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### Narratives on Self and the Other among Backpackers

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## TAKING TIME AND MAKING JOURNEYS



Torun Elsrud

# Taking Time and Making Journeys

*Narratives on Self and the Other among Backpackers*



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*To Milton, a 'true' adventurer*



# Acknowledgements

*Time exists so everything doesn't happen at once. Space exists so everything doesn't happen to you.*

(source unknown)

I used to smirk at this often quoted, anonymous, saying because of its accuracy (at least in theory) and, not the least, its comic relevance in relation to backpacking. However, whoever came up with it cannot have written a PhD-dissertation. Heading towards the grand finale, completing the last chapters, preparing for seminars and - finally - a final manuscript, something rather dramatic happens. Time and space actually evaporate (or combust?), and it all happens, to you, at once!

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# Introduction

## A case for sociology

Why use [read waste] time and sociological theory on backpacking when there are so many urgent social matters to attend to?

When I began my research into the backpacking phenomenon in 1996 another doctoral student approached me with the above question. Others have repeated it implicitly on a few occasions since. My interpretation of these inquiries is that they were made in order to redirect my critical attention to more obvious matters of social injustice, to make sure I use sociological skills on power relations, on maltreatment, on inequalities and on matters close and important to home. To those people I can offer some reassurance; do not worry, I do so. I will use some of the space in this introduction to show why backpacking (and tourism in general) is a case for sociology, by recalling a few stories I have been told, or have encountered, during this research project.

\* \* \*

An anthropologist I met, an occasional guide in a rural part of Indonesia, was taking European tourists up a river to a settlement, together with a tour-guide from the area. On arrival they were greeted by the leader of the village, who cheerfully declared that thanks to opening the village to the tourists they now had enough money to put in a cement floor in their 'long-house', a large house with room for many families. This would greatly improve sanitary conditions in the village. He was quickly advised not to, by the 'local' tour-guide. 'If you put in a cement-floor the tourists do not want to come to the village any more and you'll be without this income in the future.' Naturally it is up to the village authorities to decide whether or not to follow such advice, and they are surely smart enough to come up with their own solutions to this problem, but the matter is nevertheless a trial of strength and power. When an institutionalised and highly esteemed behaviour of one group, based on control over money, space and time, challenges not only the actual welfare of another group but also its right to manifest its own choices, by means of money, we definitely have a sociological case of inquiry.

\* \* \*

The Thai island Ko Chang, a backpacker 'favourite' outside Trat, near the Cambodian border, underwent some rather dramatic changes between 1986, when I first saw it, and 1998 when I last saw it. The previously rather quiet beaches fringed by fishing boats now harboured a large number of bungalow businesses, restaurants and shops. In interviews with both travellers and local residents two contradictory images appeared. On the one hand, tourism, as part of a modernisation process, had brought electricity, roads and telephone connections to an increasing number of beach areas on the island. On the other hand, the wealthier tourist industry based in Bangkok or overseas, had bought up much of the coastal area forcing the fishing families inland, away from their normal source of income. This phenomenon, which is easily discarded as structural change, 'natural' development or a modernisation process (whatever that may be), actually consists of people – some winners and others losers.

\* \* \*

In *Vagabond*, no 8, 1994 (pages 59-61), a Swedish travel magazine attracting backpacking readers, we get to know the Thai tuk-tuk-driver (a moped-taxi) Jeng through the eyes of a northern European traveller. Jeng's difficulties in speaking proper English are noted on a number of occasions in the text. 'No ploblem', 'I'm velly, velly solly' writes the writer in an effort to give the reader a fair idea of Jeng's linguistic shortcomings. He continues to make judgements about Jeng by describing his facial expression as that of a wounded dog, or by ascribing to Jeng a certain childlike behaviour, where Jeng is said to possess sudden bursts of happiness and spontaneity for reasons the writer cannot understand. Eventually, the writer throws a bike tyre at the house where Jeng had just picked it up. This puts an end to Jeng's cheerful mood and, we are informed, a sulking Jeng under 'absolute silence' drives the writer and his co-traveller to their 'cold beer'. Towards the end of the article Jeng is left behind and instead we are introduced to the writer's new acquaintance, an 'enormously beautiful' bartender with a 'shy, sweet smile' who threatens his self-control. There is plenty of travel writing of this kind, where events on the road, as they are experienced or described by the travellers themselves, inform audiences in places such as northern Europe. Meeting childlike Jeng and the beautiful bartender through the eyes and pen of a travel writer is not only to witness power in action, but also to witness a definition process aimed at constructing the 'other' as different from a common 'us', the travellers.

\* \* \*

A traveller at a guesthouse in Bangkok claims she is travelling adventurously. She travels without insurance and malaria prophylactics. She searches for peripheral areas, as they are, she claims, a challenge to her. She uses drugs, participates in full moon parties saying it brings her nearer the reality of drug-using 'tribal people'. The adventure, she argues, has freed her from being a prisoner of the stereotype femininity at home. Never again, she claims, will her well-being depend upon a man. Her story is a rather striking example of 'identity creation' from a contemporary, European, perspective and of contemporary female presence in an arena previously considered to be male territory. The backpacker arena is one of many examples, where women can

invest in the self-confidence and competence they have been robbed of by dominant systems of thought. However, in doing so they also participate in the continuous construction of 'western'<sup>1</sup> identities defined against stereotyped images of the 'other' in places travellers visit.

\* \* \*

There is a television series supplied by Swedish public service television, in this case channel 2, called Wilderness (Vildmark). In the autumn of 2003 it switched from broadcasting fishing and nature expeditions to joining 'Bobbo the explorer' on his expeditions among people of the 'third world' who are portrayed as never having seen a 'white man before' or are 'the last people of their kind'.<sup>2</sup> Bobbo's mission may be altruistic on an individual level, in that he, at least partly, seeks to give voice to small groups of people who have been neglected by governments and big companies. However, the way the program is presented should be an alarm signal to everyone interested in the connection between tourism and power. The decision, in the year 2003, by Swedish television to incorporate a program about people (of otherness) underneath a 'wilderness' umbrella is evidently not an unfortunate coincidence. A visit to their web-page exposes a further linkage between nature and the people Bobbo visits. The presentation of Bobbo's expeditions is positioned not under the heading 'society' where programs about *people* normally are presented, but under 'nature', a place usually reserved for elks, lions, tigers, foxes and national parks.

\* \* \*

'Find yourself in India' is the message on the front cover of Vagabond, no 8, 2002, directing readers to page 60 where they are greeted with the introductory words 'Simply being in Bodhgaya. Stop turning pages in the magazine. Stay here. Now. Sit down, light some incense and breath deeply. Through the force of thought we are now heading to India, to Bodhgaya, to a tree, to a journey within'. The subsequent text is a tribute to the total presence in an eternal now and to its importance in opening up for an inner journey. This is followed by a guide for travellers seeking harmony, inner stillness, relaxation of the senses and freedom of the soul, in which both the quality of and the directions to different meditation and healing methods in India are supplied. Researching travelling offers ample opportunities to investigate narratives on time, temporality, linearity and development.

\* \* \*

A traveller, upon arriving in a town in Nepal, finds that he is finally doing something for and by himself. His self-esteem and individuality is finally showing in that he manages to turn down the 'touts', wanting to direct him to a part of town he does not want to go to. However, the advice to do so was given to him by a *Lonely Planet* guidebook, which – given its popularity among backpackers – gives thousands of other travellers to the area the same advice. The paradox embedded in 'institutionalised individuality' is intriguing, as is the fact that this person is acting out a rather dominant discourse of 'individuality', as a quality found in quests into a constructed 'otherness'.

\* \* \*

In the year 2003 a friend appears on my doorstep wearing her new pants recently bought in a medium-sized town in Sweden. They are, it appears, very similar to the Thai fishing pants I first encountered in Thailand in 1986. At that stage they sat on – yes – Thai fishermen and a few so-called seasoned and off-the-beaten-track travellers and were only found in Thai stores catering predominantly for Thai consumers. In the 1998 fieldwork in backpacker areas in Bangkok, Thailand, I found them on plenty of backpackers, and on the shelves of the street vendors catering predominantly for backpacker customers. In 2003 I find them on my doorstep and, after giving it only a little thought, I am not surprised. The same mobility in both space and time can be noted in relation to many other forms of backpacker style; music, tattoos and piercing, drug-taking or, why not, backpacker style living conditions? In this sense backpacking is not very different from punk, hip-hop or new age, which travel the globe and calendar in lifestyle packages. Backpacking is an *avant-garde* movement and, as such, interesting not least as an indicator of future life-style alternatives.

\* \* \*

These are but a few of a myriad of stories making backpacking a worthwhile topic to study. Other, more detailed, examples will follow in this book, pointing at the sociological relevance of approaching this seemingly marginal field with an awareness of its 'situatedness' in contemporary Europe and its 'cultural cousins' the United States and Australia. Issues of power, gender, identity construction and the importance of 'difference' for constructing 'selves', encountered in backpacker interviews 'on-the-road' – in areas that some people would consider geo-politically peripheral – are at the heart of what it is to be a cultural being under the influence of 'western' discourses.

Having said that, *the purpose of this project has been to seek knowledge about the meaning ascribed to the journey by the travellers themselves, to focus on their testimonies in action, talk and written texts, as narratives loaded with cultural and subjective values and beliefs. I have interpreted these narratives as 'stories about selves', as constitutive parts in ongoing and never-ending identity projects.* In line with this focus, the voice of the 'other' who caters for, utilises, likes or dislikes the travellers' presence, remains silent at least as first hand sources of information. Yet, a critical examination of the image of the 'other', expressed in travel narratives, will to some extent speak up for those unheard voices.

## Complexities of backpacking

Löfgren (1990, 1999) and O'Dell (1999) have clearly shown that travelling and tourism is something one must learn. Like them, I dispute all attempts to explain travelling with references to biology, to manifestations of high testosterone levels or reptile

brains. Tourism, the way we see it today, is a cultural pastime, deeply linked to particular spaces and historic developments. Those interested can trace the presence of travel discourses in history books as well as in contemporary social gatherings, on television shows, in newspaper texts and on the Internet. Given the nature of discourses, these are far from value free. They structure power-relations, the good, the bad and the ugly within tourism practice. In travel stories some tourists appear to be better tourists than others, some say a particular gender is most fitting for particular tourist acts. Others tell stories which 'racialise' people (of 'otherness') into essentialist categories. Yet other discursive statements indicate to us what travel acts and practices are worthy of engaging in, and by whom. Indeed, maps of the world of tourism – of places, experiences and people – are both well-structured and hierarchical, guiding tourists in different directions depending on where they came from and their intentions for the future.

Backpackers are tourists who normally spontaneously reject the term 'tourist'. Their form of travelling, they often say, is better, more 'cultural', more 'authentic', than that of their unfortunate, sometimes even stupid, sisters and brothers occupying seats in charter flights, and beds in three-star hotels. Despite the constructed and elitist self-image that this represents, I have chosen to remain 'true' to the backpackers' own labelling of themselves as 'travellers' or 'backpackers'. While I recognise that this is yet another form of tourism, the fact that some tourists claim they are not tourists is interesting in itself. I needed a way to frame my topic and what better way to do it than to use the words of my informants. A later section in this introduction will address this matter in more detail.

Backpackers, despite their quest for 'budgeting', are seldom poor and oppressed, nor are they people without choices. Not all, but many, will return to their home countries, to a home of some sort, to some money in the bank or a job offer. They are often proud of their life-story investments, ready to use narratives of travel in order to express 'adventurous' and 'courageous' identities. Evidently then, to analyse long-term travelling is a matter of turning the focus on to those with power rather than those without.

