incomes through providing Bottom of the Pyramid solutions to their community members.”¹⁹ Professing to be a capitalist solution to global poverty, “Bottom of the Pyramid” (BoP) is a multinational corporate strategy for the development of untapped markets among the poorest nations in the world—billions of people who individually earn less than \$2 per day but collectively represent a significant consumer base (Bonsu and Polsa 236). Despite claims of significant benefits to the poor populations they serve, “tales from the field suggest that initial BoP strategies implementation efforts by [multinational corporations] ‘represent arm’s length attempts to quickly tap into a new market’ . . . without reference to poverty alleviation.” (Bonsu and Polsa 237). Thus, links between selling cheap goods to the poor and lifting them out of poverty are not

¹⁸ <http://www.business.uconn.edu/cms/p1018>

¹⁹ http://studyabroad.uconn.edu/index.cfm?FuseAction=Programs.ViewProgram&Program_ID=10348

clearly delineated by Lewin and Van Kirk: their example of aging women whose working lives in textile production could be extended with the use of reading glasses simply begs further questions about the system of global capitalism that keeps Third World people confined to low-paying labor. The philosophical supposition that the world's poor can pull themselves up by the bootstraps of entrepreneurialism, moreover, countenances no critical examination of the economic and geopolitical history of capitalism. Social entrepreneurship tacitly ascribes the cause of global poverty to the absence of its prescribed solution. Ignoring the role played by colonialist economies in determining global geographies of wealth and poverty, such programs engage in magical thinking that posits neocolonialist business intervention as the cure for global inequality.

Lewin and Van Kirk conclude their report on the UConn Social Entrepreneur Corps with claims that its students “actually and tangibly made a contribution to improving the lives of poor, rural residents in Guatemala,” but the details of how these lives were improved consist of vague references to “start[ing] up and expand[ing] existing businesses” (561). In a more measurable impact of the program's success, the authors note that “a benefactor of the university . . . doubled the size of his gift” and the “UConn Foundation is now actively seeking support from other donors to support similar projects” (561). While the UConn Social Entrepreneur Corps provides an excellent model for raising the profile (and profitability) of study abroad within the corporatized university, bringing in “deliverables” (evidence of marketable skills gained by students) to please “stakeholders” (parents and private donors), its model of

global citizenship is questionable. The Social Entrepreneur program, like other study abroad programs and campus internationalization efforts, invokes global benefits that are really centered upon the individual U.S. student and/or the university or provider as an entrepreneurial entity. According to Lewin and Van Kirk, “we are particularly interested in the social entrepreneurship model, as it dovetails so nicely with recent trends in higher education and its emphases on creativity and entrepreneurialism” (554).

But, as the various strands of my thesis converge to demonstrate, many of these “recent trends in higher education” are deeply problematic, for they tend to reinvigorate the very pathologies they purport to cure. They conduce an ethnocentric, “global capitalist” understanding of cross-cultural relationships. Among such problematic trends, I would include: the partnering of public universities with private businesses to provide services like study abroad that were once managed on campuses; “global citizenship” used as a mantra that effaces the very issues of inequality, race, class, and other categories of difference it pretends to address; the authority to speak on global issues transferred from academics and researchers to administrators and entrepreneurs; and an entrepreneurial business model focused on bringing in private money and marketing education and “global citizenship” as commodities. Rather than embracing a free-market ideology as the only way forward for public universities facing dwindling state funding, we must be prepared to critique these neoliberal trends and to question the surrender of our public higher education system to privatized corporate interests.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

While by no means universal among women's travel writings or the promotional discourses of international programs, postfeminist and neoliberal rhetorics often converge to construct expectations for, and frame student experiences in, consumer-oriented study abroad. Problematic convergences in the discourse include:

- The values and perspectives of affluent, white Westerners are privileged—particularly in their role as consumers—and non-Western points of view are marginalized.
- Self-interest and personal development are prioritized over the cultivation of historical awareness and global social responsibility. Pervasive neoliberal themes in priv-lit are echoed in study abroad promotion, which is preoccupied with personal growth and career advantages.
- Non-Western “others” are subject to stereotyping and reduced to background props for the subject U.S. protagonist. The “other” reflects the importance of the Westerner—the native is more interested in the traveler and her life than she is in learning about the native.
- “Information” about other people and cultures is slanted to entertain, sell, or support the author-promoter's perspective and/or self-representation. Presented as an authority providing subjective data, study abroad websites and travel writers like Gilbert specialize in reducing people and places to single words or catchphrases that supposedly define them.

