

A Narrative Community: Voices Of Israeli Backpackers. Chaim Noy. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. 2006. xii + 238 pp.

Reviewed by: Jonathan S. Marion, Ph.D. Adjunct Faculty, California State University, San Marcos and Visiting Lecturer, University of California, San Diego

Following the narrative path taken by Israeli backpackers, *A Narrative Community* engages with and contributes to growing literatures on tourism, authenticity, performance, and identity. Based on research originally intended to “explore the profound experiences that backpackers were narrating” (p.11), this book explores “how tourists represent that which they saw, experienced, and did elsewhere” (p.17). A previous backpacker himself, Noy introduces and describes a complex sociolinguistic tapestry of performance and identity; the various threads and intersections of which he traces and unravels clearly and comprehensively. In many ways mirroring Rosaldo’s (1986) description of Ilongot hunting, wherein a good story is the hunters’ richest game, Noy persuasively illustrates how the stories that they come back with are ultimately souvenirs of the highest cultural capital among Israeli backpackers.

Primarily based in narrative analysis, this book is split into three sections, the first of which introduces the performative and persuasive nature of backpacking narratives. The second, and by far the lengthiest section, explores the various levels of quotation and narration—ranging from personal-individual, to group-choral, to collective-canonic—recruited and mobilized in and through backpackers’ narrative constructions. The concluding section then reconsiders the self-transformative nature of the tales told, highlighting how “in the travel narratives they tell, backpackers re-create themselves as changed persons” (p. 173, original emphasis). Often at its strongest when directly addressing excerpts of backpackers’ tales, this book ties together intersections of linguistic performativity, modern commercialized tourism, Israeli culture, and personal transformation; providing valuable insight into each of these fields, this book’s greatest contribution lies in showing how cultural themes are responsive to and ramify onto each other.

Despite the general strength of this work, however, there are two theoretical items that give me pause. My greatest reservation stems from Noy’s use of performance as the underlying analytical framing for backpacking narratives. While I appreciate the idea that backpacking narration can be a performance in its own right (i.e. not just the recounting of previously performed activity), I find it problematic to automatically relegate all such narration to an undifferentiated field of “performance.” Especially given the foundational role of performance (as introduced in the first chapter), I cannot help but feel that a more nuanced presentation of various genres and functions of performance would have provided a stronger structure from which to hang the materials that follow. Schechner (1997:44), for instance, suggests that “performativity,” “theatricality,” and “narrativity,” while closely related, do not function equally across the various “performance magnitudes” that range from brain events to macrodrama. In particular I think that differentiating between performances proper and the performative—between what Schechner terms “is” performance versus “as” performance (e.g., 2002)—would have

added complexity to what reads as an artificially flat presentation of performance. Also an issue, albeit a smaller one, is an at times uncritical use of embodiment. While most references to backpackers' physicality and bodily experience work well, in a book that otherwise seems to make very deliberate use of language, I find several constructions, such as the first sentence of the epilogue—"This book embodies a discursive travel" (195)—troubling, providing room for doubts grounded in an apparent lack of conceptual specificity between (persons') physical bodies and conceptual (including textual) ones.

Despite these issues, this book has much to recommend it to those interested in psychological anthropology. Indeed, while there is minimal reference to theory or work in psychology and psychological anthropology, the underlying issues, concerns, and themes of this book resonate strongly with psychological anthropology's focus on the permeable border between person and culture. Explicitly focusing on how individual, group, and cultural voices are intertwined in backpacking narratives, Noy provides rich materials and insight into how persons talk through culture and culture "talks" through persons. Most explicitly and productively drawn out in reference to Israeli and touristic culture and themes, Noy's investigation into the interstices of culturally informed experience are informative of a far wider range of behaviors and activities.

A final topic worth noting concerns the heavy use of linguistic frames and vocabulary in this book. This direction is quite understandable given the dominant focus on narrative, so far from a criticism, I simply want to highlight that those less familiar with linguistic models, concepts, and terminology will face an added layer of challenge in unpacking what is, on the whole, a well crafted and engaging book. As such, beginning undergraduates without solid linguistic background will probably struggle if presented with this double layering of complex ideas and language. In the end, while the heavy use of linguistic frames may make some of the materials less accessible than otherwise, this quibble is a relatively minor one.

While not explicitly a work of psychological anthropology, as far as its stated purpose of unpacking the narrative constructions of identities among Israeli backpackers, this book succeeds admirably and directly concerns itself with themes of interest to psychological anthropology. Most significantly, this book provides interesting and productive ideas to think with, suggesting and illustrating how, contrary to the common cliché, talking the talk may well be part of walking the walk.

#### REFERENCES CITED

Rosaldo, Renato

1986 "Ilongot Hunting as Story and Experience." In *The Anthropology of Experience*. Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner, eds. Pp. 97-138. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Schechner, Richard

1997 [1990] "Magnitudes of Performance." In *By Means of*

*Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual*. Richard Schechner and Willa Appel, eds. Pp. 19-49. New York: Cambridge University Press.

2002 *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge.