

Performing Identity: Touristic Narratives of Self-Change

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This article explores how identity is constituted through narrative performance. It contends that in an interpersonal context of narration, a profound experience of self-change is achieved intersubjectively, in-between narrators and audiences. Performatively, the narrators' adventurous travel-narrations, which are generated by a particular type of touristic practice—namely backpacking—collapse the divides between denotation and expression, between the narrated events and the events of their narration. A heightened experiential state is attained when performers conversationally position their audiences in a unique role, a role that subtly implicates the audience and suggests that it too is undergoing self-change while listening to narratives. Because performances are social events, the personal sense of self-change tourists establish materializes in the social realm, where the backpackers assume a desired social identity.

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Tourists are performers. From the early works on the subject, elaborated in sociodramaturgical terms (see, e.g., MacCannell), to more recent, performance-oriented approaches (see, e.g., Kirshenblatt-Gimblett), explorations of tourists' experiences and conduct rest on a deeply theatrical appreciation of the spaces in which tourism occurs and on their semiotic bearings on tourists' lives and identities. While

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tourists are often constructed as those who consume performances—they are the spectators and not the spectacles—the more recent performance-oriented scholarship suggests that tourists are in effect acting protagonists who perform on the stages of tourism.

Along these lines, the present inquiry addresses the specific ways tourists construct identity through the performance of travel-narratives. It attends to the poetics of narration of personal experience and illustrates how a performative state is achieved linguistically. Through a consideration of the live and fleeting verbal interaction, I show how a strong sense of self-change emerges intersubjectively in-between performer and audience. I contend that performers need audiences with and for whom they can meaningfully experience self-change. A heightened experiential state is achieved both by conversationally positioning themselves and their audiences in a unique role, and by competently employing touristic discursive resources relating to identity and selfhood.

The inquiry brings a much-needed narrative-performative sensitivity to the research on tourists, who, indeed, lend themselves aptly to such a perspective. Tourism, a heavily discursive environment (Dann), engenders the augmentative fusion of discourses and embodied practices. This fusion generates an experiential, epistemological, and communicational syntax by means of which the performance of identity through storytelling can be credibly accomplished. Furthermore, since both the semiotics of tourism and the semiotics of performance are intimately related to the spaces in which they occur, and which they construct, the present inquiry into the narratives tourists tell after their return from the trip contributes to performance research and tourist studies alike.

Narratives of Identity: Performance, Performativity, and Self-Change

An inquiry into the telling and making of identity contends that narrative of personal experience is nothing short of the “inroad into the phenomenon of self-understanding and selfhood” (Freeman 6), a “central narrative theme” around which people construct and convey who they are (Gubrium and Holstein 101). However, insofar as it is construed as or reduced to a text, “narrative” is nowhere to be found as such. Rather, a performance-based sensitivity suggests that “narrative” is not a pre-existing abstract concept. Although narratives surely surround us—it is among the epitomes of the late-modern, high-reflexive epoch (Giddens), and its proliferation is sometimes described by narrative scholars in terms of “mania,” “infatuation,” and “preoccupation”—what in fact touches and impels us, from formal occasions of narration to everyday conversational storytelling, are interactive, communicative events. It is from these events that we can deduce or reconstruct “narrative(s)”.

When it comes to identity(s)—the sociocultural categories by means of which we present and locate ourselves socially, and to a sense of selfhood—the intimate existential experience we have of being—what is unique about narrative performance is that in the instances of narration, those fleeting moments in which narratives are

uttered, it presents who the narrator is *at the time of narration*. Who we are reflects who we have become, that is, *who we are becoming while story-telling our identity*. If, indeed, “we talk ourselves into being” (Gubrium and Holstein 101), then an enigmatic character of personal narrative is how our identity storyline culminates in the performative event of the present, or, in other words, how we embody the protagonists of the narrative at the very moment at which its articulation flows. As observed by Kristin Langellier, “the *personal* in personal narrative implies a performative struggle for agency rather than the expressive act of a pre-existing, autonomous, fixed, united, or stable self” (129, italics in original). Thus, performance engulfs a radically constructionist notion, suggesting that personal narrative performance is a site in which social meaning—including that of the narrator’s identity—is fervently negotiated and constructed.

Consequently, personal narratives are not only, or even primarily, referential denotative texts, though they may often appear to be so. The descriptions of happenings and experiences that occurred in a different time and place are linked to the present *vis-à-vis* the *constitutive quality* of narration or “performativity” (Langellier; Langellier and Peterson). Langellier stresses the speech-act effects of narration, suggesting that, “in performativity narrator and listener(s) are themselves constituted” (129, cf. Noy, “You Must” Wortham 17). It is through this interrelationship between the dramatic event of narrative performance and the narrated events depicted therein that the temporal-sequential character of narrative culminates in the present, in the crescendo of “real time,” rendering the narrative telling into a social action in and of itself. “Telling,” Langellier observes, that “intervenes” between the experience and the story, “carries the potential to rearrange the structure of social relations within the performance event and perhaps beyond it” (127, cf. Bauman 4; Young 11).

This being the case, there is an innate double reference quality within the event of narration (Silverstein, “Secret”). Narrators simultaneously index both the *referred events* narrated and the *present event* of narration, thus drawing an association between the two that is fundamental for identity claims and for a sense of self-change to be performed with credibility. Viewed performatively, a sense of selfhood emerges through the linguistically achieved experience of intersubjectivity, that is through the moving experience shared simultaneously by participant(s) and performer(s) (Young 13, following Berger and Luckmann).

The subgenre of self-change—one particular form of the many forms of narratives of personal experience—is one in which the individual articulates identity through the performance of a dramatic moment or episode in her or his biography, one that generated a major enduring change. In such cases, a substantial deflection from the expected life trajectory is depicted, a pivotal moment in which the narrator’s identity is irretrievably altered. Although self-change is commonly (and commonsensically) construed as a variant within narratives of personal experience, it is challenging to conceptualize it differently: rather than constituting a pivotal moment across some preassumed progressive trajectory, I propose that self-change may, in fact, be the primary theme encompassing identity. If, as suggested by both Gergen and Giddens,

identity is to be viewed as a trajectory, then it is possible that the genre testifying to experiences of self-change is the hallmark of late-modern times. After all, if people are continuously (trajectorily) “becoming,” then the pervasive and constitutive means by which people can articulate and experience their selfhood at any given point in time is through performing self-change. As Gubrium and Holstein argue, the self is currently “big business, the stock-in-trade of a world of self-constituting institutions, which increasingly compete with each other for discerning and designating identities” (97), a state of affairs that is arguably one of the hallmarks of late modernity (Gergen; Taylor).

