

Chapter 3

Israeli Backpackers

Narrative, Interpersonal Communication, and Social Construction

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INTRODUCTION

Those naked little spasms of the self occur at the end of the world,
but there at the end is action and character.

—Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis*

One can legitimately argue that tourism is grounded in discourse.

—Graham Dann, *The Language of Tourism*

Recent work on backpacking tourism has indicated that when traveling backpackers create and sustain a unique social environment. Backpackers typically engage in extended and multidestination travel to distant and exotic destinations, during which social interactions are very frequent and play an important role in shaping the profound experience to which they attest. In the present research I wish to inquire into the patterns of interpersonal communication that thrive among backpackers and the far-reaching social and experiential implications these patterns bear. This chapter thus complements recent studies on the topic, such as Elsrud (2001), Murphy (2001), and Sørensen (2003), by furthering the exploration of the unique social-communicational patterns typical of backpackers. Specifically, I will draw together aspects of communication patterns, on the one hand, and experiential (phenomenological) dimensions, on the other hand (by employing social constructionist perspectives), which are usually regarded

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separately in social science research. In addition, I attend to the specific communication and storytelling patterns that are typical of Israeli backpackers, as distinct from other nationalities, and to the way in which they reflect and reverberate similar patterns within Israeli culture and society.

With these aims in mind, I begin by reviewing the literature on modern, global (post-World War II) backpacking. The review highlights the *highly developed patterns of interpersonal communication* manifested among backpackers, as repeatedly observed in the research on backpacking. Then I address the field of narrative research, discussing the concept of personal narratives in general and dealing with two features in particular: its connection with issues of identity and experience and its embeddedness within the social-communicational context in which stories are performed. I address the backpackers' stories, or, more precisely, the backpackers' stories of their stories, through a "second-order" reading, which does not explore their *content* as much as the indications suggested by the tellers' own comments on the role these stories play. This is relevant to the stories backpackers both hear and tell, before, during and after the trip.

As recently shown by Elsrud (2001), backpackers socially construct their tales as adventure narratives, portraying themselves as adventurers and heroes. Following her work, I further elaborate on how these risky adventurous tales of the authentic (Cederholm 1999; Noy 2004) reverberate intensely between backpackers in general and between Israeli backpackers in particular, and on how these stories critically shape their travel experiences. The central part of the paper follows the tourists' communication patterns suggested by Dann (1996), which include three distinct temporal phases, "pretrip," "on-trip," and "posttrip" (I focus on the first and the last). Dann's conceptualization is an elaboration of the cyclic three-staged pilgrimage rite-of-passage, originally formulated by Van-Gennep (1908/1960) and later developed in Victor Turner's celebrated works (1967, 1973).

In this chapter I view these three phases as perspectives from which the trip's narrative is told, heard, and retold, and from which experience is socially constructed. I contend that the story of the travel has a cycle—the "story cycle"—which is sustained by the conveying of the stories from veteran to novice backpackers. Such occasions of storytellings and storyhearings occur during the "pretrip" and the "posttrip" phases, which overlap in their location in the backpackers' country of origin. The latter phase concerns the narrative of the "reaggregation" stage in the rite of passage, whereas the former concerns the preparations preceding the departure. This scheme is applied not only to the trip as a whole, but also to different activities to which backpackers attend throughout the trip's itinerary, when they leave the cities and venture on various excursions.

The cyclic dimension of the personal stories shared by backpackers allows for the complementary ontological role that these stories play. The story is required in order to preshape the trip and to arrange it according to a socially and culturally coherent narrative of adventure, by which one travels and constructs one's experiences and later shares them from the vantage point of the veteran; the actual travel is required in order to *validate the story (it is the "truth" claim behind the story) and to personalize and personify it*. Through the strong constitutive role carried by the stories, they simultaneously create and represent a unique "backpacking identity." This social identity is achieved throughout the extended trip and on its completion, involving both the experience and the stories of the trip (Sørensen 2003).

Within the highly discursive context of tourism (Dann 1996), backpackers are construed here essentially as *storytellers* (and, correspondingly, story-listeners). Throughout the trip they form a tightly knit community of storytellers and story-listeners, whose frequently shared stories—which they both produce and consume—revolve around their spectacular and "authentic" adventures and experiences (Cederholm 1994, 1999; Elsrud 2001; Noy 2004; Urbain 1989). These are constructed as stories accruing beyond ordinary, everyday place and time. From a narrative constructionist perspective, these stories are construed not only as a by-product or epiphenomenon of the trip, but rather as a *constitutive element* defining the experiences and, consequently, the identity of the backpackers. The extended trip, which typically serves as a rite of passage, particularly for Israelis (see introduction in this volume), is conceived of here as a *narrative rite-of-passage*.

The final section points to the similarities and connections existing between the interpersonal storytelling patterns and characteristics exhibited by Israeli backpackers, as distinct from other nationalities, and several features of interpersonal communication evident in their home society. The striking resemblances that come to light through a comparison of the two social environments suggest one possible explanation for the pervasiveness of backpacking among Israelis, as well as for the segregated national/ethnic patterns of their travel.

NARRATING BACKPACKING: FROM COMMUNICATION TO STORYTELLING

From its sparse and inconsistent origins in the sixties and the seventies through the more rigorous work conducted since the nineties, research on modern backpacking has repeatedly indicated a number of typical social patterns. One salient common factor concerns the lively patterns of social

interaction, communication and storytelling that take place between backpackers during the trip. In this section I wish to review the findings along this line of research, mostly in chronological order, culminating in Elsrud's recent work (2001). As the title suggests, I progress from a description of the network of interpersonal communication, which provides the social frame that allows the intensive storytelling activity to take place, to an investigation of the constructed meaning that underlies these stories and which is evoked by them.

The works most often quoted as the pioneers of post-World War II backpacking, written in a period when tourism research, not to mention backpacking, was still considered "merely ... an exotic, marginal topic" (Cohen 1984:374), are Cohen's (1972, 1973) and Vogt's (1976) essays, concerned with youth backpackers who traveled during the mid-seventies in Asia and Europe (see also Baumgartner 1979; Mukerji 1978; and Teas 1988; whose research was conducted in the early seventies).

All of these works discuss, in varying degrees of elaboration, the active social interactions that consistently take place between backpackers during the extended trip. Cohen (1973) writes that "information flows by word-of-mouth from the experienced travelers to the newcomer" (p. 96), part of a "new conviviality [that] develops among the heterogeneous assemblage of drifters" (p. 99). Even Vogt (1976), who views backpackers essentially as individual travelers, nevertheless points at the "transient yet intense interpersonal relationships which are formed during their travel" (p. 33); he observes that "there is an immediate common bond ... [and that] special supportive relationships exist" (p. 34), which allow for a dense "verbal inter-traveler network" (p. 36).

Pointing at the intense social interactions that are created and sustained among backpackers during the trip (Teas 1988:37), has thus received the attention of early research. These findings go beyond the different terminologies and conceptualizations, such as "wanderers," "drifters," "tramping youths," "backpackers," and so on, by which the traveling youths have been described in the various essays.¹ Nevertheless, for one reason or another, until recently they have not played any central role in the definitions suggested for backpacking, or in the conceptualization of the typical experiences of backpackers during the trip.

Riley's (1988) work, conducted a decade later, is the next salient contribution, which has influentially oriented later research on backpackers to focus precisely on the intense social quality during the trip (and at the lessened degree by which lone drifters were researched). Riley emphasizes the role of social interaction among backpackers in shaping their actual trip and in influencing the experiences it bestows. By validating the previous findings concerning the existence of a "very extensive traveler

communication network" (p. 322) and by considering these communication networks in an in-depth manner throughout her work she places them at the foreground of the features characteristic of backpackers and backpacking.

Riley suggests that backpackers have different aspirations and motivations regarding the trip than previously noted (primarily in Cohen 1972, 1973), as well as considerably different experiences whilst traveling. Compared with earlier findings the backpackers she studied did not travel aimlessly, they did not beg for money, they were involved in drug consumption to a considerably lesser degree, and they retained close connections with their families at home (Riley 1988:318).² These factors had implications on their communication patterns. Riley points at the subjects' intense social bonds, which differentiates them qualitatively from their solo "drifter" predecessors, stressing that the "communication networks" and the "interpersonal relationships" during the trip are "very intense" (p. 324) and play an important role:

Communication networks are a salient feature of budget travel ... budget travelers quickly establish friendships and are continually discussing the "best" places to visit ... a great deal of information is passed on via word-of-mouth and many of the latest "in" spots are only communicated in this way. (pp. 322-323)

In this regard Riley's research has successfully highlighted what seems to be a defining feature of backpacking tourism, which, following her work, has received central research attention. Following Riley's work the research of interactional and communication patterns typical of backpackers (termed "social networks" or "word-of-mouth") and of their implications has developed in two directions. One branch researches the socioeconomic implications of such unique patterns of sociability and the consequent impact of backpacking tourism on host societies (Hampton 1998; Jarvis 1991). If the backpacking experience is to be defined (among other things) by such unique patterns of communication, which shape the travelers' itinerary and tourist behavior during the trip, then research into the social and economic impact of backpacking tourism from this perspective is clearly of interest. And indeed, these works (including Murphy 2001, the extensive research by Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995), which focus mainly on the initial stage of the trip and the preparations, suggest that the decisions made by backpackers before and during the extended trip, and the socioeconomic implications of such decisions, are strongly mediated by social interactions, rather than by commercial material advertisement, to a much greater extent than other types of tourism.

The second branch of research furthers the inquiry into interpersonal communication from socially and culturally informed perspectives. Here the works of Cederholm (1994; 1999), Elsrud (1998), and Sørensen, 2003 (the latter includes an extensive and up-to-date review of the literature. See also Moran 2000, and Wickens 2002) are pertinent, and have made a substantial contribution to our understanding of the "culture" or "subculture" that emerges from the thriving of social interaction and communication, and of the implications for their unique tourist experience. These works suggest, as Sørensen (2003) observes, that "[b]eing both an individual perception and a socially constructed identity, 'backpacker' is more a social construct than a definition" (p. 852); and as such it is continuously created and recreated (p. 855), maintained and performed vis-à-vis social interaction and storytelling.

Though the latter works pursue seemingly similar lines of inquiry, they differ considerably in terms of the theoretical directions they take. Murphy's work considers the contexts in which intense social interactions take place during the trip, addressing them mostly quantitatively, researching the setting of the social situations in which backpackers socialize with each other and in which the "informal networks of information dissemination" (2001, 50) thrive. The results suggest that the *gathering of information* through word-of-mouth is the primary factor given by backpackers to account for the multiple social interactions in which they are involved during the trip. The work further validates previous findings that "word-of-mouth promotion ... develops through the grapevine or network of communication among backpackers" (p. 51). Yet although the informative function of the dense interpersonal communication network might have been sufficient to account for such an elaborate network, Murphy raises (and leaves open) an intriguing question concerning the *function* of these social interactions. "It is somewhat unclear," she writes, "whether seeking information is a main goal or rather a necessary part of backpacker conversation 'ritual'" (p. 61).

Elsrud's (2001) and Sørensen's (2003) works suggest a response to this query, echoed in the present work. Their inquiries, aimed at the social construction that occurs during the trip vis-à-vis personal narratives and at the far-reaching experiential implications of such constructions, is qualitative (not only methodologically but also paradigmatically) and is informed by narrative-hermeneutic and social constructionist trends of thought. Elsrud argues that backpackers' stories are, in fact, stories of *masculine adventure and risk*, wherein the "narrative identity" of their tellers is enhanced and is located high on the backpackers' social hierarchy. She points to the ways in which backpackers construct the adventurous and risky environments in which they travel and/or the activities in which they

partake. These include their perception and description of time, place, and body activities, which are presented as markedly different from those in their home society and everyday life. She maintains that the trip is an "excellent arena for such creative construction" (p. 603), which "stands out as a demarcated time and space, qualitatively different from the rest of the life course" (p. 604).

Following and complementing their work, I contend that, indeed, the conversation "rituals" among backpackers do not stem from the need for information during the trip (see Murphy, above), but that "information," among other salient features of the adventurous, risky and authentic experience of backpacking, is *yet another element in the socially constructed world of which backpackers narrate*. It is precisely these rituals that mark the sites in which narratives are embodied and communicated within a tight interpersonal field. As will be shown here, "information," and its relation to adventure and risk, is a good "excuse" to explain and legitimize the multiple interactions—conversations and storytellings—in which backpackers are continually engaged.

NARRATIVE IDENTITY: STORYTELLING EXPERIENCE

Pure unstoried action, pure unstoried existence in the presence, is impossible.

—William Randall, *The Stories We Are*

The most powerful impressions that I gained from the interview conversations with backpackers concerned the storied nature of their experiences and their eager desire to share these experiences with others. I was left with a sense that these adventure stories were, indeed, of an intense quality (Noy 2002b). In this section, therefore, I attend to the literature on narratives of personal experience and to the research on the role personal stories play in one's social life. I will return to this issue when discussing the constitutive role played by personal narratives of experience and travel among backpackers.

In the last two decades there has been growing interest in the stories people tell of themselves, typically during everyday social interactions (much of which was inspired by Labov's [1972] seminal work). In these stories people present and communicate organized sense-making sequences describing their identities, emotions, relationships, memories, and so forth. Current scholarly interest in autobiographical narratives revolves around the "storied nature of human conduct" (Sarbin 1986), and concerns the *storied* or *narrativized* cast in which people perceive and convey,

but also construct and produce, an array of actual, social, and psychological events. In a perceived increasingly alienated and chaotic contemporary world, stories—whether of the mundane or the profound, of “real” occurrences or of psychic or spiritual ones—supply individuals, as well as collectives, with an organized structure in and from which meaning may be generated (Gergen 1991, 1994, 1999; Giddens 1991; McAdams 1993; Polkinghorne 1988; Randall 1995; Young 1987; Widdershoven 1993).

Analytically speaking, narrative research recognizes and inquires into the “chronological dimension” (Ricoeur 1988) of the communication, and entails a “temporal transition from one state of affairs to another” (Ochs 1997:189; Rimmon-Kenan 1983). Later, a narrative inquiry might proceed to explore: (1) the genres and forms of the stories; (2) the themes that are addressed therein and by them, which include as diverse and varied fields as those entailed by the contemporary human experience; and (3) the social context in which personal stories are elicited and told. This richness of possible explorations may partially account for the fact that, lately, “narrative has been studied more than any other verbal genre” (Wortham 2001:47); amounting to no less than a “narrative mania” (Freeman 1994:201).

The present work inquires into autobiographical or personal narratives, that is, the adventurous narratives backpackers tell about themselves and their actions, a genre unique in that the *narrator is the protagonist in the narrated events*. In autobiographical stories people typically “use the story form to identify ourselves to others and to ourselves” (Gergen 1994:186). What is being told in these stories, which is marked and delineated as taking place in a different time and space than the occasion of narration, directly concerns the tellers: who they are, what have they undergone, and how they have journeyed from the “then and there” described in the stories to the “here and now,” that is, the occasion of the narration or storytelling. Further, as we will later see, what is being told concerns not only the narrators themselves, but also their listeners, the audience. Storytelling is the “social site” by means of which people present and represent themselves in strips, episodes and chapters to the other and to themselves. Whether these are stories covering one’s entire life span (life stories) or depicting limited periods of time and bounded events, stories nevertheless capture and represent only selected occurrences, which are threaded in a stylized plot consisting of past, present, and future (Bateson 1989, 2000; Gergen 1986; McAdams 1993, 1999; Polkinghorne 1988; Rosenthal 1993; Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992).

Events in lives are *storied into meaning*, and it is precisely this narrative interplay of occurrences and meanings that comes to be considered as personal identity. Psychologists Lieblich et al. (1998:7) suggest that “personal narratives, in both facets of content and form, *are* people’s identities ... the

story *is* one’s identity, a story created, told, revised, and retold throughout life;” and McAdams (1993:3), in a book entitled *The Stories We Live By*, asserts that “in the modern world in which we all live, *identity is a life story*” (emphasis in the original). More than any other frame of reference or conceptualization, narrated personal identity, or *narrative identity*, is conceived of as the sum of all the stories we have both heard and told of ourselves, of our psychic and social worlds, and of our actions and behaviors (Freeman 1993; Randall 1995).

Two final points should be made regarding narrative identity. The first may be entitled dialogical or conversational. Though personal stories are typically conceived of as discrete, independent units of meaning, regardless of how, where and when they were initially elicited (i.e., “text”), within the field of narrative research and communication some insist that stories (and consequently, identities) are not created or narrated so much as cocreated and conarrated. There is a *joined effort* in the dialogical process of telling one’s life events and experiences. As meaningful communicative acts, stories are addressed to addressees, whether real or imagined, near or distant, single or many. Stories, as well as storied experiences and identities, are created and re-created relationally, in a social environment in which avenues of interpersonal communication (e.g., dialogue and conversation) are open and inviting (Gergen, K. 1994, 1999; Gergen, M. 1994; Shotter 1993; Wortham 2001). Life stories and stories of lived experiences are not—and cannot be—communicated in a social void, but take place within a particular conversation(s) that itself takes place within a broader social discourse. They have no “life” but within the fleeting and transient moments of their performance, which is voiced and embodied. Through this performance they assume shape, and, through the process of being reflected and commented on, may be reshaped and revised repeatedly.

The second point is that when telling stories about themselves people are not only involved in describing or conveying “objective” reality. As Wortham (2001:17) has recently noted, “narrators do more than represent themselves in autobiographical narratives. They also act out particular selves in telling those stories, and in doing so they can construct and sometimes transform themselves.” From a constructionist perspective it may be suggested that while narrating, people do more—indeed, much more—than merely describe: as a relational and coordinated social activity, people continually change, alter and construct who they are and who they have become. Such perspectives accentuate the dynamic and processual qualities of identity vis-à-vis interpersonal communication and interaction. In fact, the common denominator of the different constructionist perspectives, over and beyond their epistemological relativist premise, is the view that “it is the contingent flow of continuous communicative interaction

between human beings that becomes the central focus of concern ... [that] unordered hurly burly of or bustle of everyday social life" (Shotter 1993:10). From such perspectives language in general, and narratives in an epitomical way, are *constitutive*. They do not merely represent social reality, but actively shape and produce it.

It is at this point that I wish to reiterate that the dense and intense social network of interpersonal communication and narration, which takes place between backpackers, definitely amounts to an "unordered hurly burly" (of which the notorious verbosity of tourists in general is an illustration) and to suggest that the trip may be an ideal social environment in which the shared stories of personal experience of travel and adventure play a constitutive role.

Interviewing Israeli Backpackers

It's wrapped up in lots and lots of stories.

—Galit

The current work is based on forty interviews that I held with Israeli backpackers in 1998, as part of my doctoral research. The interviews were in-depth and open-ended, and typically lasted between one and three hours (Fontana and Frey 2000; Kvale 1996). They took place in Israel, usually at the backpackers' (or their parents') homes, shortly *after* the conclusion of the trip (within five months). The trip in which they had participated had lasted at least three months and had taken place in the countries typically frequented by Israelis in Asia (mostly India, Nepal and Thailand) and in South America (mostly the Andeans, Argentina, Chile, and Brazil). Half of the interviewees were women and half were men, all except two were born in Israel, and they belonged to the middle or upper-middle class. They had all traveled shortly after completion of their obligatory military service in Israel, and their age thus ranged between twenty-two and twenty-five years. The method employed was one of "snowball" sampling, by which I was referred by interviewees to their friends and acquaintances (Noy 2002a:96–102; Rosenthal 1993).

As my interests in the research focused on narratives of outdoor excursions, the first part of the interview conversation was usually dedicated to listening to hiking stories, stories of safari expeditions, and the like. With this aim in mind, I addressed the interviewees with a simple open-ended question, asking them to share their stories and experiences with me, thus requesting a core narrative. Later, as the conversation evolved, other stories and experiences were discussed, concerning different stages of the travel

and relating to different activities or "attractions" (a borrowed word from English used by the backpackers), as well as the experience of the return to their homeland at the end of the trip.

The methodology was thus not ethnographic, at least not by assuming a "participant-observer" role and traveling with them in the "field." I chose to avoid traditional ethnographic methods, such as participant observation, because my primary interest concerned the creative ways by which they construct their experience in hindsight and the ways in which they narrate and share their experiences with me, as well as with other audiences (Noy 2002b).³

Lastly, the interviews, which were held in Hebrew, were characterized by interpersonal openness and informality, somewhat typical of interpersonal communication patterns among Israelis (to which I return later). The interaction was fluent and the backpackers were more than pleased at having an audience with which they could share and retell their stories, which indeed flowed from the onset of our conversations (an observation commonly shared by backpackers' researchers, see Avrahami 2001; and Elsrud 2001).

A STORY'S CYCLE: THE STORY OF THE JOURNEY AND THE JOURNEY OF THE STORY

Adventures happen to people who know how to tell it that way.

—Henry James, quoted in Jerome Bruner, *The Remembered Self*

It was at the very beginning of the research, during one of my first interviews, when, after narrating an adventurous story of her trekking experiences in Peru, Ephrat spontaneously asserted:

I get to tell this story a lot! First, anyone who comes to my home and hasn't seen the pictures yet, bam! I instantly sit him down, before-the-coffee, before-anything (laughs), and I tell him this.

At the onset of my meetings with backpackers I was explicitly and emphatically introduced to the salient communication and narrative dimensions involved in recapitulating the experiences, and in the social settings in which these stories were told. I was to realize that the stories to which I was listening had been recounted many times before (and afterward), and were highly articulated and formulaic. They were not elicited and heard only during the interviews, but rather played a social role among veteran

backpackers in Israel. As indicated by Ephrat, I had entered both a physical and metaphoric space, that of Ephrat's "home," a well-delimited social realm, filled with narratives and with their recurrent tellings (Noy 2002b). The stories, Ephrat asserted, are told and retold countless times to "anyone," and entering Ephrat's home meant partaking in the practice of listening to exciting stories of traveling and backpacking and looking at their many pictures, thereby assuming the role of audience.

Some of the intensity of Ephrat's assertion may not have transcended cultural boundaries adequately in its translation. In relating the stories to the common Israeli practice of entertaining guests at one's home while serving and drinking coffee (Kalka 1991), and in suggesting that the stories assume the privileged state of "before-the-coffee," Ephrat explicitly located the narration events at the center, if not at the crux, of self-presentation in everyday interpersonal social interactions. "Before-the-coffee," also indicates the routine, everyday character of such storytellings among backpackers who have recently returned from the trip.