The belief that the backpacker is a particularly 'good', 'ethically concerned' and strongly independent traveller reaches, I believe, far beyond the backpacker congregations on the road. Critically addressing discourses of domination in backpacking to an audience in Sweden, sometimes triggers off surprised and even angry responses. Often critics want me to admit that backpackers are better tourists than other tourists, that backpackers respect the people and countries they visit and that backpackers experience more than both the charter tourists and the Jones' at home do. Critically examining independent travelling is to strike right at the heart of the contemporary ideal of individuality. Having said that, I have not persisted with studying backpacking for so long just to be able to complain about its inherent oppressive qualities. A one-sided focus on its intrinsic links to power exertion and domination would indeed create a rather unbalanced understanding of the phenomenon. There are other interesting themes to explore in the backpacker circuit, which expose peculiar, yet rather creative, attempts by individuals to find intelligible ways to be and navigate in a

world beyond their own control, a world of uncertainties, time and space disembedding (Giddens, 1984, 1991) and abstract sociality (Asplund, 1987a). Topics of adventure, time and gender, which are central in this book, are deeply entangled with such mending processes.

It is quite possible to be amused by the peculiar ways some travellers take to express adventurous identities, through choice of clothing, food, hairstyles or itinerary. Yet, it is also relevant to view their styles and practices as an unavoidable, notwithstanding inventive, reaction to a society in which individuals struggle with feelings of not being seen, respected and responded to in relation to who they *are*, but rather to what they *do* and *how* they do it. For instance, transcending the borders of 'normality', indulging in those areas with 'liminal' qualities outside or away from what is considered to be the ordinary life of the Jones', are considerable investments in a struggle to become *someone* instead of just *anyone*.

A similar complexity can be addressed in relation to time. The long-term journey has rightfully been regarded as 'time-out', possible only for a few, while the majority are caught up in duties and economic restrictions. Nevertheless, it is a symbol of power opposition in that it is portrayed as a means to regain control over one's own time, of having escaped the power exerted through clocks, calendars, norms of punctuality and work schedules.

A gender approach unveils yet other complexities. Travelling women, just like men, fall into the old discursive primitivist trap of ascribing childlike and immature behaviour to the 'other', that is the people living in the countries visited. Those interested will, however, also find aspects in their stories that are unquestionable challenges to the stereotypical image of femininity stressed at home.

Thus, the matter at hand and its relation to power is a complex matter. Above I have provided glimpses of an array of topics yet to come in this book. Apart from introducing the subject, my purpose has been to convince potential believers in a 'liminality' of tourism to read on.

## Ethnography as situated knowledge

Complexity has also characterised the methodological work. I have used a number of methodological tools, all influential in ethnographic approaches to social reality. Qualitative, life-story interviews have been coupled with observations and an analysis of books and magazines that are popular among travellers. All in all 40 interviews were conducted; some of them were carried out in Sweden with travellers after homecoming but the majority of them were carried out in Thailand with mainly northern European travellers. A few of the interviewees came from the United States and Australia. A greater part of the informants have been women as the female travel experience, as well as the female presence on the travel track, has been neglected in previous research and I found it relevant to pay particular attention to their accounts. Needless

to say, their interpretations of travelling are as valid, as useful and as relevant as those of men, in addition to being more urgent in that their perspectives have been overlooked in so much of the previous work on tourist issues. I have also carried out two months' participant observation in backpacker areas in Bangkok and on the island Ko Chang in eastern Thailand, giving me reason to look into the language of symbols such as haircuts, tattoos or clothing. Eating out with other backpackers made me aware of the importance of food in the construction of (adventurous) identities and so forth. Alongside interviewing and observing, I have read 'backpacker' material such as popular books, guidebooks and backpacker magazines. Among those is Garland's *The Beach* (1996) – a favourite among many informants – which, when finally filmed on location in Thailand, caused an uproar among Thai nature conservationists claiming that it permanently damaged a whole beach area, in itself a sign of the relationship between backpacking and non-backpacking activities and between backpacking and power. Among this literature are also a number of *Lonely Planet* guidebooks, which are claimed to be the number one source of written information among backpackers. I have also tried to stay updated on the content in the Swedish travel magazine *Vagabond* and occasionally read the British *Wanderlust* and the North American *Escape*.

All of this together has given me many opportunities for 'cross-examinations' but, above all, it has supplied me with an awareness of a presence of many different forms of text and talk used in the construction of the journey and all its components. In addition, this multi-faceted approach makes heavy demands upon the presentation of ontological, epistemological and methodological concerns, which luckily has granted me an awareness of the strength and advantages of a situated knowledge perspective on reality. I hope the chapter on methodology in this book will convince others too. Nevertheless, a few reservations in relation to what this work includes and leaves out are in order before this introduction is concluded with a lay-out of the book.

## West goes east and other stories

All books and research projects, including this one, have their shortcomings. Listing all interesting discussions that have been consciously or unconsciously overlooked or underdeveloped in my work is far beyond the limits of this dissertation. However, there are a few points I feel it necessary to make prior to reading its chapters. These are related to a number of discursive stories about tourism and independent travelling. Left veiled they would detract from the arguments to come.

## Only 'westerners' travel

Against my better judgement I have from time to time used the concepts 'west' and 'western' when referring to specific discursive statements, systems of meaning and even origins of the travellers involved. Backpacking, I have claimed, is a highly esteemed practice in the western world. Clearly there is no such thing as a western world. The concept itself has the unpleasant tendency to reify, to make something viable and demarcated – as for instance a set of nations – when we are really talking about a discursive home of some sort, capable of spilling over, across national and linguistic boundaries.

Thinking in terms of west and east produces and reproduces a cognitive division between people and places in which it is often silently agreed that the west is reserved for progress, science, development and democracy while the east caters for those that 'have not made it' yet, for under-development, dictatorship, tradition and myth. This is not a true story. This is brainwork produced during the Age of Enlightenment and onwards.

I would have used a different concept, had the purpose of this project been different. Being as it is, and with no more suitable alternatives given by the research community, I have accepted the use of the concept on occasions, but not as an existing entity in its own right. I see it as a cognitive home for different discursive statements (as structures of thought and meaning) in the service of a continuing dualistic and modernistic project. Besides, using a west-east division is relevant given my constructivist approach to the topic. As long as my informants and the theories I have used see the world in dualities its consequences are indeed 'real'.

Having said that, I want to make readers aware of the fact that not all backpackers come from countries commonly described as 'western'. During my fieldwork, for instance, while looking for informants, I met travellers carrying Brazilian, Kenyan and Japanese passports, and who could have either contested or admitted to carrying a 'western' mind, but language difficulties on both sides prevented successful interviews. Although neglected by much of contemporary tourism research, those the 'western mind' has constructed as 'others' are tourists too, in their home countries as well as abroad (Alneng, 2002, forthcoming). This definitely calls for a critical investigation into the social construction of knowledge within tourism research itself.

However, it does not make inquiries into a notion of 'west-east' division irrelevant and as Alneng (2002:134, 137) suggests (emphasis in original); 'the world is not at everybody's feet; it is unevenly 'tourable.' (...) *How* one is mobile – vacational or vocational, freewheeling or fleeing – *its restrictions* and *if* one is mobile at all, may very well be the paramount parameters of stratification in the world today'. I maintain that travellers from Europe or countries sharing its history and many of its dominant discourses, such as the United States or Australia, are a majority in the field of long-term 'independent' travelling. The belief among these backpackers in a 'western' world can actually increase an awareness of how this division between east and west is maintained and subsequently why the voice of the 'other' is so seldom listened to in ordinary day-to-day life, or in scientific enquiries. An exception regarding scien-

tific interest is found in some anthropological accounts, where, unfortunately, the voice of the 'other' often (unintentionally) reinforces and accentuates 'otherness' rather than pointing to similarities over time and space (Hutnyk, 1996).

### **Subordinated 'locals' – victims of globalisation?**

Closely related to the story above is that of the – 'poor locals' – being victims of globalising trends and passive receivers of 'western' tourists. The label people at a destination are given indicates how firmly this assumption is tied to our structures of thought and talk. The term 'local' gives the impression of someone who remains, both in action and movement, only in the immediate surroundings making little difference to the world 'outside'. *Travellers* or *tourists* on the other hand, mobile as they are both semantically and geographically, appear in a contrastive manner as the 'globals', those that transport and reform thoughts, ideas and artefacts on a global scale. Consequently locals are seen as passive victims in relationship to an industry, which at the best of times is thought to supply them with money to become economically and cognitively freed from states of domestic oppression. In the worst case they are seen as faced with yet more oppression from an industry showing no mercy to 'local' customs and traditions.

In many ways this dissertation will, unfortunately, not do much to balance or challenge these one-sided perspectives, due to its focus, not on people living in tourist areas, but on the meaning the journey has to the tourist. Following the issues addressed and the questions asked it cannot properly answer to what extent so called 'locals' can control the processes in tourist areas or to what extent they make use of the situation or feel left out. On the other hand, it can unveil the construction process going on in travel tales and practices and thereby indirectly alter the image of the passive local. By directing focus on how the 'locals' are stereotyped into collective and essentialist categories in order to make travel stories sound better, the symbolic surplus added to the crude material of travelling becomes visible.

However, as this dissertation does not focus on travelling from the viewpoint of the 'local', a few reservations are in order, which might prevent possible misinterpretations in sections where the 'poor locals' are discussed as constructions serving the success of (western) travel narratives. My work is based on a firm belief that 'locals', regardless of all the attempts to group them and describe them in essentialist terms, can be just as individual as any traveller. There are undoubtedly honest and dishonest people among them, just as there are jokers, bores, atheists, firm believers, newspaper readers, music lovers, mothers and fathers. There are certainly people with influence and people without, people with a great materialistic 'need' and people without, just like where I live. In addition, there is nothing to say that their living conditions in villages, townships and cities do not suffer or profit equally from similarly complex living conditions as is the case in the places where the travellers come from. Further, I oppose the tendency within the field of tourism research to spontaneously label such research which critically addresses power issues involved in the construction of

'otherness' as 'culture conservatism'. Arguing that tourists – being the structural force they are – exert power through being able to relatively freely choose travel space, time and action, and through constructing an unfavourable image of the other, is not to favour eternal preservation of 'local' lifestyles. Nor is it to suggest that the 'local' has nothing to say or do about the situation. When directing attention to power structures within travelling, this dissertation rests upon a conviction that people, regardless of what place they call home, should be able to control and form their own environment and 'progress'. It should be obvious that what I see as the opposite of uncontrolled change (sometimes occurring in beach areas following backpacker movements) is not non-change but change under the influence of 'local' democratic processes.

### **Only young people travel**

There is a point in describing backpacking as a youth phenomenon or as a preoccupation for 'young adults' (see for instance Tveit, 2002). Plenty of backpackers are what one would refer to as 'young', in their twenties and thirties, and many of them probably agree that individual long-term travelling is a youth phenomenon. I have, however, found this categorisation too narrow to do justice to reality. While young people are probably in the majority in backpacker areas there are plenty of travellers who are not particularly young if we are speaking in a physical/biological sense. I have interviewed some of them – with the oldest having reached 71 – and I have spoken to and observed large numbers of backpackers who most likely have reached the age of retirement and have enough time and money to travel. Still the main problem with such a narrow categorisation is not one of proportions but one of interpretations. As Gubrium, Holstein and Buckholdt (1994) have pointed out, our linear thinking and view upon ageing as a temporal stretch in which one moves from naivety to maturity blocks out other, and at times more relevant, perspectives on a particular phenomenon.

Undoubtedly, valid knowledge can be produced through approaching the topic of long-term independent travelling from youth theory perspectives, and I have also incorporated perspectives upon youth and adolescence when I have found them suitable. However, a one-sided account of travel as a youth phenomenon circumscribes the topic and may lead to a disregard of important discourses being shared – through commitment or contestation – by travellers of all ages. Also the tendency, to view development as a linear process, and to regard youth and subsequently youth travelling, as a less developed, immature stage in life masks the possibility of viewing youth expressions as serious and relevant signals of problems and possibilities encountered in everyday life, while immunising adult travellers from the naivety of the 'young'. Consequently, I have not approached the topic as solely a youth phenomenon, nor have I divided interviewees or their answers into age categories, but instead focused on travel discourses and their appearance among narrators with a view of long-term independent travelling as an expression of a particular system of beliefs shared by peo-

ple of many post-industrial nations, of many ages and both genders. The latter brings us to another important 'truism' worth some consideration.

