THIS TRIP REALLY CHANGED ME
Backpackers' Narratives of Self-Change

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Abstract: This paper explores Israeli backpackers' travel narratives, in which a profound self-change is recounted. These tourists are construed as narrators, whose identity stories, in which the powerful experience of self-change is constructed and communicated, are founded on, and rhetorically validated by the unique experiences of authenticity and adventure. The relation between the travel narrative, attesting to an external voyage toward an "authentic" destination, and the self-change narrative, attesting to an internal one, is examined in light of two major discourses in tourism: the semi-religious and the Romanticist. The paper addresses the sociocultural context, that of contemporary Israeli culture, against which the self-change narratives construct a collective notion of identity, and wherein they can be viewed as effective performances. **Keywords:** narrative, identity, self-change, authenticity, Israeli society. © 2004 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Résumé: Ce voyage m'a vraiment changé : récits des routards de la transformation de soi. Cet article examine des récits de voyage par des routards israéliens, qui y racontent une profonde transformation personnelle. Ces touristes sont présentés comme des narrateurs dont les histoires d'identité, dans lesquelles est élaborée et communiquée l'expérience puissante de la transformation de soi, sont fondées sur et valorisées de façon rhétorique par les expériences uniques de l'authenticité et de l'aventure. La relation entre le récit de voyage, qui témoigne d'un voyage extérieur vers une destination « authentique », et le récit de la transformation personnelle, qui témoigne d'une destination interne, est examinée à la lumière de deux grands discours du tourisme : le quasi-religieux et celui du romantisme. Cet article s'adresse au contexte socioculturel, celui de la culture contemporaine d'Israël, contre laquelle les récits de transformation de soi construisent une notion collective d'identité et dans laquelle on peut les regarder comme des interprétations réussies. **Mots-clés:** récit, identité, transformation de soi, authenticité, société israélienne. © 2004 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

One can legitimately argue that tourism is grounded in discourse (Dann 1996:2).

The observation that tourists are garrulous folk seems commonsensical, one that does not call for thorough empirical research. Within the modern world the myriad forms of tourism and the varied experiences that these forms make available to the individual supply much of what people have to talk about. Nevertheless, relatively little research

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has been carried out on tourists concerning language, interpersonal communication and rhetoric, and the implications they bear on the construction of personal and collective identities (Dann 1996; Desforges 2000).

Within the broader domain of research on tourism in general, one notable exception is to be found: research devoted to backpackers has recently explored most fruitfully the ways in which these tourists frequently recount stories of their extended and adventurous trips (Cederholm 2000; Desforges 1998; Elsrud 2001; Noy 2002a). Beyond the fact that these works demonstrate that tourists have specific, well-stylized forms of narrating their intense travel experiences, they show that what lies at the core of the backpackers' stories, though often covert, is these youths' selves and identities, rather than the exciting activities and accomplishments which constitute the overt topic of narration. As will be shown, participating in the trip constitutes a "fateful moment" (Giddens 1991) in the biography of the backpacking tourists, that is, a moment constructed as formative or transformative in the stories the youths tell of their self and their identity.

Admittedly, the highly elaborate patterns of interpersonal communication and interaction exhibited by backpackers are not necessarily typical of contemporary tourism in general. The structural features that the backpacking trip assumes, which give rise to these patterns of communication, are marked. The trip is defined as an extended, multi-destination travel, lasting several months or years, and is typically undertaken by Western youths to locations in the Third World. Traditionally, it has been conceptualized as non-institutionalized (usually not pre-arranged by travel companies), but rather pursued individually, on a relatively low budget, a fact that shapes the backpackers' choices of transportation and accommodation (Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Riley 1988). Nonetheless, research into the experiences and discourse of backpackers does offer a significant conceptual, as well as methodological, contribution to the exploration of the construction of identity in tourism in general. In fact, it is precisely because such features of communication and social construction are somewhat more intense among backpackers (Murphy 2001) that they are more evident and may thus supply researchers with a lucid showcase for a phenomenon that might otherwise, among tourists in general, be overlooked.

In addition, the gap between the experiences of backpackers and other forms of travels and types of tourist experiences has narrowed considerably over the past three decades. Homogenizing forces of commercialization and institutionalization have drawn the alienated "drifters" (Cohen 1972) and "nomads" (Cohen 1973) of the 50s, 60s, and 70s closer into the embrace of the tourism industry. Though they themselves would passionately object to this depiction, contemporary "backpackers" should be viewed as a variety within, rather than outside, modern mass tourism (Uriely, Yonay and Simchai 2002). This observation further underscores the relevance of research into backpacking tourists with regard to broader tourist populations.

From the perspective of a narrative research, backpackers constitute

a unique case. Their dramatic and exciting stories tell of a personal change, which is associated, through a powerful tourist discourse, with the experiences of geographical transportation and of constructed authenticity. As will be shown, the inner change to which they attest both reflects external changes and is constructed by these changes. When recounting how they traveled, backpacking tourists refer both to geography and psychology. Consequently, exploring their narratives offers a contribution to the field of narrative identity, from the little-researched perspective of tourism—practices and discourses—in late modern times (Bruner 1991; Desforges 2000). Since narrative inevitably encompasses sociocultural dimensions, the present inquiry into stories of self-change recounted by Israeli backpackers will also have bearing upon the particularities of the sociocultural context pertaining to identity in contemporary Israeli society. It will shed light on the under-researched implications tourists' home societies and cultures have on their experiences and practices.

NARRATIVES OF SELF-CHANGE

This text begins with a description of two sociocultural contexts, global-backpacking tourism and local-Israeli society, that co-facilitate the performance of conversational storytelling. It proceeds with an inquiry into the postmodern, narrative variety of identity, and observes how authenticity is consumed and employed as a recourse for the telling of a valid and "real" narrative of identity. After several segments of narratives are explored, wherein the narrators testify to a self-change, two major self-change genres are discussed, the Romanticist and the religious, as well as their bearings on the narratives' performative nature. The paper admittedly seems heavy in theory, and because of it, Elsrud's (2001) observation concerning narratives of lived experience is instructive: "no matter how much academic knowledge is extracted from the [interviewees] testimonies, their experiences are as valid and real to them as the construction is to the researcher" (p. 599).

Communication and Narrative Among Backpackers

From its commencement in the 70s, with the works of Cohen (1972, 1973, 1979), through its elaboration in the 80s and 90s (Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Riley 1988), research on backpackers has focused on their experiences, as well as on their unique, intensive patterns of sociality. This line of research has suggested a rich environment of interpersonal communication, in which storytelling frequently occurs and through which the social construction of identities is pursued (Elsrud 2001).

Discussing non-institutionalized tourists in the early 70s, Cohen observed that "information flows by word-of-mouth from the experienced travelers to the newcomer" (1973:96). Vogt (1976), though adhering to a definition of "wanderers" as essentially being individuals, nevertheless also pointed at the "transient yet intense interpersonal

relationships which are formed during their travel", which allow for a dense "verbal inter-traveler network" (1976:33,36).

A decade later, Riley's work influentially re-oriented research on backpackers to point to the intense social quality and the intensive communication network established between them during the extended trip. These, Riley contended, rather than being by-products of modern backpacking, are among its defining features. Riley validated the previous findings concerning the existence of "very intense" and "very extensive" networks of communication, which 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" (1988:324, 322–323). Later works of Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995) and Murphy (2001) have also indicated that frequent social interactions are commonplace among backpackers and are, in fact, among the primary motivations for traveling, constituting a central experiential attribute of the trip.

This line of research culminates at present in the works of Cederholm (2000), Elsrud (2001), and this author (Noy 2002a, 2002b), which focus on the well-articulated stories frequently narrated by backpackers. These works establish the fact that in wishing to travel "off the beaten track", they seek the experience of adventure, risk, and authenticity. Throughout their trip and particularly upon their return to their homeland, they share with both veteran and would-be backpackers tall tales of the unusual and "exotic" destinations they visited, coupled with descriptions of the profound experiences they underwent while traveling (Noy 2003).

For the present exploration into backpackers' narratives of experience and identity, they may fruitfully be viewed as constituting an *ad hoc* community of storytellers. The unique structural features of the backpacking trip result in a social context which is highly conducive to narrative identity work. The frequent social interactions and the enhanced interpersonal communication activities, contribute to the creation of an environment most suitable for the telling of and listening to stories, an environment in which a tight interconnection between traveling and telling, between undergoing profound out-of-the-ordinary experiences and telling tall tales of these experiences, is creatively pursued.

A Collective Rite-of-Passage. Among secular Israeli youths of middle and upper middle classes, embarking on an extended trip soon after their discharge from obligatory military service is a time-honored, widespread social custom (Avrahami 2001; Haviv 2002; Mevorach 1997; Noy and Cohen forthcoming). Common destinations include Asia, South America, and, to a lesser degree, Africa. Often the trip is extended to the Pacific and North America, where they both travel and work, thus earning money to continue their trip.

Though the backpackers repeatedly express a desire to distance themselves from fellow Israelis and from state-related organizations, they routinely follow similar itineraries during the trip, find themselves in, or seek, the company of other Israelis, and spend a good deal of

their time in Israeli "enclaves". They lodge in accommodation facilities frequented by Israelis; they dine in restaurants that are either run by Israelis or that predominantly cater to Israeli backpackers (where "typical" Israeli food is served); they frequently communicate with their families by visiting Israeli embassies and consulates, where letters, packages, newspapers, etc., await them. While they express a desire for a radically different social environment than the one experienced in the army, in many ways their social conduct throughout the trip is, as suggested by Ben-Ari, reminiscent of a "military mode" (1998:116), including traveling in small cohesive groups, seeking risky physical challenges, and more.

Such a collectivized, nearly normative, pattern of participation in the trip encompasses and reverberates unique cultural themes pertaining to present-day Israeli society and culture. First, it accords with and is a part of a general widespread tendency for traveling exhibited by Israelis (according to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, the annual number of international departures in recent years reaches 3.5 million—most of which are for touristic purposes, a significant number when one considers that the entire population is 6.5 million). Among other factors, this tendency is accounted for by the relatively limited physical, as well as sociopolitical, space available, by the ongoing conflicts with neighboring Arab states and with the Palestinians, and, related to these points, by the tense collective experience of a "siege mentality" (Bar-Tal and Antebi 1992), from which the tourists wish to recess.

Second, within the last two decades there has been a gradual weakening of the authority and autonomy of the army with regard to civic society (Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari 1999). Consequently, there has been a decline in the traditional role that military service has played in the late adolescent psychic-social development of Israelis: that of a rite-of-separation. The fact that youth now remain emotionally closer to their parents in the course of their military service (Lieblich 1989) has generated the social need for separation, which the lengthy trip effectively satisfies.

Third, with regard to intra-societal issues concerning collective identities and social power, participation in a touristic practice grants the youths cultural capital (in the form of narrative capital), which actually serves as an admittance right to a subculture, thereby giving them a valid claim for a collective identity. Since backpacking is traditionally practiced by Western youths of the upper classes (from its origins in the Grand Tour in Europe, Adler 1985), it is perceived as a "Westernizing" practice. Through it they may align themselves and associate with youths from the West, and, at least as important, view images of the "Third World"—located both at the destinations *and in the homeland*—from a "Western" viewpoint.

It is against this sociocultural backdrop that their identity claims, in the form of personal narratives of self-change, should be construed. The experience which is perceived to be utmost, personal, and individual is actually constructed amidst a tightly cohesive collective practice and is infused with sociocultural themes and tensions.

The present research is based on 40 in-depth conversation-interviews (Kvale 1996), conducted in Israel in 1998, within five months of the backpackers' return. All the interviewees are secular Jewish Israelis, aged 22–25 and belong to the middle or upper middle classes; half are women and half men. They all traveled for a period of at least three months, half in South America and half in Asia (schematically, the former are perceived as more "adventurous", and the latter as more "spiritual"). They were first encountered in stores that sold traveling gear, after which they referred the author to other backpackers, who they knew from the trip, and so on ("snowball sampling").

The interviews consisted of two main parts: a core narrative, elicited by a general question concerning their experiences throughout the trip, followed by a few open-ended questions exploring specific issues, pertaining to experiences and undertakings. The conversations were characterized by openness, informality, and spontaneity, which are typical patterns of interpersonal communication among Israelis (Blum-Kulka 1997; Katriel 1991). The narratives were interpreted both "categorically" (comparing similar themes across the different narratives) and "holistically" (reading each narrative for its own form and succession of themes; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber 1998). The former shows the impressive frequency of the theme of self-change, and the latter demonstrates that these themes are structurally located towards the end of the core narratives, and seem to function as their conclusion.

