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Coming of Age in India: The Military and Israeli Backpackers
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Abstract

Several authors have done research on the institutionalized Israeli backpacking trip, but the period of military service preceding the trip has not yet been given sufficient analytical attention in this body of work. Therefore this piece investigates the relationship between the military and backpacking as a sociocultural institution in Israel. Ethnographic fieldwork for this study was carried out during a 5.5 month period, beginning in Israel and following the travelers along the Israeli backpacker trail in India.

In this thesis thecomplex interaction between the military and the institutionalized backpacking is seen to take place largely within two domains. Firstly, in the Israeli military-cultural complex the army is related to the institutionalized backpacking trip in several ways. Within this complex, the military as a social structure affects the habitus and subjective dispositions of those who serve. In relation to the backpacking trip, the army transmits a disposition towards siege mentality, and strengthens national solidarity, leading Israelis to form more cohesive groups in India.

In the second domain, the army is analyzed as an experience which alters the period of coming of age in Israel. In current theorizing on the subject, the period of emerging adulthood is seen to consist of a number of characteristics.These elements are fragmented in the army. During the liminal phase in India Israelis attempt to rebalance this transition by incorporating those elements of emerging adulthood they feel to have missed out on. These results indicate that the period of emerging adulthood manifested in the backpacking trip is not only culturally specific, but has an adaptive quality. Future research could focus on the growing status of backpacking as a rite of passage in industrialized societies, as well as the negative subjective effects of military service and living in a warzone.

Keywords: backpacking, military, conscription, emerging adulthood,national identity, siege mentality

Introduction: the "Big Trip"

The now institutionalized Israeli backpacking trip in developing countriesbegan in the mid 1980's among discharged conscripts as a result of worsening conditions for soldiers on the one hand and expanded visa options for Israeli nationals on the other. It is estimated that 30,000 Israelis travel to India alone each year. *Hatiyul hagadol,* the big trip, has become so commonplace that a vast Israeli tourist infrastructure has developed catering to the needs of these travelers all over India. Israeli backpacker enclaves exist in many locations across the country, complete with Israeli signposting, food, music and even locals who speak Hebrew (Maoz 2007).

There has been a fair amount of research into the topic of Israeli backpackers (Reichel, Fuchs and Uriely 2009, Uriely, Yonay and Simchai 2002, Noy 2002). While the army is discussed by these researchers in relation to backpacking, it has not been taken as the starting point for an analysis of the institutionalized backpacking trip. This is curious considering the importance of the military in Israel, and the fact that most backpackers travel almost immediately after the period of military service. In order to contribute to this growing body of literature, I will take the army as a central analytic theme and investigate the complex ties between the military and the post army backpacking trip.

The institutionalized, collective Israeli backpacking trip is a complex transnational phenomenon which is related in many ways to the military as a shared national experience and a social structure. In order to approach this complexity, the interaction between the military and the backpacking trip will be

presented within two domains. Firstly, through the entanglement of military and civilian life in Israel and its influence on Israeli's behavior and worldview, it strengthens the collectivity of Israeli backpackers, molding these personal quests into a shared national experience. Secondly, and more directly, the experience of military service alters the transition to adulthood among young Israelis, motivating them to undertake a period of personal identity exploration abroad.

Within the first domain, the army will be analyzed as a social structure that affects the motivations, behavior and worldview of soldiers (Bourdieu 1980). Due to the nature and duration of the conflict in Israel, the military also has a large influence at the societal level. Current scholars focus on the cultural and social elements of the overlap between military and civilian spheres (Kimmerling 2005, Barak and Schefer 2007, Ben-Eliezer 1998). They argue that military matters have pervaded civilian life to such a degree that they can no longer be analyzed as separate domains. Because of this entanglement, the military is able to influence civilian Israeli culture and society in a myriad of ways, affecting worldview and behavior. Kimmerling refers to this as the Israeli "military-cultural complex" (2005:211). The military thus also extends its influence to civilian institutions. The culturally institutionalized backpacking trip among Israelis in India will be examined as an element of this military-cultural complex. Moreover, the post-army backpacking trip cannot be understood outside of this particular context and the military experience. I will argue that the army and security situation have an influence on the collectivity of the Israeli experience in India.

Within the second domain, the interaction between the military and the backpacking trip takes place at a more personal level due to the way in which the army affects soldiers' transition to adulthood. In current writing on the transition to adulthood authors describe the phase of "emerging adulthood" as a culturally specific period that consists of certain demographically and subjectively distinct elements of becoming an adult (Arnett 2000). In the army, certain elements of this transition are acquired rapidly, while others are constrained or delayed.

Maoz (2004:180) analyzes the post-army backpacking trip as a rite of passage, constituting a "psychosocial moratorium" where experimental behavior is compressed into a limited space and time. In this environment, behaviors associated with freedom and coming of age are practiced intensively, but within the confines of the Israeli community and infrastructure in India. Noting the sometimes extreme behavior among Israeli travelers, Maoz (2006:138) has called for further research into this topic:

> Perhaps this is a sign for the Israeli government to start addressing such issues, while considering the effects of military service and terrorism on its youth. The insights provided from this type of research could contribute to the development of social policy and enhance the understanding of social change. It might also be asked whether, and to what extent a society should supervise moratoric and self-initiated rites-of-passage such as backpacking.

In this thesis I will argue that the post-army backpacking trip can be seen as an attempt to remedy the fragmented transition to adulthood caused by the military, by facilitating the elements of adulthood related to freedom and experimentation that were previously unavailable. It will be demonstrated that the period of emerging adulthoodis not only culturally specific but can in some cases be said to have an adaptive quality.

Although the case of Israeli backpackers in India is a very specific one, it is related to several larger theoretical debates within the social sciences and the discipline of anthropology specifically, which will be discussed in detail below. First of all, the Israeli case can contribute to an understanding of the transition to adulthood as affected by its specific social and cultural context. Secondly, this study may contribute to an understanding of the social and cultural factors which affect the practice of backpacking tourism. Finally, the topic sheds light on what effects living and serving in a conflict area have on participants.

To investigate the guiding problematic of the thesis, field research was conducted for a 5.5 month period. Of this period I spent 1 month in Israel, where preliminary research took place, and 4.5 in India. Out of practical necessity, due to the seasonal movement of tourists in India, I employed the use of a mobile field site, following the backpackers along the "Hummus Trail" stretching from Himachal Pradesh in the North to Kerala in the south. All in all, I carried out research in the backpacker enclaves of Manali, Kasol, Dharamsala, Rishikesh, Pushkar, Goa, Gokarna, Hampi and Vatakanal. During this time, I made extensive use of qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews, casual conversations and participant observation. I traveled with the Israelis, joined them in their day-to-day activities, and generally tried to experience the trip as authentically as possible.

In the next section I will detail the research design, explaining the theoretical and conceptual framework to be used for analysis. Afterwards, the empirical section is divided into three major themes, which roughly follow the chronological order of the track laid out for Israeli youngsters. In the first empirical part, I will examine the influence of the military within the different domains in order to describe its relationship with the backpacking trip. In the second part, moving on to India, I will describe the Israeli community under the heading of collective traveling, as well as the way in which this collectivity is linked the military as a social structure. In the third andfinal part I will pay closer attention to the coming of age process specifically. As the trip nears its end, I will examine the personal reflections of young Israelis' on the transitions that have occurred during the trip, and how these interactions are simultaneously constitutive of and conditioned by the institutionalized backpacking trip and the military's influence on this institution.

Theoretical Framework

Israeli Backpackers in India

There are many ways to approach the topic of backpacking. In this piece, due to the suggested utility of the backpacking trip in Israel, an approach inspired by functionalism will be applied. A backpacker has traditionally been defined as a self-organized, or non-institutional, tourist on a prolonged trip (Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995). Many backpackers travel during times of life transitions or life crises, and as such these trips can be described as self-imposed rites of passage. Travel is seen here as a form of escape from the dissatisfactions with the home society, and a way to achieve personal growth (Ateljevic and Doorne 2000). According to Cohen (2003:99), experiences vary between urban and rural enclaves, as well as between nationalities, backpacking subcultures, and age-groups.While all backpacker communities are to some degree collective, in Israelbackpacking has become socially institutionalized (Noy 2002). Backpacking as a social practice concerns a number of cultural themes for a large part as an

element of the transition to adulthood. These cultural understandings are grounded in practice and experience, which in the Israeli case are strongly affected by military service.

The phenomenon started in the 1980's beginning with trips in South-America, and when visa options widened, incorporated Asia and Australia as well. By the 1990's, the amount of people undertaking the trip had become so vast that it became part of the normal, almost prescribed track for youngsters after the army. This trend is now reflected in popular media, literature and discourse (Uriely, Yonay and Simchai 2002).Noy (2002, 2004) has focused on the discursive narratives of those who return from the journey. In the form of personal stories about their experiences, Israeli youngsters create a persuasive discourse upon return with the goal of motivating others to travel. Referring to the large role of the backpacking trip in Israeli popular culture, Noy (2002:285) describes the trip as a kind of secular pilgrimage, where narrative plays an important role in the social construction of identity.

Darya Maoz (2004, 2006, 2007, 2010) has also done extensive research on Israeli backpackers, mostly in India. According to Maoz(2007), similar to most other backpackers, Israelis travel in search of a new or augmented identity. They seek to reverse the conformism that characterizes their lives back home and the obedience to family, society and the army. Often, drugs play a large part in this process of search and experimentation. What distinguishes Israelis from other backpackers is the contradiction between escape from society and collectivism. On the one hand they aim to escape Israeli society and its conformism, but on the other hand choose to associate only with Israelis, eat Israeli food and speak only Hebrew, sometimes even to Indians (Maoz 2007).

In her analysis, Maoz (2007) uses the concept of psychosocial moratorium to analyze Israeli behavior during the trip. First described by Erikson (1968), the concept of psychosocial moratorium refers to the transitional period between adolescence to adulthood which is characterized by experimental behavior and the search for identity. While current literature on Israeli backpackers does make mention of the military, the period of military service remains largely unanalyzed. Yet, if the trip is to be analyzed as a psychosocial moratorium, then the period leading up to the trip must be examined in greater detail. Within the domain of coming of age, it is therefore necessary to examine the effect of the military on the transition to adulthood.

Building on Erikson's (1968) concept of psychosocial moratorium, more current academic writing on the transition to adulthood revolves around the concept of "emerging adulthood" as a demographically distinct phase located roughly between the ages of 18 and 25 (Arnett 2000; Bynner 2005). While the concept makes allowance for the culturally inflected nature of this life stage, it is generally regarded to consist of a number of fixed elements in industrialized societies that are part of becoming an adult (Arnett 2000).

Demographically, these elements can include moving out of the parental home, and enrollment in higher education. Subjectively, the characteristics of attaining adulthood that are regarded as most important are taking responsibility for one's actions, making independent decisions and becoming financially self-sufficient (Arnett 2000:471-472). In the army, due to hardship and the imposition of discipline, certain elements of adulthood are internalized in an accelerated fashion, and others are constrained or delayed. I will show in this thesis that this causes a fragmented transition to adulthood, which is rebalanced in India by allowing young Israelis to incorporate previously constrained elements of coming of age.

Turner's notions of liminality and *communitas* are invoked by Maoz (2004) to describe the Israeli community in India. According to Turner (1974), in the liminal phase,a member of society is "betwixt and between" two socially viable positions in society. It is described as "a movement between fixed pointsand is essentially ambiguous,unsettled,and unsettling." (Turner 1974:274). Groups of liminal individuals in communitas treat each other as equals, regardless of the pre-liminal status. There is a true sense of communion between these individuals who together find themselves in the "anti-structure" of society (Turner 1974). By analyzing the trip as a liminal phase and focusing on the personal changes travelers undergo, I will demonstrate its adaptive potential.

In this section, the interaction between the military and the backpacking trip was discussed within the domain of the transition to adulthood, which is founded upon the view of the army as an experience which alters this transition. However, current literature on Israeli backpackers also insufficiently addresses the effect of the military on the worldview and behavior of citizens, which requires a view of the military as a social structure. The investigation of this complex phenomenon thus requires a more diverse and inclusive theoretical approach. In the following theoreticalsections, the influence of the military will be described at the socio-institutional level and individual level respectively.

Military and Society in Israel

Due to the entanglement of civilian and military matters in Israel, the army affects civilian institutions in a number of ways. The institutionalized backpacking trip is no exception. In this paragraph, the influence of the military at the societal level will be discussed, as well as how this relates to the case of Israeli backpackers.In the most recent work on the topic, the borders between civilian and military life in Israel are regarded as porous and fluid, shifting according to their particular context. More than simply a military and political political institution, the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) is regarded here as an arena for social exchange, structuring interpersonal relations, collectivity and individual behavior (Barak and Shefer 2007:6).

Military matters have become central to the Israeli national identity. Since independence, the army has been actively used as a nation-building tool, uniting an ethnically diverse population (Cohen 1995). Military service is seen as the most formative of national institutions. In this way a sense of national solidarity is instilled at a young age. Due to the porosity of the borders between civilian and military life, the army has been able to occupy a central role in the construction of the Israeli national identity (Ben-Eliezer 1995).

Israel can be described as a militaristic society (Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari 1999; Kimmerling 1993). Whereas militarism may normally be defined as the prevalent attitude that military solutions offer the greatest gain (Mann 1987; Ben-Eliezer 1998), Kimmerling (2005) argues that Israeli militarism is of a special kind. As military thinking encroaches further and further within the civilian sphere, the borders between the two blur, basically altering the way civilians think. Kimmerling(2005:211) describes the entanglement of military and civilian spheres in Israel as a "military-cultural complex". This idea is explained as follows:

> The impact of war and protracted political-military conflict on Israelis is central to the self-understanding of the society and the formation of its social, military, domestic and foreign policy doctrines. Institutions not explicitly designed for waging war and conflict management have played crucial roles in shaping Israel's militaristic metaculture and have in turn been deeply influenced by that culture and the conflict(Kimmerling 2005:211).

The concept of the Israeli military-cultural complex or "militaristic meta-culture" provides a framework within which the relationship between the military and the backpacking trip as a sociocultural institution can be analyzed. By framing Israeli society as a military cultural complex, the backpacking trip can be described as a civilian institution which has been influenced and shaped by the military. Not only has the military establishment contributed to the popularity and institutionalization of the backpacking trip, but the trip itself acquired the function of a collective exposure to free role experimentation that was previously restricted by the army. It can therefore be seen, if not as a military institution itself, as an institution intricately interwoven with the military.

While the concept of the Israeli military-cultural complex offers a framework for assessing the influence of the military at the societal and institutional level, it does not offer a means of tracing this as at the individual level. Therefore a framework inspired by the notion of habitus will be employed, as this concept deals explicitly with the influence of structure on the individual (Bourdieu 1980).Here, the military-cultural complex and within this the military experience will be examined as social structures that condition behavioral schemes and dispositions, while making allowance for a certain degree of reflection andagency.

The Military, Worldview, and Behavior

The concept of habitus aims todescribe the interaction between structure and agency, or society and the individual, by focusing on the way individuals acquire societal norms of cognition and behavior. Essentially, habitus is "an acquired system of generative schemes" (1980:55), which makes possible the production of thoughts, feelings and actions inherent to the structure within which the individual is socialized (Stam 2009). These dispositions towards certain ways of acting and thinking are in Bourdieu's view largely unconscious and are internalized by individuals in structured social contexts allowing them to function in society (Crossly 2001:83). The military is a good example of such a structuring structure.Although habitus as a system of durable dispositions is largely internalized during childhood, and is thus for a large part already in place, the army is still able to alter these dispositions such as conditioning a tendency towards siege mentality.

According to Bar-Tal and Antebi (1992) many Israeli Jews believe the world harbors negative behavioral intentions towards them. This belief has become deeply embedded in the Jewish ethos, after millennia of persecution culminating in the holocaust(Sezgin 2002:52). Over sixty years of conflict in Israel have done little to counter this perception. The idea of siege mentality, as a result of historical persecution of Jews in the Diaspora and the ever present current conflict, is a common one in Israeli

scientific and popular discourse (Ben-Ezer and Ben-Ezer 1977). It has also been called the “Masada Syndrome”, referring to the ancient mountaintop fortress besieged by the Romans (Alsop 1973).

Bar-Tal and Antebi describe five psychological consequences of siege mentality (1992:265) of which three relate to Israeli behavior in India. The first is that Israelis have developed a sense of mistrust towards out-group members. Second, pressure to conform is applied extensively within the in-group, uniting Jewish-Israeli society. Third, self-protection and self-reliance have become core values in Israel, to a certain extent isolating Israel from the international community (1992:266-268). Based on the empirical data I will show that siege mentality, connected to the military, may affect Israeli behavior during the backpacking trip.

The concept of habitus exemplified here by the notion of siege mentality, while very useful, leaves little room for reflection or individual action. As this piece deals with the transition to adulthood, a period of challenging established ways of thinking and acting, it is necessary to employ an approach which is able to incorporate reflection as well as adaptation regarding social norms of conduct. Ortner (2006) is one of the many theorists who have built upon the concept of habitus. In her view, accounting for social change and individual action within a theory of practice requires the incorporation of culture and subjectivity. Subjectivity here refers to "the ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire and fear that animate acting subjects ... as well as the cultural and social formations that shape, organize and provoke those modes of thought" (2006:107). Humans then are not machines, slavishly internalizing societal norms of conduct, but are knowing and acting subjects capable of reflecting upon these social and cultural formations. In India, reflecting on the influence of the cultural schemes in Israel deeply influenced by the military, young Israelis are aware and attempt to alter certain elements of this influence.

Within the military-cultural complex, individuals internalize certain military cognitive dispositions that affect their perception and behavior. As a sociocultural institution, the backpacking trip is also deeply influenced by the army. Not only are some of these military dispositions apparent among Israelis in India, but the liminal phase abroad is used as an opportunity to reflect on and challenge the modes of thought that animate young Israelis, where the influence of the military on the transition to adulthood is rebalanced.

Mapping the intricaterelationship between military and Israeli society, and in particular the institutionalized backpacking trip, requires a dynamic, flexible view of the military. In this thesis the interaction between the military and the backpacking trip takes place within two domains. Firstly, in the way it affects soldiers’ transition to adulthood, and secondly through its more general influence on Israeli institutions, worldview and behavior.

Within the first domain the military is examined as an experience that through the imposition of hardship and discipline affects young Israelis’ transition to adulthood. During the liminal period in India, elements of emerging adulthood that were constrained in the army are practiced intensively, thereby rebalancing this fragmented transition. Within the second domain, this influence takes place on two levels. Firstly, the backpacking trip as an institution is analyzed as a part of the Israeli military-cultural complex, in which the military strongly affects civilian life and institutions.Secondly, the army as a social structure conditions the behavior and worldview of Israelis which affects the collectivity of the India backpacking experience. Having detailed the theoretical framework in which to describe the

influence of the military on the institutionalized backpacking trip, the employed methodology will now be discussed.

Methodology

During the fieldwork period I practiced multi-sited fieldwork, visiting Israel anda total of nine backpacker enclaves across India. I traveled with the Israelis along the same route, which allowed me to build relatively long-lasting relationships with participants and experience the trip in roughly the same way as they did. While this project was technically multi-sited, it was striking how similar most of the backpacker enclaves were as a hybrid Indian-Israeli space. This leads one to question the meaning of place and locality during the trip, and to what degree this project was indeed multi-sited.

In recent years multi-sited fieldwork has become a popular ethnographic practice. This new methodology "moves out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects and identities in diffuse time-space" (Marcus 1995:96). The multi- or translocality of a research project can adversely affect the quality of relationships with participants and the nature of the data gathered (Hannerz 2003). However, making use of multiple field sites, or a mobile field site, allowed me to build up longer lasting and stronger bonds with participants, as they themselves were on the move.

There were a number of difficulties during fieldwork. Language was an issue at the beginning of the research and part of the reason for spending the first month in Israel. My poor command of the language initially limited my ability to socialize with the Israelis and forced me to conduct interviews in English during the first half of fieldwork. The first month in India was also difficult in terms of access. It was difficult to meet participants and especially gain access to the groups in which Israelis traveled.This may have been partly due to the relatively exclusive nature of these Israeli groups, a characteristic noted by Israelis and travelers of other nationalities alike.

As my Hebrew improved I was able to gain greater access to groups and started interviewing in Hebrew. Generally, I had been acquainted with interviewees for at least a week before approaching them for an interview. I conducted 28 semi-structured interviews, which generally lasted between half an hour and an hour. Participants were mostly Israeli males, roughly 60%, and females between the ages of 20 and 25, of both Ashkenazi and Sephardi origin. Some people I interviewed fell outside of this category however, such as locals and older Israeli travelers.All names have been changed due to privacy considerations.

My own position undoubtedly affected my relation with the Israelis. One of the first questions I was asked was if I was Jewish. I am half Israeli, and have a lot of family living in Israel. Furthermore, I speak some Hebrew. I think it would have been very difficult to gain access to these groups if I had been a complete outsider. In fact, being a semi-insider was an ideal position as it allowed me a greater degree of access and identification, while being able to remain to some degree analytically detached. In the next section, the empirical data will be presented and analyzed.

Ethnographic analysis

Traces of the Army

Especially in Israel, where military matters have become strongly intertwined with civilian life, the military as a social structure has a large influence on the society it aims to protect. As a part of the Israeli military-cultural complex (Kimmerling 2005), the institutionalized backpacking trip has been influenced in various ways by the military. Following the path of young Israelis who travel to India, in this first part of the ethnographic analysis I will analyze the traces of the army in India by examining Israelis' recollections of military service, in turn shaped by the backpacking experience. This is necessary in order to tease out the influence of the army upon the backpacking trip, and isolate this influence from other, more general cultural factors related to backpacking tourism. The focus here will be on a number of elements that seem related to the trip, based on recollections and opinions of participants on how the military has affected them.

Before the Army

The exposure of young Israelis to the conflict begins long before actual military service. The media, especially the news, are saturated with reports on the conflict. It is constantly made visible andtangible in everyday life through security checks and the sheer number of soldiers in public transport at any given time. The situation lends a particular urgency to daily life in Israel. Yaniv, who was previously an artillery sergeant in the army and served in Lebanon, describes his early experiences with the conflict as follows:

> I don't think it's the army where people are scared, it's about living in a society… I remember as a child in primary school I had a gas mask that I used to take with me. It was green and I put batman stickers on it but it was still a gas mask. And I remember we had to run once in the middle of the night, my father came and grabbed me and took me to the bomb shelter. There was no gas in the end, but still that's not normal.

This illustrates just how early children are confronted with living in a conflict zone. It shows furthermore to what degree military concerns have penetrated the civil sphere in Israel (Kimmerling 1993; 2005). When discussing the military in Israel it is important to factor in the period leading up to the army, which has generally already exposed most conscripts to elements of the conflict. Also when taking into account the effects of the military on personal behavior, habits, and way of thinking, it should be noted that exposure to the conflict can reach back to early childhood in many cases, and involve civilian institutions such as schools (Kimmerling 2005).

The prospect of enlisting awaits all Jewish-Israeli youngsters during childhood and adolescence. With a few exceptions for the orthodox and those excused on medical grounds, all Jewish-Israelis are conscripted for obligatory military service around the age of eighteen. For boys, three years of service are required, and for girls two. An introductory contact with the military takes place in high school during what can best be described as an army summer camp.By the time high school draws to an end most people already have a fair idea of what army service entails. Through

stories, folklore and education, young people are brought in touch with Israel's military culture (Ben-Eliezer 1998). Already before the army, various preconceptions exist about the different roles soldiers can assume in the IDF, and especially regarding the different brigades. The choice of what to do in the army can be affected by peer pressure, as one interviewee explains:

> I didn't want to be a combat soldier. I basically just wanted to be a travel guide. I understand it's not so logical. All my friends were really, really hardcore. They all went to the best units in Israel, like the Special Forces. And I didn't want to be a *jobnik*[i]. So I went to the combat soldiers, I tried to be in a special unit but didn't succeed because of my knee, I wasn't strong enough.

There is still a great deal of esteem in Israeli society for those who have participated in particularly illustrious units and brigades, and spots in these units are contested fiercely during conscription (Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari 1999). Military service in the IDF even draws people of other nationalities. Gal, a Jewish American born in Israel who decided to return for the army, regards the military as the biggest part of Israeli culture in general. For him personally, it was also the most important part of making *Aaliyah*[ii]. He describes the responsibility of military service as a cycle, passed down from generation to generation. In his own words, he explains his motives as follows:

> I heard a father explain to his kid on the street, he asked why these soldiers were carrying guns. The father explained to him, they're protecting us. One day I protected us and one day you will. You know, it's like your turn. When you're old some 18 year old kid is going to protect you. I think Israelis value life a lot. All these dudes grew up during the Intifada. They know what it is to have a homey that died. That also shifts their political view, the way they look at things. I can come in as this left wing American… that's why I came out and did it. Because I'm left wing, but I'm not gonna keep criticizing from my armchair.

The previous excerpt illustrates the intertwinement of the military and the nation in Israel. While Gal does not represent the average Israeli soldier, he articulates clearly the sense of duty and responsibility most Israelis feel towards military service. Military service is regarded as a necessity by many Jewish Israelis due to the existential threat they perceive the state to be under. Due to this entrenched societal belief, conscription is viewed by the majority as a worthwhile, non-negotiable sacrifice (Bar-Tal 1998).

Because Israeli's grow up in an area of long term conflict, they are enculturated with military matters from a young age. Transmitted through stories, media, education, and sometimes grounded in very real experiences, Israeli military culture is internalized long before actual military service (Ben-Eliezer 1998). The military has a large influence on civilian institutions through their incorporation in the Israeli military-cultural complex (Kimmerling 2005). All of this goes to show that the army's complex influence on society takes place at different levels, distinct from the actual period of military service.

Military Service and the Transition to Adulthood

Within the domain of the military as an experience that alters the coming of age process, it is necessary to examine the army's effects in more detail. According to current theories on the transition to adulthood, the intermediate period of emerging adulthood consists of several demographic and subjective elements of becoming an adult (Arnett 2000). These include moving out of the parental home, taking responsibility for one's actions, free role experimentation and becoming financially independent. In the army, some of these elements are internalized while others are not. In this section, based on participants' recollections of their military service, it will be demonstrated that the army causes a fragmented transition to adulthood.

Shani, one of the younger female interviewees who did her army service in IT, sums up the basic discomforts of the army as follows:

> It's really hard for an 18 year old child to enter a place where people tell you what to do. It gave me traumas *laughs*. No, seriously. For everyone who did the army there is some kind of trauma. In boot camp I had a really hard time being away from home, someone telling me how long I can talk on the phone and how long I can sleep, 6 hours usually. That was really hard.

Moving away from home is an element of the period of emerging adulthood that is internalized in an accelerated fashion during the army (Arnett 2000). While this is initially exciting it is also very difficult for many recruits. The offhand manner in which Shani describes her "trauma" reveals an important coping mechanism in the army, which is being able to joke about it. An important note to be made here is that generally, among my research participants, service was regarded in a more positive light by females. They were quicker to highlight the positive elements of serving in the army such as camaraderie.

Many participants said they felt the army had significantly matured them. According to one participant, "the army matures you very quickly. You learn how to be serious. It teaches you self-discipline. Before the army I didn't have that. It makes you sharper." Through learning to deal with an essentially oppressive atmosphere and in some cases, the harsh realities of life and death, many Israelis feel they have experienced an accelerated process of growing up. Formulating this in other words, a girl explains:

> The army gives you a totally different perspective. I'm 21. I met people here that are four or five years older than me and it's like they don't know anything. For me, I feel like everything is small for me. I really learned a lot about how to control my temper, before the army I had a really short fuse. I really learned how to manage myself.

The changes described by this interviewee are related to several subjective elements of becoming an adult, specifically taking responsibility for one's actions and the feeling of having left adolescence (Arnett 2000). Not only does this interviewee feel to have left this stage of life, but in fact feels more mature than some people several years her senior. As most participants attributed this accelerated maturation to hardship and discipline imposed in the military, a few accounts of military experiences will be presented here in order to show how this takes place.

For a significant number of soldiers, military service involves active combat duty. This can mean being deployed in a major military operation involving actual combat, but more generally soldiers are assigned to guarding duty across Israel and the West Bank. Guarding duty, organized in 6-hour blocks on and off duty and lasting up to several weeks, is described as very taxing. Interviewees cite the isolation, loneliness, boredom and inactivity of guarding as major stress factors. A participant described the difficulties of this activity as follows:

> Guarding is where you really get messed up. I had a hard time once and I thought: how can I get the hell out of here? I was at a post for 22 days, and I fell asleep twenty minutes before my last guard ended. They made me stay another ten days as punishment. That's when you think, I'm going to shoot myself in the leg or something just to get out.

For those soldiers who were deployed in large-scale military operations, experiences and recollections can be even more acute. Some of the males I interviewed had fought in the 2005 Lebanon War, or the 2008-2009 operation "Cast Lead" in Gaza. Most of these respondents had been in tank or artillery companies. According to several participants, it was not the combat element that was difficult, but rather the conditions in which soldiers operated. They referred to the inability to communicate with parents,

weather conditions, and poor food. For tank and artillery companies, many reported that the war was not as frightening as they had expected.Some expressed sympathy for the inhabitants.

In tank and artillery warfare, it is easier for soldiers to become detached from the violence which is taking place around them. A former tank gunner who fought in operation Cast Lead compared it to being in a videogame like GTA. In his recollection, it was actually quite fun as you didn't even realize people were shooting at you. Foot soldiers deployed in the territories have the additional concern of having to deal with political activism from both the Left and the Right of the political spectrum. In the words of one combat soldier who was stationed in the West Bank: "Hebron is the most messed up place I've ever been to. You get shit from both sides, the Jews and the Arabs. They say in Israel, the army either makes you really left wing or really right wing. You always come out different."

One female interviewee, Rinat, who served as an officer describes her experiences as exceptionally challenging, but ultimately rewarding. Especially difficult for her at the beginning was being assigned to command 15 boys. She recounts that these young soldiers severely tested her limits as a commander. After 4.5 years in the army, she says, she felt she was simply no longer able to be a "100% commander". Sick of having no social life, being at the base all thetime, and the pressures of the army, she was reassigned to a desk job for the remainder of her service. The most difficult part of her service, and how this affected her, is best presented in her own words:

> I don't regret being in the army but there were many things I would have done differently. For example, I had a soldier who committed suicide. All the time you ask yourself, was I a bad commander, what did I do wrong? You need to go the parents and tell them, sorry but your son shot himself in the head, maybe because of me, I don't know. I asked myself, what do I need this for, I'm 21, and I have to go to a mother and tell her that her son is dead? I went crazy. But in the end, I don't regret it. It made me what I am today. I can suffer a lot of things and be strong.

In Rinat's view, the difficulties and responsibilities of the military strengthened and matured her. As she indicates, most youngsters of this age are not faced with such challenges. While many ex-conscripts feel the army matured them, during military serviceother elements of emerging adulthood are prohibited or restricted.Making matters worse is that these restrictions are imposed at an age when most other youngsters in the Western world to the Israelis appear to be enjoying a relatively carefree transition to autonomy. Yaniv describes these restrictions:

> When you finish the army you've been eating shit for three years of your life. And even if you're a commanding officer you take decisions but in the end there's somebody above you, it's the army, it's shit. When you're through you think, I just gave three years to the army, I can take half a year or a year for myself. I deserve it. You feel like you did your part, more than that it was so awful or so bad, because you're always dreaming. You're always cold, hungry, horny. I had a girlfriend in the army but you only see her like once every two weeks. It's not enough.

Framed in this way, the post-army backpacking trip is not only a consequence of previous restrictions, but can also be seen as compensation for previous sacrifices or redemption of previously acquired moral credit. Because of these sacrifices, many ex-conscripts feel they deserve a period of relative hedonism. Such a seemingly rebellious perspective is hard to rhyme with a pre-reflexive notion of habitus and rather lends credence to a perspective which incorporates social change or at the very least individual agency (Ortner 2006). However, the backpacking trip has gained such mainstream popularity that it is

hard to see it as a rebellion. If it is indeed a type of resistance, it remains strongly bound by collective norms (Maoz 2007).

As Yaniv explained, the army also affects one's love life, which can be very frustrating.While the army is an intensely social institution which brings together youngsters from all over Israel at an impressionable age, it is generally seen as detrimental to social life back home. Especially for soldiers stationed at "closed" bases, where being away from home for weeks at a time is no exception, it can be very difficult to stay in touch with friends and family.

Military service furthermore significantly impairs the ability of young Israelis to engage in the experimental behavior that characterizes emerging adulthood in most Western societies. Using drugs, an element of this experimental behavior, is made nigh impossible through urine tests. The consequences of being caught with drugs in the army can be very severe as one is punished not only in the army but also faces increased scrutiny on the job market. Especially frustrating is that outside the army, many people seem to be enjoying drugs such as marijuana. One interviewee, referring to smoking, said: "It's the most fun thing in the world and you're not allowed to do it. So once you get out, you're just dying to smoke." I will show that the heavy smoking among Israelis in India is to a large extent a result of these previous constraints.

Finally, the army severely constrains basic choices such as about what to wear, what to do and what to eat, at any given time. These basic constraints were worded as follows by a male participant: "You have nothing to choose, there is no left or right. You have no opinion. No one is interested in what you think. If it's hard, if it's not hard, you just sit and guard."An anecdote that came up often in interviews was that soldiers generally received seven minutes for a bowel movement. Previous interests must often be abandoned as one girl explains: "It's funny because after the army people ask you what you like doing, and I tell them stuff from before the army. I realized I don't know what to say."Lack of sleep is a serious issue in the army, one officer reporting that it was often a challenge to get soldiers out of bed in the morning. After being released, many participants told me that what they enjoyed most after getting out was being able to make choices of their own again, such as what to eat and what to wear. In India, this often translated into enjoying the freedom to engage in as little activity as possible.

Due to the imposition of discipline and exposure to intensely challenging experiences, Israeli ex-conscripts feel to have undergone an accelerated transition to adulthood. As another interviewee put it, "the army matures you on an independent level". Yet, these same constraints delay other aspects of maturity. As such, the army causes a fragmented transition to adulthood. I will show that the post army backpacking trip can be regarded as an attempt to remedy this fragmented transition. Two more interrelated consequences of military service, connected more generally to living in the Israeli military-cultural complex, are the development of a siege mentality, and the strengthening of Israeli national identity and cohesiveness.

Siege Mentality and National Identity

During the period of military service, the influence on behavior and worldview inherent in the military-cultural complex is at its peak (Kimmerling 2005). After all, military training has the goal of instilling discipline, conditioning conscripts to be effective, obedient soldiers (Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari 1999). This influence takes place within the domain of the military as a social structure, where grounded in practice, this structure works to condition the attitude, behavior and worldview of individuals (Bourdieu 1980). The army generates a disposition towards siege mentality among Israelis, and simultaneously

strengthens Israeli societal cohesiveness through its importance for the Israeli national identity. Both of these factors relate to the backpacking trip in India.

It can be argued that manyJewish Israelis have developed a siege mentality, grounded historically in thousands of years of persecution (Bar-Tal and Antebi 1992). The Israeli notion of being under siege is related to the backpacking trip in various ways. Most importantly, it affects the collectivity and cultural exclusivity of the Israeli backpacking experience. In this paragraph, participants' ideas about Israeli siege mentality and Israeli national identity will be examined.

The state of Israel has indeed been besieged for most of its existence, although it has now for some decades been the dominant occupying force. Dvir reported that serving in the army reinforced the sense of being under siege.

> Of course I'm biased because I'm an Israeli who's been five years in the army. I'm sure I am biased. In high school, all the people I was with were very left wing, and talked about peace all the time. I even went to a seminar in Morocco with Arabs. And you think OK everything is OK. Then you go to officer school and all the officers say all the time that there will never be peace. Egypt in one minute can attack, just wait, it's just around the corner. I think it's kind of something in the head, that everybody hates you, everybody hates you. You are a Jewish Israeli and everybody hates you.

Dvir's account illustrates not only how the perception of siege mentality can be transmitted in the army, but also refers to the Jewish sense of persecution. The development of mistrust is one of the consequences of siege mentality described by Bar-Tal and Antebi (1992). Ronnie explains his view on the sense of mistrust among Israelis: "It's paranoid, because in Israel they screwed us. *Freier* (sucker). That's the worst thing you can say to an Israeli. To think that somebody is cheating them, they don't like to get screwed. Enemy everywhere, everything is enemy, enemy. Always need to kill the Jew, they will kill us. Absurd."

Looking ahead to the section on the Israeli community in India, we can relate the notion of siege mentality to one girl's description of the isolation she felt during her first trip in Australia: "You say you're from Israel and people don't say oh how nice. We got the point in the first trip. We started telling people we were from Greece or something. People frown when you say you're from Israel. It's not with everyone, but it happened enough times that we understood it was a thing." The Israeli sense of isolation thus extends also in some cases to the post-army backpacking trip.

Connected to this notion of siege mentality is the army's influence in strengthening societal bonds in Israel. Especially in the early days of the state, shared military service was a prime tool in Israeli nation-building (Cohen 1995). Through bringing together young Israelis for a period of several years and under very tryingcircumstances, a sense of unity is fostered within Israel's very diverse immigrant population. In this way the army has become central to the way Israelis picture themselves as a nation (Ben-Eliezer 1998). In the words of one girl, "the army gives you *schtanz* (backbone)". It is easy to relate military experience to the characteristic Israeli directness, which one respondent described as being "cocky and in-your-face". I believe much of this typical manner can be related to military service, and more specifically the norms of social interaction that are internalized here.

Almost every person I interviewed, when asked about the positive qualities of serving in the army, replied that they valued the deep and long-lasting friendships they established during their service. Many of them felt that the bonds they established with their fellow soldiers were so strong due to the difficulty of serving in the army. Army camaraderie is described as being more intense than regular friendship as it has to be based on trust, sometimes in life and death situations. Especially in boot camp, where according to several participants the sense of being in it together is most powerful,

strong bonds are established between conscripts.

Serving in the army also changes the way people interact with others, as Maya explains: "I'm sure that the army changed me 180 degrees. It opens you to people that you wouldn't meet otherwise in your life, and experiences that you would never get. The army really helped me to develop. You have to open to other people, to talk about yourself, share experiences, especially in a closed base."The intensely social character of the army is another aspect which contributes to the process of maturation undergone in the army, as recruits are forced to adapt to a disciplined collective and function socially within this collective.

The army is not only seen to strengthen interpersonal relationships, but is also a cohesive force in society. The army in this way also strengthens the cohesion among Israeli backpackers in India. The cohesive Israeli national identity is indeed one of the forces binding travelers together overseas. A senior backpacker by the name of Itzik explained his view on this cohesiveness as follows: "Maybe it's the mentality that we developed in the army. How many nations are stuck together for three years, and three hard years, fighting together? There is nothing like that. Nothing compares to the stress and the hardship of being in the army. It really unites the people, and gives them *schtanz*."

Considering the centrality of military service to the Israeli national identity raises the question of what happens to those who have not served. Some potential conscripts are turned down on medical grounds, and some Israelis find ways of getting out of military service. By missing out on this shared national experience, they are excluded to some degree from full Israeli citizenship and sometimes socially marginalized in areas such as employment. Tal, a girl who was turned down by the army on medical reasons, describes the difficulties of this exclusion:

> Not doing the army is like... I sometimes feel unpleasant because I didn't do the army. I was really angry that they didn't accept me for service. I wanted to be just like everyone else. I also wanted to do what everyone else did. There was a period that I moved to Jerusalem and because I hadn't done the army I couldn't get a job.Even in waitressing everybody asked if I did the army. After two months I realized I wouldn't get a job, and I was really broken. I decided to go back home.

According to Cohen (1995:244-245) the status of military service as a rite de passage has led the possession of a service record to become a primary social boundary within the Jewish population of Israel. However, the importance of this rite de passage in Israel appears to be somewhat on the decline compared to recent decades (Cohen 1995). This may be connected to the growing importance of the backpacking trip as a rite de passage. The role of the backpacking trip may in fact be of greater importance to those who have not served as it offers a chance to participate in a related shared national experience.

While those who have not done the army may be institutionally and socially marginalized in Israel, they do not appear to be discriminated against socially in India. They are just as welcome to join the Israeli collective and the traveling groups as are ex-conscripts, and acquire many of the collective routines of the travelers who had done the army. This reinforces the view of the backpacking trip as a liminal phase, where according to Turner (1974) individuals in communitas treat each other as equals regardless of their pre-liminal status. In fact, during the liminal phase the previous status and identity are often abandoned altogether (Van Gennep 1960). As with the veterans, those that did not do military service travel as a response to the transition between life phases, though they often do not face the same altered transition to adulthood.Talexplained her motivations for travel as follows: "So why me? Because I finished a phase of my life, the studies. I

felt that I needed a break from life and I needed it now. I had a really difficult time this last year. I need some personal growth right now."

In this part of the ethnographic analysis, an overview was given of the way the military shapes collectivity and individual behavior in Israel. Within the Israeli military-cultural complex, the military extends its influence far outside the military realm (Kimmerling 2005). Through this construction the military affects the behavior and worldview of Israelis before, during and after the army.Due to compulsory military service, young Israelis undergo a fragmented transition to adulthood, which leaves many with the feeling of having missed out on certain elements of coming of age. In the liminal period between the army and embarking on adult life, which for many Israelis is constituted partly by the backpacking trip in India, certain behaviors associated with coming of age are practiced intensively. Two other aspects relatedto the military have been highlighted here as being of importance to the trip, namely the development of a siege mentality to which the military contributes, and the significance of the military for Israeli national identity and collectivity, both of which contribute to the cohesiveness of Israeli travelers in India. In the next empirical section, the Israeli community in India will be described, and how it relates to the military as a social structure.

Collective Traveling: "sticking with the gang"

All backpacking tourism is to some degree collective and most backpackers travel with others of the same nationality (Ateljevic and Doorne 2000; Cohen 2003). What characterizes the Israeli case is that backpacking has developed into a sociocultural institution with an unusually collective and to some degree nationally exclusive nature (Noy 2002; Maoz 2004). Israelis appear to travel in larger groups than most other backpackers, and may seek on the whole less contact with backpackers of other nationalities. The military as a social structure, through its effect on worldview and behavior, conditions the collectivity of the Israeli backpacking institution. In this section the collectivity of the Israeli backpacker community in India will be examined as well as its relation to the army as a social structure. This collectivity manifests itself in the fact that Israelis remain largely within an Israeli sphere of cultural influence, the large groups in which they travel and the institutionalized nature of the trip.