Performance of Tourist Identity

One does not simply see more of the world ... one also accepts the invitation to become a better person. (Rojek and Urry 4)

It is against this backdrop that one should consider the exponential growth of international tourism over the last decades. With over a billion tourists throughout the world every year, tourism is among the *zeitgeists* of late-modern, high-consumer times. Contemporary autobiographies of individuals of affluent societies are dotted with touristic experiences, in which tourism can be seen as supplying the discursive conditions, resources and restrictions, for performing identity and (re)establishing a sense of selfhood (Bourdieu; Giddens).¹ Indeed, the notorious loquaciousness of tourists, albeit self-evident, is a reminder of the intense discursive activities in which they engage.

A performative approach to tourism now emerges as a paradigm that improves upon the older sociodramaturgical one (e.g., MacCannell), in attending to tourists' motivations, experiences and behaviors, and, in particular, to how these assist in constituting desired identities (see Desmond; Edensor, “Staging,” *Tourists*; Katriel, *Performing the Past*; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett). The staged nature of tourism—dramatically amplified by a heightened state of commercialization, institutionalization, and mediatization, the related role played by spectatorship (defined broadly) in tourism consumption, and the publicality of tourist spaces—has prompted scholars to supplement the earlier semiotic and sociodramaturgical analysis of tourism with a more explicitly performance-oriented approach.

The literature on tourists in general and on backpackers in particular points at how the myriad experiences of tourists become narrative resources, employed in the capacity of performing and (re)establishing identity. As Elsrud observes of backpackers, “through establishing a (mythologized) image of Otherness, a story about self-identity can be told” (“Risk Creation” 606; see also, Adler; Desforges 938; Neumann, *On the Rim*; Selwyn). Since the trip is the event with which identity is intimately correlated, claims of touristic identity are performed in terms of a dramatic episode-related self-change. As Desforges succinctly observes, “touristic stories are used to present new self-identities” (927).

I attend below to narratives that are told *after* the return from the trip, once the

tourists are back in their everyday lives, activities, and spaces. These performances render problematic the notion of “*in situ*,” which, with regard to tourism, is commonly equated with “destination.” Here I find the contribution of performance-based inquiry is most illuminating, for it brings to the fore the highly contextualized event of narration, wherein occurrences of other times and places are conjured (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett).

In order to communicate a sense of self-change, tourists negotiate and construct within the performance the *very setting* of that performance. As Neumann observes, “the meaning and significance of travel assume value in the *moment of recollecting* for others the experiences that occur away from home ... [which] *materialize in the moments of storytelling*” (“Trail” 179–80, my italics). Edensor further stresses the constitutive dimensions of tourist performances which enmesh the narrated events with the event of narration: “as performers, tourists are informed by representations yet *produce representations of their own*” (*Tourists* 61, my italics). Tourist performances, then, amount to constitutive occasions in which a symbolic space is constructed in order to effect self-change, a space that is remade performatively to reverberate the tourists’ unique travel experiences.

In other words, we are dealing with tourists’ *off-site* performances and with the emergence of a “destination” in the Kirshenblatt-Gimblett sense, and not—or not directly—with the sites and spaces which are institutionally designated as “touristic.” This inquiry is inspired by the narrative poetics of extraction, whereby tourists are viewed as embodied souvenirs of their unique self-change travel (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 17–78). Indeed, as suggested by Stewart, narratives performatively bridge the abyss between the geographical and experiential distances traveled by tourists: “we need or desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative” (135).

Conversations with Israeli Backpackers

The present essay draws on research that included 40 narrative interviews that I conducted with backpackers in Israel in 1998–9, within 5 months of their return from their trips. The interviewees are secular Jewish Israelis, aged 22–5, belonging to the middle or upper middle classes; half are women and half men. All subjects traveled for a period of at least 3 months, half of them in South America and half in Asia. Contact with the first informants was made in stores specializing in traveling gear, and contact with further subjects was established through word of mouth.

Among young Israeli adults, an extended trip to “Third World” destinations represents a time-honored tradition. Within certain socioeconomic groups—consisting of secular Jewish, native-born Israelis (thus excluding Jewish ultra-Orthodox, Palestinian, and immigrant youths), backpacking is almost considered the norm, a “check mark” in one’s curriculum vitae, and a rite of both separation and transition from youth to adulthood. Being exclusive, it also serves as a rite and right of admittance to a subcollective and the assumption of a certain social identity

thereafter. Thus, massive participation in the trip is part of the politics of identity within postmodern, fragmented Israeli society, in which different groups compete intensely for sociocultural capital (Kimmerling; Noy and Cohen; Shafir and Peled).

It should not be surprising that of the myriad forms of tourism backpacking amounts to a collective rite of passage. Backpackers are a more or less distinct tourist subgroup, in that they participate in a relatively lengthy multidestination trip, and prefer low-budget (“local”) accommodation and transportation. The trip serves as a tourist rite-of-passage for youths from various countries of origin (Cohen; Sørensen). Though they would beg to differ, processes of institutionalization and commercialization have brought the backpackers well into the arms of mass tourism. Nonetheless, backpackers insist they are not “tourists,” and they stress that their trips to “exotic,” “authentic,” and “primitive” destinations are pursued under the (romanticist) ethos of the explorer. The adventures they undergo supply rich material for stories, which they perform frequently and repeatedly during the trip and afterwards, and through which identities are constructed (Elsrud, “Risk Creation” Noy, “Trip” Sørensen).

The interviews consisted of two main parts: a core narrative, elicited by a general question concerning the tourists’ travel experiences, followed by open-ended questions exploring specific issues (including socialization patterns, gender experiences, and so forth). Interviews were held at backpackers’ homes (to be precise, their parents’ homes), were conducted in Hebrew, and typically lasted between 1 and 3 hours. The interviews were characterized by openness, informality, and spontaneity, which, being typical patterns of interpersonal communication among Israelis (Blum-Kulka; Katriel, *Communal Webs*), smoothly sustained their performative character. The narrations were recorded and transcribed—two transformational processes that eventually yielded a product (i.e., text) of a completely different nature than the original, live interaction. Thus, the texts, as well as the segments thereof presented hereafter, are viewed as representations, which, akin to footprints on wet sand, mark or allude to action that occurred earlier.

The texts were initially interpreted thematically, in a procedure that considered the frequency of the theme of self-change; 28 (70%) informants mentioned self-change spontaneously (as did all the others upon specific questioning). The inquiry also revealed the location of expressions of self-change—at the end of the narratives, where it seems to function as an evaluative conclusion. Later, the evaluative—coda-like—quality of the segments directed the exploration to the linguistic-performative means by which this quality was achieved. It appears that their evaluative-concluding functions stem from the relationship of the expressions of self-change with the excited core travel narratives that immediately precede them (Bauman; Langellier and Peterson).