However casual they seem, in their narratives the backpackers not only describe a highlighted and excited atmosphere, but appear to recreate it within the event of the narration. The profound atmosphere, which initially pertained to the narrated events and experiences, is carried over, as it were, from past to present. A tight connection is drawn between the events of the trip, taking place in a different time and place, and the event of the narration, taking place in the here-and-now, whereby the former infuses the latter with its unique aura (Noy 2002a).

Narrative Identity

In the last two decades, social scientists of different persuasions have paid growing attention to the stories people tell of themselves in everyday situations and to how these stories tell of and construct their identity. The underlying assumption of these works is that the stories one tells of oneself are probably the best possible approximation to who one is. They provide, as Freeman asserts, the best "inroad into the phenomenon of self-understanding and selfhood" (1993:6). By "inroad" is meant that rather than being a reflection on identities and selves, personal narratives in fact constitute the *core experience* of personal identity. Inspired by social-constructionist approaches, such views hold that in telling stories about themselves people simultaneously describe and construct who they are and how their various experiences accumulate to form a sensible, intelligible, and communicable story of identity/biography (Gergen 1994, 1999; Giddens 1991). The amalga-

mation of such stories constitutes what is referred to hereafter as "narrative identity".

The term "narrative" or "story" generally denotes the sequential linkage of certain selected events in one's life, depicting a personal trajectory that begins in the past and continues into the present. As Lieblich et al. state, when emphasizing the reiteration of the story, "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" (1998:7, italics in original). Further, some identity narratives, particularly those in which personal change is at stake, do not end with the present. Rather, they prospect one's self and identity into the personal future, constructing who one might be henceforth (Ochs 1997).

The Genre of Self-Change. One pervasive genre by which individuals tell of and construct their identities consists of depicting pivotal moments in which their life-story changes significantly. Wheaton and Gotlib, among others, suggest that such turning points in life may be defined as "a disruption in a trajectory, a deflection in a path" (1997:1), which is more than temporary and which is recognizable only in retrospect and in reflection. Consequently, stories of self-change illustrate an unexpected and unanticipated personal trajectory. Their genre is dramatic, depicting what is commonly conceived of as extra-regular occurrences, that deviate from the everyday, supposedly linear manner in which people construe and tell of their biographical progression through life. From a hermeneutic perspective, it is precisely the interpersonal communication of personal narratives that grants the individual self-reflection, on simultaneously psychological and social levels.

This perspective is illuminating with regard to the way backpacking is constructed by youths (both Israeli and non-Israeli) as a rite-of-passage from youth into adulthood (Riley 1988). The trip commonly takes place during the period between the end of youthful obligations, such as high school, college, and, in the case of Israelis, mandatory military service, and the commencement of young adulthood, and is perceived as a transitional period.

Life transitions in general may be construed, by narrator and/or interlocutor, as carrying either positive or negative meaning. The extended trip, however, although constructed as strenuous and at times risky (and perhaps precisely because of this construction), is unanimously viewed as a highly positive experience, generating sought-after and valuable personal changes. As will be shown, experienced backpackers tell of their new place in life in positive terms—they are wiser, more knowledgeable, more socially and emotionally apt, etc., than they were prior to the journey.

Narrating Authenticity and Adventure

Research on backpackers' experiences suggests that they adhere to Romantic imagery and that they are absorbed with seeking experiences of adventure and authenticity, while encountering the constructed "Other" (Cederholm 1994; Cohen 1989; Desforges 2000; Elsrud 2001).

The trip's "non-conventional" manner, its destinations, lying "off the beaten track", and its itineraries, typically taking place in "Third World" regions, are all "form" (structural) features which are ideally suited to socially construct "type" (experiential) features (Uriely et al 2002), relating to the profound experiences of authenticity and adventure.

Backpackers are certainly not the only tourists who adhere to Romantic imagery and who seek authenticity—both qualities underlie modern tourism (Dann 1996; Urry 1990). However, the particular combination of adventure and authenticity, coupled with its location in "backstage regions" (Pearce and Moscardo 1986:126), which are constructed as adventurous, unfamiliar, and even risky (Bhattacharyya 1997; Carter 1998), suggest that they constitute an experientially unique subcategory.

With regard to authenticity, a widely acknowledged concept is referred to hereafter, originally stemming from the influential works of MacCannell (1973, 1976). According to him, the modern tourist's primary motivation for travel is to seek authentic experiences. The "authentic paradigm" contends that in the alienated, heavily industrialized and mechanized modern world, individuals romantically seek a pure, "original", unpolluted whole. The search is construed not as a matter of leisure, but as a meaningful, existential desire that may endow the individual's identity with a richer and fuller experience of being, one that is "accorded a higher quotient of realness" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:30). Authenticity is construed as a much sought-after resource made available by the industry. As Wang observes, tourism has become an "industry of authenticity", wherein existential authenticity becomes a commodity (2000:71).

In light of this discussion, backpackers may be viewed as "authenticist" tourists, as authenticity-related themes are centrally incorporated in their accounts. They insist on seeking "untouched" and "unspoiled" destinations, often located in rural—but nonetheless touristic—regions. In choosing to take a trip to such places they pursue "hot authenticity", which means they quest for authentic destinations and, at the same time, their authentic selves (Selwyn 1996:21–25).

Indeed, the interviewees in the present study have all noted the marked unfamiliarity and exoticism of the destinations they visited, pointing out that they successfully sought adventure and authenticity. When accounting for the immensity of their experiences, the words recurring in their stories include "real", "genuine", "pure", "virgin", "original", "primitive", "wild" and "untouched", regardless of whether they were describing nature or peoples, rural environments or heavily populated metropolises.

In the following excerpt, for instance, Sharon describes her experiences in rural regions in northern India, where she encountered "real people":

> People who work with tourists eventually become very nasty. It's unavoidable. But there we successfully managed to reach the real people. And these are nice and good-hearted people. Or the children that run after you wherever you go—fascinating. This was the most

important thing for me, and the reason to travel to the East and not to
other destinations: the culture and the people. Unlike Roy [Sharon's
boyfriend] who is really into views and hikes ... I really wanted to see
the people, like the elders walking on the unpaved roads, saying
"Namaste", and the children. It was fascinating.

While the people backpackers meet are described as unique, the
people "tourists" meet are either "nasty" to begin with, or become nasty
following the encounter with them. Here nastiness is depicted as an
instance of commercialization, and it is contrasted with the (idealized)
good-heartedness of the natives, in an effort to differentiate the back-
packers, and to suggest that they can truly "reach" and experience
"fascinating" peoples and landscapes. Parenthetically, notice that the
difference between interest in people and landscape is quite typically
attributed by Sharon to gender differences.

The narratives tell of the wonderful and extraordinary peoples they
met and the places they saw. They note that the visited destinations
are located beyond the everyday and the ordinary, both geographically
and experientially. Their trip, in Elsrud's words, "stands out as a demar-
cated time and space, qualitatively different from the rest of the life
course" (2001:604). And it is precisely these features—the incredible
and primordial destinations, and their authentic Otherness—that
inspire the narratives with themes of profound personal change.

Interestingly, when they describe such immense experiences, the
Israeli backpackers' stories both make use of and evoke cultural
resources. In different guises, authenticity and adventure have rever-
berated within Jewish–Israeli culture and society, from the commence-
ment of the Zionist movement in the late 19th century to the present-
day. Historically, the dominant national ideology and discourse in Isra-
eli society (that is, Zionism), has relied heavily on themes related to
authenticity and adventure, in mobilizing Jews to immigrate to Israel.
As the Land of Israel was perceived to be utterly authentic and primor-
dial, sightseeing—and, to a greater degree, physically hiking across it—
carried a highly ritualistic value for the *Sabras* (the first generation of
native-born Israelis). It amounted to a deep and fulfilling experience,
on both a personal and collective level (Almog 2000; Katriel 1995;
Zerubavel 1995). Thus, the way the youths tell of their profound
experiences of authenticity and adventure, which are crucial elements
for the validation of their self-change assertions, converges cultural
themes with touristic discourses.

Self-Change Narratives

One of the most striking characteristics of the narratives is that they
consistently describe deep and profound personal changes as a result
of the trip. These changes are always markedly positive, and are
described rhetorically in terms of a significant development and matu-
ration in central personality traits. Yet, as powerful as these assertions
may be, they were not noticeable from the start: their location at the
end of the adventurous core narrative, and the flowing narration that
led, in a natural manner, from the narrated events depicting authen-

ticity to the self-change segments had rendered them nearly unnoticeable.

Thus, on the grounds of being only commonsensical and obvious, powerful assertions pertaining to self, self-change, and identity are located inconspicuously within the narratives. Essentially, the backpackers suggest that such transformative identity claims are an organic, inevitable theme in the travel narrative genre.

> Brian: You're different as far as life experience goes. That is, when I left the country I was quite ignorant. I left ignorant in that I didn't know many cultures; I didn't cross paths with many cultures. I may have read about them, or seen them on TV, but I didn't *actually* meet them ... You see, when you leave the country you don't know that much, and when you return you suddenly know everything. You also know yourself differently, because you put yourself in many situations, like I told you—suddenly on top of the volcano mountain, or in very strenuous conditions during the trek ... You extend your own capabilities, and the limits of your knowledge of yourself. It's just like that. You know yourself better.

> Ruth: All in all, the journey changed me quite a bit. Not that I went searching for myself and returned a different person—it's really not like that. It's like I simply traveled in order to enjoy myself and to have fun, and I was surprised, like—it was much more fun than I initially thought I could ever experience. And I learned a lot of things about myself. For sure. It's not that I'm not the same Ruth as the one who embarked on the trip—I don't believe that anyone really changes direction by a hundred and eighty degrees—but there are a lot of new things that I learned about myself ... I simply learned to know myself better ... [the trip] is simply such a very intense experience. ... Now that I've returned I know how it is. Previously, I didn't feel this way. I guess that if my life were to be today as it was without the travel, I'd still feel great and have a lot of fun, but now I know how you can feel inside yourself. It's very difficult returning to this nothingness.

Brian and Ruth spontaneously tell of the dramatic personal changes they underwent, which are attributed to the trip—to the activities and the experiences it encompasses. It is quite clear from these excerpts that the point of their stories of adventure and authenticity concerns their selves and their transforming identities. In fact, their descriptions of the trip's undertakings, which preceded these excerpts, seem *inextricably connected* to the assertion they make about their selves. The shift "inwards", to the personal change they had undergone, is effortless and does not seem to require explanation. Viewing a volcano mountain naturally amounts to "know[ing] who you are", and crossing paths with "other" cultures leads to an advantageous state of knowledge ("you suddenly know everything")—both of which are clear claims for cultural capital of the kind associated with travel (Clifford 1997; Urry 1995), that is, narrative capital. The resulting inner changes are markedly beneficial: the tourists return to their homeland in an advantageous position compared to their state prior to the trip.

Though both tell the story of their personal change, they do so in different ways. Brian's story is adventurous, adhering to a more "masculine" pattern of adventure, risk, and sensation-seeking (Noy 2003).

While he plainly states that he had changed significantly, Ruth's account is somewhat more intricate, and consists of a dialogue between a direct indication of an inner change, on the one hand, and rebuffs of a potential extremity by which such a change may be perceived, on the other hand.

Through a close reading of Ruth's excerpt, a voice that she imports into her story may be heard—a social voice with which she converses. In and through this voice a *normative expectation* is echoed, perceived as too radical in Ruth's eyes (see Noy 2002b, for an elaboration on the collective-normative voice among Israeli backpackers). According to a collective norm, the youths are expected to change radically as a consequence of the trip—"a hundred and eighty degrees" in Ruth's words—and to attest to these changes unequivocally. This is what she alludes to when saying, "[i]t's not that I am not the same Ruth as the one who embarked on the trip", as if replying to a suggestion along these lines.

Ruth's social senses are accurate. Acknowledging an explicit personal change is commonplace among backpackers (as indicated by Brian). It is an inherent feature of the rhetoric surrounding the trip. Of those interviewed for the present research, 62% mentioned of their own accord that they had undergone significant changes, and when questioned directly on this point, all the others acknowledged having gone through such changes to varying degrees. Telling of these changes is an integral part of the stories, and an inherent feature of their interpersonal dissemination.