It is important to note, that while Israeli backpackers in India are described here as a more or less uniform group they are of course varied in terms of ethnicity, age, goals and experiences. After all, Israel is comprised of a very diverse immigrant population. Still, most young Israelis traveling in India do so after military service, and undertake a very similar set of routines in India. Therefore, these post-army travelers will be presented as a fairly cohesive and homogenous group.

Setting the Scene

Upon arrival at New Delhi airport, flying in from Amman, I was directed in Hebrew by a fellow traveler towards the correct luggage belt. After a brief chat, my new Israeli friend and I shared a taxi to the Main Bazaar in *Paharganj*, and arrived at the Hare Rama hotel, a local Israeli hot spot. At this hotel, transportation could be organized to any of the popular Israeli destinations. From this point on, it was a lot like getting sucked into a river rapid. Any important decisions about where to go, or what to do, had largely already been made for one. A vast Israeli tourist infrastructure caters to the tens of thousands of Israelis who visit here each year. From the very moment you arrive in India it is actually

difficult to avoid this phenomenon, even as a non-Israeli. The national collectivity of the Israeli community in India extends beyond Israeli food, music and books to Jewish spirituality, religious services and locals who speak Hebrew (Maoz 2007).

Walking around Delhi gave me what was certainly the most intense culture shock of my life. Making things even more bizarre was the sheer "Israeliness" of the tourist enclave in Paharganj. Without even enquiring as to where I was from, young Indian street-hawkers would attempt to lure me in with popular Hebrew phrases, calling me *achi* (my brother)and asking me what's up (*ma kore?*). I spent less than 12 hours in Delhi, but already it became apparent just how well this specific niche of tourism had developed in the north of India. Some local shopkeepers and travel agents spoke conversational Hebrew, and if necessary, one could probably get a fair distance in the North without having to speak any English at all.

There are Israeli enclaves all over India, but there is one village that is seen as the headquarters of all things Israeli: Kasol. This is usually the first stop for Israelis, as one informant explains: "I came to the Main Bazaar in Delhi and people told me to go to Kasol, so that's where I went". This small mountain community in the state of Himachal Pradesh owes its livelihood to the influx of Israeli tourists, and appears to cater almost exclusively to visitors of this nationality. The Parvati valley where Kasol is located is famous for its inexpensive and high-quality hashish, which together with the spectacular views are the main attraction and tourist draw in the area. The principal activities in Kasol include smoking, eating, and going to trance parties which are usually held several times a week. A respondent in Israel amusingly summed up the daily rhythm in Kasol: "You wake up around 12, and of course smoke a chillum[1]. Then you go get breakfast, which is tiring so you need a chillum. After that, people maybe go to the market or for a walk, which is of course the most tiring of all, so they need a chillum and a nap. Then you have dinner and smoke 'till you fall asleep."

Generally speaking, most Israeli travelers start in the north, working their way southwards, or vice versa, depending on the season of arrival. Probably the most common route, and the one undertaken by the author, flies into Delhi beginning with the northern stretch of the trail. The most important enclaves in Himachal Pradesh, arguably the state most saturated with Israeli tourism, are those surrounding Manali, Kasol and Dharamsala. Here, *jarras* smoking is at its fiercest, and for many it is also the period of acclimatization.

Just as the backpacking trip constitutes a liminal phase between adolescence and adulthood, the journey itself has a pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal stage. In this way the physical journey of the trip can be seen as a metaphor for the emotional and psychological changes travelers undergo, although this is not so much based on location as it is on temporality. Still, the northern enclaves provide a comfortable starting point due to the Israeli entrenchment of Israeli tourism in these parts. Van Gennep, who originally coined the concept of liminality and separated its three stages, describes the pre-liminal rites as a phase within which initiands undergo a metaphoric "death" in which a clear break is made with the former identity, practices and routines (Van Gennep 1960)

Roughly the first month of the trip is the period of initiation, where Israelis leave parts of their lives back home behind, and truly break with the previous situation of discipline and constraint. The Israelis who have been in India longer adopt the role of teacher, sometimes scolding their students quite fiercely. As the travelers become acquainted, groups and patterns begin to emerge. Asaf says the following about the atmosphere at the start of the trip: "At the start people are all hippie and 'hypie' and they don't know what to do. You have to settle in. As soon as you get settled in you have all the time in the world to do anything you want to do." As travelers adjust to the languid rhythm of backpacker life in India, without other distractions their gaze inevitably turns inwards.

Kasol is the most extremely Israeli of the backpacker enclaves in India, but the majority of enclaves follow the same general design. The "Hummus trail" stretches across thousands of kilometers, from Kashmir in the northern tip to Kerala in the far south. Along the way, there are many villages that offer tourists a more or less Israeli cultural environment in which to enjoy the Indian experience. Most of social life during the trip takes place at restaurants. It is a common joke among the Israelis that there isn't much else to do in India but smoke and eat at the restaurants. The restaurants in these enclaves are eerily similar and often actually have the same names. For reference, the author has eaten at Little Italy's, German Bakeries, and Moondance Cafe's across the Indian subcontinent. Aside from the regular tourist repertoire, these restaurants serve an array of Israeli treats including *falafel* and *tehina*, as well as more obscure choices such as *jachnoon*[1] on Saturdays.

Various enclaves exist across India where, more or less isolated from people of other nationalities, Israelis are able to experience freedom in India within a relatively safe and culturally homogenous environment. The "Israeliness" of the mainstream post-army backpacking experience extends to religion and spirituality, with several Jewish missionary organizations tending to the backpackers' spiritual needs. While some Israelis show interest in local spirituality, many paradoxically use the trip as an opportunity to rediscover Jewish religion (Maoz 2010).

While most of the young Israelis traveling in India are secular, many celebrate the traditional Jewish holidays during their time in India. Jewish New Year in Kasol is agood example of this. Preparations for Rosh Hashana started days before the event as the Chabad was expecting around 400 guests in Kasol. Preparing a holiday feast for this many people was no small task and required the ritual slaughter of hundreds of chickens. Huge pots with chopped carrot and onion covered the table outside, while inside several men were hard at work to rig up the decorations and seating arrangements. Plenty of whiskey had also been acquired for the festivities and several trance parties were to be held in the valley for the festival. The Beit Chabad was lavishly decorated with fabrics and lights.

Come the eve of Rosh Hashana, the Beit Chabad was packed. Hundreds of young Israeli backpackers were seated at long tables, dressed in their Shabbat best or at least attempting to look a little more festive than usual. Plaited Sabbath bread, hummus, whiskey and soft drinks had been placed on every table, as well as olives and other Israeli treats. The meal consisted of several courses, including potatoes and chicken, and various Jewish-Israeli delicacies such as *gefilte fisch*. Rabbi Danny and his associate Yoav lead the proceedings. After the Kiddush, the blessing and praying, and singing together, Yoav held a fiery sermon, his speech slightly slurred, which was meant to address the spiritual needs of the travelers, referring to pot smoking among other things.

The first destination most backpackers encounter on the way south is Rishikesh, where some Israelis dabble with spiritual activities such as meditation and yoga. It is here where many travelers begin to branch out in search of an augmented identity, while remaining within an Israeli sphere of influence. Traveling between the enclaves, most groups split up again into smaller units of around 3 or 4 people, which then reform upon arrival.

The hummus trail then typically turns westward to Rajasthan, where the village of Pushkar is the main tourist hub. Pushkar featured perhaps the densest concentration of street side falafel stands and Israeli signposting. Walkingdown its main shopping street, one was sometimes able to observe Indians singing along with old Israeli folk songs. As the last stop on the northern trail, many Israeli travelers made liberal use of the cheap shopping for which Pushkar is known, some people sending up to fifty kilos of merchandise back home.Passing through Mumbai, backpackers arrive in Goa. For some, Goa isthe last stop in the south, but most Israelis continue down towards Karnataka, Tamil

Nadu, and Kerala, which all have Israeli enclaves.

"Going with the Flow": Group Dynamics

According to the more senior Israelis I interviewed India, the backpacking trip in developing countries began in Israel as a phenomenon in the early 1980's and mainly involved combat soldiers who wanted to relax. The combination of deteriorating conditionsfor soldiers during the Intifada and the Lebanon war, and expanded visa options for Israeli nationals, were the impetus for this developing trend. Before that, it was also common to travel after the army, but rather in order to seek economic opportunities in the United States or Europe. The backpacking trip has evolved today into something "everyone does". In other words, it has become a sociocultural institution, which as we have seen is in Israel a part of the larger military-cultural complex.

According to Kimmerling, due to the conflict situation in Israel and the large influence of the military, civilian institutions not directly related to warfare or security have been deeply influenced by the military and in turn have affected the military-cultural complex into which they have been assimilated (Kimmerling 2005:211). The collectivity of the institutionalized backpacking trip in India is related to the military as a social structure, but in a more direct sense it appears as if this institution's adaptive potential with regards to coming of age serves a particular purpose regarding the effects of military service. I will elaborate upon the role of the backpacking trip for young Israelis' transition to adulthood in the final empirical section.

It is interesting to note some of the changes in visa policy between Israel and India, as it shows the scale of the phenomenon under study. Until a few years ago, it was very easy for Israelis to get Indian tourist visas. So easy in fact, that through making use of immigration loopholes, Israelis were able to stay in India for years. Some travelers were reluctant to return to Israel at all, which is why a number of organizations exist today that track down and bring back missing Israelis abroad. Some of these missing Israelis suffered drug-induced psychoses. Alarmed by the number of Israelis disappearing in India, the Israeli government requested the Indians to tighten up the visa restrictions for their nationals. Now, a six-month visa is the maximum allowed, with a two month cool-down between entries.

According to Bar-Tal and Antebi (1992) increased conformity between in-group members is a consequence of siege mentality. As a result of the perceived threat from the outside world, Israeli Jews appeal to unity and cohesiveness in order to withstand danger (Bar-Tal and Antebi 1992:267).Some of the more critical interviewees argued that conformism is the main force that drives young Israelis to travel: "I think a lot of people in the world do the easy solution. They're doing an easy job, easy solution to life, because this is what the system taught them. Somebody started with this phenomenon, and India is cheap, and the drugs are really easy to get there and cheap. The people feel desperate to do what all of the others do." The sheer number of people traveling after the army in Israel in this way motivates other Israelis to travel as well.