In the following I present excerpts from backpackers' stories, in which the narrators indicate the roles played by stories and interpersonal communication in constituting the meaning of their travel. As we have seen above, these instances are by no means exceptional. Backpackers often attest to the dense social networks in which they participate, usually before they actually embark on the travel, and sometimes even before they have made a decision to do so (that is, in the process of being persuaded to backpack, Noy 2002b). Since backpacking in Israel is a *collective rite-of-passage* and since it has been so for over two decades, we should not be surprised to learn that backpackers heard exciting and inciting stories of travel not only shortly before they actually traveled themselves, but sometimes long before—even a decade or so. Hence, their stories are successively linked to other stories, or more precisely, as we shall soon see, to the stories of others.

The Origin of the Story and the Beginning of the Trip: Listening to the Stories of Veteran Backpackers

During their long preparations for the extended trip, backpackers, like other types of tourists, seek information regarding the sites of their journey and its itinerary (Dann 1996). They wish to have some background knowledge and some images regarding the destinations they are to visit, as well as a rationale for the itinerary, which will later become the narrative through which the different destinations are threaded along a coherent and meaningful plot.

It should be noted that neither word-of-mouth nor narratives are a matter solely concerning backpacker tourists. When Dann (1996) refers to the "all important word-of-mouth category" of information (p. 139), he does so with regard to tourists in general, and not specifically to backpackers (see also Boyer and Viallon 1994; Riley 1994). Nevertheless, while tourists in general have a few modes by which to decide on their destinations and to plan their trip (including visual, audio, and written means), backpackers' preferences for less formal and commercial sources of information translate into their heavy, almost exclusive, reliance on word-of-mouth (as shown above).

As trivial as it may seem, obtaining information by word-of-mouth means *associating with backpackers*, for word-of-mouth means that the information is embodied, rather than inscribed in books or brochures. The soon-to-be backpackers thus seek the knowledge of experienced or "veteran" backpackers who have recently returned from the extended trip and who willingly share their knowledge and experience. Deciding on backpacking as a mode of traveling thus implies opting for a strongly interpersonal and communicative mode of information, both before the trip and throughout the journey.

Developed patterns of interpersonal communication are initiated and established prior to the trip, and, as we will see, enhanced while traveling, as well as after the conclusion of the trip. In the following, we consider how backpackers attest to the common communicative modes or patterns and to the essential narrative quality of their accounts. These reflections, which are told by veterans after the trip, relate to the state of affairs *prior* to the journey.

Dana: Older friends of mine traveled in South America and sent letters and stuff, and generally it's imprinted in you a long time before [the trip]. For me, since eleventh grade I knew I wanted to travel to South America. And during the service in the military we had a map in our office, where we marked the sites we wanted to visit. And then [shortly before the trip] I went to hear a lecture or two in the *Lametayel* store.⁴ I'm not even sure it was that good. You hear about it anyhow; you hear about everything once you're there. And I think it's better to find out for yourself, because when you arrive at these locations, which are crowded with Israelis, they don't let you *not* hear about it. Everyone you meet will tell you stories, and everyone you meet who has trekked already—well, then you'll hear about the trek alright.

Uri: So I inquired and asked people who have traveled there. One of the individuals who had influenced me was a reserve soldier in my [army] unit. He must have been quite older then, thirty plus

or so, and he traveled in Nepal around eighty-six, eighty-seven. And he hiked a certain trail that he warmly recommended and he told me it was—in his time he was among the only ones [to travel there]. So that was my primary motivation to travel to—to travel to the site of the Everest Base Camp.

In these vignettes both Dana and Uri illustrate a few typical characteristics concerning backpackers' perceptions of their travel. They choose to begin their own stories of travel by alluding to *other backpackers' stories*. They mention older acquaintances—friends, in Dana's excerpt, and a reserve soldier, in Uri's—who wrote to them or directly told them stories about their journey. Dana and Uri thus narrate how their own stories are bound, at least in their beginnings, by the stories of others.

The occasions of hearing such stories initially took place not shortly before the trip, but rather a few years previously. A chain of travelers and a chain of stories are alluded to, by which Dana and Uri indicate that the *idea or ethos of traveling* was not a "spur of the moment" matter, but conceived of years earlier, through hearing stories narrated by other Israelis. The decision to travel, then, entails joining in on a larger circle of stories. While this decision is often narrated in terms of a spontaneous and unplanned event, features that enhance the trip's drama (Elsrud 2001), Dana and Uri suggest that the decision to travel means entering a chain of travel stories and embodying within it a story of one's own. Tension is manifest here between the dimension of adventure, on the one hand, and the long-lasting expectations of affiliating with a collective, *vis-à-vis* the stories heard before, on the other hand (see Sørensen 2003).

We should note that the older acquaintances mentioned by the backpackers in their stories are from certain socially marked circles. These might include older family relatives (though usually of the same generation, such as older siblings and cousins), friends of older family relatives, or, in a few cases, such as Uri's, older acquaintances from military service, such as officers or reserve soldiers. The trip is, in fact, a trip "in the footsteps" of significant "older others," who previously traveled and then narrated their travel stories.

In her story Dana uses the Hebrew word *tavvu'a* ("imprinted in" or "stamped on"), to forcibly evoke a biological metaphor of the depth of the image of backpacking for some sociodemographic sectors of Israeli youth. Envisioning backpacking, Dana suggests, occurred some time back, not only during the military service (shortly preceding the trip), but also prior to it (noted also by Avrahami 2001). It seems that the travel narrative amorphously lingered for some time before it was actually pursued and embodied.

However, before actually embarking on their travel, backpackers search for and are exposed to more concrete stories providing more specific

and detailed information. They typically hear such stories in stores selling traveling gear, in which organized "lectures" are routinely given by veteran backpackers (Jacobson 1987; Noy 2002a). These lectures are conducted on a daily basis, lasting an hour or two, and they usually focus on regions frequented by Israeli backpackers. They are situated in designated spaces within stores, usually by the front window where the activity may be viewed by passers-by. Interestingly, Dana voices a typical resentment to the stories she heard on such occasions. Since visiting such stores and hearing stories have become routinized and commercialized activities, backpackers have a growing tendency to regard them with suspicion and criticism. Nevertheless, with only a few exceptions they all frequented these stores, in which they jointly prepare for the trip in two respects: they buy equipment and hear stories.⁵ The fact that most express resentment about going to such activities, but nevertheless persist in participating, suggests a paradox resulting from the collectivization of backpacking over the past three decades (Haviv 2002; Heichal 2000). More broadly, it reflects recent tensions between individual and collectivized identity in contemporary Israeli society (a topic that is beyond the scope of this study, but see Kimmerling 2001).

Dana, like most backpackers, stresses that once one has arrived at one's destination, hearing stories is *literally unavoidable*. She characterizes the sites to which backpackers travel, or at least arrive at—the Israeli enclaves—in a not uncommon metaphor, *homim* (lit. "humming"), which means commotion and relates to a cacophony of voices and noises. These sites are thus described as crowded with Israeli backpackers, with the stories they tell and retell, and with their "humming" voices (Noy forthcoming). It is virtually a soundscape where both veteran and novice backpackers meet, mingle and communicate. Dana suggests that throughout the trip experiences and adventures are unavoidably narrated by the experienced to the novice ("you'll hear about the trek alright").

What is implied in Dana's words is expressed quite explicitly in the following excerpt from Brian's story. After mentioning a couple of visits to such stores, as well as, like Dana, his disappointment with the "light and too general" information provided by the lectures, Brian goes on to describe passionately where it is that "real" and valuable information is available. It is toward the end of this excerpt that Brian realizes an interesting consequence of the tight chain of storytelling and story-listening among Israelis, in the form of the repetitive character that "imprints" these individual stories with their collective meaning:

Brian: The most massive information I received was from Rinat's [a friend's] brothers. They all traveled in the "East." They fed us with the best information there is. Really ... At one of our meetings

there was a slide show, and he [Rinat's brother] narrated about his trip while talking about every picture for five whole minutes. Telling you the *practical stuff* [*tahkles*] precisely. I mean, he really gets you into it, into the trip! ... That was a four-hour-long evening, sitting and watching slides while he was informing me and telling me where to go and what to do there ... He gave me treks to walk, sites to visit, everything, everything ... I sometimes feel I shaped my trip on his. Yeah, it happens that way. You travel other people's trips. Yeah, it happens, y'know.

Brian, too, greatly prefers stories told among friends and relatives in more intimate surroundings to the ones told in the commercialized and less personal lectures given in stores (which he also attended). He, too, uses a strong biological metaphor, that of feeding ("they fed us," Heb. *hezinu otanu*), to evoke the deep significance of the stories, as well as the relationship mediated through them between their tellers, who are veteran backpackers, and their interlocutors, who are novice backpackers "hungry" for pretrip information.

Brian describes in detail and stresses how and why hearing these stories was of essential importance for him before embarking on his trip. He points to their exhaustive nature and to their "practical" or "to the point" dimension. (The word he uses—*tahkles*—reentered Hebrew from the Yiddish language, after having originally been borrowed from Hebrew. The word means "to the point" or "down to earth." It is borrowed here from the same cultural and historical register of the *Dugri* Hebrew, on which I elaborate later. See Almog 2000:144; Katriel 1986:25). He is quite overwhelmed by the amount of information conveyed in the stories ("everything, everything"), which brings him, eventually, to consider the impact of these stories on his own travel, its experience and stories.

It is toward the end of our conversation that Brian realizes that the stories are detailed to a degree that surpasses the quantitative amount of information they contain; what is alluded by him here is, in fact, the *qualitative construction of the trip—its itinerary as well as the experiences it bestows—through the many, extensive stories he has heard*. Though the explicit reference to the experience of traveling "other people's trips" is quite rare in the interviews, the underlying notion is prevalent. Brian admits that the stories do not merely *inform* but also *form* his trip. They "shape" the entire trip, in a way that Brian himself designates as overlapping with previous trips made by other Israeli backpackers. This further implies that not only is the trip carried out in one another's overlapping footsteps (or "ear-steps"), but that consequently the *stories of the trip* are also similar, sometimes even to the degree of *identity*.

Through the stories' frequent reiteration, both diachronically, that is, between experienced and novice backpackers, and synchronically, that is, between contemporaneous backpackers (whether experienced or novice), they are collectivized. They carry the imprints of their former tellers and tellings, and consequently of the entire Israeli backpacking collective, past and present. In other words, the stories are collective in that they are the "property" of the travelers' community, and they are transmitted between the individual participants who embody and perform them in person, and later renarrate them. Only on entering this collectivized rite of passage, vis-à-vis one's participation in the trip, are these social and cultural resources available to the youths, and only then do they acquire the right of owning and telling them (Shuman 1986). In addition to construing the Israeli backpackers' stories as collectivized narratives of individual experience, they thus might be construed, at the same time, as both the product of and the process by which a *collective narrative is embodied individually*.