### **Men travel – women remain**

On a number of occasions and for several reasons I have been asked why a gender awareness is needed in a research project into backpacking. One reason has to do with the long-lasting discourse of masculinity in which men are mobile while women are not. Why should I study women of mobility as long as men dominate the backpacker circuit? First of all and regardless of reality, knowledge about a minority group is no lesser knowledge than accounts of the majority. Second, in this case the discursive claim is even false. Women backpack long-term just as intensively as men. Jarvis (1998) conducted a survey in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore in 1998 with more than 1300 backpackers. 47 percent of them were women. In the Scandinavian backpacker population, from age 18 to 24, women actually outnumbered men. Hillman (1999), in addition, has found that women outnumber men as solo-travellers in Australia. My own observations in backpacker areas support such arguments. Thus, the proportion of women can never be a reason to discard a gender approach.

Another reason to question a gender perspective is related to my own results and the claim that women travellers are just as 'adventurous' as male travellers. I have been asked about the relevance of applying a gender perspective to a topic in which men and women go about their business in a similar manner. The answer is rather simple. People engage in activities for a number of individual, as well as cultural, social – and gendered – reasons. Furthermore, the way their activities are interpreted by themselves and by an audience vary. There is so far no evidence suggesting that a female adventurous act is interpreted similarly to how a male adventurous act is received. On the contrary, it seems that often the adventurous female is not noticed or is discarded as an 'oddity', as an exception to the rule. Research, having been preoccupied with adventure and adventurism as an expression of masculinity, is one of many signs of this. Through, for instance, directing almost all the attention to male travellers, adventurers or travel writers, while neglecting all but a few of the 'mobile' females, the social construction of 'odd female travellers' has been maintained over time (for more detailed critique see Mills, 1991, 2002). Additional signs will be addressed later in this work, specifically in Chapter 4.

Having argued for a gender approach I need to make some distinctions. I would not go as far to say that a gender analysis is the major focus in this work. I have decided to show its centrality in one particular chapter but its presence may be felt in the other chapters as well and particularly in the methodological discussion. I have worked with a number of sociological and cultural studies tools not particularly known for their gendered awareness, adjusting, criticising, balancing, supporting or substituting them when their general arguments fail to account for gendered realities and experiences.

## Free backpackers – shackled package tourists

There is yet another story which needs to be recognised prior to a continued reading. It is related to the common notion that backpacking, or independent travelling, is a road to freedom. Free and individual backpackers are often placed in opposition to the member of a package tour collective who is said to lack both originality and independence in relation to the tourist activities and activities at home. This oppositional relationship between the two forms of tourism is an unavoidable topic on different occasions in the chapters to come as it is central to the construction of a backpacker self.

The story is attached to a number of stereotypical descriptions, which at first sight seem to fit the claim to freedom in the backpacker trail. Stereotypical backpackers, it is claimed, at least off-the-beaten-track travellers, encounter situations that put both stock of knowledge and routine behaviour to the test. Many backpackers travel on a rather vague itinerary being able to choose destination and time of departure at the last minute, including also the length of trip. Often backpackers arrive in a new area without having made reservations at a hotel, leaving them with many options. The stereotypical charter or package tourists on the other hand are stuck with a pre-booked arrival and departure date and are forced to stay at one pre-booked hotel. The package tourists talk to people at the destination through a guide and must go when the tour bus honks. Or so the story goes.

First of all, stereotypes seldom fit reality. Backpacking as a form, containing a number of possible practices, perhaps offers more possibilities for individual choice and movement than the package tour as a form does. However, there are backpackers with pre-booked tickets and guesthouses, who travel mainly with chartered buses and eat at 'tourist places'. There are also charter tourists who skip their pre-booked hotel and head out to so-called peripheral areas on local buses. Differentiating between a belief in the backpacker as a particular type and in backpacking as a form of tourism is central to an understanding of the phenomenon. I will soon explain why, in a section concerning the difference between typifying people and typifying their stories.

Second, there are, sociologically speaking, structures from which you can never free yourself, regardless of which form of tourism you engage in. The meaning-bearing structures of culture, mediated through language, penetrate most forms of individual experience. Thus, I have approached my topic with a conviction that independent travelling and the practices conducted and experiences expected are tied to systems of meaning, which are positioned in both time and space. This is, for instance, in line with the previous arguments that there exists a belief in a 'west' and a 'non-west' and that these two differ in more ways than they present sameness and that one is more progressive, modern and developed than the other. The notion that those qualities are inherent to 'western' societies is discursively formed. These constructed qualities are manifestations of a mainly European cultural consciousness and at least partly passed on by scientists, colonisers and adventurers of historical times. This conviction has most certainly influenced the following chapters.

A traveller performing a culturally sanctioned act contributes to discursive survival and cultural story-production. Yet, a traveller can be quite unaware of her<sup>3</sup> legacy when she enters her round-the-world trip. To her, the journey is indeed an act of freedom and often a sign of respect for cultures other than the one she feels she belongs to. To her, the journey can be a way to invest in more symbolic capital through bringing home a collection of travel-stories, or it can be a way to try to end a relationship at home, be it to a person or to a suppressing femininity. She can embark on a trip she feels will lead to self-respect and independence. Similar, as well as different, expectations can be held by male travellers.

While being a sign of the difficulties encountered in trying to unite an understanding of structures and an understanding of individual practice, this is not as contradictory as it first seems. It is through individual creativity that structures and institutions are formed and reformed. Individuals are tied to structures, by language, culture and maps for actions that are socially constituted. However, the individual in most cases has the choice of heading one way instead of another, of acting one way rather than another and of saying one thing instead of another and so forth. Although the amount and types of choices available for a given agent depend on her or his individual, cultural and social prerequisites it is – within the social and cultural framework from which one operates – possible to reflexively choose between different pathways, to oppose and question given conditions. That some of the choices we make seem to revive the very conditions we oppose is a different story.

Thus, the fact that almost all chapter headings in this book contain the words *creation* or *creativity* is by no means a coincidence. It is indicative of a particular ontological perspective, prevalent through the whole book. By using nouns pregnant with action, practice and process I have wanted to make this obvious; I see individuals as active rather than passive and as participants rather than bystanders. I see people as creative human beings almost always ready to construct whatever it takes to make their world explicable. This is not necessarily a sign of an optimistic view of the conditions of societies and communities. Action and creativity, in the sociological and metaphorical sense that I use them, can also frame quite threatening states that individuals can experience, forcing them to use whatever resources they have to go on in the world, to find their meanings as individuals facing rather chaotic conditions.

Furthermore, while these actions by the actors themselves are often regarded as both inventive and imaginative, they frequently reproduce the institutions that triggered them. Sometimes this circumstance shows itself as a paradox as in the case of individuality. Individuality as an escape from ‘structural oppression’ commits suicide the moment its adherents become so many that they form a new structure. Backpacking is a good example of this. Individual, often ‘adventurous’, travellers, guided to peripheral tourist settings by word of mouth or a *Lonely Planet* guidebook, are sometimes shocked to find that their efforts have been deemed useless – by the sighting of a backpacker congregation or a tourist bus directed there by the same stories.

## The making of a backpacker type

Problems of typification, as mentioned in relation to the constructed differentiation process between travellers/backpackers and tourists, are by no means something I can claim as my own discovery. It seems backpackers have an endless concern with keeping their lifestyle borders clean from intruders be it 'the Jones' at home, the tourists at travel destinations, the 'sun-sea-sex backpackers' within backpacker communities, or the 'locals' at destinations. Andersson-Cederholm's (1999) dissertation on backpacking as a search for the *extraordinary*, as well as Tveit's (2002) fairly recent account of backpacking as a *youth phenomenon* both point at the centrality of differentiation, to establish a hierarchy among tourists and backpackers. The backpacker, as they both note, is suitably referred to as the *anti-tourist*, in so far as the concept is used to describe a person who defines themselves<sup>4</sup>, as the opposite of what the tourist is thought to be (see also Damm, 1995). In this oppositional relationship lines are drawn not only between backpackers and other tourists but also between *ages*, *genders*, and accumulated *experience capital* among backpackers. The more tourist-like in style and behaviour, the less one is a backpacker. Another line is drawn between backpackers and so-called 'locals'. 'Locals', it appears, become distinction markers on at least two counts – as symbols of successful encounters with otherness by backpackers earning status in the backpacker community, and as 'mirrors' of individual introspection and self-definition. I call these efforts at distinguishing *construction* processes, and will continue to do so throughout this book as this work and my analysis rest upon an ontological conviction that what are thought of as truisms do not necessarily have to be real. They might just be real in their consequences as people believing in them will continue to make them happen.

Having said as much there is no point, at this stage, in repeating previous and convincing presentations of the typification process going on among backpackers in order to construct the backpacker. Besides, this construction process in progress at backpacker destinations will become obvious through the course of this book. Instead, I will present certain previous attempts by researchers to typify the backpacker. By doing so I also want to position my own work within a research community and the influences it owes credit to.

### **The ancestral home of the backpacker**

One of the questions research has tried to answer is from where the backpacker phenomenon has inherited its ideas, mode of travelling, and values. One ancestral home, often discussed, has been found in the so-called *grand tour* of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (see Andersson-Cederholm, 1999; Leed, 1991; Towner, 1985; Tveit, 2002; Urry, 1990). Considered a preoccupation, mainly for European upper-class men conducted around Europe in search of education, refinement and higher status, it involved some of the aspects said to belong to contemporary backpacking

– such as individual growth, experience density, novelty and self-articulation. Similar to Andersson-Cederholm (1999) Leed (1991) and Löfgren (1990, 1999) I, however, find there are more complex historical discourses informing backpacking, making a single focus on the *grand tour* inconclusive.

Leed (1991), followed by Andersson-Cederholm (1999), for instance, suggests that in order to understand the homage to individual quests, to risk-taking and adventure found in so many backpacker narratives we need to glance much further back in history, to discourses of pilgrimage, to medieval wanderlust and colonial exploration, some of which initially are thought to have been carried out out of necessity rather than by desire and free choice. What marks the beginning of modern tourism is, thus, not so much the crude act of travelling but the notion of a free man *choosing* to travel, which has since become a core element in a ‘western’ consciousness. Leed (1991:14, also cited in the same context by Andersson-Cederholm 1999:35), claims:

For the history of travel is in crucial ways a history of the West. It recounts the evolution from necessity to freedom, an evolution that gave rise to a new consciousness, the peculiar mentality of the modern traveler.

I may not be totally convinced of the sharp line drawn between a pre-modern necessity and modern western freedom. A comparison between different levels of freedom over time can never be anything but biased by the value attached to the concept during the time of investigation. Pilgrimage for instance, despite its cultural and religious importance attaching to it an aura of necessity, may have been experienced by individuals as a free choice of action. Nevertheless, I am convinced that when wanting to search for the ancestors of contemporary backpacking it is necessary to take so called ‘pre-modern’ movements into account. In addition to pilgrims, medieval adventurers and colonial explorers and writers, a history of backpacking should acknowledge its roots in early scientific expeditions where travel was motivated by a demand for more knowledge and a need for increased understanding of all sorts of living conditions (see Leed, 1991).