Finally, in line with the intense patterns of socialization and storytelling typical of backpackers (Noy, “You Must”), it should not be surprising that they responded willingly, even enthusiastically, to the invitation to participate in an interview-conversation. They clearly enjoyed recalling their travel experiences, and, in this regard, interviewing was “straightforward”: I merely had to lead with a question addressing

their trip experiences, and the stories poured thereafter. Coupled with the indication that they tried to “condense,” as they put it, several months’ worth of events and activities into an hour or two of storytelling, their explicit enthusiasm “keyed” the occasion of our interview meeting, and marked it as a performance (Hymes).

Tourists’ Self-Change Narratives

The enthusiasm that marked the participation in the interviews was indeed manifest *within* the conversations. These were characterized by a rapid pace of speech, and relatively long segments of monologue narration, in which the narrators excitedly conveyed their profound impressions. The emphatic and heightened atmosphere that was created and sustained throughout our conversations overwhelmed or “flooded” me, to some extent. The narrations consisted of highly elaborate narrative speech, replete with detailed descriptions of events and action, on the one hand, and with considerable evaluative commentary, such as superlatives describing emotions of marvel and amazement, on the other hand.

Although the interviews gave the impression of being seemingly everyday conversational interactions, talking with the backpackers was in fact an occasion in which certain pragmatic features of everyday modes of speaking were suspended, quite imperceptibly, and in which there was a relentless expectation of mutual “involvement” in the stories, entailing intense reciprocal emotional coordination (Tannen 9–14). My role was mostly reserved to listening and uttering short phatic remarks of a confirming type (e.g., “wow”), expressing now and again awe at the adventures I heard and at the tourists’ powerful encounters with “exotic” places and peoples.

Following are two excerpts from the interviews with Boaz Karmi (aged 23), who traveled 7 months in Nepal and New Zealand, and with Sharon Mishor (aged 22), who traveled 8 months in Thailand, Nepal, and India (“the East”).² Both narrators explicitly stated that they underwent significant self-change upon their return from the trip. Crucially, they locate these statements at the final parts of the interviews, after 80 minutes of narration in the first case and after 65 minutes of narration in the second. As will be shown, the meaningfulness and impact of these sequences rest, within the respected conversations, on the preceding adventurous travel-narratives into which they are tacitly woven and upon which they reflect in hindsight.

Boaz mentioned the prevalence of backpacking among his acquaintances, stressing that “everyone, everyone, traveled in South America or in the East.” He then paused before commencing to talk about self-change:

And I returned changed quite changed. If it’s changed as far as life experiences go that is mm I left- I left the country IGNORANT. I left the country ignorant in that I don’t know many cultures. I haven’t MET with many cultures. Perhaps I read about them or seen them on television but I haven’t run across them really, physically. And after I return and after all I see and after all I hear that is- I’ll give you an example. I KNEW New Zealand. That is, I knew it’s a beautiful country and all- but I didn’t know PARTICULAR SPOTS. When I arrived to travel there then suddenly >I know a lot

more with regard to general knowledge of the country < on the region on the- people. That is if you ask me today about New Zealand, I'll know MUCH MORE than I knew before. > Ask me suddenly about the mountains and all the rest and I'll know more than I knew before < you see- like- that is you leave the country when you DON'T KNOW MUCH [and] when you return you suddenly know EVERYTHING. You also know yourself better because you put yourself in many situations. > Like I told you about the volcano suddenly < or in the very difficult physical conditions at the trek. You simply know yourself differently than you knew yourself before. You simply stretch inside you the, the limits of your abilities the limits of your self-knowing. It's exactly like that. You know yourself very good. Simply you're much more responsible for yourself for the people around you. [You are] simply a changed person.

Boaz is straightforward in indicating how deep and dramatic is the change he has experienced. Attesting that he returned from the trip “simply a changed person” amounts to an explicit claim of self-change. The trip, Boaz asserts, has *truly* (“really, physically”) allowed for an encounter with “many cultures,” which is what generated self-change. The change is constructed by way of an association, one that the narrator suggests is only natural and consequential to the trip: the true encounter led to a significant enhancement in the alleged knowledge of the destination, which led, subsequently, to a sense of profound knowledge of himself. It is this knowledge that led to a sense of self-change. Boaz stresses that his new knowledge was not gained from afar, nor is it of a vague or general character anymore. Rather, it is authentic knowledge attained by means of a seemingly *unmediated* (*first-hand*) encounter. It is founded on close and solid knowledge of “particular spots,” as he puts it, which suggests it is a detailed, “factual” type of knowledge.

The dramatic character of the description is established by the forcible invocation of the empty-to-full metaphor, which follows the cyclic course of the trip. Boaz left the homeland “ignorant” and returned “full,” in a state in which he now possesses answers, where he now “know[s] everything.” The repeated use of the word “suddenly” further communicates the sense that change was dramatic. In employing this metaphor, Boaz’s narrative is indeed transformative: he retrospectively reconstructs his life story in a dichotomous, dramatic fashion, where the latter, post-trip part—leading up to the present and projecting onward—is viewed positively, even admiringly. In terms of cultural capital, or perhaps narrative capital of the kind associated with travel, Boaz establishes that he has mastered the knowledge encompassed by backpacking (he is asking the interviewer to test him: “ask me”), and consequently has gained entitlement rights to an identity story and hence to a claim of self-change. As Sørensen observes, “since no fixed mechanism can convey the individual’s road status ... it has to be communicated in every social encounter with a hitherto unknown backpacker” (857), and so “hierarchization” (858) is continuously established.

In the following extract Sharon argues that she has changed, yet she does so in a different, milder tone than Boaz. Her frequent hesitations, pauses, and self-retractions render the segment more reflexive, and the claim lacks the explicit and “masculine” parlance conveyed in Boaz’s assertions (cf., Noy, “Narratives,” “Traversing Hegemony”). Nonetheless, Sharon aims at communicating the same

profound message, and cleverly accomplishes this goal through the use of a more tacit rhetorical strategy.

Some time prior to the extract reproduced below, Sharon mentioned that she felt she was not successful in conveying her powerful emotions and experiences to me. She recalled that a day before our meeting she had spoken with an acquaintance who had recently returned from the trip, and who, like her, had been deeply moved by the experience. She then says:

Sharon: This trip really DOES something to you. I can't put my finger on WHAT but it changes your perception of things in many ways. I'm not- it's hard for me to say that I was once this way and now I'm different, that today I see specific matters differently > [but] I feel INSIDE MYSELF that some change has occurred in me but I can't- < I can't say WHAT, what has changed.

