

## **TRAVERSING HEGEMONY: GENDER, BODY AND IDENTITY IN THE NARRATIVES OF ISRAELI FEMALE BACKPACKERS**

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This article explores travel narratives of Israeli female backpackers, depicting their participation in a tourist rite-of-passage. The exploration addresses the meeting of narratives of the masculine, adventurous male hero, on both local (Israeli culture) and global-Western (backpacking) spheres, with regard to which the travelers position themselves and negotiate their gender identity. The article deals with two complementary sites of tourist gender performances: one is the actual trip and the other is the performance of travel narratives. The findings indicate that the backpackers assume several, shifting, positions in relation to an oppressive masculine social norm: while some adhere to the norm, others resist it through a subversive participation in alternative backpacking activities or through a reinterpretation of the normative activities. The article foregrounds the central role played by the body in mediating between the individual and the collective. Finally, it proposes further research on how culture and tourism are interwoven, so as to allow a nuanced picture of gender construction in women's biographies in particular, and in the biography of marginalized people in general.

Key words: Language; Experience; Identity; Body; Performance; Israeli society

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### Introduction

“You don't have anything if you don't have the stories” [Leslie Silko (1977), a female Pueblo Indian storyteller; cited in Babcock, 1993, p. 86].

Over the past three decades a touristic rite-of-passage has been established among middle-class Jewish youth in Israel. Upon completion of their obligatory military service, scores of young Israelis travel abroad, mainly to “Third World” countries in Asia and South America, on a time-honored backpacking trip that has become known as “the great journey.” The extended trip, which is widely echoed

in media and public discourse, is a collective practice, engulfing deep and abiding cultural themes in Israeli society (Noy & Cohen, 2005). Participation amounts to a highly significant life episode, about which the youths tell meaningful narratives of experience and identity (Noy, 2004). Additionally, with the symbolic capital they have gained, the backpackers are admitted to an exclusive subculture.

As they travel, the youths face images and tenets, in which cultural images of manhood and heroism are central. In undertaking backpacking they are required to adhere to a specific set of practices, which subtly represent hegemonic narratives. Hence, as a vibrant

cultural site, the backpacking trip accommodates the construction of gender identity vis-à-vis fervent gender performance. These performances take place both during the trip and in its aftermath.

The present research focuses on female backpackers' narratives, in which they creatively confront the hegemonic masculine narratives underlying backpacker culture. Through a consideration of the synergetic convergence of both local (Israeli) and global (Western tourist) gender narratives, the research will shed light on the social construction of an embodied and engendered tourist identity.

As suggested by the Pueblo woman storyteller Leslie Silko (in Babcock, 1993), the cultural and identity capital of women often assumes the form of stories. Their stories, the events that form their narrative resources, and the social setting in which they can be performed, serve as the locus of how an individual becomes part of (and, as we shall see, apart from) society. For the female backpackers interviewed, adventure telling amounts to a vital social right. In this respect, their "interviews" became a performance of dramatic negotiation of gender identity, in which the travel narratives had a dual reference: the backpacker performance during the trip and the backpacker performance during the narration.

### Traversing Engendered Spaces: Two Histories

"The classical forms of autobiography are commonly registered in some famous masculine prototypes; especially Saint Augustine, Rousseau and Goethe. What they have in common is the unitary and substantive model of a self that finds a coherent affirmation in his self-narration" (Cavarero, 2000, p.68).

This section will produce a gender account that illuminates why backpacking, with its manly ethos, is the form of tourism that has become a widespread, vibrant rite-of-passage in Israeli society. It will do so by showing the correspondence between two patterns of hegemonic masculinity: one on a global level—backpacking tourism, and one on a local level—present-day Israeli society.

### *A Global Gender History*

Women and travel is an age-old, charged issue. Suffice to recall that from antiquity to the romanticist travel narratives, images of travel, adventure, and exploration have always been predominantly male.

Along with war and sports, travel and adventure have been constructed as *constituting practices of manhood* (Campbell, 2004). "Good travel (heroic, educational, scientific, adventurous, ennobling) is something men (should) do," Clifford (1992, p. 105) writes. Documented cases of female travelers have always been infrequent, representing exceptions to the rule of the male traveler (Minh-Ha, 1994; Pratt, 1992). In this capacity the "Other," whether embodied in wilderness and nature or in distant "exotic" cultures, has been culturally constructed as carrying feminine qualities (as feminist critics of anthropology have recently shown, see Aitchison, 2001), serving as an object (an objective) against which male identity is performed.

From minute bodily movements to long-haul travels, women's mobility rights were restricted in various social domains, and their movements were incessantly under scrutiny of patriarchal regimes (Ardener, 1981; Blunt & Rose, 1994; Mazali, 2001). Women's bodies were reserved to the domestic sphere, and while their movement in the public sphere was socially upsetting, traversing the public sphere and journeying beyond it was inconceivable; a transgression of a patriarchal taboo.

Introducing themselves as travelers has always been emotionally loaded for female travelers for it threatened a constitutive underlying right of manhood: freedom of mobility. Accounts of women's travel represent a "split between traveler and lady" which "pervades women's travel narratives" (Blake, 1990, p. 354). Historically, women always had to carve for themselves their own trails and itineraries, to take extra risks—social and psychological, as well as physical, and to pay the price of a "split" in their identity. Undertaking travel, they ran the risk of becoming estranged "creatures" in the eyes of society and in their own eyes (Minh-Ha, 1994, p. 15).

At stake was not only body movement per se, but also the adventurous and profound narrative to which it entitled the heroine, who became the protagonist of the travel narrative. Through the social act of narration (storytelling) the protagonist's identity was to be validly constructed and publicly presented, thus threatening the traditional patriarchal order.

Modern capitalist tourism, the "world's most sex-role stereotyped industry" (Aitchison, 2001, p. 133), has monopolized historical travel, commodifying it by commercially perpetuating romanticist imagery

and narrative (Greenblatt, 1991; Pratt, 1992). “Today’s adventure story is still often burdened with predominantly masculine overtones,” writes Elsrud (2001, p. 602), and is “still at least partly gendered, embracing its masculine supporters while excluding its female intruders” (p. 614). Under late-capitalist (neocolonial) ideologies, tourism institutions play an important role in perpetuating masculine dominance over space, movement, and narrative, and in propagating the gender power structure of colonial psychosocial oppression (Fanon, 1986).

In recent years, feminist researchers of body and mobility have fruitfully deconstructed the Western phallogocentric appropriation of space and movement. By denaturalizing active hegemonic constructions, they have shown how women travelers do not cross “natural” space. Thus, through travel women confront and at times transgress overlapping geographical, social, and cultural boundaries (Fullagar, 2002).

*Becoming a Backpacker.* Of the myriad forms in which the ethos of adventure in tourism is guised, backpacking adheres most closely to the romanticist image of the colonial adventurer. The images and travel narratives of contemporary backpacking focus on adventure, exoticity, authenticity, and Otherness—all heritages bequeathed by the western Orientalist imagination (Taylor, 2001).

Traditionally, backpacking has represented a category of alienated, “noninstitutional” tourists, designated as “drifters” or “nomads” (Cohen, 1973). Yet over the past three decades, accelerated processes of institutionalization have brought these travelers well into the arms of mass global tourism (Richards & Wilson, 2004). Backpacking is defined as a trip at least several months long. It is commonly pursued by Western youths on a “tight” budget—a fact that shapes decisions about transportation (a preference for “local” modes of transportation) and accommodation (a preference for low-budget guesthouses, motels, etc.). The trip is planned individually, not prearranged or organized by travel agencies. By and large, the trip takes place in “Third World” countries (at the “periphery belt”). There, the encounter with the Other, perceived as “exotic,” “authentic,” and somewhat risky (Carter, 1998), is central, providing the trip’s profound, transformative experience (Noy, 2004).

Despite accelerated processes of institutionalization, the traveling youth adhere to romanticist narratives. In their travel narratives, countercultural antibourgeois themes, typical of alienated drifters and wanderers of the past, continue to be salient. In order to reduce the dissonance between the ideal image and the actual practice and in order to maintain the images of a “better mode of tourism,” the backpacking culture “reinforces the importance that backpackers place on nomadism, self-organization, and self-reliance” (Sørensen, 2003, p. 858).

With regard to female backpackers, what is at stake is the *manly ethos by which they are required to comply*, in order to attain the unique cultural capital associated with backpacking, capital that is a source and a resource for identity and sociability alike. If “backpacker” is a process, an engendered social construct, then female backpackers processually confront the need to reconstruct themselves as backpackers within a masculine discourse.

#### *A Local Cultural Gender History*

Constraints surrounding women’s travels are augmented in the case of the Israeli “great journey,” where, in addition to global themes, local (cultural) themes concerning gender and travel are powerfully introduced. At stake are the dynamics of intense crystallization and cohesion in (Jewish) Israeli society, as these have been traditionally pursued on a national level through participation in outdoor activities, notably hiking. In addition, as the trip takes place shortly after military service, the backpackers exhibit militaristic/chauvinistic attitudes and patterns of socialization.