Ruth, however, eventually manages to hold the stick at both ends: she refutes the collective notion, conveyed in black-and-white terms, of a radical personal change, thereby gaining an individualistic and not-too-conforming voice; yet, at the same time, she does indicate that she has gone through a significant change, going so far as to imply that prior to the trip her capacity for feeling was "nothingness". "Nothingness" is for Ruth what "ignorance" is for Brian—in both cases these terms describe the experiential states prior to embarking on the trip and joining the collective, and in both cases the "before" and "after" states are compared and contrasted in a way that grants them validation. In debating whether or not she has changed along the lines proposed in and by the collective expectation, and eventually acknowledging that change indeed took place, Ruth's rhetoric powerfully substantiates her transformative claim.

Like Ruth, some of the interviewees believed that the transition they underwent was indeed inevitable, a natural part of their development. Even so, they suggested that the period of the extended trip was at the very least a catalyst of this process. In Ruth's words, pointing out that the trip "simply" constituted "a very intense experience" is significant in that there is an effort at understatement (while an overstatement might resemble conversion-like rhetoric, which backpackers try to avoid).

The following excerpt, taken from Emily's narrative, further illuminates the social backdrop against which Ruth defends. Emily discusses the significant changes she has experienced, while reflecting upon

what she was told by veteran backpackers during the "pre-trip" stage (Dann 1996), when intensive interpersonal communication and story-telling activities take place:

> Emily: Here people told me ... "Yae, this trip really changed me. This trip changes me". And so during the trip I constantly thought about it and I said, "well, how have I changed" jokingly [chuckles]. I arrived in Israel and then, suddenly, I keep on running into situations where I'm sure that I've somehow changed. The trip had an influence on the way I view life—it's not that I'm not moody or that I don't get angry about trivial things any more—but it [brought about] a better attitude to life. As far as self-confidence is concerned.

The social norm implicit in Ruth's narrative is explicitly voiced, through citation, in Emily's story of return and change. It is precisely her rebuffs that clarify that the experience, and the rhetoric that captures and communicates it, indeed point to a meaningful and positive personal change, over and above the experience of authenticity. As with Ruth (but unlike Brian), attesting to a too dramatic self-transformation is somewhat awkward for Emily, as evident in her joking remark. Yet although she initially doubted the superlative descriptions voiced by veteran backpackers, the fact that upon completion of the extended trip she eventually found them validated by her experiences cleverly enhances her argument.

The explicit citation affirms the existence of a normative, collective expectation that participation in the trip will generate a "real change". In fact, it is clear that self-change is an inherent feature of the collective voice, with which the Israelis are familiar, and it is evident that they adhere to and identify with it to varying degrees. As asserted in a instructive, moralistic tone by a backpacking guide, working in the legendary gear store in Tel-Aviv (*Hametayel*), "the point is not returning to the country and marking a check sign [that you've traveled], but *changing*, while understanding that people in this world die of hunger and you are the fortunate one" (Jacobson 1987:43, italics added).

Furthermore, like Ruth, Emily indicates that she had experienced a life transition, which is phrased in terms of a general "attitude" or "approach" to life. It is a profound change because it concerns personality as a whole, and not specific delimited areas of experience, emotion, or behavior. This generalization, which points to wide and sometimes undifferentiated personal change (and is evident in all three excerpts above), is characteristic of the backpackers' narratives (Bruner 1991; Mevorach 1997:68). Limiting the magnitude of the transformation to well-defined areas of selfhood could have undermined both the claim for enduring self-change (as it could have been understood to be relevant only to the trip's circumstances, and not beyond them) and for the degree of that change. Nonetheless, Emily does mention briefly, at the very end of the excerpt, that the changes she experienced concern her self-confidence.

The correlation between the "external"—the exciting adventurous activities—and the "internal"—the dramatic transition—lends the excerpts above to an alternative reading. The states described by the terms "nothingness" and "ignorance" may point not only to a lessened

psychological state prior to the trip, but also to the social context of the tourists' home society, to which they return. Thus read, the psychological and the social are intertwined, complementing each other in the narratives, which may be read as indictments of states of isolation of the available social experience within contemporary Israeli society.

Themes of Self-Change. Examining those qualities that are repeatedly mentioned as having been profoundly changed during the journey indicates an overall pattern. To begin with, it is noteworthy that all descriptions refer exclusively to positive and beneficial changes. It suggests that within their rhetoric the transformative theme is a powerful, inherent one, and that consequently, "being a backpacker" amounts to experiencing personal change and narratively testifying to this experience. Parenthetically, counternarratives might be told by participants who were disappointed with the trip and who consequently do not constitute part of the collective. In other words, such disagreeable voices are silenced. Those who either leave the trip or participate in it in ways that vary from the collective convention are regarded as "weird" and "freaky" by the majority.

Further, the descriptions of the changes typically include wide, undifferentiated personal traits, and only seldom mention specific traits. In the excerpts above, Brian asserts that while traveling "you know who you are", and Ruth says that she "learned a lot of things" about herself and that she is now capable of feeling more happiness. Emily mentions a change in her general "attitude" towards life, on which she elaborates only in mentioning her "self-confidence". Such descriptions point at the romantic, impressionist language register, by which the self-change is experienced and narrated.

Finally, beyond their positive quality and wide scope, most of the descriptions carry a hue of newly acquired openness, tolerance, and patience. These virtues were attained during the trip and are outcomes of meeting the authentic "Other"; consequently, they are signs of self-growth and maturity (conveyed in a new age parlance). Such a striking similarity, in traits that the they themselves describe as "deeply personal" and "intimate", is yet another indication of the existence of a tightly shared, collective discourse among Israeli backpackers, of which a beneficial self-change is a component.

Nonetheless, the findings in the present research point at some degree of variety among their experiences, which may be explored most fruitfully through a gender perspective. Male interviewees portrayed a clearer connection between the personal changes they had undergone, and specific, seemingly risky, activities in which they had participated (such as climbing a volcano mountain, in Brian's narrative). Female interviewees, also described significant delineated experiences, but expressed criticism of the masculine features of the discourse pertaining to strenuous outdoor activities. Thus, they accounted for the changes by referring to the experience of the trip as a whole. Compared to their male counterparts, they were less inclined to attribute their inner change to particular, bounded episodes, referring instead to the accumulation of various undertakings.

These findings lend support to previous research on the salience of

gender among backpackers in general (Elsrud 1998), and particularly among Israelis (Mevorach 1997). In this regard Elsrud observes that "historically founded 'risk and adventure narrative of travel' is still at least partially gendered, embracing its masculine supporters while excluding its female intruders" (2001:614). Among Israeli youth, masculine dimensions of adventure and risk are even more salient, due to both the general pervasiveness of militaristic, chauvinist discourse within the general civic society (Azmon 1995), and the fact that these youths have recently completed a lengthy service in the army.

Authenticity and Self-Change

The narratives exhibit a clear connection between the touristic experiences their narrators underwent while traveling and the unique experience of self-change of which they tell: the former is narratively presented as the basis for the latter. Although the stories indeed describe adventurous undertakings, they reflect upon the "internal", rather than (and by way of) the "external", and thus present a witnessing narrative, testifying to *inner* changes. In other words, experiencing adventures and encounters with authenticity are *means*, rather than ends, in the narratives, substantiating a claim made on a different level—not on that of undertakings but of identity—that the individuals underwent a change.

For example, while Brian explicitly mentions events that took place "suddenly", at the top of a volcano mountain in New Zealand, as well as "very strenuous conditions" that he endured during trekking, he describes, in the same breath, the interconnected inner changes he experienced as a result of this endurance ("you extend your own capabilities"). All such cases, where encountering constructed authenticity and eventually experiencing existential authenticity are mentioned, are consequentially correlated by the narrators to their acquisition of more patience, tolerance, and maturity in their everyday life back home.

A cyclic relationship may be conceptualized between (a) the experience of (constructed) authenticity, (b) the authenticity of the tourist's experience (existential authenticity), and (c) the authentication of the self-change narrative. Authenticity is promoted by institutions and discourses as a valuable commodity (a). It is consumed by the backpackers and consequently gains a subjective meaning (Taylor 1989), endowing the individual with its unique, distinctive qualities (b). As Cederholm writes, there is "a longing for *personal authenticity*; to 'find the real me' and to live 'with the people and among the people'" (1994:4, italics added). Hence, there is a reciprocal relationship between the "experience of authenticity" (a), on the one hand, and the "authenticity of experience" (b), on the other hand, where each factor reinforces the other. Commodified authenticity can be viewed as something that is "brought back" from the trip, one of many illustrations of touristic souvenirs.

Authenticity, however, reverberates on a third level, that of *authenticating the inner change*: remarkable personal changes are con-

structed and communicated as a natural consequence of a remarkable experience (c). Rhetorically, the claim for this change is thus validated by the claim for the uniqueness of the experience (b), which, in turn, is founded on the uniqueness of the destinations (a). It is the wonder, constructed in (and into) the trip, that allows touristic stories "to present a new self-identity" (Desforges 2000:937).

A cyclic quality is achieved within the social context of the intensive activities of interpersonal communication and storytelling. This assumes the role played by formal commercials and institutionally disseminated information in the tourism industry (Noy forthcoming). Backpackers not only frequently *tell* stories, but also *hear* of their peers' experiences before, during and after the trip. Thus, the narrative and the actual occurrences are nicely intertwined, leading to a strong variety of social construction of both the experience of the trip and its actual undertakings. The self-change theme, and the adventurous narrative as a whole, forcibly construct for the audience of the would-be backpackers a travel narrative in which authenticity reverberates cyclically, from (a) to (b) to (c) and back to (a).

Romanticist and Religious Genres

Adventure must always be said to belong to another place or time (Green 1993:34). It is fruitful to discuss the arch-genre of self-change with regard to two distinct and pervasive genres of transformation in contemporary Western society. Both genres correspond with the tourists' profound experiences of encountering authenticity: one is inspired by Romanticism and the other by semi-religious and religious-pilgrimage experience. As will be shown, it is no coincidence that they both converge in tourists', and specifically backpackers', narratives.

In the Romantic and the religious-pilgrimage discourses, the transformative theme is central, and in both it is attributed to travel. In both, travel is constructed as transcending the boundaries of that which is existentially familiar, while seeking the sublime, authentic "Other". In both, the features of the exotic destinations are perceived as being primordial and unchanging, while the person continually undergoes meaningful changes (Bruner 1991). The excursion is thus two-fold: from the "inner" (self) to the "outer" (place), and from the homeland to the destination (the analogy between self and homeland is yet another reflection of nationalist features of modern tourism). Notwithstanding these similarities, the Romantic-adventurous and the semi-religious, pilgrimage narratives of self-change do differ, and each sheds unique light on the backpackers' stories.

Romantic-Adventurous Narratives. Listening to the stories backpackers tell, in light of 18th and 19th century travel writing and narratives, is illuminating. Although by and large the present generation of Israeli youths is probably not directly familiar with such literary works, the resemblance between the narratives is uncanny. The fact that backpackers are Romanticist tourists should not be surprising in light of the unique structural features of the trip: the "off-the-beaten-track" locations and the continuous seeking of new, exotic destinations, sup-

posedly as yet unexplored by scores of tourists and not yet insti-
tutionalized by the tourism industry (see Sharon's narrative, above).

The works of Cederholm (2000), Elsrud (2001) and this author
(2003) clearly indicate that, in a similar vein to the heroes of adventure
and travel literature, the conduct and experiences to which inter-
viewees attest carry expansionist, semi-imperialist qualities. The adven-
tures, the search for exoticism, authenticity, and "virgin" territory,
when amalgamated in the experience of Western backpackers, inevi-
tably entail and evoke imperialist and neocolonial themes, in varying
degrees of explicitness.

But is the theme of self-change present in the Western travel and
adventure genre? Green's seminal works (1991, 1993), which systemati-
cally discuss the genre of adventure and its deep roots and widespread
influences in Western and Westernized cultures, suggest a positive
answer. In addition to elaborating on large-scale historical processes,
including the role adventure has played, and still does, in Western
nationalism, philosophy, art, etc., Green considers *experience* as felt by
individual characters. The search for adventure, and the quest for the
authentic and the "Other", endow the individual with a unique experi-
ence. Since the 18th century, Green notes, explorers have established
a "special relationship to 'origin' and 'nature' ", which subsequently
leads to sensing the "full value of experience" (1993:52). This, of
course, is but a different wording of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's quote
above (1988:30), concerning the experience of authenticity as "real-
ness" (that is, existential authenticity).