Interviewer: mmm but you FEEL it [and-]

Sharon: [And people] see it, certainly. People who know me and others too like- everyone told me I've changed. And it's- you know, the trip- where else can you have such a thing [...] Later I DID travel to places that have opened up only recently I reached less touristic places. It attracts me. You see the pictures you see it's a completely a DIFFERENT world. Not one that we know of or even think of [...] It had already begun being touristic but not enough. I KNOW that if I'll travel there NOW it won't be the same anymore. It's clear to me. Because people hear about it and so they travel. And in big numbers.

Sharon argues that she underwent a meaningful change, and that upon her return she was “different.” She makes it clear that the impact of the trip on her is to be framed in terms of selfhood, and in this regard it is unmistakably of a positive, wide and enduring scope. As in Boaz’s argument, the change she sensed is narrated in a way so as to indicate it is *directly linked* to the unique experience of the trip, about which she rhetorically asks, “where else can you have such a thing?”

Yet Sharon indicates that the particular, or even general, domain of the profound changes remains unspecified. Unlike Boaz’s straightforward narration, it is precisely the vagueness or the unspecificity of the description that persuasively communicates Sharon’s argument. The two words she chooses to emphasize in the beginning, “[R]eally DOES something,” and “I can’t put my hand on WHAT,” are related. They are simultaneous indications of the powerful impact of the trip on her, on the one hand, and of its inherent ineffable and unnarratable quality, on the other hand. These words emphasize what positively *is*—i.e., the profundity of the experience, the sense of realness of the self-change—and what *is not*—i.e., what is extradiscursive, noncommunicable. The difficulty to put into words her transformatory experience, a difficulty she previously interpreted as a failure of her communication skills, does not in effect undermine the message she communicates, but rather enhances it.

In other words, what could have been paradoxical is complementary in her narrative: the immensity of the experience, Sharon implies, lies precisely in the fact

that it is located *beyond* speech, beyond the possibility of words to articulate and communicate it referentially. By employing this structure of complementary *confirmation and negation*, Sharon establishes a communication that concerns the “ineffability of the immense.” What she describes is profound and elusive both simultaneously and consequentially. It is essential to the construction of the experience of self-change and to its successful communication that its impact be located beyond the “sayable.” The claim she makes about identity is thus also a claim about language and about the various ways it may be manipulated in the performance of self/self-change (Stromberg 1–16).³

When Sharon asserts that she cannot elaborate further on her immense feelings, I feel impelled to confirm her experience, to share *my experience* with her—to indicate that I understand that self-change has indeed occurred and that it rests “inside” her as a “deep” feeling. My assertion that it is “inner” and experiential in essence (“you FEEL it”) compels Sharon to claim that, even though she acknowledges its interior quality, the change is by no means abstract or invisible. By correcting me and insisting that the changes are not only (“subjectively”) felt, but also (“objectively”) seen, the similarities between Sharon’s and Boaz’s performances gradually come to light. What is “visible” for Sharon is “actual” for Boaz: in both cases, claims are made to “actual” manifestations, to their factual, observable quality, which is crucial for communicating a sense of a true self-change. In both cases the changes are construed as the result of a trip (which truly occurred) and the true or real encounter with places, cultures, people, and so forth.

It is noteworthy that soon after Sharon stresses that she arrived at a unique, marvelous destination, she evokes a temporal attribute (“travel there NOW”). She suggests that the nearly epiphanic moment she experienced is singular and fleeting. Experiencing singularity is presented as a matter of arriving at the right place at the *exact* right time. It is not only the unique place she has visited, but also the special, propitious moment—the last minute—at which she has done so that together amount to what has touched and “influenced” her profoundly. Sharon incorporates a common variety of the discourse of time in tourism, whereby the new (i.e., the western) spoils the old (e.g., the “Oriental,” the “Other”). In the convergence of time and identity, it is both the *whereabouts* and the *whenabouts* that matter, and it is through the discourse of romanticist nostalgia that tourism powerfully draws time, as a commodity that becomes a resource, into the autobiographical time of the lives of tourists (Bruner 242, 248; Elsrud, “Time Creation” 312, 318–19).

Moreover, temporality and evanescence give the impression that Sharon was one of the last to *witness* the uniqueness of which she narrates. She is, thus, a witness of things bygone, and her performance is not merely of a touristic travel narrative, but a testimonial one, bearing witness to that which once was and is no longer. Bearing this witness has affected her profoundly, and consequentially she, too, has changed and she, too, will not be the same thereafter. She thus draws a parallel between the destination she visited and her inner realms—both of which have altered irreversibly; both of which require a witness to capture the experience and “propagate” it (Barbara Johnson, qtd. in Felman and Laub 23).

Transcendent Texts and Self-Change

Narrative arguments of this magnitude, wherein the self is construed as undergoing valuable and significant changes, are among the strongest claims that can be asserted by narratives of personal experience. In order for the narrator to speak convincingly of such meaningful occurrences, which, being internal, cannot be observed, or measured, their accounts need to be sufficiently anchored in culturally powerful and socially persuasive texts. For this reason, narrators draw an association between their experiences and some other authoritative topos of extraordinariness, which authenticates them and renders them credible and valid.

Texts of such type have two prerequisites. First, they must embrace some sort of transcendent quality. They relate to and convey some profound realm of meaning, consensually acknowledged as such by members of a socially relevant subgroup. Second, they do not refer to the self, at least not explicitly, but to some other (or, better, Other) realm of meaning. Thus, narratives of dramatic occurrences, which take place “within” the boundaries of the conscious self, correlate with dramatic arch-narratives (such as the travel-narrative), pertaining to events that occur “outside” it and that are perceived as being responsible for its vicissitudes. In other words, though transcendent texts are seemingly of other/Other subject matters, they nevertheless inherently revolve around the self.

The following two excerpts illustrate the employment of transcendent texts (cf., Maingueneau) in the context of tourism. They occurred earlier in the conversations than the previous excerpts, when the narrators were describing the sights they saw and the adventures they underwent (the core travel-narration). The first is drawn from Sharon’s narrative (preceding the above excerpt by 40 minutes) and the second from a narrative by Danit Shai (aged 25), who describes trekking in the Azangate mountain range, where she traveled during a 5-month trip in South America. In both cases the conversation flowed while we looked now and then through pictures from the trips. Sharon and Danit describe breathtaking views, in what seem to be naïve descriptions, typical of tourists’ excited and wordy accounts. However, these descriptive segments can be read as legitimizing sources of the dramatic claims of self-change that follow shortly after. In contrast to the sequences described above, the apparent subject of these segments is not the self (the “inner” realm), but the impressive sights viewed by tourists (the “external” realm).