- The “other” is exoticized and commodified. The Western traveler takes what she wants from another culture—food, language, spiritual teachings, art, artifacts, images, etc—and repackages it for personal profit.
- Cross-cultural encounters are dehistoricized and depoliticized. In the age of neoliberal postfeminism, the personal is strictly personal.

Although the number of study abroad programs offering social justice-themed curricula in non-Western countries is increasing, most U.S. students will participate in programs designed around a concept of “global competency” that is steeped in neoliberal ideology congenial to multinational corporations. Students can challenge current practice by demanding stronger education in international issues and social justice, and future researchers could develop more nuanced methodologies for assessing multicultural competencies. A decolonized feminist understanding of global citizenship challenges capitalistic priorities and emphasizes humanistic over individualist imperatives. While unchecked narcissism can translate to ethnocentrism, to examine one's own social location and theorize “difference” is a useful first step towards global competency. It is also necessary to restore a historical and political framework for discourse about Western and non-Western cultures that makes visible the “underlying exploitative social relations” of colonialism (Narayan 78, Mohanty 124). Wherever situated, study abroad programs should emphasize and celebrate the differences among people and the distinctive energies of various cultures without essentializing or commodifying them.

The opportunity to place oneself in the position of the “other,” as a visitor in another country, can open new avenues for self-reflection and critical thinking. The educative value of a term abroad could be enhanced significantly by encouraging students to be more conscious and deliberate in their observations of difference. To document their cross-cultural engagements and reflect on how their own assumptions about gender, sexuality, race, class, and nationality are challenged or affirmed by their experiences abroad may foster greater understanding and respect across multiple barriers of difference. To incorporate postcolonial and transnational feminist theory into a field that is deeply concerned with identity and cultural development could reshape the understanding of global citizenship in higher education and encourage students to be critically engaged participants in—not simply consumers of—study abroad.

Recommendations and Further Research

As study abroad is a complex field encompassing many different educational approaches and delivery methods—including nonprofit and for-profit private third-party providers, faculty-led programs, short- and long-term sessions, exchanges, service-learning, and entrepreneurship models—future areas of inquiry might include comparative analyses of the multiple types of study abroad programs. Focused studies on visual rhetoric could be employed to compare the promotional strategies of various providers. Ethnographic and case studies might examine how students interpret, and to what degree they internalize, U.S.-centric representations of the study abroad experience. Future research on the impact of identity and privilege on

students' experience and understanding of cross-cultural encounters could provide deeper context for analyses of educational outcomes. I would strongly support organized efforts to encourage more minority faculty and faculty of color to lead study abroad programs and increased financial support to enable greater numbers of underrepresented students to participate.

Because students' perceptions and experiences abroad are influenced by the framing of study abroad promotion and the convergence of messages about travel, self, and "other" they receive through books, movies, social networking, and other popular media, universities and study abroad providers can help shift the tenor of discourse by altering the visual and textual rhetoric they employ. Images should represent host country people as active participants in the production of knowledge rather than passive recipients and beneficiaries of Western attention, as subjects of central interest rather than objects or backdrops. Global citizenship should be presented as an inclusive concept, not as a merit badge one earns by going to college or studying abroad. Acknowledging that all people are global citizens, we should refocus educational outcomes for students on developing a critical understanding of their privileges and responsibilities as global citizens, which begins with recognizing the equal humanity of all people as well as the unequal distribution of power and resources worldwide. Study abroad can and should be an opportunity for students to challenge their assumptions, question inherited cultural value systems, critically self-examine, and engage alternate perspectives and ways of knowing. These objectives must be integrated throughout professional discourse, including promotional

messaging, predeparture packages, courses and curricula, and reentry programs, in order to create an unambiguous representation of the educative goals of study abroad and to prompt students to differentiate, critique, and perform responsibly their roles as global consumers and global citizens.

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