The decision to travel is thus related to peer-pressure starting in the army, but it also simply involves the curiosity to experience what so many friends, acquaintances and family members have done before you. Regarding India specifically, a respondent explains the social element of the choice to travel: "Your older brother went to India and smoked a lot, and your buddies as well and they all tell you to go. It's an influence from people that have already done it, and the people that are gonna do it." The trip has rapidly acquired the status of a tradition, and can according to Noy (2002) even be seen as a kind of secular pilgrimage. Just like the military, the backpacking trip is a shared national

experience, which is shaped by collective behavior and in turn shapes this same behavior.

Most backpackers arrive in India alone or with one or two friends. An Israeli website, *Hametayel*, arranges travel buddies for backpacking trips around the world.Among the young Israelis in India, it is common to travel in large groups. The *khevre* (gang) is for most Israelis a key element of the trip and is what gives it its intensely social and collective character. Once in India, these smaller units combine into larger traveling groups which can stay together for several weeks before recombining into other formations. Going with the flow, or flowing (*lizrom*), is the expression most Israelis use to describe this social way of traveling. After two or three years in the army, many young Israelis are used to operating in this collective, socially cohesive fashion. As one Israeli man explains, "people get to Delhi, and they just flow. All you have to do is buy a ticket, maybe even a friend bought it for them, or their mother, and they get to Delhi and start to flow."

The cohesiveness of these large groups can also be related to the military. By their own account, it is easy for many Israelis to pull up a chair, or in India a cushion, and quickly achieve very familiar terms with people they have never met before. One girl relates this ease to the army: "The Israeli people are very united. You don't see Europeans travelling in such big groups, one always meets Israelis here. It's part of the Israeli mentality, it's a small country and you have a lot of shared experiences. It's also because of the army. We all know each other, we all sit together. Like, stick together." Another person commented on the familiarity that is seen to characterize Israeli culture: "The army adds something to the Israeli characteristics. The army is like a tiny bubble cut off from everything outside. We're not polite, we don't even know how to. It's like, weird. When you try to speak politely in Israel,it's like, are you joking. You don't need it, it feels formal to us."

Statements like these indicate a tendency among Israelis to make very general observations about what they see as Israeli culture and its essential characteristics. This could be interpreted along the lines of subjectivity as it does involve reflection on societal norms of conduct (Ortner 2006). Yet, due to the highly generalized nature of these observations and the fact that they are shared by a majority of individuals leads one to question the degree of reflexivity inherent in these statements. One could therefore also interpret these generalizations in the light of siege mentality and the disposition it creates toward minimizing the portrayal of in-group differences (Bar-Tal 1998:272).

Traveling in groups provides security for backpackers, and makes the trip easier in the sense that many decisions have already been made for one.A former officer in the army describes how easy it is to fall into this flow:

> A lot of people just get sucked into it. They don't have the power to think, because it's really nice. You go in big groups, and in the group is a leader, and the leader says we go here or there. And you just go with the flow, till something happens, and for me it was OK. I went with a group, and I decided what to do because it was easy for me to be the leader of a group like this.

The last sentence refers to this interviewee's military experience commanding soldiers. The organization of these groups is in this way very reminiscent of the army, but the objective seems to be rather to engage in as little activity as possible. It is a kind of anti-army. The construction of the *zoola* is a good example of army organization and efficiency being put to work with the purpose of relaxing. A zoola, literally "chill-out" or "relax", is a space where the Israeli's relax according to a scripted routine. When groups of travelers arrive in a new place which seems suitable for the construction of a zoola, without too much communication the travelers get to work on building supports, hanging up psychedelic fabrics and hammocks, and arranging the electrical utilities and music installation. The

tasks seem clear to the travelers, who have practiced setting up such a relaxation area many times before. The efficiency anddiscipline that Israelis employ for relaxation is in this way very reminiscent of military organization, namely setting up camp. In fact, these scripted sequences indicate the existence of certain a cognitive and behavioral residue of the army that appears pre-reflexive (Bourdieu 1980).

Interaction with Locals and Other Tourists

Maoz (2004) has signaled the post-colonial character ofthe interaction between Israeli backpackers and locals. This is a topic that came up frequently in interviews and something I also observed, mainly in the enclaves in the north. Large groups of Israeli youngsters can be quite loud and intimidating, and sometimes treat the locals as servants or worse. An interviewee says the following about this behavior: "I've seen some Israelis that treat the Indians like shit. They sit in a restaurant and treat the waiters like shit and they feel like kings. They have the money and everybody has to do what they say. This I hate. But it's not the majority, just a few."

Also in my own observations, it appeared as if the majority of young Israeli travelers were able to have reasonably polite interactions with the local people, and often genuine friendships. But in recent years, as a result of young backpackers misbehaving abroad, the phrase "the ugly Israeli" was coined. According to one respondent, this was not too much of an issue in India: "I know about the idea of the 'ugly Israeli', but that's not what I saw. Most of the Israelis I saw here are great with the Indians. The Israelis suit the Indians more than any of the other tourists. I heard of this 'ugly Israeli' thing but I saw exactly the opposite." In conversations between Israelis about Indians, a slightly different picture emerges. Indians are sometimes described as weak, effeminate, and child-like, if not stupid or lazy.

Of course, the locals have their own views about Israeli behavior, and a few of the locals I interviewed related this behavior to the army. Ram, a trekking guide with over ten years of experience with Israelis, remarked upon what he saw as their siege mentality. In Ram's view, many of the problems he perceived from Israelis stemmed from the fact that they are and perceive themselves to be victims. He referred here to persecution going all the way back to the slaves in Egypt, a legacy which he believes they're carrying around all the time. He also thought they had a strong feeling of not belonging.

The collectivity of Israeli travelers in India, partly related to the army, affects the way Israelis interact with locals and tourists of other nationalities. For many young Israelis, the backpacking trip is the first extended contact with non-Jews, which contributes to the distinctiveness of the Israeli backpacking experience. While there is contact between Israelis and travelers of different nationalities, most choose to associate with Israelis. It is a common experience for outsiders who join an Israeli group to have their hosts switch back to Hebrew after a minute or so of English, something that happened to the author on countless occasions. Yanivdescribes this tendency:

> Israelis are not so open. We always think we are very different from you. The difference between Israeli and German people for example is pretty big. Most Israelis just can't act in a European manner. If I'm sitting with German people they will speak English all the time. And if they switch to German I'll say, hey, don't speak the Nazi language, and they'll laugh and feel bad and they won't do it. We just go to Hebrew every time.

Nevertheless, many Israeli travelers do associate with people of other nationalities. Generally, these

are the more individually minded travelers that tend to avoid the Israeli groups and enclaves more than theaverage backpacker. The more individualistically inclined travelers consciously use the trip as an opportunity to meet people of other cultures, but this can be difficult due to the sheer number of Israelis in India, as illustrated by the following statement: "I was in my trip avoiding Israelis a bit. First of all I wanted to meet people from around the world. That was one of the main reasons I wanted to travel. But it's hard. At the end of the day it's easier to speak Hebrew. And there are so many Israelis, you can't avoid them. It's become something you do, a norm." Even for those travelers who want to meet other cultures, the attraction of the Israeli community can be strong.

It should be mentioned here again that the Israeli military experience is quite unique and is for many Israelis a non-negotiable existential necessity. Elsewhere, military service is usually temporary, either restricted to a period of conscription or active deployment in a warzone, usually overseas. In Israel, citizens in fact always live in a warzone, and are either about to be conscripted or called up for reserve duty for several months every year until late middle age.

The Israeli backpacker community in India is an intensely collective shared national experience which takes place in a largely Jewish-Israeli cultural environment, and mostly with other Israelis. The army as a social structure is related to the collective nature of the backpacking trip in several ways. The Israeli siege mentality and national identity may be partly responsible for the way Israelis stay together in India. It affects young Israelis interactions with locals and travelers of other nationalities. In this collective liminal space, behaviors associated with coming of age are practiced intensively. This process of coming of age is the topic of the next and final empirical section.

Coming of Age in India: Collective Experience and Personal Changes

In the current literature on backpacking tourism, backpacking is seen as a self-imposed rite of passage which usually occurs during periods of life phase transition (Ateljevic and Doorne 2000). The Israeli post-army backpacking trip is an unusual example of this, first of all due to the fact that it is has evolved into a socio-cultural institution and secondly due to the influence of the army on the coming of age process. According to Maoz (2004) the backpacking trip in India is an example of a "psychosocial moratorium", a liminal phase between adolescence and adulthood characterized by intense role experimentation and search for identity. This final part of the ethnographic analysis will provide a more detailed analysis of the transition to adulthood and personal changes undergone by travelers.

Dealing with Autonomy

When young Israelis finish with the framework of high school and the army, they are suddenly faced with a number of important life decisions, a situation which is experienced as exciting as well as stressful. After a period in which most decisions, even down to clothing and food, have been made for one, Israelis enter a stage of relatively free choice and take the first steps towards adulthood and autonomy. For Rinat, this transition was both intimidating and rewarding, as she explains:

> For me this freedom was very scary because I was in the army for 4.5 years. It's a good place, it's secure. You have food and money. And all of a sudden you make all the choices. If you don't get up in the morning you're not making money. So it was very

> scary for me, and I can tell you that I stayed another year in the army because I was afraid to go out. So I left, and it was actually really fun. I started working, I was a sushi deliverer and I was responsible only to myself! And the bag of sushi. I didn't have to make change even. I lived like this for a year, a simple life, this is what I wanted.

The entry into education or professional life is one of the elements of adulthood that is delayed during the period of military service. Because of the delayed entry into professional life, there is an added degree of pressure behind the choice of a career path. After I mentioned that in Holland it is not uncommon for undergraduates to switch majors, Asaf had the following to say on work and education in Israel:

> You [Europeans] can go to school at 18, do something for a few years, not like your subject, change it, and still have a career. In Israel you can't make those mistakes. You don't have the luxury. And now the thing is that you have to make the biggest decision in your life, the most important one, while you're trying not to think of anything at all. You're trying to enjoy. That's why most people come back from their big trip still not knowing what they want to do. You look at yourself as a 24 year old, I'm not saying the army doesn't mature you, but most Israelis don't feel like they're adults until university. Mentally they still feel like teenagers, you get out of the army and you still feel 18, 19.

This realization of the army's ambiguous effect on the process of coming of age is exemplary of the way young Israelis interpret their military experience. Many young Israelis are in this sense critical of certain military influences that have become embedded in Israeli culture and internalized at the individual level through practical experience. Framing the feeling of returning to adolescence in other words, Johnny comments: "You know, after the army you have the feeling that you need to throw things away. You're 23 and you got out and you want to fuck a few girls and do some drugs. But suddenly I realized that I returned to age 17."

Both the previous interviewees highlighted the feeling of returning to their teens after being discharged. For many young Israelis, the trip constitutes a liminal period before embarking on adult life, where previously restricted behaviors associated with freedom and experimentation are practiced in a condensed timeframe. In this way, young Israelis consciously use the trip as an opportunity to rebalance the elements of adulthood they feel to have missed out on.