During the heyday of Zionist ideology, in the mid-20th century, participation in strenuous and adventurous traveling activities was a widespread, highly valued social practice. In fact, hiking was a national tradition that played a significant cultural role in forging the bond between the bodies of the recent immigrants to Palestine and the land. Hiking trips throughout the “Land of Israel,” particularly to national/historic sites on steep and mountainous paths (most notably the Herodian fortress of *Masada*), were performed by the Israelites’ bodies in an effort to strengthen the bond between people and land (Gurevitch & Aran, 1991; Katriel, 1995). These trips were carried out zealously in a quasimilitary

manner, fueled by an amalgamation of romanticist and colonial images. Whether performed in schools, youth movements, or military units, these practices forcibly promoted a masculine identity. They presented the formation of the image of the “New Jew,” the opposite of the effeminate, weak, and vulnerable exilic Jew (Boyarin & Boyarin, 1997). To be worthy of this new image, the collective body of the *Sabra* (native-born) Israeli was to be well built and to encompass manly qualities such as determination and stamina; it could overcome intense physical challenges, and when necessary, could protect the fledgling state (referred to in feminine terms) by sacrificing the individual male body. In this capacity, the trails and paths that criss-crossed the Land of Israel were to become the arena where bodies were to be cohesively forged.

Processes of social cohesion and the pressure to forge a normative collective identity, which were employed by national institutions, have consistently been imbued with gender themes pertaining to normative masculinity. For this reason they are considered suspect by feminist researchers in Israel. As observed by Weiss (1997b), “[T]he stronghold of collectivism seems to be the necessary price of this crisis-cum-routine pattern. Thus, ‘Israeli individualism’ should always be questioned” (p. 817). It is no coincidence that a prominent feminist like Weiss should be concerned with the resources available for individuality in Israeli society. The mode of “crisis-cum-routine,” to which she refers, supplies the perpetual foundation of chauvinist discourse, and, arguably, is the ultimate pretext for a preoccupation with militaristic practices and discourses in central social spheres (Sered, 2000; Weiss, 1998). Women are repeatedly marginalized in these public institutions, from military to political, and in the social spaces they manipulate, from mass media to airports.

To conclude, Israeli backpacking is imbued with masculinity, both in its evocation of romanticist themes related to heroic adventurous outdoor practices and in its collectivized (and collectivizing) effect, which smothers individuality. The issues encountered by female backpackers in their negotiation of gender identity concern images of exploration and a cohesive type of sociality, which are both forcibly promoted by intense interpersonal networks of communication and storytelling. As observed by

Rapoport and El-Or (1997), “feminist research in Israel is preoccupied with the *price extracted* from women who wish to become part of the collective, and participate in it, in the sense of belonging and being recognized, but also in the sense of changing the collective, and resisting its patriarchy” (p. 579, emphasis added). This price, as well as the vicissitudes of belonging and resisting, is one of the foci of the current article.

#### Engendered Interviews: Conversations With Female Tourists

“We proceeded inductively, opening our hearts to the voices and perspectives of women so that we might begin to hear the unheard and unimagined” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 19).

The present research draws upon 21 open-ended, in-depth, narrative interviews (Kvale, 1996), which constitute part of a broader study of Israeli backpackers of both sexes. The interviews were held in Israel during 1998–1999, within 5 months of the travelers’ return. The interviewees were secular Jewish Israelis, aged 22–25 (somewhat younger than Western backpackers), of middle- or upper-middle-class background. All had traveled for a period of at least 3 months, shortly after completion of their obligatory military service. They had visited countries typically frequented by Israelis: half had traveled to Asia (India, Nepal, and Thailand) and half to South America (the Andes, Argentina, Chile, and Brazil). Initial contact with some informants was made in stores selling traveling gear. From there, subjects referred me to friends and acquaintances from their trip (“snowball” sampling).

“Must” activities of the “great journey” include participation in outdoor activities, especially trekking, involving strenuous hiking on high-altitude mountain routes for several days or weeks. The interviewees were therefore presented with a leading question addressing narratives of outdoor activities. Later, more specific inquiries touched upon specific matters, such as experiences relating to gender and body, and the social encounters they experienced.

The text of the transcribed interviews was regarded as a static residue, an artifact of a live, dialogical interaction. These texts were studied not only in terms of content and form, but also for the interaction in which they were conceived. Text relating to

gender and bodily experiences was demarcated and analyzed: some of the content was straightforward (explicitly engendered by the interviewees) and some tacit, inferred from silences via contextual sensitivities (or “unsayables,” Rogers et al., 1999). The structure (plot) in which these themes were presented was explored.

Admittedly, it was quite some time into the process of interviewing that the extent to which the interview occasion was engendered became clear. This was so because the *subject of the conversation* was charged with gender meanings in a powerful, albeit tacit, way. Since adventurous outdoor activities are culturally marked as masculine (see above), the initial focus of the interviews foregrounding them had inadvertently (and unreflexively on my behalf) infused the interviews with gender themes and tensions (see Reinharz, 1992).

### *Gendered Tourist Performance*

The implications of an engendered context of storytelling are substantial. Gender tensions are not only manifested referentially, in what the backpackers’ travel narrative is about, but are also embodied in the *here-and-now* of their narrative performance. Following Fontana and Frey (2000, p. 663), it is contended that some of the hegemonic tenets with which female backpackers have to grapple during the trip are pervasive issues during the telling of their travel experiences as well.

This evokes the more general notion pertaining to the “location” of tourism as a powerful cultural site. While traditionally tourism was considered to be sited in tourist sites and destinations, current trends following the “end of tourism” hypothesis (Lash & Urry, 1994) point to the complex interrelationships between tourism, culture, and society. These trends conceive of “tourism” and “culture” as being organically enmeshed, continuously interfacing and interrelating in various cultural sites, and perceive tourism not in isolation, but as part of everyday, high-consumer life.

The merging of tourism and culture takes place at the sites of tourist performance. The performative paradigm is useful here, for it suggests that tourists do tourism in various occasions and locations, not limited to the attractions and sites they visit (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). In fact, conversational

storytelling, of the kind illustrated in both everyday and interview interactions with tourists, are surely sites of tourist performance, sites where the narrators continuously construct what it means to be a backpacker, as they cash in on the cultural capital gained vis-à-vis traveling. Tourists, Adler (1989) observes, are “concerned with innovating or reaffirming norms of travel performance and with providing evidence that such norms had been honoured in practice” (p. 367). Like the performance of travel, the performance of travel narration constitutes a “space of elsewhere where feminine subjectivity exists within, and yet exceeds, the closure and fixity of phallogocentric representation” (Fullagar, 2002, p. 59). Hence, “methodology” and “findings” in gender-sensitive research are not easily distinguishable on empirical grounds, nor does the dichotomy between the two hold on epistemological grounds.

### Findings: Traversing Masculine Space and Norm

#### *Expectations and Experiences*

Backpackers of both genders typically express very high expectations of the trip. The defining features of the trip, particularly its lengthy duration, multiplicity of sites, and “authentic” locations, sustain a distinctive experience to which the backpackers’ travel narratives attest. In accordance with the cultural role of a rite-of-passage played by the trip (Elsrud, 2001; Sørensen, 2003), the youths’ expectations are stated in high stakes. For participants, the trip is an inauguration into a subculture, and is commonly perceived of and narrated as nothing short of a self-transformational rite (Noy, 2004).

Crucially, the profound expectations expressed by the female travelers are usually shaped by an authoritative, collective narrative that they acknowledge with disappointment. When endeavored successfully, they commonly indicate that a satisfying travel experience was achieved despite a masculine norm. In other words, their stories record their efforts to traverse not only geographical distances and borders, but also sociogender boundaries, engulfed in an authoritative social norm. This duality enhances and complicates the drama unveiled by the narratives.

The following excerpts imply that, contrary to the expectations commonly shared by travelers, female backpackers were required to seek for themselves

and to realize alternative and subversive ways of traveling rewardingly. Dana considers the expectations surrounding hiking the Azangate trail in Peru, and Ayelet expresses this with regard to hiking activities in general.

Dana: They enfold it in lots and lots of stories. That is—the Azangate was far less than they said it would be. It was great, and it was *wonderful*, and it was *everything*, but it wasn't that cold, and the path wasn't that horrible, and the night in the hotel wasn't horrible. And it's always so that whoever doesn't trek is supposed to feel a little uneasy with himself 'cos, "what!? haven't you come to see the landscapes and views of South America? you traveled all this way!?" And I don't think it's right.

Ayelet: I've always heard that the trek is the most exciting thing in the trip. But I had many other things that did not—that I can't mark them out in terms of a specific experience. It was more of the atmosphere that I absorbed, or the people I got to know.

Dana contends that although participating in the activity indeed gave her a unique experience, she nevertheless experienced disappointment. She suggests that it was not so much related to the actual sites she visited as to the stories in which they were "enfolded" or "wrapped." Through the metaphor of narrative enfoldment or wrapping, the narrator observes that the destinations are heavily mediated by a collective narrative, according to which participation in several activities is a traveling "must," an inevitability. Traveling not for the consensual sake of seeing "landscapes and views" is almost inconceivable and requires explanation. Though, as Dana attests, she did trek and thus complied with the norm, she contends that the requirement to do so is disturbing. It seems that in order for her, like other narrators, to pass criticism, they have to first undertake the activities and to praise them to a certain extent ("great"). It is only then, from *within*, that sentiments of incongruence with the norm can be expressed.