By repeatedly hearing stories, the listeners progress from participation in a merely passive activity to being implicated by the stories, invited to protagonize, so to speak, within the dramatic scenes they describe. The one who wishes to backpack thus gradually assumes the identity of a backpacker, when shifting from the former identity, that of a discharged soldier, into a new one. Listening here is *becoming*. Through the "*formative and relational* power of language" (Shotter 1993:22; emphasis in the original), their adventure stories produce, and do not merely reflect, social reality.

Excursion narratives

Thus far, the excerpts from Dana, Uri, and Brian's stories concerned the role they carry with regard to the *entire travel*, through reference to its preparations and commencement. Backpackers bound the entire trip with stories that are told and heard in the homeland, both immediately before and long before and after the actual participation. However, the multiple stories they hear are not limited only to the trip as a whole, but are told throughout the trip multiple times, with regard to participation in many activities and excursions (see fig. 1, page 130).

The trip's extended length (it is the longest type of tourist trip) entails a multiplicity of sites (Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Sørensen 2003; Urieli et al. 2002). These excursions, often referred to as "attractions," include various activities, ranging from mountain trekking, river rafting, driving "safari" jeeps and bungee jumping, to bathing on sunny beaches, participating in "full-moon" parties, or in extended meditation sessions. These activities may be viewed as excursions of sorts, because they are all narrated as if involving a temporary leave or distancing from the cities, in which the Israeli enclaves are commonly located; thus, they make for well-demarcated activities.

The following excerpt, taken from Emily's story, is an example that concerns not the story of the entire trip, but the description of events regarding one such excursion. Specifically, Emily is narrating about her trek, referring to a deliberation within the group of Israelis with whom she was trekking in Chile, as to whether to hike the longer path (the Round Path) or the shorter one, in the Torres del Paine trek:

Emily: All the way there we were terribly hesitant as to whether we should trek the Round Path. Because we've been told, "it's plain barren rocks there. There's really no pretty view here. It's got to be quite unattractive [if] no one even narrates about it at all."

Emily spontaneously quotes a suggestion, the voice of which is commonly heard in Israeli backpackers' stories, that she and the group with which she was traveling had heard prior to embarking on the trek. In this case, other backpackers' voices concern a *specific activity* undertaken during the trip, and not the trip as a whole. Before we deal with the suggestion itself, we should note that it is quoted here since it, too, is told by veterans with regard to an activity into which novice or beginner backpackers are inquiring. The narrative pattern we have observed above is manifested here with regard to specific activities or "attractions" along the trip's itinerary.

Emily indicates that she and her travel companions heard stories about the specific trek prior to their trekking. As was apparent in Brian's assertion, the stories that backpackers mentioned they had heard concern both information (in a descriptive form, "barren rocks") and, more important, evaluation and experience ("no pretty view"). It seems that the tourist attraction is not only viewed and experienced by *themselves* as they are undertaking it, but is also reviewed by older peers who have told stories about it. The trail is trailed with stories, so to speak, heard from veteran Israelis prior to the trip and prior to the various activities that form its itinerary. As they walk and hike these trails the backpackers are in fact becoming storytellers, earning rights for their words and stories with every step.

More intricate than it initially seemed, the suggestion made by other backpackers is, in fact, reflexive. The reasons stated for *not* trekking the specific path (the longer, round one), include not only the subjective evaluation that it lacks a "really pretty view," but, both surprisingly and more forcibly, the fact that "no one even narrates about it"! *Because the route is not included in the community's storied itinerary, it is downplayed and excluded.* This "strong" narrative argument is taken to be valid in and of itself, and it points, once again, at the constructive (and instructive) roles played by personal narratives. While some routes and destinations are

included in the backpackers' collective narrative by way of warm recommendations, precise directions, and elaborate descriptions, which are embedded in the narrative of the events that took place there, others are excluded, either by not being mentioned at all (silenced), or by being mentioned in an uncomplimentary and derogative manner, as in this case.

Incidentally, the route which Emily's group eventually chose to hike was the Round Route of the Torres del Paine trek, thus manifesting agency on behalf of the group. The group arrived at this decision precisely because of the route's poor reputation. The fact is that the group's decision, which countered communal wisdom, eventually led to one of the highlights of Emily's story, in the form of a deeply satisfying experience. The "barren rocks" (*trashim*) were found to be surrounded by "great fields of yellow flowers," to the group's great surprise, a sight which was "simply gorgeous." The highlighted experience which Emily narrates received its uniqueness not only because of the impressive view, that of barren stones surrounded by fields of yellow flowers, but also because the break away from the conventional and collective itinerary *constitutes social drama in and of itself.* The yellow fields thus attain their impressiveness because they present a surprising reversal of the collective narrative and its related experience. One cannot help but consider how and in what ways the view of the barren stones surrounded by the yellow flowers and the experience bestowed by it would have been perceived differently had there not been a collective storied itinerary suggesting that this trail would be disappointing.

Whether the trip is carried out according to the collectively narrativized itinerary or breaks away from it, an action entailing social drama, backpackers travel in relation to stories of others' experience, in which sites assume their appearance and attractions conjure up their attractiveness. The itinerary, the destinations and the ensuing experiences are not only "wrapped up in lots and lots of stories," as observed by Galit (above), but are socially constructed within a dense layer of stories, which are reiterated frequently within a close interpersonal social context throughout the extended trip. This also holds true for the backpackers themselves, whose protagonistic or heroic quality is constructed in these stories of personal experience. They, too, are "wrapped up" in stories of personal/collective travel experience (as shown in fig. 1, page 130).

Figure 1 is a graphic depiction both of the routes and directions taken by the stories of the trip and of its many activities. The upper, larger circle refers to the narrative of the entire trip, which is told and heard in the homeland before and after the participation; the smaller circles concern the recurrent storytelling occasions that occur during the trip, in which the stories recount the many activities undertaken by the tourists. Eventually, these multiple stories combine to form the story of the entire trip. In both

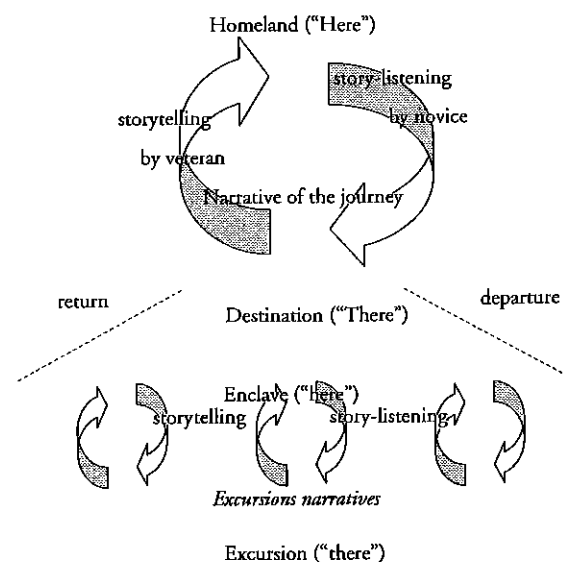


FIGURE 1. A Story Cycle.

cases, experienced travelers share their stories with novices, and in both the “circular quality of tourism” (Dann 1996:140) is clearly manifested, as the backpacking tourists eventually return to their homeland or to the Israeli backpackers’ enclaves.

The convergence of these two facets implies not so much a circular movement, but rather a cyclic, spiral one: there exists an intricate social structure or network that enables the returnees (*ad hoc* veterans) to meet with beginners, and allows for word-of-mouth to travel from the end of one’s trip/activity to the beginning of the other’s, time and again. This, in Sørensen’s terms (2003), following the works of Clifford (1997) and Appadurai (1996), is how the culture of travel and the travel of culture get constructed in an intertwined fashion in backpacking tourism.

The trip itself, which comes to mean the narrative experience of the touristic practice, is “wrapped,” indeed, in travel stories. These stories, told in the “pretip” phase (Dann 1996), preconstruct the experience of the participants socially and culturally. They do so by shaping the itinerary, which assumes the structure of a storyline or a plot, the activities in which backpackers’ participate, and the storied fashion by which they recount their trips.

But stories heard are stories told. While in the above section we focused on the stories heard *before* embarking on the trip and its many different activities (*story-listening*), in the following section we consider the role

played by the stories located at the “end” of the cycle, that is, on the return (*storytelling*). In many ways, telling stories and listening to stories, along this cyclic or spiral continuum, is akin to a relay race, in which the baton is passed from one runner to the next. The basic premise on which this enterprise is based concerns the fact that each runner or backpacker distances him- or herself from a certain location (a “here”) and indulges in an activity that transcends—geographically, symbolically and experientially—the everyday routine, whether in the homeland or during the trip.

A constructionist perspective suggests that the stories not only reflect this adventurous distancing, but construct it simultaneously. For this reason the “here” and the “there” (fig. 1, page 130) are bracketed. They are not merely physical or geographical locations distant from each other, as a destination is distant from the homeland, but are also constructed as such. The destinations’ remoteness is narrated and emphasized precisely through the genre employed, that of travel and adventure (Carter 1998; Cederholm 1999; Elsrud 2001). Of course, this does not mean that *actual* travel does not take place between “real” distant locations, but it stresses the fact that the backpackers’ stories construct such a “there” vis-à-vis such a “here,” and such an “away” vis-à-vis such a “home.” This feature is essential in establishing a distant, liminal area that is qualitatively different from the homeland, which can play a role of a (narrative) rite of passage. It is in such locations, and on the way to and from them, that self-transformation is thus made possible (Noy 2004).

The Reiteration of the Stories and the Conclusion of the Trip: Narrating Stories and Narrative Rites

You wait and see—afterward all we’ll talk about will be the trip.

—Ophir

The narrative within which the experience of the trip is framed suggests that the return home is conceived of, constructed, and narrated as a closure of the adventurous travel narrative. The third phase of the triadic cycle described by Van-Gennep (1908/1960) and Turner (1967, 1973), that of return and reagggregation, now takes place and is accomplished through practice of the rite and the rite—both gained through extended backpacking—to author and narrate one’s stories of profound experience and to share them with others. On their return, either to Israel or to its symbolic reflection in the form of an Israeli enclave, the tourists have ready audiences with which to share their plentiful experiences and thus cash in on their recently gained (tourist) cultural capital.⁶

We now turn to consider the end of the cyclic loop (fig. 1, page 130), where the backpackers who had earlier mentioned hearing stories before embarking, describe how—on their return—they themselves are the ones who now own stories and share them with novices. While our previous inquiry regarded the narrative cycle from the “consumer’s” point of view, that is, listening to stories before and during the trip, we now explore the practice of narrating, that is, the “production” end, which takes place after the trip, or the activities therein, have ended. (The consumer-product image here is intentional: the transformation from consuming stories to producing them entails a social implication, that the individual has acquired the ability to produce viable cultural products.) Benefiting from constructionist perspective, we attend not only to the ways by which the end of the trip is reflected and narrated in the stories, but also to the ways in which the stories construct and mark that very end—the closure or completion of the trip and of its profound experience.

In the following three excerpts Ofra, Uri, and Sagit describe sharing their stories after returning from a trek. In Ofra’s case the return is to Cuzco; in Uri’s case, to a village located at the end of the trail in Nepal; and in Sagit’s case, to Israel after a trip to South America:

Ofra: We arrived at the local discotheque to tell about the trek that very evening. That’s another kind of “drill” [*nohal*] there. It’s very common that people who return ... tell their stories to those who leave.