Freedom and Experimentation

Due to previous constraints, young Israelis can be said to experiment with drugs in India more intensively than young adults would during the period of psychosocial moratorium in other Western societies (Maoz 2004).After several years of working hard and taking orders, many travelers enjoy simply being able to do nothing on a day to day basis. An interviewee described everyday life among the Israelis in India as *pentsia mukdemet,* or "early retirement". As the concept of free time loses its meaning in India, drinking chai, eating, mingling with the other travelers and smoking jarras become the central activities for many people during the trip. Buying drugs is another important recurring activity, referred to as *lehitargen*, literally to get organized. In this liminal phase, young Israelis go through certain rites of passage which enforce the subjective element of feeling like an adult.

In the liminal rites described by van Gennep (1960) initiands acquire a clean slate by breaking with previous forms and limits. These liminal rites follow a strictly prescribed sequence and take place under the authority of a master of ceremonies (Szakolczai 2009:147). Among the Israelis in India this

authority is often delegated to the collective, but the liminal rites in India certainly follow a prescribed routine. An example of this is the chillum smoking ritual.

Especially in the northern enclaves where soft drugs are inexpensive, abundant, and of high quality, the majority of young Israelis smoke jarras on a daily basis. In Kasol, many travelers start with the day with a "good-morning chillum". Smoking a chillum requires quite a lot of work, and when done intensively, can be a full-time occupation. As this ritual can occupy most of the Israeli day in the north, and users are very particular about its customs, it is worth examining more closely. First, the chillum is removed from its sock. One also needs *safi*, surgical gauze, and a stick, which is used to clean the chillum afterwards. Before smoking, certain Indian phrases are recited.Afterwards, the chillum and its stone are cleaned, ready for the next use. These instructions are extremely precise and Israeli travelers rarely, if ever, diverge from them. The ritualistic quality of the chillum smoking and especially the diligence with which it is kept clean are reminiscent of army habits, such as the meticulous cleaning of one's weapon. In fact, upon the author's first attempt to clean a chillum, an Israeli informed him that he clearly had not done the army as the pipe did not come out clean enough. According to Rinat, the heavy smoking in India is directly related to the military:

> I think there's a connection between the army and drugs, because there someone is always telling you what to do. You're not allowed to smoke in the army, you can really not smoke. So everyone is really afraid of drugs, you start maybe towards the end when you know you can run from this somehow. So everybody does it like pigs after they get out, because now it's allowed. You can do what you want, rent a house and live there and smoke every day. No one is on you.

Asafalso relates this not so much to the drugs themselves, as to the freedom to use them: "It's not necessarily the drugs, it's the fact that you can choose the drugs. I can wake up in the morning and I can say I feel like doing fucking everything, and you know why, because I feel like it. When I was in the army I couldn't do that." The heavy drug smoking can therefore be framed as a kind of resistance against previously established modes of behaving and operating. This institutionalized form of rebellion is shaped by individual reflection and action, but in turn also shapes these subjective dispositions, and is therefore a good example of the interaction between culture and subjectivity (Ortner 2006).

Another interviewee, who himself did not smoke and was to some degree critical of this phenomenon, framed the situation as follows:

> All the Israelis here take it as something normal. And I just don't take it that way. I think it does something to your mind. That's a thing here, where there's a lot of Israelis, there's a lot of drugs. First of all, it's the atmosphere of being away from home. I think it's also really related to the army, during the army you have drug checks so it's really impossible. Most people start smoking before the army, so all the time during the service you're thinking about it. Here they do it without thinking about it at all, not a single thought of whether they're exaggerating. If there is weed then they'll smoke. And listen, it's ok. But once it gets to chemicals, it's a little more dangerous.

The status of drug use as a rite de passage is illustrated by the social distance between smokers and non-smokers. Those who abstain from drug use during the trip are jokingly referred to as *sachim*, the opposite of *satlanim*, stoners. A minority in India, those who do not engage in drug use at all tend to travel with others of the same preference. Forming a rebellion within a rebellion, the non-smokers were sometimes regarded with some suspicion by those who had been fully incorporated in the India

communitas.

Experimentation with drugs in India for many people moves beyond smoking jarras towards harder drugs. The synthetic drugs used in India range from MDMA and Cocaine to LSD, 2CB and other psychedelic compounds. Often these drugs are used at trance parties for which travelers dress up in a colorful display of hippie looking costumes. The use of hard drugs is perceived by many travelers to be of a different order than smoking jarras, as Asaf explains: "Most people here right now are after the army, 95% percent of the Israelis in India right now are post army, trying drugs and yes that's why they're trying chemicals for the first time. People who did it like once or twice back home, are now in India full power." This role experimentation as part of the condensed psychosocial moratorium takes place in a context where responsibility is limited and regulated by the collective. The tension between collectivism and the individual projects of experimentation and search for identity inherent in the Israeli institutionalized backpacking trip can be seen as a reflection of the incongruous and often conflicting effects of military service on the process of coming of age, as well as its residual effects on behavior and worldview.

Hard drugs use in India is sometimes excessive and in certain cases, dangerous. The Beit Chabadis usually charged with caring for those who experience a drug-induced psychotic breakdown, dozens of which happen every year in India. This is referred to among the Israelis as *lehitfalep,* the Hebrew rendition of flipping out.The author observed a few of these cases. Generally, these psychoses are a result of MDMA or LSD use, and according to the Beit Chabadare becoming an increasingly serious problem. For a large part, this extreme use of hard drugs, and its negative consequences, can be related to constraints in the army. While bound by collective norms this drug use can be framed as a type of resistance. It is as if young Israelis seek a period of engaging in habits and behaviors as far removed from the military as possible, which is in India the freedom to do nothing and make liberal use of drugs.

Largely due to the constraints imposed during military service, Israeli behavior during the backpacking trip can be interpreted as a condensed moratorium. In the conventional psycho-social moratorium young adults from industrialized societies are granted a period of free role experimentation in which to find their niche in society (Erikson 1968:156). Arnett, building on this concept, proposes the idea of "emerging adulthood" in modern societies as a demographically and subjectively distinct life period, which is mediated by cultural and social factors (Arnett 2000:478). In Israel, the period of psychosocial moratorium after the army is not just about experiencing free role experimentation, but also about experiencing something which one was supposed to have had but didn't so far.

Reflection on Personal Changes

Backpackers are generally regarded to travel during periods of life transition, and are often in search of a new or augmented identity (Cohen 2003). In this respect, the Israeli case is no different. What distinguishes the Israelis is the reason they collectively search for this new identity. The mood towards the end of the trip is a lot more reflective, after months of intense experiences and personal changes that have now to be interpreted. The travelers who had not long ago been disciples in the north had now become the masters, instructing newcomers not only on customs in India but also on how to achievepersonal growth. Rather than unconsciously internalizing the cognitive schemes transmitted and acquired in the military, the trip is used as a way to reflect upon and alter these influences.

Following subjectivity theory (Ortner 2006), the reflective capacity and agency of young

Israelis will be examined with regards to the process of coming of age as it is experienced by Israelis in India. In Ortner's (2006:107) view, the incorporation of subjectivity, or human consciousness, in contemporary cultural critique requires an examination of the interaction between the cultural formations that affect the thought and behavior of acting subjects and the inner states and reflective agency of these acting subjects. In India, the individual search for identity undertaken by young Israelis is shaped by the institutionalized backpacking trip and the military-cultural formations to which this is related, and simultaneously constitutive of this cultural formation.

For many soldiers, the realization of what happened to them and what they did only came afterwards. The army thus also hampers one's reflective capabilities, capabilities which were reactivated after the service and practiced again in India. The following quote illustrates how these realizations affected one soldier:

> Only after the army I realized the bad things that happened to me, the bad things I'd done. I didn't see it during the service. You do crazy things and they tell you that it's ok. You can hit, you can do stuff, after the army I realized that it wasn't right. I was also mentally unhealthy for a while, I behaved badly at home, instead of being a happy discharged soldier I was closed, depressed, there's not a chance that I would have been able to do an interview like this back then.

Vatakanal was one of the locations where, due to its isolation, travelers were in a sense forced to adopt an introspective attitude. In this tiny Israeli enclave set in the mountains of Tamil Nadu, which only last year opened its first and only falafel house, there are no guesthouses, internet cafes or shops selling hippie bric-a-brac. Travelers rent houses, do their own cooking, and build fires to keep warm. Around the hearth at night, accompanied by the ever-present strumming of guitars, travelers open up to each other and discuss not only the trip, but every aspect of their lives. At an altitude of 2,300 meters, far removed from everything that is familiar, travelers were forced to take a long, hard look at themselves. Yasmin, a girl I interviewed in this enclave, tells her story:

> When I got here I was really confused, really an emotional rollercoaster. The person I am, it takes time for me to really get close to people. I was really a calculating person before, I was thinking about the pastall the time, and what I'm going to do later, and I learned here to start living in the present. I stopped looking back, and it works wonderfully. I can really feel like I got it now. I was trying to be perfect and I'm not. There's something about India, this country allows you to do whatever you want, to be whoever you want. Many times I found myself being so static and it would drive me crazy. That changed when my friend from home came, and we went on this horse riding trip. He always told me that I had a *pkak ba tachat* (a cork in the ass). And this trip just blew my head away, because you feel so free, and you do crazy things. I have guards all the time, it's just the way I am. And after that horse trip, my friend told me he thought the *pkak* was out of my ass.

Yasmin's narrative is related to the concept of subjectivity as being aware of socially enculturated habits and personal behavior (Ortner 2006). The interviewee reflects on changes in self-esteem, mood and worldview, which she relates to the India trip. Eli, also at the end of his trip, describes similar personal changes:

> Once you're finished with the army, you have the ultimate freedom that we didn't have at any point of our lives. After high school you have maybe a few months,but it's not really free,you can't get a tattoo or anything. So afterwards it's the ultimate freedom

> feeling andIsrael is not enough. After India it's hard to speak about the army because it's much more, you know… It's more far away now... I think I changed almost everything I didn't like about myself, the stuff I'm aware of. I know what I want to do in the future, I'm going to change a lot of stuff when I go back home. Also with family and friends. It's reverse inside, not outside. The mind, the spirit. Now I think differently than what I was thinking before. These are the changes. I hope for everybody. I can tell you that not for everybody, but not everybody comes for this.

Alon also describes his personal changes during the trip, phrased here as learning about himself and the outside world: "What do I need to know when I'm living in Israel? I learned so many things here that I didn't know. About myself, about how to treat people. I learned that I could be myself and not be afraid. And I learned that I love myself, and that I have a lot of things to offer. And I learned a lot of things about drugs." All the previously described narratives of personal change, as examples of individual life projects that together constitute the institutional backpacking trip in India, are in turn deeply influenced by the institution and its incorporation in the Israeli military-cultural complex.