Dana's expectations have a masculine hue. The rhetoric, by which the significant geographical distance traversed by the travelers only *enhances* their discipline of their selves and their bodies, is a backpacking tenet. As expressed by one of the male backpackers who hiked lengthily: "after you complete the trip—the *pride* that you are not just sitting vainly, and you traveled all that distance, merely to

sit in some restaurant and smoke pot... That's our greatest pride: That we did the trip as it should be done. To really consummate this phase." Clearly, and quite commonly, the distance tourists travel is constructed chauvinistically: it is a *leverage by which expectation and discipline* are boosted. It is a variation of the conflation of colonial tourist imperative—to constantly strive to new frontiers—with the consumer imperative—to see/gaze at "as much as possible." Thus, over and above their everyday burdens in their home society, the youths now have new, out-of-the-ordinary obligations to endure and overcome. This is precisely the authoritative rhetoric that Dana critiques (or "trivializes," Radner & Lancer, 1993). By expressing her disdain, the common *interpretation* of what the great journey is ("that cold... that horrible") and what participating in it *means* for female backpackers is contested.

While Dana points out that these activities did not amount to significant, memorable experiences, Ayelet proposes that merely delineating particular activities and trying to order them hierarchically is problematic. She supplies different directions along which the inquiry could be fruitful, including "atmosphere" and "people." Like Dana, Ayelet relocates the experiential foci of the trip. Rather than refuting the hierarchal norm altogether, she constructs a different, subversive set of acclaimed experience-endowing practices. She suggests that interpersonal associations and a general heightened sensitivity, rather than challenging strenuous activities, amount to the trip's formative experiences. It should be noted that her suggestions adhere to a more "feminine" perspective, favoring sociability and sensitivity over competition and achievement. Indeed, female backpackers typically express interest in "native" peoples, while the men show more interest in strenuous activities and searching for sights to take pictures of.

Finally, Ayelet mentions she had "always heard" about the great journey and its activities, which, as for Dana, evoked the heightened and intensive network of interpersonal, intrabackpacker communication. Through indicating their high expectations, narrators mention in passing the enhanced grapevine system through which information and stories travel among backpackers, especially between experienced and novice ones. Indeed, backpackers indicate that they were motivated to backpack, and were aware of

the images and expectations of backpacking, years before actually traveling, having heard of the “great journey” from older siblings and acquaintances. This points to the cultural and psychological breadths and depths of the backpacking ethos in the lives of the (yet-to-be) travelers and the extent and impact of the interpersonal network of communication in the backpackers’ community.

All in all, both Dana and Ayelet acknowledge the existence of a hierarchal norm by which participation in the trip should be pursued and conducted, and against which it is measured. They indicate that before the trip they had believed that certain activities were at the trip’s experiential, if not existential, core, and were rated as the “most exciting,” hence supplying the backpackers with the greatest measure of cultural capital. Importantly, the excerpts indicate that through a tight word-of-mouth network, backpacking tourism, although not formally institutionalized, embodies and perpetuates chauvinist norms and narratives akin to other, more commercialized forms of tourism (Noy, 2005).

These depictions are in line with Sørensen (2003) and Welk (2004), who found that hierarchies play a lively role in backpackers’ communities, and that they are constructed through adventurous activities. In other words, mentioning the intensive network of interpersonal communication implicitly carries the consequences of a tight social norm whereby certain activities, and not others, are deemed a “must” and are “wrapped” in social expectations concerning their practical qualities and experiential rewards.

With regard to the performative context of the interview, the narrators’ explicit mention of their having heard about strenuous activities before the trip positions the interviewer in a place that resonates their own state of knowledge *prior* to the trip: like them the interviewer had expectations and preconceptions as to what counts as a travel narrative, with which he approached the interview.

Reading these excerpts for the gender interaction they evince, they make, like Aylete’s words above, for a site of contention on what qualifies as a “good trip.” In other words, expectations are discussed here on two levels: what were their expectations of the trip (and how they traversed them), and what were the interviewer’s (normative) expectations in the context of hearing their narrative. It is suggested here that what the backpackers accomplished in

the trip—the praxis, they tried to accomplish in the interview—the discourse: to acknowledge the masculine foundation and traverse it. Note that the excerpts above do not evince terms that are explicitly gender-related. Rather, what is at stake is “the epistemological, ontological and logical structures of a masculinist signifying economy” (Butler, 1990, p. 13), as it operates in and in relation to the backpacking trip.

### *Expectations and Exclusions*

The female storytellers were not always able to frame both their participation in the trip and its narrative performance in terms of active agency; they were not always able to assert a position that suggested subversion or reversal of the norm, through a competent backpacking storytelling performance. As indicated by Sharon, the norm to which she had to stand up (quite literally) during the trip—the norm I came to represent in the interview context—was more excruciating than she could bear.

During the interview, Sharon seemed somewhat anxious, and we changed rooms a few times, looking for a convenient place. As she apologized repeatedly for the “mess” and for not finding her “many, many pictures” from the trip, her narration was constantly halted and was replete with embarrassed chuckles and giggles. She began by referring to our meeting.

Well... I’m not that good a choice in this respect. As I told you, I simply have problems in my leg. So I... couldn’t hike ah as lengthily as I wanted. ah if it was up to me, that is... So you know Nepal is *the* place for hiking. There is one path there um that’s the... considered the most beautiful. They say that it’s the most beautiful trek with the widest variety of views... So I unfortunately couldn’t do it, because I have problems in my legs. So we wanted to hike the shorter trail, which we planned for 2 weeks, and got ended abruptly after four days, because the legs gave [me] troubles (chuckles), to my regret (chuckles). So ah that’s it. So ah like—where to begin? It’s a problem.

Sharon indexes both the trip and its narration, as she, too, evokes a collective masculine norm, with regard to which she measures herself and finds herself lacking, and suspects that the interviewer, as well as others, measure her thus. With regard to the trip, she says that she did not or could not pursue the consensually most rewarding (“most beautiful”)

trails, and, moreover, due to physical problems, she could not even complete a shorter, 2-week trail. Though not asked to narrate stories of exceptionally lengthy strenuous endeavors, she contends that she is not a “good” informant, on the grounds that she does not stand up to the backpackers’ norm. Unlike the narrators quoted above, Sharon does not promote or provide an alternative view. Rather, the excerpt, which is drawn from the beginning of the interview, ends somewhat bleakly, with a deep hesitation as to whether and where the conversation should commence.

The narrator effectively evokes the demanding norm by describing the status of the activities backpackers are supposed to undertake. Though different routes are available for different hikers, she notes on three separate occasions that there are common expectations as to what is deemed valuable. She mentions that Nepal is the place for backpacking, implying that there is a reputation involved, of which she is aware, and then says more explicitly that a certain trail is “considered” highly attractive, and that “they say” its views are uniquely breathtaking. Thus, the attractions are marked or imbued with cultural capital, and the spaces where backpacking tourists travel are socially constructed.

By referring to the interviewer’s assumed knowledge pertaining to Nepal (“So you know Nepal is *the* place”), Sharon neatly aligns the male interviewer, the masculine interview agenda he has set, and the masculine norm of which she speaks. She thus subtly communicates that the very question about Nepal promotes some presuppositions concerning manly adventurous activities.

Note that Sharon insists that it was not her free decision to withdraw from the lengthy, beautiful trail, nor is she at fault for bringing the shorter 2-week hike to a sudden end. She repeatedly maintains that these regrettable incidents were not of her free will: she simply “couldn’t” participate in these activities due to her *body’s weaknesses*. As is typical of cases where a competitive masculine discourse is applied to the body, a detachment occurs between self and body (Connell, 1995). To avoid being perceived as critical of the norm, Sharon repeatedly “blames” her body, and bodily organs for their incompetence. She mentions her leg “problems” three times, claiming that they “simply” prevented her from pursuing the high-status activities the trip has to offer.

The backpackers locate much of the normative ethos by which they should pursue the trip in the body, as a “social site” of manly discipline and achievement. Consequentially, overcoming body “problems” generates a highly rewarding experience for the individuals, as well as a prominent social status. Alternatively, when one does not meet the expectations and demands, one is not entitled to the status or identity of a “true” backpacker—both of which underlie Sharon’s contention that she is not a good/worthy informant (see also Ruth’s excerpt, below). Just as she—her body—has disappointed the normative expectations, in the interview she assumes the role of (seemingly) disappointing the interviewer, suggesting that the “problem” concerns not only her legs, but also, as suggested in the final words, the interview itself. With her body as alibi, Sharon says that it is only due to its failure to withstand the hardships that she did not complete the activity and failed to earn a respectable place on the hierarchy.

In other cases, female backpackers indicate that it was not themselves, but other female backpackers, who did not endure the demands of the extended rite. By doing so, they inevitably evoke the tight and compelling norm thriving among the travelers. For instance, after Osnat tells of her profound travel experiences, and how, upon her return, she remains enchanted with South America (“that magical continent”), she suggests that the interviewer would certainly enjoy traveling there himself, having heard the stories. At that point she elaborates, in passing, on expectations and exclusions:

You’ll enjoy it. There are very few people who did not enjoy it. Really. I ran into one (fm.) who came to the trip, and after a couple of months she started whining, and said: “this is not what I thought. This is not what I expected. I’m quitting and flying to the US.” She simply decided it wasn’t for her. But she was really weird, because usually people who leave for the trip know what it is they’re going for. I didn’t really know, like, what a trek is. I knew it’s a lot of walking and it’s hard, but I didn’t know what attractions I would see. But I knew I’d be living in rough conditions for half a year, and I might not shower for a week and have to live with it. Simply um once you come prepared, it’s easier for you. I guess she didn’t know what she was coming for.