Further, adding a class perspective, we find that the roots of independent, off-the-beaten-track travelling can be traced to the bourgeoisie rather than the working class. Löfgren (1990, 1999; see also Frykman and Löfgren, 1979) writing on the history of vacationing shows convincingly how the tourist movements in Scandinavia (as in other European countries) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are tied to the development of an infrastructure and of the home as a safe-house, needing departures and arrivals to remain as such. The relatively wealthy bourgeoisie in urban areas managed to maintain the distinctions between free time and work time, between successful, yet overworked, urban individuals and unsuccessful collectives of workers and farmers, through escaping to summer houses in rural areas, to beach areas and to hikes in the wilderness. The quest for individuality, practiced by the bourgeoisie and expressed through tourism, has undoubtedly become more widespread, and travel as a way of manifesting it remains successful, although the destinations rendering symbolic value have changed. In addition, the complex position of the farmer in

this act of (earlier) distinction is sociologically intriguing and similar in position to 'the local' in today's travelling to nations considered 'poor' and 'behind' in time. While the farmer in rural Sweden during this period in history was thought to lack hygiene, manners and social competence, in other words was seen as dirty and ridden by spontaneous outbursts, he nevertheless became the object of attraction when the bourgeoisie left their city homes for their summer houses. Parallel to a ridiculing of the farmer was thus nostalgia and a longing for the pure and undistorted life in the countryside, far away from the chaotic urban and public life of a developing industrialism. Such complexities and contradictions are much more than past peculiarities in the history of tourism.

A figure not acknowledged by very many tourism researchers is that of the ancestress. Most researchers addressing the topic of gender agree that the 'generalised normal' traveller is a man, both in theory and common knowledge (see Bauman, 1995; Clifford, 1992; Goffman, 1967; Leed, 1991; Riley, 1988; Ryall, 1988; Scheibe, 1986; Swain, 1995 and Veijola and Jokinen, 1994). It is important to keep in mind that this generalised traveller is *a construction* that strikes a discordant tone not only in facing contemporary *reality* but also when looking at travelling of the past. The absence of female ancestors to contemporary backpacking is indicative not of factual circumstances but of the lack of interest in their presence in travel contexts. Researchers into travel literature, such as Blunt (1994), Mills (1991, 2002) and Pratt (1992) have, however, managed to correct the image somewhat by directing light upon female travel writers such as Mary Kingsley, Isabella Bird, Flora Tristan, Maria Callcott Graham, Alexandra Tinné or Mary Wollstonecraft but, equally important, they have also shown that a fair number of unnamed women have travelled in the past. The failure to acknowledge this says more about the interest of the general public and the research communities than about reality. Undoubtedly the possibilities for solo female travelling were fewer in the past, and the practice available predominately to a rather limited group of European middle-class women. Yet their function as female examples in a world of travel, described as masculine, should not be ignored if we are to understand the history and popularity of tourism in general and backpacking in particular.

As Mills (1991, 2002) has convincingly argued, these women travellers of the past have had to handle an uneasy relationship between conflicting discourses, seemingly finding no self-evident position, linguistically or argumentatively, in a practice carved out as an encounter between a masculine traveller and a (feminine) otherness. So, for example, Isabella Bird is forced to find a number of excuses for wearing pants while horseback-riding in the Rocky Mountains, in order to secure her image of being a proper lady while also being a traveller (see Ryall, 1988). Other women travellers have been analysed as carrying out a delicate balancing act between belonging, on one hand, to the 'western' and 'European' community exploring lands of 'otherness' and on the other hand being accustomed to being the 'other' in western discourse (see Mills, 1991).

Issues such as these will be discussed at various places in the chapters to come. Here I just want to direct attention to the lack of attention to female travelling in the past, suggesting that a change of interest may not just reveal a presence in numbers

but also other ways to theorise and understand the linkage between travelling of the past, and travelling at present.

Summing up the arguments, I can only admit that this has been a far from conclusive presentation of potential historical ancestor types informing backpacking, or the theories addressing such issues. Their discursive family tree is far more extensive and complex than can be accounted for in a dissertation focusing predominantly on contemporary travelling. Undoubtedly, too, the historical discourses which have evolved into an interest in backpacking can also be traced in much less mobile practices, from within the processes of urbanisation and industrialisation in places the travellers call their homes. This rather brief historical presentation has, nevertheless, served the purpose of positioning backpacking as part of a rather complex historical development rather than as an expression, solely, of contemporary trends in current tourism and everyday life.

### **From backpacker type to form**

Typification and categorisation are common practice among researchers. In this context research into tourism and backpacking is no exception. The most persistent and commonly cited model has been presented by Cohen (1979), who has ordered 'modes' of travelling according to motivational factors among tourists and their attachment or lack of attachment to their own 'cultural centres' at home. Tourist modes stretch from *recreational*, over *diversionary*, *experiential*, and *experimental* to *existential* and are related to the tourists' experience of cultural belonging. The more recreational a tourist is, the more it can be assumed that this individual feels content with soon going back to the everyday routines and the place he calls home. At the opposite end of Cohen's scale, towards the experimental and, most of all, existential mode one finds those travellers who are discontent and are searching for a new centre out there, a cultural context abroad more appealing than the home they have left. The latter modes, it is argued, seem most suited to fit the motives and minds of the so-called 'drifters' and individual long-term backpackers. While it is obvious that Cohen himself is aware that different modes may be present within an individual traveller, as he suggests in his comparison between trekking periods and beach periods during a backpacker journey (Cohen, 1982), it seems that his types are often used to position individual tourists inside distinct categories. The outcome of this is a rather blunt tool when it comes to understanding the complexities involved in seemingly homogeneous gatherings, and the thoughts and motives within each individual traveller.

There is another persistent concept I find rather insensitive, which is used almost 'by heart' in much tourism research. Urry's (1990) concept *gaze* suggests an image of the tourist as a voyeur and an observer with a superficial relationship to the objects of *his* vision. I say his vision, as the main part of the critique against this concept has come from feminist scholars suggesting that a preoccupation with vision is in itself a product of masculine discourses. Rose (1993) shows convincingly how the concept is closely linked to the historical, scientific (and masculine) tendency in exploration and coloni-

sation to survey encountered areas, to describe them visually and to ascribe feminine qualities to the land and people encountered. Veijola and Jokinen (1994) have criticised the concept from another angle, namely that of a contemporary charter holiday complex. From an imagined pool side in the broiling sun, or at an evening dinner feast slurping food and drinks while conversing with some of the key figures in tourism research, they embark on a hunt for sensations having nothing or little to do with the 'gaze'. Not surprisingly they find the body of the tourist to be a receiver of much more than visual impression. Bodies move, touch and smell. They burn in the sun, digest food, sweat in the heat and ache from sunburn, late nights, long bush-walks and strange food. Tourism is as much about being there and feeling the destination as it is seeing it and taking photos. Yet, the notion of tourism as a 'gaze', used bluntly as it often is, tends to rule out further investigation into other sensations and experiences.

I have found the earlier work of Cohen and Urry insufficient to describe the complexities in contemporary backpacking, as in tourism in general. While they, undoubtedly, have contributed greatly to the development of critical tourism research, I feel it is time to direct attention to the topic using different, and partially new, theoretical lenses. Thus, in my work I have approached the subject matter from a slightly different angle than trying to produce or reproduce existing typologies, supposedly sufficient to divide tourist types into groups or to ascribe them specific 'modes' of travelling.

While I initially just felt uneasy about the idea of trying to rank the travellers into different categories, Uriely, Yonay and Simchai (2002) later provided words for my hesitation in an article suggesting we turn from a preoccupation with 'types' to a categorisation on the basis of 'form'. With these concepts they suggest that minds, that is the motives, attitudes, wishes, wants and needs of individuals, can differ profoundly within any group of backpackers, as they can within each individual backpacker under changing circumstances (such as whom they talk to, when they talk and what they experienced at breakfast the very same morning). The form, however, as the structural arrangement providing backpackers with, for example, transport, accommodation, choice of destination, length of stay, food, equipment for carrying their possessions and so on is the most obvious measuring 'instrument' to separate the backpacker from other tourists.

Undoubtedly, a focus on 'form' rather than 'mind' is what most researchers have concentrated on when initiating a sociological project in order to find the right field and people to interview. The 'mind' is what we hope to eventually find and 'typify' as a consequence of thorough and inquisitive fieldwork. Yet, the importance of Uriely's, Yonay's and Simchai's (2002) arguments is not to teach us on what grounds we should choose our informants and context of fieldwork but on how we then use the information the informants offer to share with us. Their arguments are much more important when a researcher arrives at the stage of interaction with informants and when interpreting results, as efforts to position people according to distinctive 'mind-types' shun, rather than welcome, peculiarities and contradictions. In my work, trying to typify their individual minds and placing them in categories, has not been a concern. Rather, I have tried to locate categories within individuals. I have looked upon the phenomenon of interest as a structural arrangement – travellers wearing

backpacks, travelling ‘budget-style’ and for a long time to places not yet incorporated in the charter tourism industry – and trying, subsequently, to find and pay particular attention to specific narratives present within the backpacker context. Approaching a topic as a vehicle for numerous narrative structures, some coherent, others surprisingly inconsistent and contradictory, allows an understanding of backpacking as a complex phenomenon. Some backpackers may share many of their motives with charter tourists while having little in common with other backpackers and one backpacker’s journey – and story – may fluctuate between periods best described by Cohen’s (1979) recreational mode, via an experiential mode to an existential mode and back again.

This is, it should be noted, not to argue that there is really nothing that separates backpackers from other tourists apart from structural arrangements. I have, indeed, ‘typified’ in this dissertation by paying a great deal of attention to, for instance, time, gender and adventure narratives, claiming they are rather dominant in the backpacker context. However, it is quite possible that such narratives, as cultural expressions, exist outside the backpacker congregations – in charter tourist settings, in sport arenas, in history classes at grade school, in places travellers call their home. Focusing on narratives, rather than minds, awakens a curiosity into adjacent fields of activity and into fields seemingly very distant from the backpacker context. At the same time it acknowledges the complex web of thoughts that transcend activity borders and different sub-cultural arenas. Consequently, the starting-point when typifying adventure, gender and time narratives, is that I am looking at narratives and not the minds *per se* of individuals.

## Structuring travel stories: an overview of the book and its chapters

Another issue of importance relates to the structure of this book. While this is a PhD-dissertation, it is not what people would expect from a proper monograph, nor from a proper collection of previously published articles. This is a book built on previous publications, forthcoming publications and chapters written specifically for this book. The intention is that all the chapters can be read either as self-supporting and independent parts, or as parts of a whole. They are independent in so far as some of them have been published, or will be, as research papers in either journals or anthologies. These publications are used with an unaltered content except for Chapter 4,<sup>5</sup> which was produced in a longer version for the dissertation and a shorter version for a British anthology on tourism and identity. But the chapters are also parts of a whole as they all obviously address the same phenomenon albeit from slightly different viewpoints and since they are tied together by a main thread twined by fairly homogenous ontological, epistemological as well as methodological perspectives.

The advantage of such a construction is that it allows different types of reading. I hope it has been so wisely structured that it can be read in parts, in pieces and fragments by students or scholars interested in individual topics such as risk and adventure, gender, media or time without forcing the reader to digest a whole book. Yet, like most writers I assume, I hope readers will stay with the book from one end to the other.

As a book of (partly) earlier published articles it has certain advantages, one could argue, besides illuminating some of the aspects of backpacker existence. It can be read as showing how my knowledge in the area has developed and changed over time. The observant reader may even detect a slightly ambivalent relationship between the writer and written presentations by comparing the language used in the separate chapters. I myself find these matters rather exciting, as they not only direct the attention to backpacking but also to the research process *per se*. It will become more apparent what I am hinting at in the outline below.

## **A book-guide**

Chapter 1, *Researcher Creativity in Theory and Practice: Empirical Findings and Research as Situated Knowledge*, is basically a discussion concerned with ontological, epistemological and methodological matters, which have informed this book as well as my research interest in general. (Travel) reality is presented as something constructed not only by travellers but also by their colleagues in movement, by anthropologists, sociologists and other researchers into tourism. This will lead to a discussion about narratives, my own or the interviewees', as tales from specific positions. Situated knowledge, I claim, is a strength, not a weakness, in that awareness about it calls for critical assessment and a reflexive approach to the activities of both backpacker and researcher communities. Chapter 1 also deals with more practical matters, such as accounts of my 'fieldwork' in Thailand and of the interviews conducted both there and in my home country Sweden. This chapter has been written mainly with the dissertation in mind and as a methodological framing of the arguments presented in other chapters.