Not at all travelers describe these changes, and some do perhaps not undergo them. As Asaf says, "India a good place to reflect, but you really have to make yourself do it. You have to want to deal with your problems in order to approach them in the first place." Interestingly, the individual process of searching for identity for many Israeli travelers in India takes place collectively, and in a relatively familiar cultural environment. Many don't see this as a contradiction. However, some of the more critical Israeli travelers commented on this extensively.

The more critical minded Israelis I interviewed questioned the authenticity of this search for identity among groups of backpackers. Rather than subjectively criticizing personal behavior directly, these interviewees challenged collective emotions and motivations. At the same time, they saw their own behavior to be strongly shaped by these collective norms. Mainly, they criticized Israelis, including themselves, of staying too much in an Israeli sphere of influence. Alon has this to say on the matter:

> Everybody did the same thing, everybody went to the army, came to India, maybe did something along the way. It's the easiest thing to do, come and sit in a restaurant and eat falafel. People forget that they're on a trip. Just sitting around and smoking and looking for themselves. Look how many things there are to see here. Where have we gotten to?

Lior also reflected on and criticized some of the social norms in Israeli society, describing the modes of perception and behavior that may be a result of army and conflict experience:

> I don't know if the army made me any stronger, maybe something I don't recognize in my subconscious. It can block you emotionally, you're not tender to understand, like, weakness and you always want to be tough. What about weakness? I'm working on myself. You have to be aggressive in Israel to get what you want, very sharp and no mistakes. Even if you take two minutes to think about something, you're taking too long.

Lior reflected here on the way he sees Israeli military to have formed his personal behavior and emotions. Not only articulating these perceived influences, he intends to change some of them. Many participants were able to easily describe the modes of perception and behavior they felt characterized the Israeli backpacker collective. While travelers seem to undergo genuine personal changes, there is an apparent contradiction with the collective nature of this process among Israeli young adults. The

culturally specific period of emerging adulthood can be seen to have acquired a more collective character in Israel due to the social and cultural influence of the military.

In the post-liminal phase of the rite of passage, after the transition has been completed, the individual is reincorporated into society with a new status or identity (Szakolczai 2009). Upon return to Israel, most young Israeli travelers are expected to begin adult life by enrolling in higher education or starting a career. Due to the army, this choice has an added degree of pressure behind it. Towards the end of the trip is also when interviewees began to appreciate India more fully, faced with the prospect of returning home. Asaf describes this feeling as follows towards the end of his trip: "I'm at the point now where I wake up and I think, thank God I'm still in India. I know that, back home, I'll be longing for just one morning when I can wake up, go to the *Freekasol*[V] and have a chillum, because everything was so simple two months ago."

At the end of trip, some of the travelers were quite anxious about returning home. In the words of one interviewee.According to Dvir this is related to drugs:

> After 6 months in India, heavy hardcore chillum people, they were terrified of coming back to Israel. They really didn't want to go back. Give me your visa if you can they say. I think the drugs make them that way. It's so nice you know all the day to smoke drugs, from morning until the evening. They can't do it at home, not in this influence or in these dimensions, and not so cheap. And they come back and don't know what to do.

For some veterans of the backpacking trip, returning home can be quite problematic indeed. Yaniv describes how he got a job upon return and ended up quitting and going traveling again after a month because he couldn't handle it. In his estimation, quite a few Israelis encounter this problem after the India trip. Some of the participants who I spoke to after their return reported they had had episodes of depression, and generally had a hard time adjusting to life back home. The liminal phase can, in Turner's (1974) view, be a very unsettling experience.The question then arises whether or not the trip is actually practically adaptive, as well as subjectively adaptive.Similarly, while the heavy drug use during the trip seems to be subjectively useful in the sense that it allows young Israelis to feel mature in a fuller way, it represents a mental health risk which sometimes only becomes apparent upon return.

While most travelers stress the sense of freedom the trip represents, the freedom experienced in India is strongly bound by the collectivity and cultural context of the Israeli backpacking experience. The trip occupies a space in young Israelis' lives between finishing a restrictive framework and learning to deal with making one's own choices, which influences the trip and leads people to consider life ahead. Aware of and able to articulate many of the ways in which the army has influenced them, young Israelis attempt to incorporate the elements of the transition to adulthood they feel have been delayed or constrained. These reflections on personal life projects are constitutive of the Israeli backpacking experience as a cultural formation, and are simultaneously shaped by the trip and the sociocultural context that preceded it.

Conclusion

The Israeli post-army backpacking trip began to acquire mainstream popularity in the mid 1980's and has today developed into a cultural institution. Over 30,000 Israelis travel to India alone each year, and while destinations such as Latin America and Thailand have grown in popularity in recent years, India remains the classic post-army destination. In India, a vast Israeli tourist infrastructure has developed along the "Hummus Trail", where travelers remain largely in an Israeli cultural environment. Several authors have investigated this phenomenon (Maoz 2004; Noy 2002). However, the period of military service has not yet been given sufficient analytic focus. To address this problematic, in this thesis the interaction between the military and the backpacking trip as a cultural institution has been examined. This interaction takes place within two domains.

Within the first domain the military is examined as an institution and social structure. Due to the intractability of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the nation of Israel has been constructed as a military-cultural complex, where the borders between civilian and military life are fluid (Kimmerling 2005). As such, the military has a great deal of influence on society and civilian institutions, as well as individual behavior and worldview (Ben-Eliezer 1998). The post-army backpacking trip, as an Israeli sociocultural institution and an element of the military-cultural complex, is affected by the military in various ways and cannot be understood outside of this particular context.

The military moreover affects the cohesiveness of Israeli travelers in India through the Israeli notion of siege mentality (Bar-Tal and Antebi 1992) and its importance for the Israeli national identity (Ben-Eliezer 1998). Many Israelis perceive themselves to be more cohesive as a group due to the military. The Israeli backpacker community in India is an intensely collective one, and for many represents a shared national experience. Peer pressure is one of the forces motivating Israeli youngsters to travel, as it has become a norm of sorts among this age group. Traveling in large groups and remaining largely in a culturally Israeli sphere, young Israelis intensively practice behaviors associated with coming of age within the confines of the collective. Much of this behavior revolves around experimentation with drugs. Unlike in a traditional psychosocial moratorium, it is not just about experiencing free role experimentation, but about catching up with something that should have happened already. Many Israelis feel they have built up enough moral credit to now deserve a period of freedom and experimentation.

Within the second domain, military service is analyzed as an experience which severely affects the transition to adulthood among young Israelis, by imposing discipline and constraints at an age when most youngsters are enjoying a period of relative freedom and experimentation. Current theories on the transition to adulthood propose the concept of emerging adulthood as a demographically distinct stage with certain elements (Arnett 2000). In the army, certain elements of coming of age are internalized rapidly, while others are constrained or restricted. Soldiers undergo a fragmented transition in the military, which leaves many with the feeling of having missed out on important elements of this passage. For this reason, the Indian backpacking trip can be framed as a condensed psycho-social moratorium (Maoz 2004; Erikson 1968), a liminal phase in which the effects of the army on coming of age are offset. Within this liminal phase, young Israelis attempt to rebalance the fragmented transition to adulthood through experimentation and reflecting upon their modes of conduct and perception. The liminal phase in India can thus be said to have an adaptive quality.

Towards the end of the trip, backpackers became more reflective about their behavior and the personal changes they felt they had undergone in India. Respondents were able to reflect lucidly on Israeli collective behavior in India, and personal changes in behavior and worldview that had occurred during the trip.According to Turner (1974), the search for identity in a liminal phase is a very unsettling experience, which led to stress among many Israelis upon their return home. Narrating the search for identity and the results to which this led, Israelis recounted deep emotional and psychological changes following the trip in India. Together, these personal changes are constitutive of and conditioned by the Israeli backpacking institution, in its turn deeply influenced by the military.

The results of this thesis may indicate a number of fruitful future lines of research. Future studies could examine the growing importance of backpacking tourism as a rite of passage in Western societies. Additionally, more research is necessary on the negative subjective elements of military service and living in an area of intractable conflict.

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Notes

[i] A *jobnik* is a conscript assigned to a non-combat, usually supporting position, such as administration or catering.
[ii] *Aaliyah*, literally 'ascension', is the act of migration from the diaspora to Israel.
[iii] A chillum is a long straight pipe of Indian origin, used for smoking jarras, Indian hashish
[iv] Jachnoon, a savoury pastry dish eaten on the Sabbath, was brought to Israel by Jews of Middle-Eastern descent, or *Sephardim*. Jews of European to descent are usually referred to as *Ashkenazim*.
[v] Freekasol is a popular hangout in Kasol, remarkably lacking a menu in English

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Summary

In Israel, it is has become common for many young Israelis to undertake an extended backpacking trip after the army. This backpacking trip has acquired such widespread popularity that it can be described today as an institution. Over 30,000 Israelis travel to India alone each year, and an extensive tourist infrastructure catering to Israelis has developed all over the subcontinent. These enclaves offer Israeli food, music and Hebrew signposting. Current research on Israeli backpackers in India discusses the army in relation to the trip, but does not analyze the period of military service as a central theme. This is surprising considering the importance of the military in Israel. In this thesis, the relationship between the military and the institutionalized backpacking trip among young Israelis is examined.

Due to the entanglement of military and civilian life in Israel, the army influences Israeli society and citizens in many ways. Showing this complexity therefore requires a multidimensional view of the army. The army's influence on the backpacking trip is shown here within two major domains. Firstly, the military is analyzed as an experience that the imposition of discipline and hardship alters soldiers' transition to adulthood. Secondly, the influence of the military is examined as a social structure which affects the worldview and behavior of Israelis.

Within the second domain, the army as an institution and structure is seen to affect the emotions, worldview and behavior of recruits. In relation to the trip, the army creates a disposition towards siege mentality and strengthened national cohesiveness, which also strengthens the collectivity of the backpacking experience. Within this collectivity, young Israeli travelers attempt to reflect upon and alter certain effects of the military on worldview and behavior. These individual quests together are constitutive of the Israeli institutionalized backpacking trip.

Within the first domain the army can be seen to change soldiers' transition to adulthood. Through hardship and discipline, soldiers acquire some elements of adulthood in an accelerated fashion, will constraining and restricting others. The backpacking trip in India can then be interpreted as an attempt to rebalance this fragmented by transition by allowing young Israelis to catch up with the elements adulthood they feel to have missed out on, such as freedom of choice and experimentation on various levels.

Because of its utility in allowing young Israelis to catch up with the elements of coming of age they feel to have missed out on, the institutionalized backpacking trip is deeply connected to the military. By analyzing the personal changes undergone by travelers in this intermediate phase of life, it has been argued in this thesis that the backpacking trip common among young Israelis can be seen to have a restorative quality.