Furthermore, within adventure and travel literature the unique
experiences of authenticity are typically conveyed, in fact, in terms of
a *personal change on behalf of the Romanticist traveler/hero*. During the trip,
Green writes, "the Westerner traveler became himself creative and div-
ine, or at least legendary and heroic" (1993:52). Arriving at authentic
places and encountering "real" people bestow the tourists with nothing
less than a deep, transformative experience. The Romantic quest is
thus not leisurely or recreational, to use terms coined by Cohen
(1979), but rather existential or experiential.

Religious-Pilgrim Narratives. Interestingly, within the research on tour-
ism, religious experiences have been discussed more systematically
than Romantic ones. In fact, one of the basic paradigms accounting
for the exponential growth of modern tourism construes its link to the
traditional religious experience of pilgrimage (Cohen 1992; Graburn
1977/1989; Wickens 2002). This line of conceptualization stems from
the experiential parallels which have been observed between tra-
ditional religious and pilgrimage experiences, and at least some of the
experiences to which tourists attest, by viewing the latter as a contem-
porary manifestation of the former. It is founded on both Victor Tur-
ner's model of a search for a sacred "Center", which is located at a
geographical and experiential distance from the mundane surround-
ings, and on Mircea Eliade's model of a sacred "axis mundi". Graburn
(1983) claims that modern tourists, although by and large secularized,
travel within a symbolically religious universe. Similarly, Allcock (1988)
and Vukonić (1998) contend that, at least partially, tourism and reli-

gion have parallels, in that "implicit" or "invisible" aspects of the latter appear in the former.

Indeed, research on the narrative of the religious experience of self-change, generally indexed as "conversion narrative" (Keane 1997; Stromberg 1993), demonstrates significant resemblances with the stories told by backpackers. The transformative religious experience stems from and revolves around a certain interpretation by which actual occurrences, whether mundane or profound, are construed. In transformative narratives, events that happen to the protagonist are subjectively interpreted as indicating that divine intervention is aimed at the believer's, or the would-be believer's, self. The religious language and discourse offer a similar kind of interpretation and inspiration, as does the Romantic discourse: events are imbued with profound meaning and significance, following which the individual is changed.

As with tourism, religious discourse also designates sites in which the divine is said to be present in a more "condensed" form. In actual pilgrimage, the trip to the sacred Center, and the crossing of experiential and geographical boundaries, clearly brings the person to experience the authentic "Other" (although it is perceived as divine rather than human or natural). But even in religious transformation where an actual trip does not occur, the above research offers a view of how religious language socially constructs an inner change *vis-à-vis* an "inward voyage", undertaken by the believer's self.

A Telling Experience

Interestingly, Romantic and religious rhetoric also share features concerning the *telling of transformative experiences*. Regardless of which arch-genre is more adequate to describe the narratives, the act of telling such emotionally powerful stories, which carry deep personal meaning (to their tellers as well as to their ready audience), is of unique significance in and of itself. With regards to both arch-genres, it is important to note that the stories are told and retold within a particular social-interpersonal environment, which the trip sustains. Interpersonally, they are not mere (referential) descriptions of past events, but rather, should be construed as their performance, as an *enactment of present experiences*. When narrated to novice, would-be backpackers, during social occasions of storytelling, the narratives are not only compelling, but also impelling.

Viewed from a religious perspective, the acts of sharing one's experiences and telling the story of one's self-change amount to "a creation of a particular situation in the moment of its telling". For Stromberg's Evangelical interviewees, telling of their fundamental inner change constituted "not a chore but rather a central ritual of their faith" (Stromberg 1993:3). From the religious perspective, then, narratives of personal change are not about "external" matters and the fact that they are told in hindsight should not be misleading: they are part and parcel of an *ongoing transformative experience*. They forcibly impel their audience. On this note, Keane observes that "an important kind of religious transformation consists of taking a new role as speaker. The

conversion narrative ... [entails] being transformed from the listener to the speaker" (1997:58).

In a similar vein, when exploring the Romantically inspired self-change, Green observes how the readers of such novels—usually white, Anglo-Saxon male children and youths—were affected by the experience and would seek to pursue its profundity and heroism later in life. "Kipling's truths", Green notes, "were very unlike the truth of 'literature' ". In his exciting stories, "his solicitations to his readers as children, [were] to act out his imaginings, in play" (1993:44). The adventurous stories were not meant to be merely read as "literature"; instead, they were expected to be *acted out*. The veteran backpackers tell of their transformative experiences to the novice and to the would-be backpackers, who, akin to Romanticist adventurers, "are bound to feel how far short ... their own perceptions fall and look forward to becoming adventurers themselves, inhabiting a realm where they too will see and smell and hear like that" (Green 1993:55). They, will also pursue the experiences, as well as eventually becoming narrators who share their experiences with would-be backpackers, thus perpetuating the cycle.

The term travel narrative, as used throughout the present work, should thus index not only the content of the narratives (the themes of self-change) nor the arch-narrative to which they adhere, whether Romanticist or religious. Rather, the term also includes interpersonal—performative and narrational—aspects, without which the experiential picture is not complete. What the narratives are about, the structure of their plotlines, the social context in which they are repeatedly told and heard, and the broader discourses and practices of which they are a part, are inseparable; they all converge in the performative tellings of the touristic narratives where identity and self-change are accomplished.

Thus conceptualized, the term travel narrative affords a more socioculturally comprehensive view of the Israeli backpackers' narratives, entailing both thematic *and* performative dimensions. With regard to the former, their stories powerfully echo Romanticist and semi-religious themes, an amalgamation which played a central role in mainstream Zionist ideology, from its colonial onset to its post-Zionist present.

When backpackers leave Israel, their trips reflect and enact cultural patterns typical of their home society's (continuous) encounter with natives of the Levant region, particularly Palestinian Arabs. In light of abiding cultural themes, and particularly in a period located immediately after a lengthy service in the army, authenticity and "Otherness" are inevitably viewed through Romanticist-militaristic lenses. Indeed, the backpackers commonly refer to their quests in terms of conquests. Though in a ludic manner, when they assert, "we conquered Cuzco", and "Bangkok is in our hands", or when they refer to themselves in such terms as "settlers" (*mitnahalim* in Hebrew, a highly charged political term that denotes Israelis living in the occupied territories), or "conquerors" (*kovshim* in Hebrew), they demonstratively *act out* collective neocolonial perceptions and attitudes towards authenticity and

"Otherness", that are pervasive in the Israeli culture (Noy and Cohen forthcoming; Stein 2002).