Sharon: It’s all clouds here. So here I took pictures all the time because they kept on changing but again. You can’t see it in the pictures. It’s not- you know I tried to do [a montage] with the pictures mm but it never came out right [...] It’s simply the- the change. But you can’t see it. It’s not- you know all the time the clouds are moving and shifting forms and suddenly there’s a hole HERE and previously there was a hole HERE. And- the shades again they are changing all the time. You see, these pictures are already more lighten up- Here you already have the blue. Here it’s still all red. I don’t know it’s something °different. Simply different.°

While Sharon foregrounds that which is shifting and fleeting—the moving clouds—

Danit concentrates on that which is stationary—the Peruvian mountain chain. Nonetheless, the scene’s dynamic quality is competently communicated.

Danit: There are whole mountains that are- or in that red color, or in the color of dark green. And then you think that you see- that it’s only say the MOUNTAIN that’s in this color or the SAND that covers it. But NO. You see whole rocks that are in that RED color or whole rocks that are in the green color. And you simply- at some point you reach it and you walk on it and you look. “I’m walking on a RED mountain. I’m walking on a green mountain.” Simply °[amazing there-°

Interviewer: °[wow, wow. Amazing.]°

Both Sharon’s and Danit’s extracts are fine illustrations of the tourist gaze, as they powerfully evoke vision and referential language related to it. These not only convey, but also construct, the remarkable, the authentic, which assumes in tourism the shape of peoples or places, urban or natural. In all cases, the tourist’s moving gaze endows the tourist with the powerful lived experience. Once they are actually “walking on” remarkable places and truly “knowing” authentic cultures and peoples, to use Danit’s and Boaz’s excited words, tourists consume the commodity of constructed authenticity, in the capacity of constructing an identity *vis-à-vis* a dramatic narrative of self-change.

The breathtaking scenery, the intense experiences it bestows upon the tourist, and the travel narratives capturing and enacting these experiences amount to what Maingueneau describes as “self-constitutive discourse.” These are powerful transcendent texts, which are deeply rooted in modern-western societies, and are “under the control of something transcendent, such as Tradition, Reason, Truth” (190). Of central importance to these texts is what lies *beyond* narrative, i.e., the ineffable. What grants them their transcendent authority is precisely their being “under control” of that which is beyond narratability, and is “bordering on unspeakable meanings” (183). Such discourse has a liminal quality, and its generativity and authority are drawn from being located “betwixt-and-between” (Turner 93–111). It is a threshold, or an intermediary between the sayable and the unsayable, between language and the “nonreadable surround” (to borrow from Silverstein and Urban 1).

The vivid descriptions provided by Sharon and Danit, which are seemingly related to the scenery and not to the self, amount to transcendent narratives of tourists. The narrators’ identity claims, which are staked as high as self-change, are viably asserted by being bound to a transcendent text. The narrators summon profound meanings that are perceived as existing independently both of the viewer, the gazing tourist subject, and of language.

Symbolically, the role these narratives play corresponds to that of revelations (Stromberg), or gospels (Harding), in religious Evangelic narratives of personal experience and change. Such institutional discourses enable the articulation of selfhood at a (trans)formative moment, endowing the individual’s narrative with much needed validity *vis-à-vis* claims of transcendence that are presented as the *raison d’être* of the profound self-change.

Transcendent discourses, however, are imbued with authority with regard to particular historical and cultural contexts. In backpacking tourism, the romantic (adventurous) experience lies at the core of the desire for formative, constitutive experiences and grants backpacking tourists' narratives their transcendent quality and is their legitimizing source. It enables the construction of an identity having "deep interior" (Gergen 18–47), where the self allegedly lodges and in which its feelings reside. The "deep exterior" reverberates here with the deep interior, as both metaphor and motive: by gazing upon such profound, transcendent sights, the tourist him- or herself is simultaneously constructed as encompassing great depths.

Performing Touristic Self-Change

In addressing performance aspects of tourists' narratives, three observations should be made. First, tourists are performers in the sense that they have a story to tell (a touristic travel narrative), a ready audience (mostly yet-to-be and veteran backpackers, who are either planning their trip or wish to "compare notes"), and sites where conversational storytelling intensely take place (in backpackers' enclaves in the course of the trip, and in cafés where backpackers socialize upon their return to their homeland).

Within these settings they are granted a "voice" (Shotter 7–10), or a "speaking role," as Webb Keane observes: "transformation consists of taking a new role as speaker ... [of] being transformed from the listener to the speaker ... the speaker's religious identity is approached ... as an inhabitable speaking role with all the discursive and moral possibilities that may entail" (58). Those who have heard time and again stories by others have now become narrators themselves. To paraphrase Keane, they shift from the listener role to the speaker-narrator role.

Having a voice, or a speaking role, is crucial for a performance wherein the experience of self-change is induced. Discussing born-again Evangelists, Stromberg observes that the change "occurs as a result of changing embodied aims into articulable intentions" (29). Entering the domain of the articulate, Stromberg suggests, "draw[s] a new part of the subject's experience into the realm of the self," producing a sense of self-change. As Maingueneau pointed out (183, 195), it is precisely the capacity of allowing permeability of meaning from the ineffable to the effable, from the embodied to the articulatable, that characterizes the effect of transcendent texts, and it is that which allows for a self-change narrative to be viable.

Hence, the experience of self-change is located within narrative or narratability. Consequently, the narration of a self-change experience *constitutes its experience*. Language is not employed in this regard only referentially, conveniently located within the effable, but also constitutively: it is through language, in its transformative capacity, that self-change is experienced. Clearly, narratability and the move to the effable require the sociocultural conditions of the type that makes performance possible, wherein one can assume and materialize a voice, a speaking role.

The second observation to be considered is that oral performance entails the bridging of the experiential and epistemological gulf that lies between the there-and-

then of the narrated events and the here-and-now of the storytelling occasion. The more fluid and seamless the weaving of the two contexts, the more persuasive and effectual is the performance. There is a unique paradox here that the narrators need to contend with when performing self-change before an audience that has not traveled. Because the latter did not know the former prior to the trip and is thus unable to compare the “before” and “after,” all the narratee has to go by is the story of the self-change. The tourists are thus under pressure and are required to persuasively *show* change *in vivo*. They accomplish this performatively by extensively employing metacommunicative allusions, addressing the very acts of communication in which they are involved (Bauman and Briggs; Lucy). These, in turn, affect the pragmatics of the conversation, or, in narration, “the pragmatics of putting narrative into practice” (Langellier 127).

In order to implicate their interlocutor(s) in their narratives and bridge the two realms, the backpackers establish performative—interpersonal and intersubjective—communication, by means of which they are able to perform their new speech role, that which instantiates their significant self-change. It is only within interactional positioning that I was able to experience and “know,” as the backpackers put it, the sense self-change they underwent (Noy, “You Must”). By merely listening to their stories, I too acquired a conversational position: that of the listener. I was uncannily drawn from the storyrealm into the taleworld (Young), where, Susan Harding observes, the story “on a deep level [is] about the listener: You, too, are a character in these stories; these stories are about you” (173).