Chapter 2, *Time Creation in Travelling: The Taking and Making of Time among Women Backpackers*, addresses backpacking from different time perspectives. Narratives of travel, given by female travellers and interpreted through 'time lenses', lead to an analysis of the journey experienced as an individualised time-space in which the traveller regains control of her own time and movement. It is argued that this control, sensed as 'freedom', opens up both mind and body to a complexity of different temporal experiences. These vary depending on context and speed of movement. Thus, the long-term journey into what is experienced as different and diversified cultures is discussed as a move away from clock-time and other structuring devices into a space and time where the traveller feels that she is, to a certain extent, left alone to do her own structuring. From this perspective she is both living and creating her own time. This chapter was the first article I wrote on the topic of backpacking and has a streak of essentialism built into it in that I, at least implicitly, suggest that there may be a less constructed experi-

ence awaiting a person having freed herself from constraining and constructed clock-time. Its arguments are based on interviews with eleven Swedish women travellers after their home-coming and it was published in 1998 in *Time & Society* (see Elsrud, 1998). As is often the case with journals, there was a limit to the number of words allowed in the article. While the theoretical and analytical arguments are based on considerable empirical 'evidence', I found myself rather restricted in terms of testimony presentations. This circumstance applies also to the following chapter.

Chapter 3, *Risk Creation in Travelling: The Taking and Making of Risks and Adventure*, addresses how culturally and socially constructed narratives about risk and adventure are manifested by individuals in backpacker communities. Such manifestation is carried out through consumption of, for instance, experiences, places, food, medicine, and clothing. It is argued that tales and acts of 'risk and adventure' work particularly well in individuals' efforts to 'narrate identity'. It also addresses a need for more gender sensitive research, through suggesting that adventurous women may be caught in an intersection between two structures of thought: the reflexive life project of 'late modernity' open to both genders and the adventure as a historically founded masculine practice. The arguments are based on 35 interviews with both women and men, on field notes, as well as journalistic texts. The chapter was the second article I wrote and was published in *Annals of Tourism Research* in 2001, under the title; *Risk Creation in Traveling. Backpacker Adventure Narration* (see Elsrud, 2001).

This article proved to be the most difficult to write. One of the reasons was that it was accepted by *Annals of Tourism Research*, often considered to be the most qualified journal in the field of tourism studies. I was asked to adjust the language and structure to suit the journal's form, which meant a total rebuilding of the whole text, including changing my own first person presence in the text to a third person presence. I had, and still have, difficulties accepting that I could not be there, in the text and in the field, since I had been, and I see it as a rather sad example of research(ers) trying to keep up an image of objective and distanced knowledge as opposed to indicating a researcher presence in all science (not just qualitative). Although I was quite pleased with the end result despite this, I should perhaps have considered publishing in a different journal. The importance of reaching out to a broader international academic field and possibly adding merits to my CV can obviously overpower being true to one's own convictions.<sup>6</sup>

Chapter 4, *Gender Creation in Travelling, Or the Art of Transforming an Adventuress*, continues where Chapter 3 signed off. It focuses on the gendered construction of adventure in backpacking by analysing stories among both women and men. It argues that a hegemonic masculinity is still present in (adventure) travel discourse and addresses how women travellers, entering what has traditionally been culturally constructed as male territory, relate to this discourse. The claim is made that female travellers, by consuming 'exotic' times, places and experiences, appear to be reproducing a western adventure travel discourse. However, as women entering a masculine territory (in this case of mobility and adventure), they also appear as contestants to a dominant belief. It is within this paradoxical relationship these women use their narratives and creativity in the construction of self-identities, a construction in which

compliance to norms but also emancipatory statements and irony are important tools. At the stage of writing this text I had 40 interviews upon which I built my arguments in addition to journalistic texts and field notes. A short version of this chapter, (Elsrud, forthcoming 2004) is awaiting publication in a British anthology on *Tourism Consumption and Representation: Narratives of Place and Self*. (K. Meethan, A. Anderson and S. Miles, eds. Wallingford: CAB International).

Although I make references to various media texts in the above chapters, Chapter 5, *Mediated Creativity: The (Re)Production of Travel Mythologies*, focuses more explicitly on the centrality of media in the production and reproduction of travel discourse, or mythology as I have chosen to call it when addressing written text material. Parallel to ascribing the media such an important position I, however, focus on the media's dependency on agency, on acting individuals, for maintenance and survival. Travellers, it is argued, are readers of the world just as they are writers of the same. Through specific travel texts – post-cards, letters, guidebooks, journalistic texts, e-mails and web-pages – they have the potential to both comply to and contest existing media mythologies. While efforts at contestation are present, not least in verbal discourses of travel and in interviews with travellers, the overall impression is that conformity to stereotyped images is the predominant outcome from the relationship between travellers and their media texts. The chapter ends with a discussion about possible reasons for this rigidity of the media form and was written primarily with this dissertation in mind, but it is also produced with the intention of a publication in a cultural studies or media studies journal.

Chapter 6, *Travel and Power: Conquering Time, Space, Self and the Other*, first of all sums up earlier arguments in arguing that identity as well as adventure search in backpacker contexts – as opposed to much activity in many of the world's industrialised and post-industrialised countries – are attempts at time and space integration. The traveller, taking personal time and searching for individual (self-chosen) space on a local bus in Laos or on a mule-wagon in China, is actually engaged in actions where time is, to a certain extent, experienced as re-embedded in space. The pace of transport, the amount of time spent in each place and the place one chooses to visit and stay at indicate the status of the traveller. 'Adventurous' status and highly valued identity experience are often granted to the slow-mover and the off-the-beaten-track traveller, making time and space integrated as well as personalised. Therefore, while adventurous long-term travelling and its meaning to travellers can be regarded as a (western) status-enhancing quest it can also, as this chapter argues, be analysed as a serious effort by resourceful individuals to regain individual control and power. Such efforts need to be viewed in the light of living conditions in places travellers call home. However, this is not the only case of empowerment addressed in this chapter which will subsequently link attempts to gain individual power to more structural power relations maintaining a clear division between 'we' of a travelling 'west' and the 'other' of a perpetuated destination. Above all this text argues for a return of the analytical concept of 'primitivism' if we are to move further in an understanding of the strong, yet tacit, forces behind long-term journeying to so-called 'third world' countries, making them such powerful identity-statements.

# Researcher Creativity in Theory and Practice: Empirical Findings and Research as Situated Knowledge

*The desire for control is a fantasy and cannot be enacted in the research process.*  
(Skeggs, 1997:31)

Control is not merely an issue for statisticians and quantitative science, needing to eliminate other possible explanations by controlling for possible intervening factors. It is very much part of the qualitative research process too, as all mastery of knowledge is in itself a struggle for control (Skeggs, 1997; Walkerdine, 1988). This is a problem of science too easily ignored in research reports, dissertations and papers which are heavy with themes, systems, concepts and/or explanatory models but light in the sections dealing with the role of the researcher and the relationship between researcher knowledge and the everyday experience of interviewees.

As researchers we sometimes violate the experience of our informants. Their stories and acts are taken from them and converted into our stories. Their feelings and emotions are analysed and used in the name of science. Their relevant knowledge – if and when they are accredited with such – is transformed into what is often regarded as a higher form of knowledge. Science has, so to speak, the last word in defining reality. This self-acclaimed and/or given right to define is a matter of power as well as control.

One of the ways research uses to remain in control is to practice science *frontstage*. That is done by presenting the end product and the proper method leading up to it while leaving out all those *backstage* matters, all the mistakes, inconsistencies, complexities and emotional hang-ups during the project work (Goffman, 1959; see also Mulinari, 1999). Other *backstage* information often left out is concerned with all the matters, the situations and positions, which lead a researcher to prefer some ontological, epistemological and methodological standpoints while rejecting others.

The above reasoning does not mean that we should let ourselves be totally absorbed by the information presented by the informants, or that we must dwell on and bore readers with details concerning every bellyache during fieldwork. In my view, it

means that we must enter the research context with respect for the informants' knowledge. The times – and they undoubtedly do exist – when we feel we must violate an informant's story, for instance through using it as an example of a rather discriminating discursive statement not consciously intended by the informant, we must also be aware of the circumstances noted above and be as meticulous and careful as we can, making sure the argument is relevant and does not come out of habitual power exertion. I see this as epistemic responsibility as opposed to epistemic imperialism (Code, 1987, 1988; Skeggs, 1997). We must also, in my view, not only be aware of our own *situated knowledge* (Haraway, 1991) but be prepared to expose it to a reader so that the reasoning, the conclusions, the knowledge presented can be positioned and validated in relation to the biases and paradigmatic stances that produced it.

I would like to regard the above standpoint as common sense, but it is not. It is, at least in part, the result of a critical assessment of dominant methodologies and theories, forced to the fore by numerous feminist scholars. While it is not only feminists who today show signs of and skills in both self-awareness and self-critique I prefer to put the credit where I feel the credit is due. It is the feminist critique that has inspired me in issues concerning methodology, both during the processes of collecting information and in the production of this chapter. The rest of the chapter can, thus, be read as an attempt not only to describe the practical research process behind my findings, but also to show where and how the knowledge produced is situated. The chapter has two overarching purposes and sections. It begins with a presentation of the different theoretical approaches, and the ontological and epistemological assumptions that come with them, which have informed the research project, its methods and the way I have viewed my own position in it. Thus this section will deal with travellers as narrators of both self-identity and of cultural systems of meanings, while also addressing issues brought forward by feminist scholars. In the second section I move to more practical matters dealing with the actual collection of empirical material through means of reading, listening, viewing, smelling and aching.

## Travellers as identity narrators

*I am going to marry my novels and  
have little short stories for children.*

(Jack Kerouac<sup>7</sup>)

Jack Kerouac, one of the founders of the Beat-generation, the author who some travellers have mentioned as a source of inspiration, points at the close connection between personal identity and narration. By identity I do not mean a given and permanent set of individual qualities. What we think of when we talk about identity is situated in both time and space. The timespace of contemporary north-western Eu-

rope, and countries, which relatively speaking, share much of its history, traditions and *stock of knowledge* such as the United States and Australia, supports a view of identity as something unstable and flowing. The individual identity story is seen as created and recreated, changed and worked upon throughout a life-course (see Alheit, 1994; Giddens, 1991). I see contemporary identities as reflexive projects for their bearers. Unlike identities of the past, which were to a larger extent experienced as 'preordained' by tradition, family-ties, social and geographical circumstances, people of contemporary north-western Europe learn that identity is mostly a responsibility for, and a right given to, the individual. However, I must add that this is a matter which should be stressed with caution. No man or woman is free from structures. Norms, values and discourses guide what people express and feel. Claiming identity is a project for the individual, is also a structure of thought, a discursive statement, but as it is enacted by believers it must be taken seriously. Needless to say, as a discourse, it is not universal but applies more to people in some parts of the world/nations/cities than to others. The travellers in this project are definitely its adherents, though.

Despite, or rather because of, identity being experienced as 'personalised', flowing and unstable, identity-making is very much an act of synchronisation and harmonising; an effort by individuals to unite discrepant and unrelated events, experiences and feelings into a continuum of some sort of coherence and continuity. This is one of the functions of narrative. Narratives, as Alheit (1994) for instance claims, are ways of establishing links between the individual's experience of an *everyday time* and a *life time*. While the (often cyclical) *everyday time* is loaded with routine shared by many, the (linear) *life time* becomes the escape road to individuality. Life time has to do with the experiencing of an individual biographic whole – a coherent identity story. It is, claims Alheit (1994:307), an experience of 'a "biographical" life containing starting points, stations, direction-setting and termination points' as opposed to the 'recurrent taken-for-granted phenomena' of everyday time. An individual's everyday time and life time are seldom totally separated from each other but are mingled and coexist. While sometimes they seem to coexist rather anonymously as the days go by, at other times they seem to fall into a clinch and expose an uneasy gap between the actual routine act and the biographical life one wants to lead. Given the unstable relationship between the two time experiences, narrative as a method to *fix meaning* is needed. Narrative works to mend the inconsistencies, to make everyday routine action suit the biographic story and vice versa. It works to express individuality at times when individuality risks drowning in the voice of the collective and to express belonging when solitude frightens. Narrative is thereby a way to form cohesion between the two modes of life – the life we live everyday and the life-span we feel we are granted at birth.