Upon deciding to discontinue the great journey, the backpacker described by Osnat did not return home, but continued to travel a different itinerary (a



non-“Third World” destination), hence suggesting an *alternative* to the normative itinerary. The figure of the anonymous traveler is evoked in the conversation to illustrate the exception to the rule: when one is prepared for the challenge, accomplishing it successfully becomes considerably easier. Indeed, Osnat depicts the backpacker who decided to leave the trip as complaining (“whining,” rather than withstanding the hardships and praising, as Osnat does), and is referred to as “weird.” It is clear, then, that the price one pays for disengaging from the ethos of backpacking is considerable and is stated by Osnat in critical, exclusionary terms.

The narrator is explicit about the significant challenge posed by the trip, which she overcame while the other did not: it is physically demanding and involves extensive physical efforts for long periods of time. In addition, it involves a “rough” attitude to the travelers’ bodies, incongruent with bodily needs, and particularly with female bodily needs. In fact, in Osnat’s description, hiking is employed metonymically, indicating that serious difficulties, demands, and discipline are posed *not only* through specific outdoor activities, but throughout the trip. She suggests that the gender *ethos* that is particularly and explicitly embodied in strenuous outdoor activities, in effect underlies the entire trip (indeed, the “rough” conditions to which she refers last throughout the trip—6 months long).

Finally, an alternative reading of Osnat’s evocation of the backpacker who left the community in the middle of the trip suggests that, in an extremely tacit manner, the narrator is bringing into dialogue with herself, and—within the conversation—with the interviewer, an alternative to mass masculine backpacking. Although Osnat clearly depicts the anonymous dropout in negative terms, she is nonetheless implying that an alternative does exist, and its price, when pursued, is being labeled and excluded from the collective, devoid of cultural capital.

In any case, the tight interpersonal communication that thrives among the youths is evoked yet again, suggesting this time that not being updated or well-informed, or, in other words, not being well within the information dissemination circles, is potentially harmful. The implications of not adhering with the collective are not subtle. They amount to a downright breach with the collective, and a relinquishment of the cultural capital it can affirm.

### *Embodied Narratives: The Body’s Incongruence With the Norm*

At the beginning of our conversation, when Ruth described the famous Peruvian Machu-Picchu trail, she drew a distinction between “lazy” backpackers and “combat-unit veterans”: the latter engage in the trip in a militaristic mode, displaying great discipline over their bodies.

Walking was very—it was very nice, other than that we arrived late all the time because of me (chuckles). It was a little—*very* difficult for me. It’s simply *uphill* all the time, and it’s *stairs*, and it’s *exhausting*. And Peru is *hot*, and that region is very hot. So it was very ah difficult . . . and climbing wasn’t easy at all. I even nearly gave up on the way and wanted to turn back and didn’t—They didn’t let me, and again—there’s that thing with “no! why on earth!?” we—” and it’s more so when you’re traveling with ah Israeli men . . . they’re *always* against [hiring] donkeys, and against all those things, and they don’t want help from anyone. There’s always that thing with “we’re Israelis!” and Israelis are *known* in South America as the most experienced travelers, and they’ll always try to do the toughest and the hardest things. So it’s clear they’ll do the Machu-Picchu trail by foot and won’t ask for help from anybody . . . if there’s a cliff and two are jumping from it one of them is surely an Israeli. It’s always like that.

Ruth supplies a vivid image of the occurrences in which she participated and her perspective about them. Though she clearly expresses her criticism of the norm, she is hesitant at first. Typically, she does not open with a straightforward contestation of the norm, but says that hiking was “very nice.” She chuckles when she recalls how late her group companions had to arrive every evening due to her slower pace of walking (she would later mention that the same was true in the mornings: the group would have to wait for her). This recollection, which might have generated embarrassment or frustration, may have energized her to take a stand in the description and be hereafter blatantly critical of the norm. The description “very nice” is then replaced with “*very* difficult.”

After she emphatically describes how hard “walking” was for her, when she had to face a heated, steep and lengthy ascent, she suggests that “climbing” was even worse. At that point she nearly broke down in despair (*hitya’ashiti*). She indicates that choices such as breaking down, giving up, and returning (“turn back”) are restricted, censored. Her wish to turn

back runs counter to the general *progressive manner* by which hiking, and the trip in general—in which the backpackers incrementally check the different “musts”—are conducted. Under the masculine colonial goal of continuously moving and reaching designated spots, ascending and progressing are positive engagements, while breaking down, giving up, and turning back are viewed as *weakness of character*. The norm carries an actionable, achieving quality, and adhering to it is measured against certain backpacking practices, in this case against the hot steep slopes of the Machu-Picchu trail.

The text, we can hear, is embodied, stemming from within the description of the narrator’s corporeal experiences. The panting, the sweat, and the exhaustion, though concretely indicating the unique heat in a certain Peruvian region, *are symbolically attributed to the heated friction between the performance of Ruth’s backpacking body and the norm to which it does not stand up*. Wishing to “give up,” to return, and to leave the collective rite runs against expansionist (colonial) tendencies, which are directed forward, upward, and onward.

Ruth’s body is narrated, then, as *stuck—locked, frozen—in the middle*, caught between the hammer (the social norm) and anvil (the individual): on the one hand, she cannot ascend any further, while on the other hand, she is prohibited from turning around and descending.

The narrator stresses the scene’s gender quality, indicating that her predicament was exacerbated because she was traveling with “Israeli men.” In many ways her male companions are embodied representatives of the masculine norm. They are derided as macho, demonstrating traits of hegemonic masculinity: as a team of men, they refuse to receive assistance from others, and authoritatively insist on self-reliance. In addition, they do not *offer* help, as Ruth well knows.

Ruth proceeds with a depiction of the conduct and character of the masculine collective, captured by the expression “we’re Israelis.” She suggests that the men’s preference to hike the Machu-Picchu trail “by foot,” rather than enjoying the benefits of other modes of transportation (such as a scenic train ride), is consequential. Accordingly, the masculine collective, captured in and expressed by the assertion “we’re Israelis,” discerns, forges, and defines itself vis-à-vis strenuous and risky activities. Ruth

suggests that Israelis congregate not only in youth hostels and other such enclaves but also on cliff tops. Thus, a link is drawn between the emergence of an engendered collective and the specific type of masculine practices in which Israelis frequently engage. Mainstream backpacking, Ruth suggests, corresponds with the mainstream of Israeli youths: in both cases masculine performances are prized.

Likewise, in the following excerpt the narrator’s voice emerges against an explicitly gender-laden background. Inbal recounts her “Chile experience,” testifying how she and a female friend were “conquered” by the idea of “conquering” mountain passes. Though Inbal occasionally mentions that the trip was overwhelmingly painstaking, she does so almost independently of the story she narrates, wherein she recounts time and again how rewarding it was.

In Chile I was with—in Chile we were with two men. Two platoon officers on a short leave from the army, with a military attitude. They had me go through basic training ah [for] a month.

Q: wow wow

Throughout Chile we slept in a tent. Like, once a week I said “listen, I have to wash my head, take me to ah hotels to wash, anything (quieter), to bath in the river.” And that’s what’s fun, you see a nice spot, you can decide to spend the night there.

After Inbal mentions the two male participants, she addresses them as a group, elaborating on the group’s masculine character: the men are identified only by their military affiliation and role, which they seem to be carrying enthusiastically into the trip—they had an active “military attitude” (Inbal uses the colloquial expression, *rosh tsva’ee*, lit. a “militaristic head”).

Inbal describes the men’s impact upon her trip: although engaging in a leisurely touristic (civic) practice, she in fact underwent an intense physical experience, poignantly captured in the (militaristic) metaphor “basic training.” Her criticism transcended the specific instance she was relating, and points to a structural parallel between backpacking and basic military training. These are two rites-of-passage: both are gendered practices that exert significant cohesive pressure and discipline over the individual and her body; both, if carried out successfully, are rewarding.

Against this background Inbal's individual voice ("I have to wash my head") assumes salience, as it touches upon a central metonym of the feminine body: her hair. The narrator argues that she has to wash her long hair and her body. This is where her own voice—that of a female backpacker—surfaces and expresses the body's unique needs, which are customarily unrecognizable and suppressed by the group. It emerges within an exclamation that illustrates how ill-adapted the norm is to women; women, therefore, must expressively demand what they need and deserve ("listen"). Again, the backpacker must pay the price of belonging to a collective, this time with regard to her bodily needs.

In her request, Inbal addresses the group's authority, seeking a change in its travel patterns or even a mere response. The narrator says she had to reiterate her request repetitively; she is not reporting a dialogue. Note that the group consists of four backpackers, two of whom are women. Yet, as her female friend is shadowed, Inbal is left alone, outnumbered by the two men and by the hegemonic masculine discourse they embody. She is, as Minh-Ha (1994) writes of women travelers, "representatively singular" (p. 15), facing men, who, by hegemonic practices of masculinity and cohesion, are grouped together ("representatively plural," to paraphrase Minh-Ha, 1994).