Uri: I climbed down to Namche and there I was already [considered] among the “old timers.”⁷ There were already tales about me. And there I told my own adventure stories, and so I was an attraction for a while. It was nice. They sought my advice and asked questions and such. [They referred to me as] the “Crazy Israeli.”

Sagit: [I get to tell my stories] every chance I have. It’s simply like that. I sometimes ask people around me to let me know if I get carried away, ’cos whenever I hear someone speaking Spanish, or someone with a Spanish accent, you can be sure I will tell my stories ... Only today I told some friends at work about South America, and before, yesterday, I dated someone who’s about to travel and I eagerly showed him the picture albums and told him of the experiences [I had] ... And we don’t stop reminiscing about these experiences.

Storytelling is pointed at in these excerpts as commonplace, a routine or a “drill,” as put by Ofra, which takes place on the completion of the activity.

The return from the activity and from the trip as a whole means both a return to the departing point, which could be Israel or an Israeli enclave, and/or a return to an Israeli audience with whom the narrators may now share their stories of experiences and adventures. The instances in which backpackers mention they have participated in the social activity of telling stories are as abundant as the cases in which they mention that they had heard stories prior to the trip.

Further, when stating that stories are to be told “that very evening,” Ofra points at a degree of immediacy (perhaps even urgency) in the sharing and telling of such stories on the same day of the completion of the activity, as well as at the interconnected relationship between the actual activities and the stories depicting them. Stories are told soon after participation, thus framing and articulating the event. There is hardly time or room for them to be contemplated before their telling. These direct relations between story and travel are apparent in Uri’s excerpt as the first location to which he arrives at the end of the trek, that is, the first site perceived as located outside the trek’s trail, is also the first site where his stories are narrated. He, too, explicitly refers to the sharing of information after completing the tourist activity, in the form of “adventure stories” (*sipurei harpatkaot*).

The discotheque mentioned by Ofra, called Mama Africa, is in fact a familiar site of meeting and mingling among Israelis in Cuzco, and is frequently mentioned in the narratives of those traveling in South America (“All the Israelis partied there every evening ... it’s *the* known discotheque,” as one backpacker put it). Arriving there to share one’s stories is a socially acknowledged rite, part of the backpackers’ experience in South America.

Although Sagit’s reflections do not suggest a designated public site in which such storytellings take place, she does point at a few places and a few everyday social circumstances in which veteran backpackers narrate their experiences. These include the workplace, meeting and reminiscing with friends who have also traveled, and meeting with peers who are planning to travel and who are seeking advice. Significantly, the instances Sagit mentions also include truly informal circumstances, such as striking up a conversation with complete strangers on the street (we will turn to this informality later).

Referring to such stories, told from the vantage point of the experienced, another backpacker points out that “by passing on the stories you can also help people.” The stories and the interpersonal activity of communicating them are thus perceived as carrying a *positive moral and social value*. By sharing what one has learned one is, in fact, doing good to one’s fellow backpackers. Storytelling one’s experiences during the trip is viewed here not only as a privilege, but as an obligation, complying with a “norm” (Riley 1988). Hence we can assume that avoiding sharing one’s stories in not a

neutral matter, where one can simply choose as one wishes, but a refutation of a communal tenet and, as such, is a misconduct. The interpersonal network of communication, in and through which narratives are authored and narrated, thus attains an additional dimension. Due to the stories' informative features, they are regarded as helpful, and communicating them means *helping one another* (the experienced helping the novice), akin to the ways backpackers might lend each other traveling or hiking gear once they are through with it. The stories are not about leisure, but about risk, adventure, and authenticity (Cederholm 1999; Elsrud 2001), and they are not valued in terms of a leisurely practice for entertainment's sake, nor only for boasting or bragging, which enhance one's esteem among peers, but rather in terms of how *useful and functional they are in helping to cope successfully with the difficulties and challenges they themselves construct*. The stories constitute part of the social fabric of the culture of backpacking tourism.

Thus, after repeatedly hearing stories of veterans before and during the trip, the cyclic character of the narratives reaches its completion with the assumption of the role of narrator. On returning from "there," which is typically referred to as "Third World"—a space in which adventures and risk supposedly linger (Carter 1998; Elsrud 2001; Noy 2004), to the contrasted "here," the location of the mundane, the tourists eventually achieve a much valued status. Riley (1988:321) suggests that although they portray the lack of social pressure as one of the advantages of backpacking, the fact is that among backpackers it "brings status or at least approval when one shares her or his experiences with other travelers." They are now perceived by others, as well as by themselves, as experienced or veteran, which indicates that they have successfully fulfilled the rite of passage and have been initiated into the community of veteran (Israeli) backpackers. Subsequently, they earn the right, without which the assumption of the status is never complete, of telling and sharing their stories of adventures on their return and reaggregation.

From this constructionist-narrative perspective, the stories that they narrate on their return validate their status as experienced backpackers, as ones who have been "there" and returned, and complement the actual trip. The return is constituted through its narrative: the return is the *telling of the return*. It is done through a retrospective re-creation and narration of a "taleworld" (Young 1987), the story in which the events of the trip are described in detail and in which the backpackers-narrators are themselves the protagonists (Elsrud 2001). By the mere fact that they tell their adventurous stories on their return, they are acknowledged as possessing both authorship and storytelling rights (Shuman 1986), and they assume within their stories not only a role of protagonist, but also of hero and heroine.

The status and role of the narratives told by veteran backpackers suggest a resemblance with types of stories which, *prima facie*, would not seem similar. Although discussing aspects of religious language, Keane's (1997) elaboration on conversion narratives points at the complementary role carried by narratives in the conversion. These narratives, too, depict profound personal experience from a retrospective view, and in them too, a well-built story is constituted vis-à-vis "travel," albeit through a symbolic space. According to Keane (1997:58) the convert assumes the role of a storyteller: "Transformation consists of taking a new role as speaker. The conversion narrative ... entails being transformed from the listener to the speaker ... the speaker's religious identity is approached not only or most usefully as object of discourse (as in the 'life history'), but also as an inhabitable speaking role."

While this is not the place to elaborate on the significant yet covert religious aspects pertaining to the backpacking experience (but see Noy 2002b), it is noteworthy that the backpackers indeed attest to a transformation. The sought-after and achieved state of an "old timer" (see Uri's excerpt, above) is clearly mediated and validated through narrating rights and rites, which mean through repeated participation in storytelling occasions in which an audience is readily available. The adventures and experiences they have endured, they assert, may be witnessed *exclusively* through backpacking. In other words, there is no other way by which one may gain these rights, but the actual (embodied) participation in the travel rite.

On their return to their homeland, they assume the active role of telling stories, which means they have earned the right that veteran backpackers are known to possess: they are now certified storytellers. These narrating rights are actualized and validated repeatedly by the continuous presence of eager audiences, to whom the stories may now be told in the first person and to whom the stories are as useful as traveling gear and as essential as "food."⁸ As we have seen, there are designated places and spaces, private and public, as well as ritualized activities, in which such interactions take place. The returning tourists now "produce" and own significant and highly esteemed cultural capital (of a kind typically gained via travel, Clifford 1997).

BACKPACKERS' PREFERENCE FOR ORAL NARRATIVE: INFORMALITY, RECENCY AND RELIABILITY

The above excerpts evoke the central role carried by personal narratives in the information-gathering and -disseminating activities with which backpackers are continuously preoccupied, as well as the constitutive role by

which "information" contributes to the construction of the adventure and travel experience. As shown in Figure 1, the stories of participation in a variety of activities "travel" alongside the backpackers' route, so to speak, in a direction from the experienced veteran to the "would-be" beginner. (No wonder then that some researchers consider the entire backpacking enterprise to be an educational experience, focused on continuous learning. See Avrahami 2001; Tomaszewski 2002.) I now return to the communication aspects of storytelling activities and social interactions, addressing them through an investigation of such activities and such interactions in the tourists' home society.

The impressive frequency with which backpackers engage in storytelling and story-listening activities, in addition to a variety of oral and written forms of interpersonal communication activities, and the roles that such narratives play during the trip, are made possible by the dense network of social interaction and oral communication that exists between global backpackers (Elsrud 2001; Murphy 2001; Riley 1988). As instances of interpersonal communication, the narratives—the meaning they hold, and the social constructions they produce—are embedded within a rich social interpersonal context. In this context the backpackers express their need for these many stories in terms of their informative value, yet the stories, while indeed containing information, also construct the experience of risk, adventure, and authenticity (Cederholm 1994, 1999; Elsrud 2001), and thus, in turn, augment that very need.

It is therefore worthwhile to point to the features that backpackers attribute to the stories they share, which make them so appealing and so relevant in their eyes (or ears), and which may account for their pervasive use. Before we commence, however, I wish to touch on two additional sources of information that are available to the backpackers and that are frequently mentioned by them: the guidebooks that are read closely before and throughout the trip, and the "lectures" that are attended prior to the trip (note, I do not presently regard the important role played by the Internet and electronic correspondence, cf. Sørensen 2003). These two sources of information complement the network of oral interpersonal communication in shaping and constructing the experience of backpacking tourism. They are regularly and frequently referred to, though not as highly esteemed as the stories told by the backpackers themselves.

Alternative Guidebooks and Lectures

Akin to backpackers of other cultures of origin, Israelis, too, make much use of commercial, alternative/underground, travel guidebooks while preparing

their trip and in the course of their travel. The tourist guidebooks they mention are directed specifically at backpacker tourists; they typically include such publications as the "Lonely Planet" and the "Hand Book." They are frequently mentioned in the stories as helpful sources of information, which influence the choice of sites and itineraries during the trip (Elsrud 2001; Riley 1988; Sørensen 2003; on guidebooks, see Bhattacharyya 1997; and particularly Carter 1998). Such alternative guidebooks are considered by the backpackers to be a viable alternative to guides in the more conventional charter-tourist travel. Rather than depending on a guide as the sole source of information, necessitating traveling in a group, the backpackers' preference for guidebooks allows them to avoid group congregation, and yet not relinquish the much sought-after tourist information. The preference for use of guidebooks, particularly those "underground travel guides" (Riley 1988:322), and their frequent reiteration of this preference, plays a role in the backpacking discourse, suggesting yet another contrast with the perceptions of the "mass tourist." In short, regardless of whether backpackers actually do or do not travel in groups, the alternative guidebooks provide an alternative—one of a few we will shortly consider—to traveling in groups with the help of guides, and thus play a role in the backpacking ethos themselves.

Somewhat paradoxically, the guidebooks' constant availability (due to their written, rather than oral, medium) renders them a comprehensive and highly influential source of information. This is attested in the observation that backpackers often point to concerning the closely synchronization between the activities they engage in and the information and recommendations made in the guidebooks (often when relying on specialized editions, which describe in great detail subregions or specific activities). It seems that the guidebooks, which are generally not suspected of being commercialized, allow the backpackers the *experience* of independence and autonomy from tourist institutions (in the form of a guide and a group). This is the context in which one might understand the backpackers' assertions concerning the high status of guidebooks, expressed in statements such as, "our bible was our Hand Book," or "in South America one must travel with the *Lonely Planet Hand Book*. It's in English ... [it describes] all the sites. All the smallest places you reach" (cf. Riley 1988:322–323; Sørensen 2003:859–860).