While the perspective above places considerable weight on the psychological advantages for the individual to experience a coherent and continuous identity, there are other perspectives which shed additional light on the meaning and importance of narratives. There are many social advantages to be won by an interesting identity narrative. Through telling, or acting, what is considered the proper story a person can

position her or himself in relation to other people (Bourdieu, 1984). In line with Scheibe (1986) I see narratives, and in this case adventure narratives in particular, as expressions of such positionings. Through stories about everyday occurrences, about others, about just about anything, 'stories about the self' are told which seem to position individual storytellers in relation to each other and within society at large. Thus, individual narratives enact structures. Similarly structures inform individual narratives. Through language, written or spoken, we express ourselves, our beliefs and the meanings we consciously or unconsciously are supporters of. Narratives do not only serve the narrator, but also the discourse to which he or she belongs. This topic will be discussed in more detail below.

My view on identity and narratives will be discussed further in Chapter 2, 3 and 4. As the purpose of having this discussion here is to explicitly address its significance for my choice of method (and the project as a whole) this is also the time and place to put in a reservation of methodological concern. The above theoretical reasoning does not automatically lead to what is often referred to as *narrative analysis*.

Narrative analysis proper is 'inherently interdisciplinary' and an infant of the 'interpretive turn' in the social sciences influenced particularly by theorists such as Bakhtin (1981), Barthes (1974), Bruner (1986), Ricoeur (1981, 1984) and Sarbin (1986) (see Kohler Riessman, 1993:1<sup>7</sup>). It stems from both methodological and theoretical assumptions that people make sense of the world around them and their own identities through constructing narratives. People seek control over reality, knowledge, including their positions in it, by naming and ordering through story telling. These individual narratives stem from narratives on a much grander and broader scale than the themes they encompass at the moment of narration. Thus, individual narratives draw their material from a social and/or cultural repertoire. This has the methodological consequence that making thematic groupings from, for instance, an interview does not always capture the whole story or at least not the cultural one. There is an order, a narrative structure, which influences even discrepant themes and remains so to speak silent and between the spoken lines, despite its strength and potency to define. Thus, narrative analysis *proper* (like discourse analysis *proper*) is a way of approaching the structures behind the individual stories.

This can, however, be done at different levels in the text, one so to speak being nearer and more linked to the text than the other. The former is what narrative analysts normally do, as they try to identify and define the order of a text, such as an interview, and link it to a culturally specific ordering occurring in other texts than the one under examination. This is what researchers have found when they speak about individual texts being informed by structures of for instance 'comedy', 'tragedy' or 'romanticism' (see Sarbin, 1986).

Approaching the text at the other level, that is being less focused on the particular order of matters in the individual text, means putting the emphasis on the cultural messages from which the text draws its material. My work is an example of such an approach, which is a rather unorthodox way of conducting narrative analysis. Regular themes found in interviews are not necessarily linked to other details in, or to the structure of, the interview. Nor are they linked to generalised ideal types of story tell-

ing such as structures of ‘comedy’ or ‘tragedy’. Rather the themes are analysed as expressions of cultural structures other than the interview itself, that is to acts, values, practices, text and talk, which form, and inform, a given society.

Thus, I have applied a thematic approach in the analysis of the texts using the term *narrative* in a less orthodox manner than a narrative analyst would. Yet, I have found that it best suits the theoretical assumptions that individuals create and recreate their own biographies and identities through, among other means, story telling or narration. In addition, the term is used to elucidate the link between the individual and the structures. Narrating stories requires some sort of repertoire to draw the material from. Narrators, be they informants or researchers, create and construct new stories mostly from old cultural and social material. One of the starting points in this project was the conviction that people express themselves through narratives and that these narratives are important if we want to say something not only about the individuals but also about the culture(s) to which they belong. Thus, I have been on a search for narratives, narratives among Swedish travellers having returned from long-term journeys, narratives among (mostly) north-western European travellers still on the road in Thailand and narratives of writing travellers expressing themselves through guidebooks or travel magazines. Later in this chapter I will present these interviews and readings in more detail.

Above I approached the matter of individual narratives as also being expressions of societal structures. Below I will focus on this phenomenon and the concepts I have used in my research project to pinpoint the cultural voice of individual narratives.

## The discursive guidebook to travel

While regarding the journey as a timespace for creative identity work by individuals, as portrayed above, this work has also been carried out in the conviction that these individuals express certain cultural and social beliefs. Although this most certainly is in line with a cultural studies approach it comes with the risk of underestimating other, perhaps less cultural, aspects. Mulinari (1999:40), addressing the difficulties in choosing the ‘right’ qualitative method, writes:

When I have almost decided to begin the work process with a discourse analysis I hear a sigh of disappointment. It is of course the existentialist in me that is asking: Where are the body and feelings, the pleasure and the passion, the fear and the hope? Existentialistic sociologists believe that ethnographic sociologists are too superficial and generalising to be able to capture personal subjective experiences, while ethnomethodologists, in their efforts to systematically reveal underlying structures of talk, are said to have led sociology further and further away from reality (my translation).

Furthermore, continues Mulinari (1999:40), existentialists find that the qualitative researchers’ focus on cognition leads to an unawareness of the researchers’ as well as

the informants' feelings and emotions. Similarly, a discourse analysis with its focus on language tends to ignore cultural and individual practices with their proneness to 'ambivalence, antagonisms and silence'.

This being a work embedded in cultural studies and ethnographic approaches there is of course the risk of underestimating issues which do not let themselves become easily described in cultural terms. The reader, however, will perhaps become aware of a slightly ambivalent presence of both constructivist and existentialist interpretations in at least one section of the book. This is partly a consequence of the fact that the individual papers that constitute the whole were produced at different times and at different 'stations' during my own theoretical development. Interpreting interviews and reading social theory on time for Chapter 2 (also Elsrud, 1998) had me convinced and intrigued by a presence of stories about a body time of sensations, feelings and emotions. This expressed body time appeared much stronger to some travellers when clocks were discarded and others no longer controlled their time. If I were to write the article over again today I would possibly approach these testimonies with a stronger focus on discourse, thus regarding stories of thrown away clocks, of a more regular period synchronised with the moon and so forth, as cultural symbols and discursive expressions 'constructing' travelling as a way to reach an 'authenticity of the body'. However, I am far from convinced that this would be the right thing to do. Partly then, too, the remains of an existentialist interpretation is a sign of a slight disobedience within the researcher, refusing to accept that there can be nothing more for social scientists to study but discourse, or whatever else one chooses to call cultural structures of thought and meaning. No matter how important I find it to investigate discourses and the power structures they uphold, which is also what the absolute major part of this work has been about, I still feel, and want to keep, a deep respect for the stories of individuals and their attempts to linguistically describe sensations of the body, emotions and other forms of non-verbal experiences.

Having said that, I will now return to the initial matter; namely that of individual narratives being expressions of culture. If we accept a definition of culture as a structure made up of a large number of conflicting as well as mutual – and changeable – systems of meanings (Hall, 1997), such a culture must be a structure set in constant motion, of conflicts and struggles over meanings and the power to define what the world is. A repertoire of codes of conduct, of values and norms embedded in cultural systems of meaning, are available to combatants as well as the adherents to hegemonic<sup>9</sup> claims on normality. My view, following Hall's reasoning above, is thus that what I call a culture is not so much a congregation of people based on ethnic or national similarities but based on mutual understandings of what they are supposed to agree on or fight over. This culture consists of a large number of possible stories to enact, to obey and/or alter.

Taken together, neither travellers, nor I, speak without a script of some sort. Due to this dissertation being an account of my theoretical and analytical development over time, through its content of articles published at different stages during the research process, these scripts are called different things at different times: *grand narratives of travel*, *narratives of travel*, *mythologies* or *discourses*. Yet I am, the whole time,

referring to the same ontological conviction, which is that individuals carry the structures within them (Giddens, 1984). Individual narratives are also cultural narratives and cultural narratives are used to make individual narratives. Individuals are also representatives of institutions and so forth. Yet, these structures are not petrified and unchallengeable. I see them more as guidelines, or raw manuscripts, for talk and action. Individuals have the potential to reflect over, make use of and challenge the structures, intentionally or unintentionally, so that old structures are questioned and new structures are formed. Such a perspective lies close to Simmel's (1911/1971) concept *form* where he argues that a paradox exists between individuals' need for a transcendence of forms and the new forms that are created once the transcendence becomes institutionalised. *Individuality as a form* is indeed a (collective) structure formed by individuals seeking to transcend the borders of structures. However, the urge to transcend, triggered by the structures it seeks to challenge, is an example of the individuals' ability to take action and (re)move or alter dominant structures of thought. This has been a profound conviction during the whole project.

Towards the end of the project I have mainly been preoccupied with the term *discourse* as I have found it of most use for my purposes. Given the arbitrary meanings of the term, a sign in itself of the power struggles that the concept is designed to explore, a declaration similar to the one I gave in relation to the definition of the term *narrative* is in order. This project is by no means a *discourse analysis* in a linguistic sense where it serves to label 'passages of connected writing or speech' (Hall, 1997:44). The concept is used, in a Foucauldian tradition, as an aid in defining particular occurrences in the empirical material. I have used it as a term describing systems of meanings – and power relations – which are culturally, historically (and socially) produced and reproduced and which define what can be said, thought and enacted in relation to a given topic. This distances me from proper discourse analysts who approach sociological matters from a linguistic perspective in their work in order to dissect and value texts and text segments, to trace semantic patterns, metaphor and repetitions. I, instead, side with those advocating a much broader view of the concept discourse than those who use it as a tool in analysing conversation practices. Spencer (1994:275) has proposed such an approach to discourse particularly in relation to ethnographic work:

The concrete and detailed nature of tape-recorded data can seduce analysts into conceptualizing discourse solely in terms of conversation behavior. However, (...) discourse can be conceptualized in ways that include written texts as well as collective forms of knowledge. Such a conceptualization flows, in part, from Foucault's (1972) work on discourse as well as more recent work from postmodern and poststructural perspectives (e.g., Fairclough 1992, 1993; Lyotard 1984).

Collective forms of knowledge do not have to present themselves in speech or text alone. This broader sociological, rather than sociolinguistic, adoption of the concept also opens up for a broader approach to the topic studied. I have come to interpret texts, spoken as well as written, from a more action oriented sociological perspective where I regard them as one of many social practices where discourse lurks. I have thus adopted a definition of discourse in line with the arguments of Dijk (1997) who, in

editing *Discourse as Social Interaction*, has brought together a number of informative texts on the importance of discourse as a *guide to action and practice*.

This has two obvious consequences. First of all, written or spoken texts are but two sources I have used in a search for discursive elements and cultural meanings. The project has been carried out in the conviction that discourse also speaks through action – making fieldwork and observations equally important methodological tools. Secondly I have often approached texts seeking confirmation as well as diversions or ‘counter-evidence’ after having observed matters of action and practice. Thus my approach has been characterised by a constant oscillation between different sources of information; between media texts, interview testimonies, conversations over food at restaurants in Bangkok or the choice of clothing among guests at a cheap guesthouse on the Thai island Ko Chang. This has been done in the conviction that people talk – identity stories as well as cultural stories – in more ways than through oral or written language. Having said that, I would like to present my view of the different discursive expressions, of three different voices, which I have seen as central to this project.

## The voice of texts

Discourses, as systems of meaning, which define what can be said, thought and acted out in relation to specific topics, do among other means express themselves through written texts. I have been particularly interested in the texts of travel journalists as well as guidebook authors. While the voice of talk, if not tremendously rehearsed, has the tendency to hesitate, shift and drift away from the topic, written texts are manifested meanings, end products hiding most ambivalences which influenced the road to a final conceptualisation. Using Goffman’s (1959) terminology, a text presentation is more often than not a front-stage matter, a presentation of a favourable positioning of the writer. Thus, a written text seldom gives the reader access to contradictory information.

Furthermore, there are few opportunities in written texts for negotiations between writer and reader. Although readers can choose to believe or not believe the content, or interpret things their own way, they cannot interact during the development of the text or have any impact on the quality of the end product unless they are also their writers. This has obvious consequences, particularly in relation to guidebooks and travel magazines, which, like many other written products, are produced to make a profit. The product must attract as many readers as possible making the introduction of new ideas a bit of a gamble. It is easier to stick to the same old stories, the ones that are assumed to be easily understood by readers. This, I believe, is part of the explanation why (travel) journalism tends to thrive on myth – or stereotypes – regarding the nature of ‘otherness’ and other stories separating the tourist from the people at the destination (see Fürsich and Kavoori, 2001). As is argued in Chapter 5 on the reproduction of mythology in the media, not everyone gets to publish a text in a trav-

el magazine or a guidebook. The text has to satisfy the editor and the editor has to satisfy the owners.<sup>10</sup> Thus, writers try to accommodate what they feel the editors want, leaving little room for the questioning of old truisms.

Related to the assumption that the characteristics of the media system are dependent upon mythology and stereotypes is the fact that the media form in itself only has room for a limited amount of information. Short paragraphs in a newspaper are supposed to capture an emerging civil war somewhere, a spread in a travel magazine is to capture the specifics of a particular tourism destination or country, one photo is supposed to give the 'whole picture' and so on. It is hard to even imagine how much meaning must be compressed into these few symbols, if the reader is to get the message at all.<sup>11</sup>

Another issue concerning written texts is their capacity to transport meanings over time and space. While the function of transporting meaning is inherent to all storytelling, it has become particularly effective with the development of written language and, not least, of book printing (Bourdieu, 1991; Davies, 1990; Giddens, 1979). There are few technical or infrastructural hindrances for written texts to travel all over the world or within worlds today. Rather, restrictions to book access have economic and sociostructural causes. This phenomenon works in favour of those who are in control of a) money to make the texts, b) readers with access to the texts, and c) a language which is linguistically and culturally understood by those readers. This does not only work in favour of separating classes and groups within a country but also in maintaining or even inducing differences between countries and regions. Those who control the written text are also active in setting the agenda, of initiating and maintaining the 'talk of the day' in a given community/nation/continent (Mathiesen, 1989). This exemplifies how media penetrate space. Yet, it is also effective in carrying matters over temporal borders. Although myth and oral storytelling should not be underestimated as vehicles of tradition and discourse, written material has, quantitatively speaking, supplied an awareness of history and anticipation for the future on a broad scale. Meanings of yesteryear as well as anticipations of the future hitch their ride to the present with books, magazines, diaries, Internet-pages and letters, which are spread to an indefinite number of people. Although this situation undoubtedly is of utmost importance to the wellbeing of people, who can access so much inspiration, knowledge and guidance, it calls for an awareness of the fact that historical facts are subjective accounts too, like all other media texts.

So far I have presented a rather bothersome view of written texts but it is really not as bad as it may seem as my work has also been carried out with the conviction that people are active in creating the structures by which they are surrounded. Thus, written texts are constructed by writers who have the capacity to make a difference, given the right circumstances. While Fürsich and Kavoori (2001) have suggested that travel journalism seems to be more prone to stereotyping than the travellers themselves are, the reasoning following my active actor perspective is that with enough critical travellers, stereotypes can be questioned and overthrown also in the media (see Chapter 5).

When focusing on written text alone it is easy to forget the activity of its readers and writers and the work risks becoming over-structuralistic. Although much of my reasoning is positioned within the theoretical field of cultural studies I have not positioned myself within the more structuralistic approach to social reality. By that I mean that I have not been content only with studying society and social interaction as text. Nor have I been convinced that studying culture is to study signifying practices rather than acting individuals.

Barker and Galasiński (2001) address the issue of a division in cultural studies between an older focus on the active and acting individual and a newer (semiotic) focus on signifying practices which are read as text, as structural manifestations. Drawing on Hall (1992) they claim:

The breach between [Raymond] Williams' concern with meaning produced by active human agents and an understanding of culture as centred on signifying systems, cultural texts and the 'systems of relations' of language marks the shift in cultural studies from 'culturalism' to 'structuralism'. (Barker and Galasiński, 2001:4)

I have felt there is a lot to be gained by playing down such a sharp division between the two approaches. There are structures, both institutional and discursive, that guide our voices and actions, but these structures are not petrified and finite. People can make a difference in that they do not only accommodate these structures – they also have the capability of challenging hegemonic claims, by ascribing other meanings to given phenomena than expected within a culture. This calls for an awareness, not only of the structural remnants of action left behind in for instance magazines or guidebooks, but also of the ongoing negotiations, the questioning and compliance, the distortion and take-over of meaning that goes on in the mundane talk among people. With this conviction I have found it best to use an ethnographic approach also incorporating the production and reproduction of meaning produced through various forms of talk: in interviews, at dinner conversations, in guesthouse areas and on the streets and beaches.

## The voice of talk

There are, to begin with, many different types of talk – speeches, lectures, presentations and other examples of formal talk, as well as various forms of more or less informal talk among people who, to some extent, know each other. Furthermore, different types of talk can be presented in a variety of narrative forms; for example regressive, progressive, comedy, tragedy, romance, and satire (see for instance Sarbin, 1986). In addition to previous claims that discourse operates through language (and practice), there is no doubt that talk, regardless of type, is structured not only by language but by the forms this is presented in. Thus, structure, structuring and meaning

are vital components in the voice of talk as well as in the voice of written texts. Yet, accounting for only one of the two in this project would have resulted in an unawareness of the negotiations going on about meanings as they are presented both in media texts and in everyday talk in backpacker communities. Written texts such as those found in the media are but one of many voices informing a traveller.

There are a few obvious, yet seldom discussed, differences between the voices of talk and the voices of text which call for incorporating both into a research project directed at any specific cultural expression (such as backpacking). To begin with, unless broadcast by the media or maintained in fairytales and other forms of myths<sup>12</sup>, talk is generally more demarcated in time and space than printed texts are. A lot of talk goes on between the media lines, so to speak, and an inquiry into the nature of backpacking calls for an awareness not only of the grand and pervasive systems of meanings repeated by the (travel) media, but also of the practices in everyday life through which these meanings are repeated or contested. Informal conversations offer arenas for self-expression, by the use of cultural meanings (Hall, 1997). To focus on conversations and on interviews is to seek understanding of how cultural meanings – expressed through media, talk, signs and behaviour – are enacted and given life.

When it comes to structure, talk is double in character. I previously suggested, based on Alheit's claims (1994), that talk in the case of narratives works to fix meaning and unite discrepant experiences of being and times. Furthermore, in addition to being structured by rules of language, talk is guided and directed by cultural and social structures. Hierarchies, positions and power relations influence who says what, when and how. However, these restrictions apply to both talk and written text. I now want to approach the more elusive qualities of talk as opposed to written texts. Although talk, just like writing, is more or less a *frontstage* performance in that actors normally strive to express a favourable image of themselves, it is less controllable, and sometimes even a tool to repair front stage activities backstage. Informal talk at least, carried out between two or more participants, requires ongoing and immediate reflexivity. A listener may misinterpret, challenge or distract the speaker, threatening the intended meaning. Thus, informal talk is to some extent a matter of constant negotiation. Participants have the potential to influence one another, to add further and/or contradicting knowledge to the ongoing conversation, changing it as it develops. While written and spoken language can both be questioned by an audience retrospectively, that is after the end product has been presented, the content of a conversation is less certain than the content manifested in a written text. This is not a claim opposing that of ethnomethodologists finding normative patterns and formal structures lurking behind any type of conversation, but rather a difference found when approaching talk with an interest in its potential for change and transformation rather than stability.

Following the reasoning above I have found talk to be one of the major empirical sources in this project. Seeking knowledge about the backpacker phenomenon I have come to see written texts as providing insufficient information without taking into account the ways they are interpreted and negotiated – and even written – by their readers. For similar reasons oral testimonies during interviews and participant obser-

vations have called for an investigation into the media stories to which these testimonies relate. A backpacker makes use of both written and spoken information to inform her knowledge and influence her itinerary and experiences so why should I not do this too?

## The voice of non-verbal communication

Not everything worth saying – or noting – is spoken. As a sociologist influenced by a cultural studies' interest for symbolic language and representation I have been convinced that I can expect to find information regarding long-term travelling not only in media texts or in interview testimonies but also through approaching a language of silence. By that I mean the language of symbols other than letters, of acts which are not spoken but carried out, of gestures, emotional expressions and whatever other non-verbal communication a traveller uses to express herself.

The importance of symbols as language has long been established within the sociological tradition, represented primarily by symbolic interactionist perspectives. Communication as an interplay of words, body gestures and aesthetic representations has become common knowledge today not only in social science but also in everyday experience and knowledge. In cultural studies this has become prevalent, brought forward by Bourdieu (1984) and not least Hebdige (1988) and his *Subculture: The meaning of Style*. By appropriating and wearing specific symbols, people can send out messages about themselves. Clothes, hairstyle, jewellery – or the lack of the same – can express a particular identity story given that there is a common understanding leading to a particular interpretation of the signs. Such appropriation is also a matter of politics, of struggles for powerful positions (Bourdieu, 1984). Just as verbal discourses are used in struggles over power, non-verbal systems of signs and symbols are means to gain access to definition. Thus, punks sought to gain definition – and power – by taking over, and mixing, symbols which had previously belonged to other sub-groups.

This is indicative of a semiotic approach to reading social representation as 'text' (Fiske, 1990). Not only symbols, but actions too, become important matters to account for in an effort to broaden or deepen an understanding of a phenomenon. From the very beginning of my fieldwork I experienced that particular actions had a meaning beyond the actual occurrence. The eating of deep-fried bugs at Khao San Road in Bangkok is an example of what I mean. Some travellers would eat them, while others would not. When I approached this topic in interviews with travellers I found that the eaters saw it as a sign of their bravery in terms of daring to taste all that travel had to offer, while some non-eaters saw their resistance as a sign of smartness. Eating or not eating bugs were components of identity-stories.

There is, all in all, plenty of action to study in a backpacker context. People are on the move most of the time. They choose some destinations before others. They eat

at particular places but not others. They speak to some travellers but not to others and so forth. This starting-point has been important for me. I have seen observations of non-verbal symbols as a way of gaining access to other aspects of a given community than could be achieved by relying on words alone.

This has called for an ethnographic approach, where I have had the possibility of using different sources of information and to incorporate the silent voices in my empirical material. Doing fieldwork is not only an advantage when it comes to gathering information from many different sources. It is also effective in reminding the researcher of the fact that she, or he, is always to some extent taking part in the field of action. Verbally, we can always claim to be elsewhere, keeping our researcher distance while structuring field material and relating empirical material to theory. The body however, does not listen to reasoning the same way. Sweating in 40 degree heat along with thousands of other backpackers in Banglamphu in Bangkok or on the island of Ko Chang during the build-up to the rainy season has been an unavoidable reminder of the fact that as field participants we can never detach ourselves, physically or mentally, from the reality of the matter at hand. My stomach was there, eating at the same restaurants and from the same menu as my informants. My ears listened to the same music, which seemed to be played over and over again at the swarm of guesthouses and restaurants filling up many of the backpacker areas. It would be a lie to claim that this did not inform my body as well as my mind, giving me experiences which have influenced the content of this book.