Soon after illustrating her repeated request/demand, however, Inbal shifts elsewhere in the conversation, describing how she had enjoyed the trip tremendously. While this shift could be accounted for by the pressures felt by narrators when disputing the norm, it might also be that Inbal is indicating how difficult the trip was for her, in order to receive approval for the hardship she successfully endured. If so, her unanswered demand cleverly serves to magnify the hardship she had to overcome, over and beyond that of her male companions, and to stress it before a male interlocutor, who might not be aware of what backpacking women have to endure.

In the last illustration of the "incongruent body," Rachel observes that Israelis "excite" or "enthus" one another prior to and during the trip, leading to their communal participation in rough activities. Again, she evokes the intense intrabackpacker network of communication and its powerful influence over the travelers. She describes a site where many Israelis meet, and she claims it was hard for her and

others to resist the collective authority, to refuse being exhilarated into masculinely constructed adventure.

You simply um get dragged along, what can I tell you. I too found myself at some point being dragged along into all sorts of things. But you get dragged along. Simply um "what!? How come [you] haven't!?! I did it already. It's worth trying. It's very um fun. It's very um helpful." Here the best example is when Uri and I, we traveled together and were friends. And he didn't do the Machu-Picchu [trail] in 2 days and I did do the Machu-Picchu [trail] in 2 days. 'Cos somehow I did get dragged along like—it was also interesting for me, but I did get dragged along after the traveling guys, who told me, "listen, it's better to do it by foot, it's more interesting you see more sights."

Rachel describes the impelling power of the collective persuasion (see Noy, 2002). She makes a point of discussing the individual's inability to stand firm against the collective, whose recommendations and tips assume the familiar and friendly form of interpersonal communication. She admits five times that she was "dragged along" (*nigrarti*), which is a way of saying her body was passively drawn into doing things the way they *should* be done, rather than being truly enthused.

Rachel illustrates gender issues in reverse fashion, when she indicates that it was her, rather than her male companion, who adhered to the pressing norm, and made "better time" while hiking. Unlike Ruth's (above) body, Rachel's "weakness of character," to which she succumbed and was dragged time and again, paradoxically resulted in her completing the task faster than her male companion. Though both women's experiences are similar, as they assume passivity vis-à-vis the masculine norm, their bodily narratives are reversed: one is stuck, while the other runs forward. Indeed, Rachel typically evokes the masculine paradigm of embodiment promoted by the norm. The excerpt's concluding sentence clearly contends that there is a *certain, preferred way* of doing things "the backpackers' way." As with Ruth, Rachel indicates a specific type of embodied engagement is expected of the backpackers, one which, if adhered to, should produce a rewarding experience.

Evoking the saying "by foot" here indicates an entire bodily paradigm, requiring the body's rigorous involvement in highly demanding activities, and embodying the cliché "no pain, no gain." The body

is not allowed any respite, not to mention quitting or backtracking. The proper way to progress and to ascend through the ritualistic movement is by investing genuine physical effort. It is an expression of a “desire,” Fullagar (2002) observes, which “is characterized by Protestant metaphors of hardship, working on the self through a masculine ethic of disciplined autonomy aimed at self actualization” (p. 63). As observed by Kimmel (1996), “masculinity required proof and proof required serious effort” (p. 120). When this is accomplished, when there is both effort *and* (narrative) proof of effort, the experience to which one is entitled is indeed “more interesting.”

Because there are different ways of reaching the ancient city of Machu-Picchu, what is and what can be at stake are not merely the sights. Gazing at the sights without the body exerting a significant amount of effort would potentially rob Rachel of an “interesting” experience. First, Rachel’s experience might be shallow and sour, rather than profound and transcendent, and she might *miss out* on much of what others view and (thus) gain. As observed by Riley (1988), “social recognition . . . is derived from the exoticness of one’s destinations and variety and difficulty of one’s modes of getting there. The less traveled route and more difficult way of getting there have a high degree of mystique and status conferral” (p. 321). Second, touching on “status conferral” on a performative level, the narrator herself and her travel narrative might not be viewed by her peers as interesting or worthwhile. While the norm is covertly about sightseeing, it in fact pertains to the right experiences one may have, and to the way they may be reached and incorporated into one’s travel narrative and into one’s biography.

Women’s evocation of the norm constantly indicates gender tensions, both because it is an explicit masculinized norm, and because of its collective authority (Weiss, 1997a). In the illustrations, aspects of embodiment are fervently raised, indicating sites where bodies and norm are incongruent. If Ruth’s body is narrated as “trapped” between the collective demands and its own capabilities and inclinations, Rachel’s body is “dragged” in a similar vein. The terms “trapped” or “dragged” convey some of the embodied gender implications of the collective oppressive authority; of how “discourse injures bodies” (Butler, 1993, p. 224). Paradoxically, the fact that

these narratives are embodied, rather than *disembodied*, is in itself a consequence of the bodies’ inability (inadvertent or not) to be completely regimented under and within normative hegemonic discourse. Figuratively, the bodies displayed in travel narratives have “spilled over” and crossed the narrative borders embodying the individual’s stories; they are visible through their incomplete discursive “enfoldment,” to paraphrase Dana (above).

Another illustration of the costs and perils of traversing the masculine collective and of the particular strengths required of female backpackers is subtly supplied by Sarit, who mentions that on two separate occasions, three female backpackers traveling in South America had died in adventure-seeking accidents. She mentions that these activities are “musts” for the backpackers, as is hiking the Machu-Picchu trail. “The trail is dangerous,” she continues, “on your right there’s a rock, on your left—a wadi. And it’s uphill—that is, if you momentarily trip, then bye-bye (waves with her hand and smiles). You fall.” Immediately after that, she addresses the “heightened Israeli atmosphere”: “So I—in my opinion it’s really nice that there’re people around you, on the one hand. On the other hand, there’s that, that element: whoever is not strong enough to say no, can (short pause) fall.”

In this gripping illustration the narrator turns from *describing critical physical perils to describing social ones*. Sarit draws a connection between the realms of nature and society through employing the motif of fatal “falling” twice: both concretely (falling off a steep and narrow trail) and metaphorically (falling in the sense of losing one’s identity and standing). In both realms, says Sarit, female backpackers need to be constantly vigilant. Being “dragged” or “trapped” is nothing short of fatal in Sarit’s narrative: it is a social “fall” that can lead to corporeal tragedy.

Sarit’s effortless shift between the natural and the social realms is noteworthy: it indicates the enmeshing of background—the trip’s adventurous setting, and foreground—the cultural drama of gender and individuality. The three travelers who died were in effect *terminated by an oppressive masculine discourse*, against which they were “not strong enough to say no.” More generally, Sarit implies that surviving the physical and social perils of backpacking (as she did) amounts to a heroic accomplishment in and

of itself. Women who succeed in this endeavor have gained vital travel-related knowledge: they learn how to decisively walk the thin line between compliance and resistance.

*Gazed/Gazers: Women's and Men's Bodies*

Mapping gender with regard to any cultural site entails the interactions and interperceptions of both women and men (Henderson, 1996). As already evinced, female depictions consensually portray men and their bodies as highly fitting—in fact, embodying—the norm of the adventurous, daring hero. The body movements of male backpackers are described with an almost mythic aura. They are depicted as “running” up the steep, mountainous slopes and “racing” them (designating both speed and competitiveness). One female backpacker says that the men were “instantly at the summit,” while another observes that they “flew up the hill.” The picture emerging is that men and their bodies take to the physical conditions and rough undergoing as naturally as fish take to water. The opening conditions, the women explicitly (and somewhat reflexively and ironically) contend, are unequal and unfair.

Interestingly, in cases in which men's physical competence is doubted, women acknowledge that they have to conform more orthodoxically to the hegemonic norm and that their performance is thus ultimately better. As one of the backpackers says about carrying heavy gear, “there are many men I know who are not able to do it physically, but would still do it ‘cos they're men and they need to do it. And I don't feel this need, if I can't travel with the gear on.” A little later she continues associating the gender requirement to perform competently with the broader Zionist discourse, “something in our character or in our education, that we've been taught here, in this country (Israel), that it's good and healthy to travel, [you] need to travel, [you] need to see views, not just um go out and party all day” This observation suggests that ludic recreation makes way to colonial ideology. Along these lines, two other female backpackers mention that “even when male backpackers are ill, they will not allow anyone to relieve them of their backpacks.” Amidst a masculine rite-of-passage masculinity is maintained and adhered to in all circumstances.

The depiction of gender differences that may be fleshed out of the male backpackers' narratives is more or less the exact reverse: it is contrastive and derogatory. Men's perception of their female companions oscillate between mere indifference and explicit misogyny. Women are mentioned as those who slow down the group (in two cases they are referred to as the group's “baggage”). They are depicted in passive, objectified terms, and their incongruence with the trip as a whole is explicitly indicated.

In varying degrees, the dichotomous and belittling gender perceptions evinced in men's stories are shared by some women. However, beyond the question of how each sex perceives and constructs its gender identity, it is female backpackers who continually *face the pressing need* to work out (quite physically) in order to reach hegemonic narratives, as these are introduced into their trip and embodied by male counterparts:

Ravit: I think for women it is natural, it is very important for women to shower every evening. And—the periods and all that nonsense we have. And men, like, they're less—all the men who were in combat units, then they didn't shower for 3e days—no big deal. [For] women showers are important; cleanliness—that there are no roaches. I might be a little too spoilt, but I think that most women are like this... they can't be stingy.