The third and final point to be made is that in a performance, transcendent texts are seamlessly woven into the realm of lived (inter-)personal experience, thus imbuing the narrative performance with credibility and authority. The transcendent quality is “imported” from the alleged there-and-then to the here-and-now and is constructed and reenacted interpersonally as lodging within the (transformed, transcendent) self. Consequently, the occasion of narration is imbued with features of what the narrative describes: it describes authenticity and establishes it simultaneously.

In the first extract above, Boaz is consistently referring to himself, until, at a certain point, he addresses me directly for the first time, suggesting two illustrations of his newly gained knowledge. He employs a repetitive structure (“ask me”), as he rhetorically invites me to examine him. Under the equation that he draws, correlating new knowledge with self-knowledge and subsequently with self-change, establishing detailed familiarity with the destination is crucial.

The problem Boaz faces is that *I did not know him prior to the trip*. He thus searches for ways to credibly communicate the knowledge he has gained. He stresses that his knowledge was previously only of a general character (“seen them on television”), while after the trip it is accurate and founded on concrete details. From this point onward, it is me to whom Boaz explicitly refers. He follows the lead he himself has made, as he ventriloquizes me into the conversation, and suggests answers to the queries that he puts in my mouth.

Interestingly, these queries are only seemingly hypothetical. What Boaz suggests I

could have asked is in fact what *I indeed asked*. It is the inquiry that lies at the core of our meeting, its underlying motivation. When he suggests that I ask him about New Zealand or “about the mountains,” he in fact indexes the context of the interview and the fact that I *did* ask him such questions earlier, the answers to which generated the performance of his travel narrative. This is why he alludes to the core narrative when he reminds me, in a metacommunicative note, that he previously told me about such events (“like I told you”).

The way he implicitly indexes the context of our interview meeting constructs the roles and positions we play in it. Elaborating on the experiences and undertakings of the trip positions Boaz as the “knowledgeable” and me as the “ignorant.” Hence, the emerging rhetorical structure, the transformative before-and-after claim, denotes in the performance not only Boaz’s experiences, but mine too. After all, the knowledge I presently hold of New Zealand resembles, in kind and scope, the knowledge he had *prior* to the trip. Through conversational positioning, the metaphor is cast dialogically. In this capacity Boaz positions himself as occupying the role of the experienced (full, after), and myself that of the novice (empty, before), in an interpersonal, “pedagogical” interaction (Briggs, *Competence* 82–3).

Note that the word “suddenly” (“ask me suddenly”) functions in a metacommunicative capacity. This is the only instance when it refers to the present context; in its three other occurrences it denotes the narrated events. An analogy is drawn between two occasions that carry dramatic and, more importantly, factual weight: that which occurred *during the trip*, and that which occurred *during the performance of the narrative*. What *was* dramatic and sudden *is* dramatic and sudden. From the perspective of the self-change claim, which is located at the end of the narration, akin to an evaluative sequence, both of these contexts are not here-and-now, and are thus alluded to. While I did not partake in the trip, I certainly did play a role in the narration, collaborating with the narrator in the conversation.

In a more profound way, the unspoken understanding entails the fact that Boaz has *indeed* traveled, that he has actually participated in the practice, and that we both take this statement for a fact and agree, epistemologically, that it “occurred.” We agree that traveling amounts to an *actual or factual practice*, which from the outset led to my desire to meet him, in the same way that, from the perspective of the self-change segment, the narration took place. By the time the narrator arrives at telling her or his self-change, the conversation has a weight of its own, so that the evaluative assertion may rest on the *eventfulness of the conversation* itself and on how we both assumed the speaking and listening roles throughout.

At this point in the collaborative storytelling, narrator and interlocutor share the grounds they have covered together. The location of the self-change towards the end of the interview is thus not coincidental. It stands in epistemological and metapragmatic tension with the events depicted in the core-narrative, which itself depicts the “actual” occurrences of the trip.

Moreover, by meeting with him and listening to his travel narrative, I gained substantial knowledge of the destination. And, if this knowledge is correlated with self-change, as Boaz contends it is, then the occasion of the interview amounts, in

itself, to the commencement of *my own* experience of self-change. Paraphrasing Boaz, I also “put myself in situations,” in the present actual/factual encounter with him, as he did with regard to the destination, in which the seeds of self-change are planted.

Similarly, following my reflexive comment (“you FEEL it”), Sharon employs metapragmatic cueing as she chooses to stress four words: “did,” “different,” “know,” and “now.” The first two emphases confirm that she did in fact travel, and, more importantly, the fact that she arrived at inspiring destinations, previously not visited. Akin to Boaz, she too establishes what is agreed upon as factual in our conversation. The position of the third emphasis is only natural—after all, the remarkable sites inspired a unique experience, one that is captured in the intimacy of her knowing, of her coming to know. The final emphasis evokes the *context of the narration*. The narrator contends that from the perspective of the present, both the places she visited and her self have changed irreversibly. As noted earlier, her story has a testimonial quality, and it is she, at the present moment of the conversation, who “knows” and treasures that which has vanished.

The precious singularity of which she narrates also reverberates within the occasion of narration. By listening to her remarkable story, I, too, became a witness: a second-order witness, a witness of a witness. In a way, I also get to see that which is transcendent, which now lies within the narrator and not at the destination. As asserted by another backpacker, when describing how he descended to a town at the end of a trek, “I told everyone of my adventures and so I was a kind of an attraction. It was nice. [People] asked me and took my advice.”

Though she does so more implicitly than Boaz, Sharon forcibly evokes the sense of my own self-change. Through tacit employment of metapragmatic framing devices, she suggests that my self-change is already under way. Her pointing out—and correcting me—that people in fact *see* it (among several other allusions she makes to vision, e.g., her reference to “montage”) evokes referentiality and the tourists’ gaze. Only now she draws the tourist gaze *onto herself*. She is now the one who should be looked at and viewed with appreciation, and it is “within” her self that an attraction—with its unspecifiable and ineffable characteristics—is located. She establishes a second order type of spectacle: at the present moment of narration, what is worth viewing is (within) Sharon. As she indeed indicates, people actually “see it,” both those who “know me, and others, too ... everyone,” perhaps alluding to me.

Again, Sharon faces the need to establish the credibility of the fact she has changed, even though I did not know her previously. Similarly, backpackers commonly assert that upon their return, their inner change was clearly apparent, and that “people would see [it] in my eyes,” in those very eyes that have seen, gazed at, and consumed tourist sites and sights. These are the vicissitudes of the powerful constructing tourist gaze. In the conversation I am the listener/spectator, I am a tourist of sorts, granting the narrators their role as changed, while, at the same time, being implicated in that change.