Notwithstanding their heavy reliance on guidebooks, the tourists nevertheless systematically express their preference for *transient information* communicated through word-of-mouth, rather than the permanent (written) information offered in guidebooks. As observed by Riley, "As ubiquitous as these guidebooks are ... a great deal of information is passed on via word-of-mouth and many of the latest 'in' spots are only communicated

this way" (Riley 1988:323). Moreover, Sørensen (2003:860) recently noted that, "in certain circles among the backpackers, guidebooks are much scorned and seen as a symbol of the lesser traveler," a consequence of which is that they engage in "bible bashing" (p. 860). And indeed, soon after his assertion that "our bible was our Hand Book," Ariel makes a clear point regarding his perception of the hierarchy of the information sources that influenced his decision-making while traveling:

Ariel: Everything you need you can find there, and [if] we would want to see where we should be heading—we'd open the Hand Book. It's like that mainly in Mexico, though, where there aren't many Israelis. 'Cos in Chile, for example, or in the Andes, you simply meet Israelis all the time and you'll hear from them, "hey, go there, go there!"

The last sentence in the excerpt clearly implies that the preference for guidebooks is superseded by the abundant availability of information conveyed via oral interpersonal communication. A guidebook is of value to the backpackers in cases in which the oral communication networks do not exist. The latter source of information is perceived as being as detailed as the former, but with additional positive features. If the image used by backpackers to describe the knowledge (and authority) of the Hand Book is "the bible," then one may only speculate about the appropriate image for the social network among (Israeli) backpackers, which surpasses the guidebooks.

In addition to guidebooks, the travelers often mention that they attended "lectures" given by veterans prior to their trip, in designated stores in which backpacking (and military) gear is sold (Jacobson 1987). Backpackers tend to mention such stores in their stories in proximity with the mention of guidebooks, as if grouping the available sources of information, making an "information package" that contains, in ascending order of value, lectures, guidebooks, and personal stories. They point out that, like guidebooks, the lectures are conducted in commercial stores, consistently stressing their lower status on the information hierarchy. They perceive these activities as signifying an advanced degree of institutionalization of the backpacking practice in Israel, which indeed seems to be the case. As mentioned by Dana in the excerpt above, although she attended two such lectures she did not think they were "that good," because "you hear about it anyhow; you hear about everything once you're there." Another backpacker suggested that "it's o.k., but the lectures there are too general."

Nevertheless, nearly all the interviewees in the present study mentioned spontaneously that they *had* visited such stores, at least once or

twice, and had heard a couple of lectures there. Vered, talking about her decision to travel, said, "first thing [you] go to the 'La-metayel,'" and Yoav pointed out that "nearly everyone passes through the 'La-metayel,' either in Tel Aviv or in Jerusalem." The routine mention of visits to the stores, throughout the last two decades, suggests that they have come to assume a unique *rite* of their own within the community. They are, in a way, the first site and activity along the itinerary, the first "must" along a list of "sites" that backpackers are obliged to visit, a social activity to engage in and perform on their decision to travel, one which assumes a role in shaping and constructing their tourist experience and identity.⁹

Surpassing the guidebooks and the lectures in terms of the informative value they hold in the eyes of the backpackers and in terms of the ways they shape their itinerary and construct their experience, narratives, which make for the dense pattern of interpersonal communication, are clearly the preferred medium. Why is this the case? What are the characteristics of oral narratives that backpackers point to when accounting for their pervasiveness? In the following paragraphs I suggest a few prominent qualities that are attributed to the stories: informality, spontaneity, recency, and reliability or trustworthiness. Later, the inquiry will turn to common patterns of communication within Sabra-Israeli society in general, which also manifest quite a few of these features.

Informality and Spontaneity

Backpackers refer to the stories they constantly hear and tell throughout the trip as an inherently informal and spontaneous means of interpersonal communication. Because they are not printed they are not perceived as commercial(ized) products, associated with an institution. Unlike colorful tourist brochures or even guidebooks, oral stories ideally adhere to the backpacking ethos: their informality and spontaneity affords them a "counterculture," backpackish quality. Because they are not perceived as being consumed (in the commercialized tourist sense to which backpackers react negatively) and are by no means expensive (on the contrary, they are free!), sharing them is a constitutive social activity, perceived as an alternative to conventional "mass tourism" modes of communication.

Somewhat paradoxically, these narratives, an inherent product of frequent socialization, support the backpackers' self-image of a *solo or individual traveler*. They do so in two related ways: first, as pointed out by Elsrud (2001) and myself (2003, 2004), they are adventurous travel narratives about individual heroes and heroines, about their achievements, their successful encounters with risks, perils, and so on; second, while traveling

with the help of stories, communicated spontaneously and informally, backpackers attest to the fact they are in effect traveling “alone,” *independently, as it were, of any marks of organization or institution*. Such, for example, is Dana’s suggestion (p. 183) that one should “find out for yourself”; by “yourself” she is in fact referring to the network of communication between backpackers. When referring to *sipurei dereh* (lit. “stories of the path/road”), which are exchanged between the travelers and are sometimes handwritten and collected into bound albums, Neta suggests that “you simply know exactly where to hike, where to stop, where to camp ... you don’t really need a guide,” and Ronen points out that “you can trek independently.” Thus, remarkably, within a thick interpersonal social realm the trip’s experience is constructed as an individual endeavor (Cohen 2004).

Recency

A second merit often mentioned when praising the qualities shared by travel stories is their recency or “freshness.” By this backpackers indicate that the time that has elapsed between the occurrence of the narrated events and the time they are told is short, even infinitesimal; in the continuously changing and adventurous world they explore and construct, this is a crucial esteemed quality. Mention of the stories’ recency serves a dual purpose: it constructs the adventurous realm in which backpackers travel, as dynamically changing, and it affirms these constructed qualities by “supplying updated information” about destinations, sites, and so forth. The interval between actions and stories lends the latter a seemingly considerable degree of accuracy. After all, where there is constant change only very recent accounts and reports—those with a “real-time” quality—can represent reality accurately and thus be of value. In the following vignette Brian explicitly points to the importance of the recency of the stories. He does so while describing a meeting with fellow Israelis, who had just arrived at Bangkok and had brought with them guidebooks and additional information from Israel. Brian asserts:

But there’s nothing like when someone’s “in the field” (*ba-shetah*). When someone was in the field and knows—[pause] he is now in the field. It’s not that he was, but he is there this very instance. ‘Cos things change, it’s hot-on-the-grill, hot-on-the-grill (*ham al ha-esh*).

While considering the immediate quality of oral communication in the social environment surrounding him, Brian realizes that, although the narratives have the narrated events as their content, and hence are ontologically on a different plain, they nevertheless take place *within the same*

context of the events they describe, that is, the trip. The temporal distinction between the present and the near past is confusing for Brian. On the one hand, the stories reflect the events in hindsight, yet on the other hand, the geographical, temporal, and experiential distance between the told and the telling in the trip is infinitesimal.

To invoke Brian’s culinary metaphor, which stems from the semiotics of the highly developed barbecuing tradition in Israel, the stories are suggested to be as close to the events they describe as grilled dishes are to the fire that grills them. The metaphor also evokes another image, another unique quality that is attributed to the activities. Fire attests here to the “real” and “authentic” qualities of the experiences met with while traveling, which are conveyed in stories of authenticity (Cederholm 1994, 1999; Noy 2004). The use of the fire metaphor is quite powerful in that fire is of a truly transient nature; to “capture” it would require an immediate or instant mode of referential communication.

The stories are considered updated as they are heard “hot,” straight from the “field.” While guidebooks have publication editions, which mark their temporal fixedness and their relevance to a specific point in the past, oral communication and stories are perceived to be as alive and as immediate as their narrators. In this sense, the existential and experiential tension typical of Western thought (at least since the Middle Ages) between printed and oral literatures is manifested (Stewart 1991, 1993). As expected, while printed matter is associated with commercial tourism, the backpackers align themselves with oral versions, which they render countercanonic.

Reliability or Trustworthiness

A third esteemed feature commonly attributed to the stories is their reliability. They are conceived of as far more reliable and trustworthy than any other available source of information. These valued features are an outcome of the qualities mentioned above, that is, the spontaneity of their communication, and the recency of their telling with regard to the events they describe. Needless to say, in a context in which risk and adventure are constructed as prominent features, reliability and trustworthiness are of exceptionally high value.

It seems that among the stories of Israeli backpackers in particular, reliability receives considerable weight and is very highly esteemed. This esteem is conveyed not only with regard to the features mentioned above, but also with regard to the *sources* of the stories, fellow Israeli backpackers. Thus, in addition to their aforementioned structural qualities, their particular origin with *Israeli narrators* is a crucial consideration in the evaluation of their worth.

For instance, Eli mentions meeting New Zealander backpackers who traveled with the help of topographic maps. He then imports into his story the voices of Israeli backpackers who told him, "You can't do anything with such maps," and Eli continues, "this one Israeli guy who did this trek a couple of weeks before us, sat down and drew us a map ... on the piece of paper. The trail was marked [on the map] and it said 'here you hike through a pass,' 'here you go through so and so.'" The stories told by Israelis are perceived as superior, in this case to topographic maps. Like Eli, even after expressing criticism of the "Israeli herd" and of the enclaved manner in which Israelis travel, the interviewees mention that when reliable information is "really" needed, fellow Israelis are, after all, the most reliable sources. Orit observes:

We have congregating and grouping qualities, for good and for bad. We help each other. If you are alone and sick, and there are Israelis around, you can be sure they'll take care of you ... they'll always help you. It's very typical of Israelis, always giving you advice, even if you don't want it ... All the information circulates between Israelis. The best restaurant, the best hotel, where should you buy this or that, and then you know everything.

Israeli backpackers—while in an extranational and multilingual environment—point to one another as sources of reliable information through which they construct their narrativized experiences. Orit's excerpt reminds us that the stories are conceived of as concrete and as useful in similar ways to the traveling gear carried by the backpackers (see above). Because the travel is constructed as risky and adventurous, Orit does not refer only to restaurants and hotels, but also to *predicaments* (such as "alone and sick"), where informativity and reliability are not perceived as a touristic luxury. It is in these uncertain environments that Israelis "help each other."

Though they occasionally mention meeting and traveling with non-Israelis, these short-term companionships are hardly reflected in shared storytelling and story-hearing practices. Further, when they do mention exchanging stories with non-Israelis, the backpackers eventually admit that when it comes to "reliable" information (and they explicitly refer to reliability), the stories Israelis tell are clearly of the highest value. They can be "taken at face value." They know the right prices, places and seasons, but more crucially, they will offer real "help" in times of trouble.

ISRAELI STORIES OF A RITE OF PASSAGE

So far we have explored the constitutive role played by narratives among backpackers in general, examining the dense interpersonal social space in

which these stories are narrated and echo during the trip, and which, in turn, they help to construct. The constructed features of adventure, risk, exoticity, and authenticity suggest a radical change from everyday life at home, *as well as* an opposition to other modes of travel, primarily "mass tourism." Further, we have seen that in addition to their content, their emphasis on qualities such as reliability allows the oral narratives shared by Israelis to construct their collective narrative in opposition to "Other" travelers, whether charter tourists or backpackers.