With regard to performative aspects, the dense interpersonal context, sustained by the structural features of the backpacking trip, forcibly corresponds with central, characteristic features of informal and direct interpersonal speech communication in the Israeli society, past and present (Blum-Kulka 1997; Katriel 1991). Congregating in cohesive enclaves, occupied mostly by Israelis, augmented by the informal and intense interpersonal communication that the trip facilitates, enhances and heightens the social interpersonal context, in which self-change narratives are persuasively performed time and again. Consequently, the attraction backpacking holds for Israeli youths has as much to do with the interpersonal communication features that are structurally sustained therein as with the trip's attractive destinations (Noy forthcoming).

CONCLUSION

The paper commenced with the observation that tourists are loquacious folk, and that even though this is quite evident—to the point of being their hallmark—language and oral communication receive "amazingly" little attention in the research (Dann 1996:2). Throughout the paper, interpersonal communication and storytelling among backpackers were explored, as well as the experiences they both reveal and constitute, the meaning they hold for narrators and audiences, and the sociocultural context within which they are meaningfully performed. The exploration assumed the form of a study into well-stylized travel narratives, which culminate in the telling of a profound self-change that their narrators have undergone.

The self-change to which backpackers attest emerges with regard to the discourse of authenticity. From this perspective, traveling to socially constructed "authentic" locations and peoples is not carried out merely for the sake of acquiring a heroic and exciting story. Rather, authenticity, and the adventurous experiences therein, allow for narratives of identity to be told, through the claim of a lasting self-change. Authenticity here is best conceptualized as a commodity, which the tourists consume and employ. As shown, they make of authenticity an authentic experience, which is eventually manifested in the authentication, and the validation, of the transformed identity. The paper considered the Romanticist and semi-religious genres, in which such claims for self-change are culturally and historically embedded. These were conceptualized as pertaining not only to the content and structure of the narratives, but also to their performative features, which emerge within a specific interpersonal context.

Clearly, the findings do not reflect the various experiences and narratives of all contemporary tourists. Rather, they should be reserved to certain categories who, while traveling, romantically or semi-religiously seek authenticity. In recent work, Uriely et al (2002) found an impressive heterogeneity of experiences among backpackers, including the "experimental" and "experiential", both of which indicate a search for

authenticity to varying degrees (Cohen 1979), as well as "diversionary" and "recreational" types. In this regard, the experiences and the narrative genres explored above are most relevant to those who seek authenticity *regardless of the structural features* assumed by the trip: experimental, experiential, existential, or humanist types of experience.

Interestingly, the few interviewees who were inclined toward recreational and diversionary experiences *also* viewed the trip as transformative. Engaging in recreational activities did not rob their narrative of its transformative themes. Yet, as pointed out by Elsrud (2001), it might be that the Romanticist and/or semi-religious discourses surrounding travel to "Third World" destinations pervade the tourists' experiences so that they need not explicitly mention authenticity in their narratives. Alternatively, leisure discourses may have their own self-change rhetoric.

In any case, when discursive and constructionist dimensions are considered, the distinction between structural attributes and experiential ones may be more complex than previously suggested. Seemingly different activities may share similar underlying discourses, and vice versa: similar activities may be motivated by different discourses, and consequently be experienced differently by the tourists. The discursive features by means of which identity and self-change are established among different forms of tourism are a matter for future empirical research and theorizing (Dann 1996:101–134).

It is along these lines that the present paper contributes to the study into the relation between tourism and (narrative) identity in late modernity. The discourses, that are embodied in practices, constitute vital resources for the construction-*cum*-communication of narrative identity. It is contended that tourists' (notorious) garrulousness is in fact the materialization of narrative capital, by which credible identity claims are asserted in the social realm. Talkativeness assumes here the touristic "sounds of identity", as it were.

The paper also touches on the unique sociocultural themes that are exhibited in and through the participation in the trip, and the ways these play a role in the construction of collective identity. For many young Israelis, backpacking amounts to a normative rite-of-passage. The transformative travel narratives they repeatedly tell play a crucial role in initiating the participants into a marked social subgroup, consisting of secular Jewish, native-born Israelis, from middle and upper classes (thus excluding Jewish ultra-orthodox, Palestinian and immigrant youths, etc.). Hence, what is implied by their self-change narratives is that what they have undergone, *others—who did not backpack— did not.* In other words, the trip's veterans are now at a vantage point not only with respect to their own pre-trip state, but also with respect to their peers. These youths position themselves, through the trip to markedly "Third World" destinations, as "Westerners" in and with regard to the deep divisions, tensions, and politics of identity characterizing their home society.

For this reason, the narratives explored above exhibit both demonstrative and canonic features. They reveal a clear worldview, which one may adhere to or reject. From this perspective, a comparative research

on the rites-of-passages of Israeli youths of different sociodemographic subgroups would illuminate how narrative (capital) helps to assert identities in a competitive and conflictual social world.

The demonstrative or canonic features of the self-change assertions may well stem also from two methodologically related factors: the "snow-ball" sampling procedure used in the present research, which led to the selection of those who are well connected to the dense social and interpersonal networks active during and after the trip (who were referred by their companions); and the positioning of the researcher-interviewer as an "outsider", before whom the sociocultural assets of the backpacking narrative community are emphatically, and invitingly performed.

There are, of course, various narratives that diverge from the norm, the exploration of which would provide intriguing directions for future research. Noteworthy are the narratives of those who have left the trip and given up the "backpacking identity" altogether; of those who traveled individually and were not part of the tight socio-interpersonal network and the norm it embodies; and of those who, through contact with centers and synagogues run by the missionary Jewish orthodox *Chabad* movement, underwent an explicitly religious conversion. The research of these narratives will shed light on competing narratives of identity, all of which are vibrantly performed within the sociocultural space and with regard to the resources made available by the discourses and practices of (backpacking) tourism.

As they are presently pursued and narrated by the majority of Israeli youths, nationality, tourism, and the construction of personal and collective identities are intertwined. The fact that this normative encounter with authenticity and "Otherness" is accomplished through neocolonialist and consumerist discourses bears moral implications and is problematic. While it endows Israeli youths' identity narratives with tensions and paradoxes, whereby tight cohesiveness and estranged perceptions of the "Other" are perpetuated rather than mitigated, it also points at a more general concern: the kind of personal and collective identity contemporary touristic practices and discourses pervasively construct. ∎

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