In this regard one should consider the narrators’ unique use of the conjugation of

the word “change” (*hishtanut*, “some change has occurred”). This specific form appears, in fact, only twice in Sharon’s narration: once here and once in the core-narrative (second extract, fifth line), where it refers to the changing contours of the clouds. Akin to Boaz’s use of the word “suddenly,” Sharon uses this pivotal word both in the transcendent text *and* its reflexive, evaluative coda, referring in the latter to her self-change. Thus, through a unique lexical repetition, she performs how what occurs within her self is as profound and perhaps as “natural” as the events she witnessed.

Once again two “destinations” are simultaneously referred to: one at a spatiotemporal distance and the other nearby both in space and in time, being constantly recreated in the fleeting narrative interaction. Semiotically, we can see how the contention that contemporary tourism entails and promotes a blurring of the signifier with the signified, is here performed by the tourists’ evocation of double reference or two-fold “conceptual structures” (Wortham 36). Consequently, narrating tourists have themselves become potent signifiers of what is worth the tourist’s gaze and narrative. After “actually” being there, they become signifiers—not only on-site markers of the attractions, but *off-sight markers* as well (Dann 9–12). They are now metonymically associated with the destination, *vis-à-vis* their own (owned) narratives. In a way, they have now become an “attraction” themselves, while their listener/spectator has transformed, too, and has become a “tourist”.

Thus, the performance of their transformation is an occasion of its own right, and it emerges as homologous with the event of the travel. The transformative, metapragmatic force of language begins precisely with the listening role, without which the speaker’s role cannot be inhabited later.

As for Sharon’s second extract, the depiction of the dynamic play of subtle hues and shifting clouds persuasively conveys the two-fold point she has been making: that the more spectacular the views, the more elusive and ineffable they are and thus the harder it is to communicate them. Here, again, the complementary rhetorical structure of confirmation and negation emerges, wherein each evaluative judgment reinforces the other. The confirmation concerns the *experience of witnessing* a spectacular view, and the negation lies at the recurrent expression of dissatisfaction with a referential mode of communication. It amounts to an instance of a metacommunicative evaluation, typical of romanticist-idealist language. As observed by Valentin Voloshinov, the possibility of expression is negated on the grounds that it can “deform the purity of the inner element” (85). This is also established by Sharon’s allusion to an unsuccessful attempt at creating a “montage.” It suggests that even an artificial construction, which is deliberately aimed at conveying and enhancing the scope, depth, and vividness of the object of the photograph, has failed in communicating that about which she is narrating. In the event of story-sharing these two aspects—the confirmation of the experience and the dissatisfaction with its referential communication—converge: the narrator conveys that s/he is overwhelmed, at once satisfied and frustrated.⁴

The three narratives point at what lies beyond the sayable, that which is extradisursive. They imply that there are no narrative shortcuts, no words to replace acts.

To continue the process of my own transformation, I now need to embark upon a trip myself, a practice that has two profound “destinations”: sites and self.

Finally, an illustration of how the interlocutor is skillfully implicated in the taleworld is also found in Danit’s depiction, which is drawn from the core-narrative and does not seemingly concern her self-change (or mine). At first glance, Danit seems enthusiastic about sharing her powerful experiences, without being preoccupied with their communicability: she stresses how “simply amazing” the views are. Yet a closer reading reveals here, too, the narrator’s metacommunicative preoccupations concerning the *communicability of her profound experience*. Masked as a descriptive sequence, a meaningful mininarrative is embedded within the excerpt, where Danit narrates her gradual, and eventually successful, approach to a colorful mountain.

The narrative points out that the first impression of the view arouses both admiration and suspicion, side by side. The remarkable sight arouses doubts about its realness, about whether it is “only” the sand, the mountain’s “cover,” that is colored. Again, the two-fold structure is discernable: the more awesome the spectacle, the more elusive it is for expression. Yet in the narration it is so both in the eyes of the tourist-protagonist *and*, later, in the ears of the interlocutor: the fact that Danit is not sure of the reality and authenticity of the mountain may reflect the audience’s hesitation as to whether her self-change is authentic and real or only a “cover,” a superficial colorful facade.

The answer Danit provides to her preceding (skeptical) hesitation—a subtle way of ventriloquizing me—is a resounding “no”: the mountain *is* authentic, its color is natural, its *inside* is red or green. In a particularly excited utterance, Danit describes how sharp and real its colors are and, reaching the scene’s climax, how she reached the colorful mountain and actually walked on it. It is then that she resorts to the use of direct quotations, which performatively instantiate in the narration the actuality of her being there.

When she describes reaching the mountain (“you reach it”), Danit actualizes her protagonist’s voice and tells herself aloud—and, in effect, tells *me*—she is/has actually been there. The direct quotation, which “fuses expression with communication” through a shift in the spatiotemporal perspective (Lucy 20), is an important metacommunicative framing device that marks the convergence of the narrated events with the event of narration, and conveys, in a seemingly unmediated (“direct”) *manner*, that she has been there. It parallels and enacts the narrated fact that she has reached, *in actuality*, what she previously only saw from afar. By arriving at the truly “red” mountain, Danit has reached the inside of the direct quotation, so to speak, a crescendo that I echo sympathetically. Now she—her transformed self—is as enthralling an attraction as is the marvelous mountain. She is speaking from within the experience with a voice that, if I should wish to own it, would require me to travel there for myself. Following the trip she establishes having gained not only storytelling rights (Shuman), but also *quoting rights*.

The double reference here—i.e., my witnessing her being within the quotations, in the there-and-then—means that at present *I* am a witness of a tourist attraction, already on the track of my own touristic self-change. In the interview situation Danit

re-evokes a short-circuiting of referentiality, which she accomplishes in speech and voice rather than in gaze and vision. The verb with which she introduces the quotation is “look,” which is a play on the usual type of speech verbs, one that indicates the shift in senses involved in her performance, from vision to discourse. Danit exchanges (transforms) the perceived immediacy of vision with that of *direct* quotation. The colors of her changed self are just as real as the colors of the mountain, and just as she experienced—viewed—the mountain, I experienced—heard—her.

Conclusions

The present exploration incorporates into the research of identity in late modernity linguistic and narrative knowledge concerning performance of narratives of personal experience. It does so by regressing from the (transcribed) text—that two-dimensional residue of the interaction, a “thin and partial record of deeply situated human behavior” (Bauman 2)—to the live intersubjective realm in which a sense of self-change emerges and in which it assumes meaningfulness and viability.