Ravit, making an observation about the difference between women's and men's bodies, posits their bodies dichotomously: on one side she draws by association a triangle connecting “period,” “nonsense,” and women's “cleanliness,” while on the other side she locates men's bodies, militarism, and “roughness” or uncleanliness. The excerpt's conclusion brings out the implications of these “natural” bodily qualities. After all, traveling on a low budget is taken by the backpackers to be a central defining characteristic of this form of tourism, one which carries high esteem (Elsrud, 2001). Therefore, the point that Ravit is making is that women are less suited to backpacking. Note that although her argument sounds essentialist at first (“for women it is natural”), her evocation of the exclusionary combative military service brings social factors into the equation.

Women and menstruation are associated with “nonsense,” which Ravit also conveys in her brief, incidental manner of speaking, in comparison with their male counterparts, who embody and perform

a national militaristic discourse. As shown above, women often mention their bodies in their stories, indexing various body organs, movements, and postures. Indeed, such embodied allusions to cleanliness are frequent in their narratives, and it is through this most problematic theme that the body is repeatedly narrated. Women frequently relate to washing facilities, and discuss the unbearable coldness of the snow-melted waters in which they have to wash.

Nonetheless, Ravit is the only backpacker who explicitly mentions the menstrual period (*mahzor*), an omission that might be a methodological artifact, stemming from the interviewer's gender. Interestingly, yet another untypical exchange with Ravit was evinced. At the very beginning of our conversation, when the interview agenda was introduced and Ravit was assured of confidentiality, she said in passing that she "anyhow did not intend to tell of the nuclear secrets of the State of Israel." Akin to "period," mentioning "nuclear secrets" also touches upon a taboo: an unspoken secret (Douglas, 1966). Yet while menstruation is akin to "nonsense," according to Ravit, "nuclear secrets" lie at the core of what is defined as important and hegemonic in Israeli discourse. While the female's individual, private body is posited on one side of a gender dichotomy, on the other side the nation's nucleolus, its ultimate nuclear weapon, is secretly located (Ravit's statement is a play on Israel's official policy of not acknowledging its well-known nuclear arsenal). The individual, or more precisely, individuality, as embodied in women's bodies and organs, is contrasted with the "body of the nation," which also holds a taboo. Beyond the symbolic perception of a nuclear arsenal as a "form of male domination" (Weart, 1988), long expressed by eco-feminists, and the "symbolic richness of *niddah*" (the cultural perceptions of women's period, Ricoeur, cited in Yanay & Rapoport, 1997), Ravit evokes embodied images with regard to Israeli society and its central, national militaristic discourse. From her words it seems that some of the collective national discourse has permeated backpacking, where, again, women's bodies are marginalized, made to feel like "nonsense," and silenced.

The above illustrations evince some of the resemblances between the oppressive colonial structures operating between the tourist and the Other, on the one hand, and those operating among the tourists themselves, on the other hand. As shown by postco-

lonial feminists, the colonial discourse of gender is refracted in and perpetuated by tourism, where forceful stereotypes pertain to both feminized native and (feminized) female tourist (Aitchison, 2001; Blunt & Rose, 1994). From being "baggage," a metaphor originating in tourism discourse itself, to having to demand repeatedly minimal bodily attention, women travelers are devoid of agency while their bodies are oppressed and their needs and movements restricted. In the capacity tourists are performers, and not only spectators of "native's" performance, gender narratives of their home culture intertwine with tourist discourse to position women tourists as instantiations of the "Other." They too are situated under the psychosocial and cultural intricacies of neocolonial oppression (Aitchison, 2001; Fanon, 1986).

Note that men, too, face the need to comply with hegemonic masculine images, and to perform tall-tales that infuse them with enough cultural capital to position them favorably (Elsrud, 2001; Noy, 2003). While about one third of the men narrated stories of heroic adventurous backpacking (for instance, hiking for 2 months in uncharted Himalayan wilderness), two thirds reflected improvisation and subversion of hegemonic images. Nonetheless, their accounts of gender and body were far fewer than those expressed by the women, suggesting that they did not experience the oppressing masculine norm as harshly as the women, or that the loci of oppression were different.

Another resource by which gender comparisons are made in a tourist context concerns *non-Israeli* backpackers. On a few occasions backpackers compared their achievements with those of European backpackers and contemplated the clear-cut gender differences that emerged. These contrasts, which by and large reflect Israeli perceptions of Westerners (commonly referred to as "foreigners"), highlight the traditional sex roles in Israeli culture. Regardless of whether the depiction of foreign backpackers was positive or negative, in the narratives they exhibited very little of what is stereotypically perceived as "feminine." In one case, a Swiss backpacker was depicted as overtly masculine (having "very bad manners and hairy legs"). In another case, a backpacker expressed her appreciation of European female backpackers by saying: "Israeli men say 'I've just completed military service, I don't need to carry heavy gear anymore.' And so most of the Israelis

make use of porters. But most of the European that I met, particularly women, simply carried their own gear. And it's quite heavy." This segment relates to gender differences within Israeli youths and to how (and why) men travel differently than women. By making a comparison with "foreigners," the gender/culture matrix is evoked. The narrator contends that men employ military service as an excuse, allowing them to avoid complying with the full demands entailed in the backpacker's ethos. Here, men are those who are depicted as complaining and seeking relief (of a kind only they can demand!), unlike their European counterparts. The tacit point she is making is that Israeli women, who generally do not serve in combat units, are nonetheless drawn into chauvinist gender relations, and conform with and exhibit typical feminine behavior.

These comparisons suggest that in a touristic space, the narrators' intracommunal negotiation of gender makes astute use of multinational and multicultural resources. Specifically, female backpackers relate to backpackers of other nationalities, and particularly to their female counterparts, in forming and expressing their views as to the traditional gender perceptions and conducts in their home culture and society.

#### *Resistance and Improvisation: Pursuing Normative and Alternative Attractions*

While the high points of excitement in the men's stories focused on physical ability and competence, and specifically upon their successful transcendence of seemingly hitherto nonconfronted barriers, the experiential weight in female backpackers' stories almost always rested on achieving a *sense of independence*, and, with it, a *sense of personal growth*. Both were tied to the different activities in which they participated or to their successful command of normative, masculine action. Additionally, considerably more room was allocated in their stories to the description and contemplation of relationships they either restored or developed while traveling, either with older acquaintances or new travel peers.

*Different Activities—Different Experiences.* The narratives tentatively suggest that women and men pursue somewhat different itineraries and, more noticeably, partake in different activities. On a large scale, statistical research of Israeli backpackers

indicates that fewer women travel to "adventurous" destinations in South America, and more to "spiritual" destinations in Asia (Mevorach, 1997). During the trip, it seems that sometime after encountering the dense Israeli enclaves and the social pressure exerted therein, female backpackers negotiate their participation in mainstream, normative activities. Generally, the strenuous activities and the cheap style of travel are discarded early on, and strenuous adventurous activities, such as hiking, are exchanged for alternative practices, exciting nonetheless.

In Tamar's story, a bungee jump near Quito, Ecuador supplies an alternative, noncolonial climatic experience. The exciting story commences with her pointing out that she had far stronger experiences than those relating to strenuous activities and that upon jumping she had completely surprised herself and those who knew her. Of the bungee jump itself she says, "but there are pictures and witnesses. I flew like a bird. There was something truly mystic about it. Unbelievable." She suggests that the story is so surprising and perhaps so subversive that proof might be required—hard proof that she holds in the form of photographs. Later, Tamar describes the scene in a lively manner: "We arrived in the morning, and people started jumping. And you stand and you say 'what? I'm going to jump?! No way.'" Her female companion had jumped before her, and was deeply exhilarated. As Tamar relates to her friend's thrill, she moves to describe her own, profound experience.

It's not so nice to put it this way but she looked like she had just made love to God. Something *really unbelievable*. . . . And then I jumped. . . . And this thing with jumping, I don't know, maybe 2–3 seconds, 90-something meters, and later this really fun part of bouncing. Your body goes up and down because it is a plastic rope. And people told me, "that's the worst part, once it's over you'll be fine." But I really enjoyed it. Because it's all such confusion. Suddenly the sky is *there*, the river *there*, the mountains *there*, and your eyes are totally open throughout. At the end you're hanging upside-down like a clock's pendulum, completely enjoying yourself.

Tamar cleverly frames the remarkable experience she and her friend had had in terms of an alternative experiential and narrative resource to those prescribed by the norm, one which promotes a *fundamentally different type of embodiment*. With the long agonizing weeks of hiking in the background,

her allusion to the “2–3 seconds” of the fall, creates a different time frame for her experience. It implies that intense experience is not linearly correlated to chronological time (Elsrud, 1998).

Apropos linearity, the very description of a *free fall* (descent), rather than a *disciplined climb* (ascent), intimates a striking contrast to the manly ethos embodied in demanding activities like hiking (Mishel, Carton, & Jouvent, 1997). Instead of the demanding bodily regime, which presents the colonial’s agency and will, when bungee jumping the strapped body is completely loose; it is falling, seemingly passively, unregimented (in stark contrast too with the fatal falling described by Sarit above). This is how Tamar’s words, “it’s all such confusion,” should be interpreted. The narrator illustrates this chaos by pointing to a fundamental sense of disorientation (“upside-down”), which brings about a sense of exhilaration and a mystified feeling of joy that undermine the normative masculine bodily paradigm. Instead of linearity, ascent, effort, control, and orientation, Tamar’s tacitly gender-hued allusion promotes the sense of nonlinearity (rapture), descent, effortlessness, passivity, and total disorientation.

Moreover, the jump is pursued *individually*. Though Tamar and her companions arrive at the site together, participation in the actual event of jumping is inherently singular. Tamar communicates this point by describing the exchange she had had with her companions (partly cited above), indicating that while recounting her own experience and hearing the experience of others, it is nonetheless an intimately individual endeavor. Akin to other outstanding experiences described by female backpackers, it is exactly this severance from the group that endows one with a feeling of exhilaration, encouraging a sense of autonomy and independence.

Alternatively, a sense of independence and agency is sometimes generated not by pursuit of an alternative activity, but by demonstrating command over a normative one. This is the case when backpackers note how well they hiked, mentioning that they surpassed the men they were traveling with (and sometimes the women, too). In these cases the heroic narrative implicates a female, rather than—prototypically—a male.

Dalit narrates her memorable Mount Kenya hiking excursion, on which she embarked with a female friend and another Israeli couple. From the onset she

establishes the story’s dramatic foundation by pointing out that “it is known to be a very, very difficult trek, very difficult. Which is said to be very beautiful. The most beautiful thing is arriving at the top, which is called Point Lenana, and viewing the sunrise from there.” She thus draws a common equation, by which sincere effort and hardship, offered by the “very difficult” route, translates into a deeply rewarding experience of accomplishment and success. Indeed, throughout the narration she elaborates upon the difficulties they had to overcome, including a point where “two Israeli commando men” (signifying ultimate masculinity) were not able to pass. Her depiction also captures spectacular views, exceptional, magical flora and fauna (“lunar views . . . weird, giant cactus-like plants”), and the menacing possibility of the eruption of acute mountain sickness. The last impediment indeed affects the group, and by and by her companions give up on the venture:

And so Michel . . . started crying at about 9 p.m., ‘cos she had a terrible headache. That’s where those guys from the commando [gave up]—it’s not about physical fitness, you see, [it’s] mountain sickness. Her head ached. We couldn’t fall asleep until 2 a.m. Then, Michel obviously couldn’t carry on, and Brian, her boyfriend, said that he was staying with her, and perhaps they’d descend ‘cos she was really suffering. And Maya, my friend, told me that, “Dalit, I really enjoyed myself up until now. I’m surely not able to succeed. I’m not—I’m staying here.” And here begins the exciting part of the trek. I really didn’t know what to do. ‘Cos on the one hand, it’s 2 a.m. and it’s totally freezing—it’s inconceivable, and none of them wanted to continue. But [on the other hand], if I’m that close shouldn’t I at least try? I had a very hard time with these doubts, and eventually I decided I’d try.

Dalit dramatizes the affair of climbing not only by indicating the considerable physical difficulties the group had to withstand, captured in the allusion to mountain sickness (“it’s not about physical fitness”). The underlying drama is inherently of a social-gender quality, and concerns the dynamics by which Dalit—the story’s female protagonist—is *uniquely foregrounded*. Her severance from the group, which, as we have seen, contests normative traveling behavior, is convincingly conveyed as the group’s severance from her (or as the group’s disintegration). Health issues, coupled with her close friend’s inability to proceed and her exhortation to Dalit to continue, *release the narrator* from the



tight normative bosom of the group, and does so in a “legitimate” way, which makes for a valid alibi of individuality.

Finally, after surmounting additional difficulties, Dalit arrives at dawn at the sought-after Point Lenana, where she is the first to arrive. She argues that it was not the common tourist spectacle that she found so captivating (“viewing the sunrise,” which she mentioned at the beginning). Rather, it was the view of the moon, still shining brightly in the morning skies that she “terribly enjoyed” (echoing the previously described “lunar views”). Hence, atop Point Lenana, Dalit is not content with merely exhibiting outstanding physical competence, which nonetheless complies with the masculine norm of exhibiting excruciating physical effort and achieving the aim at all costs. Rather, she physically singles herself out from both her companions and tourists in general, and indicates that her preferences, too, are singular, and nontouristic—she does not take pictures, and she does not look in the direction everyone does (at the sun). Note, incidentally, that her association with the moon and the lunar views, rather than with the sun, might in itself evoke images of womanhood.

Other female backpackers also mention how they hiked faster and more competently than men, occasionally relating that even though they were teased and even mocked at the onset, they prevailed and reached high-altitude mountain passes that men either did not reach or did so more slowly. Such stories convey the successful appropriation of the prototypic masculine travel-and-conquest narrative, wherein the narrator is an individual who transcends social norms (Cavarero, 2000). The heroine breaks from the cohesive group to reach the peak and experience a transformatory climax. These stories fall into the same category as other instances in which normative backpacking practices, socially constructed as masculine, are appropriated by women, and consequently serve as fruitful gender recourses for narrating their unique experiences. As we shall soon see, these stories also serve to perform the female narrators’ identity, namely their recently acquired independence and self-assuredness.

Another oft-mentioned activity is the practice of bargaining with suppliers of tourist services and products. The “quantifiable” outcomes of bargaining easily locate their performer on the social hierarchy. As observed by Riley (1988), backpackers “find ego

enhancement from getting the ‘best value’...cost/benefit is an important yardstick for measuring success” (p. 320).

After Rebecca contends how “very independent and assertive” she and her companion had come to feel toward the end of the trip, she supplies examples pertaining to bargaining:

In the beginning we were quite shy [at bargaining]... we met a traveler who taught us. She had been some ten months in the East by then, so we learned from her. And so with all the bargaining I did I became really assertive, getting great prices.... We got along alone very well, me and her, and we were, after all, two women. We felt very strong.... In India, for instance, men are horrible. They bother travelers (fm.), and they try to touch your *breasts* all the time. Once they even tried to touch me *down*. Very unpleasant. So at some point we got into this habit of watching over ourselves. And we’d spot them. One time we both slapped a guy right when he was turning around to touch us.

Rebecca’s reference to bargaining is made within an explicit gender frame (“we were, after all, two women”), perhaps suggesting that two women traveling is not commonplace. She illustrates how, through “hierarchizing” activity (Sørensen, 2003), gender is performed. Bargaining is pursued and interpreted in relation to the backpackers’ self-assertion, and is mentioned more frequently and with greater elaboration and enthusiasm in the women’s stories than in the men’s (of the 21 female interviewees, 14 mentioned bargaining, compared to only 7 of the 20 male interviewees). Indeed, in line with Kharaki (2001), in more conservative, sex-segregated societies women tend to bargain more insistently and straightforwardly than men, thus exhibiting determination and self-assertion. Interestingly, Rebecca recounts that an experienced female traveler had taught her to haggle efficiently. She thus touches on *engendered intrabackpackers’ grapevines*, by which particular backpacking knowledge and skills are exchanged between women travelers.

Rebecca’s narration shifts naturally from depicting bargaining activities to describing how she and her friend were continuously being bothered by men, and how, in a similar vein, the two women asserted themselves, successfully resisting impinging men. They were able to sustain their traveling together without the need of (Israeli) men to assist or protect them. Bargaining, on the one hand, and sexual ha-

rassment, on the other, are the training grounds for female backpackers to practice assertion in face of the male “Other.”

*Narrating Travel Relationships.* The narratives also indicate that the travelers make use of the time they spend together to discuss and deal with past and present relationships. In this respect, the lengthy trip and its frequent socialization supply a fertile social context wherein young women can exchange opinions and narratives, and negotiate, usually with same-sex peers, what they think of themselves relationally, and how they wish to see themselves participating in civic adult life upon their return. These, in turn, become *yet another engendered experiential focus of the trip.*

When she talks about the women she traveled with, Orit spontaneously notes that prior to the trip, during her army service, “[I] simply could not find myself alone. All the time surrounded by people. . . . Even when I got to my quarters I was never by myself. . . . But the trip really gave me the opportunity to focus on myself.” Orit then explains:

There, though I was *with* [people], everyone gave each other their living space (*merhav mih'ya*). When someone wanted to be on her own, her wish was respected. And when people felt they want to talk, that was also possible. Like, we [fm.] were *sensitive* to each other and we were thoughtful of each other. And in the trek I participated, for instance, I enjoyed hiking by my own. And those moments of being alone—even if 2 meters behind me three women are walking and talking ‘n’ all—really gave me this opportunity to think about what I was really absorbed in: in returning—what have I done and what have I achieved until now. What do I want of my life at present. And even—not to think about anything. Simply to walk and see things you don’t see everyday. I really enjoyed it.

Orit does not refute the social axiom pertaining to socialization and traveling in cohesive groups, nor does she mention specific activities or sites that lie beyond the normative itinerary, yet she redefines the engendered social space constructed and occupied by groups of women travelers. The lesser degree of structuralization, to which she points—surely in comparison with the military institution (the contrast Orit evokes from her recent past)—allows for the creation of personal space *within normative confines*. Thus, Orit implies that even when one pursues common routes and engages in frequented attractions,

certain conditions, namely fellow women travelers, nonetheless sustain conditions of self-development and growth.

Orit describes togetherness and separateness in the same breath, as states that coexist, rather than conflict. By practice and narration she illustrates how one does not need to be a hero and to sever oneself from the collective, in order to feel by oneself. On the contrary, it is *with and with regard to her companions* that the possibility of being by oneself is fruitfully nurtured. In a way, Irigaray’s (1985) famous notion, “This Sex That Is Not One,” is portrayed by the narrators’ relinquishing of the colonial romanticist ethos of the individual hero in favor of a social relational experience.

In a similar vein, other backpackers devote considerable parts of their stories to their exchanges with fellow travelers, pertaining to past, present, and even future relationships, and the effect these had on their lives. Women, more than men, frequently recounted cases in which relationships, both with the same and the opposite sex, were strengthened or disintegrated during the trip and its aftermath. They delved on relationships experienced in the recent and less recent past, and, as evinced in Orit’s excerpt, were preoccupied with being “with,” that is, with the impact and role of relationships on both the trip and (more generally) their life course and identity, of which the backpacking rite is a part. (These findings corroborate works on Israeli backpackers, cf. Mevorach, 1997.)

When speaking of the meaningful relationships they reevaluated and established during the trip, female backpackers commonly evoke *familial interactions*. These, within the context of a trip that takes place far from home and that is usually the youths’ first extended stay away from their families, are explored. Akin to their relationships with their peers, women emphasize how they need time for themselves away from their families (while they also commonly indicate that toward the end of the trip they missed their families and their homes; see Riley, 1988, p. 324).

Occasionally, they reflect upon themselves and the trip through a comparison to other trips taken earlier in their lives, with their families. Such a comparison enhances feelings of independence and autonomy, which stem from having to stand on their own two feet, away from home. As Miriam says, recalling a

holiday trip with her parents to the Black Forest in Germany, “I remember that I told my mother, ‘[I] need more, it’s not—[I] cannot *connect* like this,’ and there [while backpacking] I really did have more. And you have this freedom, like—you have your own time, and you do whatever you want with it. It’s your time—it’s your trip.” By relaying direct speech with her mother, the narrator communicates her point persuasively. First, her words indeed indicate her wish for *more* time, which the short trip in Germany did not supply, and which the backpacking trip rewardingly did (cf. Elsrud, 1998).

Second, the short exchange between Miriam and her mother supplies, in itself, an indication of close relations that hinder her sense of autonomy and independence. The proximity to her parents during the short trip might have been restrictive, and thus her wish for “more” might relate not only to time per se, but also to interpersonal (familial) space (Josselson, 1992). That the backpackers often mention their families, their frequent communication with them, and their allusion to missing them indicates that the distance from their families is simultaneously emancipatory and problematic. (This is reinforced by a growing phenomenon in Israel, in which backpackers’ parents travel together with their offspring for parts of the trip.)

### Conclusions

Recent advances in tourism research hold that tourism can no longer be conceptualized as an isolate, insular cultural sphere. Rather, tourism and culture are enmeshed, interwoven, and the umbrella term “tourism” is in fact organic to culture, if not one of the underlying cultural features of the late-modern epoch. “Whether they like it or not,” Urry (1990) famously argues, “people are much of the time tourists” (p. 82).

The implications of the merging of culture and tourism are crucial for a “thick,” nuanced, and comprehensive appreciation of gender in tourism culture. Indeed, tourism is now thought of as a symbolic arena in which gender processes are constructed and where particular manifestations of societies ordered by gender relations are evinced (Aitchison, 2001; Henderson, 1996).

This article’s explorations of gender in backpacking tourism rest upon a neat conflation of hegemonic

narratives of a local sphere, pertaining to Israeli culture, and a global (or Western) touristic sphere. Backpacking travel narratives are construed as performances of participation in a symbolic rite-of-passage, an activity pursued en masse due to the rite’s appealing resonance. This resonance, pertaining to romanticist and neocolonial themes, is constructed as a thoroughly engendered endeavor, centering upon a manly image of a lone hero who seeks *terra incognita*. Add to this the blend of romanticism and militarism central to their contemporary home culture, and one begins to understand the wide attraction of backpacking and the role of hegemonic masculine narratives.

Yet the narratives suggest that there is more to gender and to images of masculinity in backpacking. The collectivized manner in which the rite is pursued, allowing for the assertion of social pressure in the aim of social cohesion, plays an important role in the construction of gender identity and gender power relations. The very state of social cohesion implies compromising individuality and impinges upon women and men who do not adhere to hegemonic images.

Negotiating these tensions in their stories, some of the female backpackers simply stated that they complied with the norm as much as possible (i.e., as much as their bodies allowed them), and tried to check as many “musts” on the backpacking list as possible, doing the best they could in assuming the sought-after backpacking identity. Others sought alternative attractions and imbued them with profound experience, suggesting an experiential alternative to the manly adventurous narrative. While the latter is progressive, accumulative, and pursues effort and accomplishments, alternative pursuits suggest different, nonlinear raptures. Yet others followed the beaten track, only to redefine it from within. They were not concerned with conformity or resistance, but with pursuing their central motivation for travel: their wish for independence and individual growth.

These positions represent different themes and experiences recapitulated in the backpackers’ narratives. The same backpackers expressed different positions with regard to the many different attractions and activities, thus producing differential, changing, gender positions. Furthermore, these negotiations were expressed not only with regard to the trip, but also within the performative context of the narra-

tive interview. Hence, the present inquiry pursued the claim that tourist performance is as much about what happens at the destination as it is about what happens at “home,” in the here-and-now of its *telling* (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998).

The implications of the interaction are far-reaching when one considers female backpackers’ travel stories, performed in a context where gender is (re)evoked. In this respect, the various “themes” recounted are viewed more fruitfully as dialogical, pertaining to gender dialogue rather than to gender content. The research thus confronts the collective manly norm with which the backpackers grapple, and the interview is perceived as a site wherein travel-related symbolic capital is cashed *in and through gender relations*. The exploration thus reflects the intermeshing nature of traveling-and-telling and the inseparability of the concepts of “tourism,” “gender,” and “culture.” Additionally, the narrative performances represented various strategies of coping with hegemonic, oppressive narratives, including, among others, appropriating hegemonic tenets, trivializing them, and boldly confronting them (Lawless, 2001; Radner & Lancer, 1993).

As far as Israeli society is concerned, stories of backpacking evince the first significant encounter of young adults with a civic social institution, wherein they confront hegemonic images outside the formal arena of the Israeli army. For many, then, the performance of travel-related narrative capital of the type explored above is the beginning of a life-long negotiation of gender identity in a cultural context (Azmon, 2001). Sociodemographically, these women (and men) assume a certain social identity in contemporary society vis-à-vis backpacking tourism—that of the secular middle class. Inherent in this identity, however, lies a gender structure, which the backpackers resist but at the same time embody. This is part of the price they must pay to be part of the collective (Rapoport & El-Or, 1997).

This brings us to the final point, which concerns the transgressive potential of these stories. First, it is contended that while feminist and postcolonial scholars have pointed to the considerable price women have to pay for materialization of movement rights (Mazali, 2001), it is nonetheless not automatic or obvious that women indeed traverse symbolic spaces merely by traveling. Stated differently, the question is whether upon traveling women

do unfetter themselves from restrictive hegemonic discourse, resist and subvert social norms and borders, and by and by gain new knowledge of themselves and of the world, or whether they actually travel through “glassed corridors” (Mazali, 2001), kept invisibly within the confines of masculine progression and rule.

Clearly, the “snowball” sampling procedure employed in this research highlights the tight web of interpersonal communication sustained by the backpacker, and contributes to the magnified view of the unremitting oppressive social pressures facing the travelers. Despite the scarcity of information at hand, it is nonetheless clear that there are many solo female backpackers who position themselves via travel both physically and socially outside the dense collective. In fact, the above excerpts supply a few indications of such lone travelers (and of the exclusionary price they pay). A more systematic study of this phenomenon would first have to deal with the methodological difficulty of sampling non-institutional travelers.

Secondly, we are concerned with the life-long (biographical) effects of travel and travel narratives on the lives of women. Further investigation of the general interrelationship between gender and travel via a longitudinal perspective is required, entailing the complexities of both “everyday” and “extraordinary” experiences. Traveling a rite-of-passage, women (and men) position themselves as belonging, and at times “unbelonging” (Rogoff, 2000), to a particular sociocultural center. Yet, as Naveh (2002, p. 12) writes, travel can also serve as an “alibi,” a case where physical mobility covers subjective immobility and identitary entrapment.

Lastly, the gender perspective on performance employed here is highly sensitive and perceptible of the body appearances and roles of travelers—their limbs and organs, movements, postures, relationships, etc. The narrations suggest the *backpacking body* as the site in which social cohesion and processes of collectivization maintain their grip, almost literally, and the space wherein negotiation and contestation occur. As has been already observed by others, romanticist discourses, embodied in the practices of backpacking, have the body as their target site (Elsrud, 2001, pp. 609–613). More than bodies backpacking, what is at stake here is bodies in culture and gender culture in bodies, enfolded.

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