The inquiry has not focused so far on unique sociocultural patterns which are typical of the *Israeli* backpackers, as opposed to backpackers of other countries of origin. Most of the features discussed are typical of backpackers in general, and not necessarily of Israelis. Yet a sensitive reading of the excerpts above does suggest that in addition to the general institutional features concerning interpersonal communication and storytelling, there are noticeable cultural-specific features common among Israelis, to which the backpackers themselves allude. These issues are at the focus of the final section. The discussion could pursue two alternative tracks. One possibility would be to explore comparatively the patterns of interpersonal communication and storytelling during the trip, as they are manifested by Israeli and non-Israeli travelers, thus differentiating the unique features that characterize the two groups. Alternatively, it could concentrate not on the differences, but rather on the *similarities*, between modes of interpersonal communication and storytelling common among Israelis in general, on the one hand, and the *social-institutional context created and sustained during the trip*, on the other hand. In the latter case it would inquire into the features of the backpacking context that *appeal* to Israelis, and which allow and support the *reverberation* of social knowledge they already possess. Since this research is not comparative, and since in this case I find the theoretical issue concerning the *similarities* between the social features of the home society and of the tourists' trip to be more intriguing, I have opted to pursue the latter course of action.

The Dugri Style of Communication and Storytelling

To speak Dugri is to act like a Sabra.

—Quoted in Tamar Katriel, *Talking Straight*

Before considering the sociocultural patterns characteristics of Israeli backpackers, I wish to make a short personal digression. During the years of my doctoral research the question Why do so many Israelis backpack? has persistently surfaced. It was raised by the backpackers with whom I met, by

colleagues, by acquaintances who had heard of my work, and, of course, by myself. It has always been present as a lingering, unsettling question. While I entertained a few possible answers, some of which are presented in various essays in this volume (and Noy, 2002a) and which refer to macro-sociocultural issues, I was nevertheless not fully satisfied. As I am aware that within a Geertzian, interpretive social science, "Why?" questions are often *misleading*, I was wary. But more important, the more literature I read (particularly recent works, such as Cederholm 1999; Elsrud 2001; Murphy 2001; Sørensen 2003), the more I was struck by the similarities (rather than the dissimilarities) between Israeli and Western backpackers, with regard to interpersonal communication and narrative sharing.

It was precisely this observation that later enabled me to rephrase the "Why?" question in a far more creative and productive manner, suggested in this study. Rather than considering the question Why do so many Israelis backpack? I began to question What is it about this particular practice, that is, backpacking, that specifically resembles or echoes common social patterns among Israeli youths? While sociological and anthropological literature on tourism generally concentrates on the *differences* between images of home and destination, which attract, "pull" or "push," tourists to travel, in this case I chose to focus on the similarities. This theoretical viewpoint does not negate the existence of differences, but suggests that, at least in cases of such pervasive patterns of participation, the dissimilarities are complemented by similarities, which makes massive participation more likely. Further, while the dissimilarities are overt and relate to the image, the similarities are covert, and relate, in this case, to process: the communication patterns by which the images are constructed and communicated.

In the specific issues concerning interpersonal communication and storytelling, the investigation of similarities and resemblances has been illuminating. Once this question has been posed, it pointed at quite striking resemblances, which have not received mention in the literature on Israeli backpackers and which, considering the importance of interpersonal communication in constituting the practice and its experience, play a crucial role in collective participation. It turns out that the characteristics of the frequent interpersonal communication and storytelling patterns discussed above—informality, recency, spontaneity, trustworthiness, and so on—are *the very same dominant features of the sociability style common among the sociocultural linguistic background of the Israelis who choose to backpack* (i.e., secular, middle- and upper-middle-class Jews, born in Israel). The interpersonal communication patterns typical of backpacking tourism *tellingly resemble and reflect* similar patterns among Israeli youth. In fact, such characteristics are iconic to an entire epoch in the Israeli (near) past, that of the "Sabra" culture, on which I elaborate shortly.

In other words, what I suggest in the following section is that it is not merely coincidental that the features manifested in global backpacking are precisely the ones that typically, if not emblematically, characterize the close and informal interpersonal communication patterns among large parts of native Israeli society. Indeed, these features function as primary facilitators, allowing for the massive participation of Israelis in a rite of passage in the form of backpacking tourism.

Finally, in order to gain an historical perspective, it should be mentioned that the heyday of the Sabra patterns of sociability and communication was in the generation of the present backpackers' grandparents. Nevertheless, the enduring influences of this culture are pervasive and are manifested in the dominant patterns of interpersonal communication in contemporary Israeli society (Almog 2000; Blum-Kulka 1992, 1997; Katriel 1986, 1991, 1993).

Informal interpersonal communication

The most influential interpersonal communication style in Israeli society, which has probably had the greatest influence on contemporary patterns of communication in the public sphere, is the register of the *Dugri* Hebrew. In her in-depth study of communication patterns among native-born secular Israelis ("Sabras"), Katriel elaborates on the *Dugri* style of speech as a pattern of sociability relying on a marked style of interpersonal communication (notably "Talking Straight," see also Katriel 1999:206–225). This pattern of communication has been a "key symbol" of the Sabra culture, and is characterized by a cluster of qualities such as interpersonal informality, directedness (matter-of-factness), simplicity (or an "antistyle" attitude), assertiveness, sincerity, and solidarity or companionship.

The *Dugri* "interactional code" (Katriel 1986:34) was initially performed by the first generation of native-born Israelis as a reaction to their parents' generation, the pioneer immigrants from eastern and western Europe, and to the perceived Diasporic Jewish culture and Yiddish language. It was part of a cultural, intergenerational reaction, which sought to constitute and affirm a new collective and a new national identity (the "New Jew"). The Sabra generation had a primarily masculine image, that of the courageous warrior, as well as that of the adventurer, the seeker of risk and authenticity (Almog 2000), features crucial to our discussion. The speech style produced by the Sabra generation may be clustered into two patterns—sincerity and informality.

Sincerity or directness of interpersonal communication refers to a speech style in which interpersonal space is close, the speakers engage frequently and actively in each other's utterances, and some aspects of politeness, such as different (and usually hierarchal) terms of address, are

disavowed (Blum-Kulka 1992, 1997; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984). The result is the seemingly "direct" interpersonal approach that is conveyed in the literal meaning of the word *Dugri* (Arabic "direct," "not round-about"). As the *Dugri* register is an "externalized" mode, it expresses openness between the participants in the conversation, companionship, and the "fusing [of] the personal and the communal in dramatizing sincerity" (Katriel 1986:24). In fact, Katriel points out that it is related to the "communitas" state (Turner 1969), wherein "personal honesty, openness and lack of pretensions and pretentiousness" (Turner, cited in Katriel 1986:30) are sought and highly valued.

Informality or simplicity refers to a speech style in which the *tabkles* (lit. "purpose" in Yiddish) attitude is evoked. It is a factually oriented speech style, conveying a clear preference for accomplished acts, rather than a stylistically elaborated manner of speech. As seen above, for instance in Brian's excerpt (p. 186), the stories backpackers tell are esteemed primarily for their *tabkles* or purposeful qualities. In the broader context, that of global backpacking, the practical, "informative" genre of communication, which we have referred to repeatedly, echoes this "antistyle" speech style (which has become, of course, highly stylized), in which "value is placed on a pragmatic, matter-of-fact, active orientation" (Katriel 1986:25). The emphasis is on doing, achieving and accomplishing, rather than on verbal elaborations or loquaciousness. In other words, storytelling is valued in such interpersonal patterns of communication only when describing achievements in the "actual" world (and, indeed, what better genre to fit into such a demand than the informative-adventurous one?).

Informal interpersonal storytelling

Within the interpersonal communication context of the Israeli backpackers, storytelling also manifests a clearly Israeli-Sabra variation. The *Dugri* speech style entails a repertoire of subgenres of adventure stories. The preference for a factual and *tabkles* style of speech, discussed above, would indeed suggest that adventure stories, in which actual accomplishments and achievements are described in detail, would be precisely the kind of verbal elaboration that would receive high social legitimacy, and would reward their tellers with a higher social status. Adventure stories would be the foremost genre by which to earn interpersonal social esteem, for they are intrinsically related to "actual" events and occurrences (Green 1991, 1993; Noy 2003, 2004).

A typical example, one drawn from the Sabra period and culture of the first half of the twentieth century, is the *Chizbat*, a tall tale of adventures and wonders, often describing humorously mischievous doings (Katriel 1986; Oring 1981; Zerubavel 1995:168–169). The *Chizbat* (Arabic "lie") is a well-structured narrative in which there appears to be a need to prove

the protagonist's assertive character (which sometimes leads to a humorous-ironical point, mostly missing from the backpackers' tales). As with the travelers' stories of shared experiences, the *Chizbat* created and recreated nostalgia and a sense of group togetherness and cohesiveness, as it was a "medium through which the group talked about itself and honed its common identity" (Almog 2000:248).

Among the backpackers, the telling of adventure tales serves a similar function to the *Chizbat*, in terms of crystallizing the collective's identity. At the end of the trip or the specific tourist excursion/activity in which they participate, the youths have many occasions in which to narrate their perspective on the events within a communal social setting; they thus create a shared "group story" which has a discernible "group voice" (which sometimes augments and sometimes contrasts with the individual voice in the stories. See Noy 2002a, forthcoming).

However, regardless of the specific features of the *Chizbat* genre, bragging and boasting stories are well-acknowledged features of the register of interpersonal communication under discussion. As a common Hebrew expression describes these bragging and boasting trends, *laruts lesaper la-bevre* (lit. "run and tell the guys"), once a challenge has been overcome and a mission accomplished, there exists an explicit social expectation to hurry and to share one's story with one's friends. The original semantic connotation of the expression was related to male sexual conquests, in which the "hero" is expected to "run and tell" his guys or buddies. With regard to the backpackers, however, the conquests described in their adventure stories are not of a sexual nature, but concern a tourist, pseudo-colonial conquest, and a triumph over risks and perils (Carter 1998; Elsrud 2001; Nash 1989). Note, incidentally, that colonial discourse itself is not without sexual/erotic underpinnings. On the masculine and masculinizing narratives of adventure and conquest told by Israeli backpackers, see Noy 2003). Ofra's excerpt (p. 195), in which she mentions that she and her companions rushed to tell their stories "that very evening," indicates a commonplace, a "drill," as she puts it, which reflects a social pressure to hurry and to share the stories of the *tabkles*, that is, boasting and bragging tales of "matter-of-fact," real accomplishments, of narrative accounts that are "hot-on-the-grill," to quote Brian.

Though the quality of openness of the *Dugri* speech relays on the ethos of a supposedly egalitarian, "communitas" like community, the tall tales of the narrator's/protagonists' adventures suggest that individual stature is held in high regard (Almog 2000; Katriel 1986). The fact that such a strong hierarchical network exists among the backpackers—non-Israelis and Israelis alike—has been pointed out repeatedly (Elsrud 2001; Riley 1988). In this hierarchy esteemed positions are reserved for those experienced veterans who tell stories of profound and extreme experiences of

adventure, risk and authenticity. Within such a hierarchy, where narrators are continuously esteemed and criticized for doing or not doing the right thing at the right time, it is clear how tall tales could advance their performers along the social hierarchy. As stated explicitly by Uri (p. 195), and implicitly by Ephrat, Brian, and Ofra, telling adventurous stories of achievement and accomplishment is highly rewarding (entitling Uri to the acclaimed status of an "old timer"). Moreover, because there are no external—institutional or organizational—structures by means of which status is maintained and expressed, the travelers are required to repeatedly engage in status-constituting storytelling. "The effect is that," writes Sørensen (2003:858), "even though status exchange produces instant hierarchies, this must be described as 'hierarchization' as process rather than hierarchy as structure" (emphasis in the original).