The persuasive narrations of self-change performed by tourists are accomplished through the positioning and involvement of their audiences. These tourists manipulate pragmatic aspects of live narrative interaction, which rests on the perception that by merely seeking to meet with them and interview them the researcher is already implicated in their taleworld. Storytelling thus emerges not as a by-product or an epiphenomenon of the ostensible principal touristic practice (i.e., the trip) but as a constitutive rite of its own. As a social action, the narrations amount to an initiatory rite in the listeners’ own search for self-change and constitute the initial stage in the construction of their own touristic taleworld itinerary. The interlocutor is conversationally positioned and experientially constructed as the novice, occupying the listener role, and the narrating tourist is cast as the experienced performer, occupying the speaker role.

In this manner, narrating tourists adeptly work around the evidentiary problem and around the challenge of conveying their self-change to an audience who did not know them before the change. In the interactions, their self-change assertions are typically located *after* the core narrations, at a point where conversational roles have already been established. The credibility of their argument is achieved by drawing a parallel between the trip and the core travel narration, on the one hand, and the core travel narration and the self-change statement, on the other. The self-change statements are not organic (narrative) parts of the travel narrative; rather, they are hanging evaluative clauses, knitted to the narrative via metacommunicative comments. This work of knitting parallels the work of overcoming or short-circuiting the ontic gulf between the core narrative (discourse) and the trip (practice), and it accomplishes important metapragmatic work that is at the core of the narrative performance.

Further, the backpackers’ accounts revolve around the ineffable, in that they extradiscursively point to two non/extralinguistic “destinations” simultaneously: sites

and selfhood. Both, they imply, possess a factual quality. Somewhat paradoxically, the backpackers' wordy stories suggest that there are no narrative shortcuts, no words to replace acts: in order to be viable, self-change claims should be closely associated with practices perceived as extradiscursive, such as traveling. Such metapragmatic work is effectively accomplished under shared perceptions of language, and under the sociocultural knowledge narrator and audience share (Langellier; Silverstein, "Shifters"). Accordingly, the sense of self-change and of selfhood—and with them the (re)establishment of a social identity—harbor performatively in and stem from the dialogical, the intersubjective.

Tourists' performances also illustrate how seemingly everyday conversations are in effect inspired by institutional discourses, which provide their performative resources and are woven into the lived experience of selfhood (Holstein and Gubrium). The backpacking trip is constructed as one that crosses a mythical geographical and experiential gulf, about which a transcendent narrative can later be performed. The persuasive impact of such narrations and their role in establishing identity parallel that of revelation or gospel texts in religious discourses. Indeed, if tourism in general is perceived as a modern (i.e., secularized) pilgrimage, backpacking in particular is an acknowledged rite of passage.

The backpacking trip, extensive and often excruciating, supplies a valuable discursive recourse, to be employed performatively elsewhere. In Goffman's words, narrating tourists sell association (187). Through the audience's actual, physical access to the performer-tourist's narrative, it gains "ritual accesses to the subject matter over which the speaker has command" (Goffman 187; cf. Langellier and Peterson 8–18). Indeed, what generates self-change and grants it credibility is this command of the practice and lore of backpacking, the travelers' "road status" (Sørensen). In a way, the trip of which these backpackers narrate has not ended, and tourism, as a system of signification, is reenacted time and again. This exemplifies the conflation of the notions of culture-as-performance and of culture-as-tourism (Bauman and Briggs; Briggs, "Linguistic" Rojek and Urry; Urry). Within these conditions tourist discourses supply a pervasive "laundering" of capital: economic capital and travel rights are exchanged for cultural and narrative capital. This is particularly illuminating regarding the resources by which identity is established.

Considering the sociocultural backdrop against which touristic assertions of self-change are made, young Israeli backpackers rely on discursive resources that are commonplace in their home society. Adventurous outdoor (nature) activities and the antibourgeois nature of their trip are clearly reminiscent of the hegemonic cultural heritage of the Zionist *Sabra* (the native-born Israeli; see Katriel, *Talking Straight*). Moreover, their open and interpersonal manner of narration, sustaining the heightened atmosphere of the interview conversation, relies on typical forms of Hebrew speech in Israel, notably the direct and open *dugri* style (see Katriel, *Talking Straight*). While the backpacking tourists appear to share a common extranational realm with other tourists, their experiences and narrative performances are transcendent only within the bounds of this subculture.

In this sense, the performances of Israeli backpackers are highly political (Langellier

lier 128; Peterson and Langellier). Albeit covertly, they forcibly reaffirm what is shared by performers and audiences, all the while *excluding* others—both with regard to destinations (e.g., “natives,” conventional “tourists”) and, likewise, with regard to their home society (e.g., Palestinians, ultra-orthodox Jews). The performance thus serves social-political and ideological aims of sustaining and strengthening a subculture identity, in times of deep ruptures and vital social and cultural competition.

Notes

- [1] Note that since tourism is commonly perceived as a haven, a recess, from the burdens and constraints of everyday modern life, and not as additional institutional engagement, it is (uncannily) located in the moments in peoples’ lives that are thought of as not tangled in discourse—in fateful moments (Giddens), wherein narratives of identity are susceptible to the effects of (trans)formative institutional discourses.
- [2] In accordance with standard ethical protocols, the identities of the interviewees are masked by pseudonyms. For the most part, the transcripts emphasize the verbal content of the interviewees’ stories over the nonverbal content. In a few instances, however, I have added the following diacritical marks to underscore selected features of the narrators’ delivery:
- wha- Hyphen indicates a cut-off of sound, an abrupt break or glottal stop.
- [word] Bracketed words were added by the transcriber to clarify a contextual meaning or reference.
- > and < The “greater than” and “less than” signs bracket talk that is spoken at a markedly faster rate than the surrounding talk.
- [...] Bracketed ellipses indicate that words were elided from the extract.
- [over]
- [lap] Bracketed words in adjacent lines indicate overlapping speech.
- LOUD Words in capital letter denote a higher volume, usually for emphasis, than the surrounding words.
- °and° Words bracketed by “degree” signs denote speech that is softer or quieter than the surrounding speech.
- [3] The use of opaque language and the avoidance of explicit statements of transformation serve also to avoid, or rebuff, potential allegations of a downright, religious-like (born-again) transformation story. Since the backpackers are viewed in their home society as “secular” and since the trip is perceived as a recreational practice, rather than a spiritual-religious pilgrimage, backpackers generally do not wish to convey a total transformative experience too explicitly. In this sense Sharon’s narration differs from Boaz’s, and she manages to grasp both ends of the stick: while successfully conveying a meaningful experience of self-change, she simultaneously refutes potential claims that her story is of a fundamental, born-again-like nature.
- [4] Note that shortly before the extract Sharon mentioned an acquaintance she met, who traveled and who shares her experience. Thus, when she communicates her frustration with her inability to convey the trip’s meaningfulness with an interlocutor (myself), who, she presumes, has not backpacked, she is alluding to an alternative, nonpedagogical genre: where personal experience is shared—co-narrated in Elinor Ochs’ sense—by both sides.

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