Furthermore, within the Sabra culture there exists an inherent historical connection between storytelling and travel adventure. Many of the tahkles stories of the Sabras revolve around extensive, strenuous and risky hiking and traveling, often in search of an "authentic" experience. The outdoors, the "natural" and particularly mountainous locations such as Masada, the Negev Desert, and the Judean and Galilee Hills were attractive destinations set by a national(ist) discourse in which hiking and traveling carried a central cultural, promilitaristic role (Gurevitch and Aran 1991; Katriel 1995; Zerubavel 1995). In fact, according to some scholars, Zionist immigration to the Land of Israel in general and settling the land may be perceived as an "adventurous" endeavor (see Green 1993:101–113).

In any case, the current tradition of adventure stories, as manifested among Israeli youths with regard to their tip, and to the activities in which they participate while traveling, rests on and vibrantly resonates intricate cultural themes in hegemonic Israeli culture and society. The features regarded above, that is, the *Dugri* speech features concerning sincerity, informality, directedness, and matter-of-factness, are all manifested within the well-developed word-of-mouth network, characteristic among backpacking tourists. It is thus contended that it is more than a telling coincidence that Israelis find this particular form of tourism greatly appealing.

CONCLUSION

Adventure must always be said to belong to another place or time.

—Martin Green, *The Adventurous Male*

My single most powerful impression from my meetings with and interviews of Israeli backpackers concerned the fact that what they told were

stories, and that they told them passionately. It seemed that they all had much to tell about. Indeed, they were eager to share their well-shaped narratives of profound experiences of excursions, adventures, and risks; exoticism and authenticity; and the like; exciting and wondrous stories in which they themselves were the protagonists and heroes. I came to construe the tourists' experience—stemming from and revolving around the backpacking trip—literally as a *telling* experience. Backpacking is just as much about performing backpacking narratives effectively, and sharing them with veteran and would-be travelers, as it is about carrying heavy backpacks, lodging in low-budget guest houses and practicing other structural characteristics of this form of travel.

In this study I attended to the role played by personal narratives of experience among Israeli backpacking tourists in a dual manner: first, I inquired into the stories backpackers tell about the stories they heard and told. From this "second-order" inquiry (with a metadiscursive or metanarrative perspective), we learn that the stories they hear play a crucial constructionist role within their community. The stories they share with one another, which they hear and tell repeatedly, are constitutive of the experience of the trip and of the identity of the backpacker. In effect, they are as much a by-product of the extended trip as the travel is a by-product and an acting out of the exciting and inciting stories of adventure, risk, and authenticity.

These travel narratives not only describe the travel, but also construct it. In this touristic context, the distance between "home" and "destination" (fig. 1, page 130) is constructed as an existential, nearly mythic, abyss, the banks of which create a variety of related symbolic distances and binary oppositions, such as the familiar and the exotic, the subject and the object, the veteran and the novice, the teller and the listener, the experienced and the seeker. These bring to mind Dann's (1996) assertion, with which I opened this chapter, that tourism is deeply rooted in discourse (which is another way of saying that there are multiple ways in which tourism is a segregating and segregative social practice). We noted how these experiences are narratively elaborated, not only with regard to the entire trip, but also throughout it, in the multiple activities in which the tourists participate. In all cases the adventure genre of the stories rhetorically correlates to and reciprocates with the *actual* occurrences: journeys, accomplishments, risks, and so forth.

Second, researching the indications given by backpackers regarding the role of these stories in shaping their experience requires focusing not so much on the *meaning* of the stories, but on the *unique social context in which they are repeatedly performed and in which meaning is conveyed, as well as constructed*. While it is clear why researchers differentiate analytically between meanings (or content), on the one hand, and modes of communication

(or form), on the other hand (a division reflected disciplinarily within the social sciences), this work bridges the analytic divide and considers the meaning of the travel stories of backpackers with regard to the social context in which they are embodied and reiterated. The two modes play, in the tourists' stories, a complementary dialectic role: the intensive and frequent interpersonal interactions, which take place during the trip, "wrap up" the trip's sites, activities and experiences with abundant information, in the form of personal stories of experience describing the destinations and seasons of the backpacking itinerary; these stories, in turn, construct an adventurous, ever-changing and challenging theme which enhances the need for further, updated ("hot") information regarding the sites and activities. The informative genre of the stories may be viewed as an excuse and not only a reason for their constant reiterations: although they are guised as merely informative (Murphy 2001; Riley 1988), as Elsrud (2001) has astutely demonstrated, their overall meaning greatly transcends that of mere informative chronicles. The stories do not quench the need for information, but rather augment it. Thus, their meaning is inextricably intertwined with the social setting in which they are told, that of a journey to and from the socially constructed unfamiliar, distant, risky, and authentic.

Here we observed how the stories carry a similar significance, not to say weight, as does the gear backpackers use. Through their informativity they are perceived as helpful and as useful as actual traveling gear. They are also heard, at least before leaving for the trip, in the same spaces in which backpacking gear is sold, and in a way they are recycled (heard and told repeatedly between backpackers) as is their gear on their return to Israel. In the backpackers' ears the stories hold more than a "mere" literary or even aesthetic value, because they are perceived as *useful*, and communicating them carries a positive social and moral value. In fact, telling stories is an opportunity for the backpacker to *act morally* (and perhaps even patriotically). It is yet another commitment the backpacker takes on him- or herself or on joining the community.

While these stories have adventure, risk and authenticity as their themes, it might just be that these same qualities are also embedded in the social context of the storytelling itself, relating not to the subject of the stories but to the stories themselves in their capacity as unique modes of communication. Authenticity may lie not only in "nature," constructed beyond the backpackers' social circles and physically surrounding them, but within them as well. The excitement created by the word-of-mouth information network and the value by which the narratives are esteemed might suggest that they themselves, the stories and the protagonists therein also carry a unique and authentic weight of their own. The drama we have

heard of above (in Emily's story, and the "heat" in Brian's) does not relate only to the risky business of mountain hiking, but also to the no less risky affair of hiking *astray from the collective storied trek*. Risks, here, are social, and not only physical, and are constructed as *existing within the backpackers' realm* and not only, or not necessarily, beyond it (in the encounter with what is romantically perceived as "nature," for instance). What is exciting and adventurous, in addition to the high mountains, the steep glaciers and the thick jungles, is the travel of the information itself and the role the individual plays in the "cycle of the stories."

The final section has dealt with what I consider to be an issue in the underresearched relationship between the social and cultural aspects of tourists, on the one hand, and their home environment, on the other hand, or, to be more precise, between the social context created and sustained in (backpacking) tourism, and the social context typical of Israeli culture and society. In this respect I have attended matters of interpersonal communication and storytelling, as typical features of the Israeli *Dugri* speech style, as they vibrantly reverberate among backpackers.

What I have not discussed in any depth is the macrosociological picture of which personal communication styles and preferences constitute a part (see the Introduction to this volume). In brief, some defining dimensions of the Jewish, secular Israeli experience, such as the "siege mentality" (Bar-Tal and Antebi 1992), are echoed in the perceptions of the backpackers regarding the risky, dubious, authentic, and adventurous environment in which they travel (Carter 1998; Desforges 2000; Elsrud 2001). The reliability and trustworthiness Israeli backpackers revere is a feature enmeshed in the broader social picture. In some ways, this is reminiscent of the aforementioned notion of the entire Zionist Movement—from the pioneers to the Sabras to the backpackers—as an adventurous one (Green 1993: 101–113), or, in terms of the present discussion, a backpacking-tourist one. Accordingly, the backpackers reenact and literally live out a deep and lasting cultural and social narrative.

NOTES

1. For reviews on terminological and conceptual issues, see Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Sørensen 2003; and Uriely et al. 2002.

2. Of course, it might be that the chronological "progressive" line of argument suggested by Riley is not the only one possible, and that, unlike Riley (and Teas 1988; and Vogt 1976), Cohen was in fact observing a *different tourist population*. If so, the convergence of the plethora of previously used terms under the umbrella term "backpacking" does not include less commercialized and more individual and alternative tourists (see Uriely et al. 2002).

3. What amounts to the "field" in the study of tourism and tourists is a complex question, of which discussion directly touches on how research methodologies in this field are conceptualized. Specifically, meeting with tourists and hearing their stories actually *does* amount to being in the "field" for the cultural significance of these stories is as much performative as it is referential (Noy 2004).

4. *Lametayel* (lit. 'for the traveler') is a well-known store in Israel selling traveling gear and equipment to backpackers (to be elaborated on it shortly. See Jacobson 1987).

5. The fact that gear and stories are consumed in the same space suggests that the stories heard in such stores resemble the gear sold there: though not corporeal, they, too, travel with the backpackers, and as we will see, their informative genre is, like equipment, considered to be helpful and useful, even essential, for traveling.

6. Cohen (2004) has recently argued that the Turnerian use of term reaggregation, and in fact the entire concept of rite of passage, is not adequate while discussing backpackers. His claim rests on the fact that Turner (1973; Turner and Turner 1978), following Van-Gennep, has regarded traditional, tribal societies, and not modern (and postmodern), complex ones. Among other arguments, Cohen asserts that while in the former case reaggregation within rites of passage meant simply being reabsorbed in society and assuming heavier, adult responsibilities, in the latter case the backpackers contest the authority of their home society, and on their return continue their participation in ex-backpackers' subcultures, rather than assume different, traditional social roles. Hence, referring to the rite of passage and to the stage of reaggregation in the present essay may be conceived of as heuristic, and does not suggest a theoretical contention concerning rites of passage in tribal versus modern (and postmodern) societies and tourists.

7. A transcription note: Uri uses a lyric and somewhat archaic expression, *mi-vatikey hador*, literally meaning "elders of the generation." The older register of the Hebrew language Uri evokes here alludes to the historical period of the Israeli pioneers and Sabras, to which we will return later.

The last two words in the excerpt ("Crazy Israeli") were originally uttered in English, thus further enhancing the status of the narrator, by pointing out that he was praised not only and not merely by Israeli backpackers, but also by Australians and New Zealanders, who are famous among backpackers for their extended trekking practices.

8. A validation for the important role the stories told by veteran backpackers/storytellers carry, is raised by Ofir, who, on returning to Israel, began working in one of the stores that sell backpacking gear. Reflecting on his experience as a "lecturer" there, Ofir suggests that, "People [backpackers] leave Israel in stress, and they think of you as if you're some kind of idol (*elil*), that you've been there. Big deal. So I traveled the *big world*. People leave Israel in deep stress."

9. Another recent and popular sources of interpersonal information are chat rooms and the electronic mail. By and large, this venue has not been systematically researched as of yet with regards to backpackers, but see Sørensen (2003), and Haviv (2002), and the following major sites: www.lametayel.com, www.far-east.co.il.

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