### **A note on visibility and power**

Common to many of the voices in non-verbal communication, for instance clothing, haircuts, groupings, piercing, and facial expressions, is that they are visible. I have regarded the travellers as quite powerful cultural beings, aware of the varied symbols they can choose between in order to express themselves. Yet it is important to remember that the matter of visibility is not as clear-cut as it has been presented above. Visibility is not simply a means of self-expression and communicative action, voluntarily used by travellers wanting to send out a message of experience and worldliness. At the best of times an individual can make use of it by signalling preferred symbolic stories to the surroundings. At the worst of times the individual *must* do so in order to remain in charge of the story, of his or her identity presentation. Thus what is interpreted, and often expressed, as voluntary symbolic expression (for instance the individual choice of clothing) may in fact be a consequence of cultural or social forces (such as for instance gender struggles manifested in fashion) beyond one's own control.

In relation to this query into visibility in the context of travelling, there is yet another power situation to take into account. Visibility, being a tool for self-expression, at least at one level, by those who control the time and place for stage entrance, is to others, forced on stage by circumstances they cannot control, signalling a loss of power. This phenomenon has been addressed many times in relation to tourism, not least by Urry (1990), who has paid particular attention to 'the gaze' of tourists, which

turns people and land at the destination into objects. Being in control of 'the gaze' with or without binoculars, camera-lenses or indeed telescopic sights, is a form of supervision. Whether working their rice paddies, begging for money by the train station, or driving their mule through the village, people, being the objects of the tourist gaze are subordinated to being supervised whether they like it or not. Indeed, going through travellers' albums or travel magazines, photos are seldom taken of a local resident signalling a cosmopolitan, 'modern' lifestyle. The objects of the gaze are often people thought to be on the stagnating side of an otherwise progressing society. These people are cast in walk-on parts in a power game. However this is not to say that they are powerless or silently accept the situation. People at travel destinations sometimes make use of the situation by 'staging authenticity' (MacCannell, 1976/1989) or by finding other ways to profit, economically or otherwise, from the presence of tourists.

Implicated in my ethnographic approach to the topic is yet another aspect of visibility and power. Carrying out observations in the field is in every sense an ethical concern. Having viewed people from a distance, when they eat their breakfast in the morning, queue up to check their e-mail at an Internet café or eat roasted bugs at a food stall late at night, I too have exercised power. I have taken notes on the actions of people who are unaware of my presence, just as the travellers have taken photos and written diaries about their observations of the 'others'. At other times I have openly participated in backpacker congregations making the partakers participate in a research process with the risk of not being fully understood, of being violated by interpretations and definitions out of their control in a future PhD dissertation. This is definitely an issue of concern, particularly for qualitative research and most specifically in observations. Although this has not stopped me from practising observation techniques, I have taken pains to approach the field and my informants with respect. Similarly, this awareness has called for a closer examination of the power I thus exercise and represent as a researcher in the field. I owe at least part of this awareness to feminist contributions to contemporary sociology, which will be described below.

## The feminist contribution

As noted in the introductory text of this chapter my gathering and analysis of empirical material as well as my reasoning and writing in relation to this book have also been influenced by feminist theory and arguments. The reader will already have noticed that I have taken a particular interest in the experiences of female travellers not only in response to a previous critique of tourism research being male biased (Beezer, 1993; Clifford, 1992; Riley, 1988; Ryall, 1988; Swain, 1995; Veijola and Jokinen, 1994), but also due to my own experiences as a woman and as a former backpacker. Furthermore, feminist writers have convincingly pointed out the importance of being honest to the informants, to the researcher's self and to the readers (see for in-

stance Davies and Esseveld, 1989; Mulinari, 1999; Skeggs, 1997; Smith, 1979; Widerberg, 1995). This has resulted in an effort, in particular in this chapter, to show as clearly as possible just how and where the knowledge produced, that is my knowledge, is situated. I believe such a positioning of knowledge – and of the researcher – should be common practice in all research. Although clearly a growing trend among various qualitative perspectives, this is still predominantly a feminist tradition.

It has been widely claimed that notions of masculinity (and femininity) have informed much previous and current research, including methods (see Bernard, 1975; Carlson, 1972; Clifford, 1990; DuBois, 1983). Mulinari (1999:50), in discussing gendered metaphors in qualitative method, argues that many of these, presented to students of method, appeal to traditional notions of manhood and womanhood. She writes:

Two types of masculinity are present in stories of qualitative research: the logical and the romantic. The story about our logical hero is often formulated like this: Once upon a time there was a Researcher who searched for the Truth. By means of precise categories and a strong analytic mind he succeeded in unveiling that which was hidden behind the words of the informants (which the informants knew nothing about). The story about our romantic hero is different; here a choreography of exotic places, dangerous surroundings and adventures is created. The spontaneous is suppressed. It is a happy fairy-tale in which our hero, after having risked being eaten by the Other during fieldwork, ends up not losing himself in the worldview of the informants but instead returns to us (my translation).

The ideal researcher created in an academic field influenced by a hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995), that is a 'system' where norms and values work in favour of certain men's reality over women's, appears as a bystander – and a cleverer one at that. He is the voyeur, the observer, *extracting* knowledge from the field and/or the informants with his male gaze (see also Gouldner, 1964; Rose, 1993). Behind this view, even in qualitative research, lurks a positivist ideal that true and objective knowledge can be extracted from the empirical reality. Under the roof of such 'professionalism' the researcher does not have to bother with the anxieties of the field, the problematic relationship with his informants or his own personal and academic biases. Although this ideal still seems to influence much contemporary qualitative research the critique from feminist perspectives has opened up an increased understanding of knowledge production as situated, thus defusing some of the elitist tendencies to claim research knowledge as better knowledge. In all fairness, too, it should be added that feminism cannot claim sole right to an increased reflexivity in the research process. Feminist critique of hegemonic masculinity within research coexisted with the questioning of objectivity by followers of Marx and Weber in the 1980's (Skeggs, 1997:33).<sup>13</sup> Further, the 'postmodern' emphasis on knowledge as socially constructed is, indeed, a critique of the 'modern' vision of a 'true' knowledge, which can be extracted from reality (see for instance Baudrillard 1998; Derrida, 1967/1991; Rorty, 1989). These trends in social research, carried forward by both non-feminist and feminist scholars, have brought attention to the relativity of language allowing critical analysis of language and its function as a vehicle of power exertion, be it in the hands of a researcher or other privileged groups in society.

Without claiming to have insight into all strands of feminist or postmodern theory, I have here wanted to point out that I have been inspired by these developments.<sup>14</sup> At the same time I have not lived up to the ideals proposed by some feminists calling for a focus on under-privileged groups (of women) as a majority of the female travellers in this work are white and well educated in addition to often being supported by relatively large quantities of either symbolic or cultural capital. Basing one's research on long-lasting relationships between researchers and informants is also sometimes stressed in feminist work (see for instance Lundgren, 1993; Skeggs, 1997). While I have managed to stay in contact with a few of my informants and indeed experienced a strong sense of respect and understanding in relation to them, I have not remained 'in the field' for very long. The nature of the backpacker context does not support such efforts. Many of my informants did not have a permanent home address and were more or less constantly on the move. Instead I was offered e-mail addresses, which often turned out to have been cancelled when I later tried to resume communication. Thus, while some of the interviewees have been able to read and share the results of our meetings many will most likely remain unaware of the final outcome.

In addition, while I do find close and empathic relationships worth striving for, it can not overwrite the fact that sociological research must also dare to be critical, to ask and try to answer the difficult questions. I have remained a constructivist at heart, approaching the field in search of discursive statements and practices. I have most likely, through my analysis, violated some of my informants by using their testimonies in ways they would not like, or even agree with.

Yet, while searching for hidden messages, for discourses of domination and whatever else may appear in the informants testimonies I have remained true to the conviction that in research and in every-day life we produce different knowledges and that these should not be ranked against each other but are parallel and intertwined systems, like a rope needing at least two threads to remain intact. The informants' knowledge about travelling gives meaning to their lives and activities, in addition to adding information to my research. My knowledge about travelling gives meaning to the world of research, whilst in addition, eventually and hopefully, reaching the world of backpacking. Similarly these systems of knowledge have their own advantages in their specific contexts. It is much better for a traveller to know a lot about travelling than to know how to typify different travellers according to structural conditions in contemporary Europe, when dealing with a broken-down vehicle in an unfamiliar area or when congregating with other travellers at a guesthouse somewhere. It is, on the other hand, more favourable for a researcher to know theories on travelling, than the budget hostels of Bangkok, when wanting to address discriminating issues within travelling at a research conference aimed at eliminating global injustices in the tourism industry. All in all, in travel as in other areas of life, scientific results and everyday experience and knowledge continuously inform each other, in books, research reports and the minds' of both travellers and researchers.

A rather severe power problem, though, built into research, is that it often serves those with power. Again, this has been a prevailing feminist critique, claiming that

research has been preoccupied with maintaining systems of power.<sup>15</sup> Moreover science has defined what is interesting enough to study and as Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1991:134) claim:

[W]hat is taken as problematic in much of social science has also been what is problematic for those who control and manage the society.(...) Almost all those who rule and manage are male; interesting and important phenomena are identified from a male perspective as well as from the perspective of those who manage and control.

Not only the stories which scientists produce, but also the topics they choose, seem to be an advantage for some and a disadvantage for others. So it has been, also in the past, not least in relation to the realities of what it means to be a man or a woman. The realities of women are to various extents still left out. One consequence of this unfamiliarity with female reality is that it is still common to regard women as a group, not seeing individual traits in one's material, nor describing complexities and incompatibilities in a group of women (see also Felski, 1995). This critique falls back on feminism itself, in that feminist research too, contributes in various degrees to the power-structure. As Johansson and Molina (2002:265), Skeggs (1997:140) and others note, feminist research is usually practised by those with 'class and race privilege' and as such tends to be partial as well as representing only some women's experiences. In consequence, individualities, inconsistencies and complexities of 'womanhood' remain to some extent 'unexplored' by science. This is a concern, which has some relevance for my project.

The major part of my informants have been women and I have from the very beginning been interested in their stories in particular (although I have not neglected male travellers). The fact that they are women in societies permeated by hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) places them automatically in the position of the 'other'. They are what men are not, the difference to 'normality'. Like other critics of a previously male-biased tourism research (Beezer, 1993; Clifford, 1992; Riley, 1988; Ryall, 1988; Swain, 1995; Veijola and Jokinen, 1994) I have seen the urgency in learning more about travelling from female perspectives. This, I believe, is well in line with feminist efforts to unveil knowledge and experiences of the 'other'. However, the women interviewed in this project do hold a rather privileged position under contemporary circumstances. In terms of economic and/or cultural capital these women – and men – can generally be seen as rather affluent travellers compared to men and women both home and away. This research project has thus in some ways provided yet another contribution to a science which focuses on the interests of relatively powerful groups. Nevertheless, an awareness of this, in addition to the need to learn more about women's realities in various contexts including travelling, is more than enough justification for a continued investigation into the topic of gendered travel practices.

There is another aspect of the relationship between research and power, having little to do with gender, that has occupied my thoughts from time to time. Tourism research has been criticised for not being critical enough towards its research subject (see for example Fürsich and Kavoori, 2001). Although, in my experience, there are interesting and critical texts regarding various forms of tourism, a closer look into the

field of tourism research reveals a clear dominance of management inquiries and efforts to make 'better tourism' in order to increase profits. This is, I believe, a telling indication of the link between the managers of society and the interests of research. In societies where money accumulation, the market and flow of capital have become unquestionable necessities of life, research to increase profit is only too natural. Critical tourism research is, thus, up against a quite powerful body of research into tourism management, tourism planning and tourism marketing. There is a common notion that independent travelling as well as small-group travelling into peripheral areas at tourist destinations, are more 'environmentally' sensitive and 'ethical' than large-scale tourism developments. Directing a critical spotlight in that direction may be counteracted precisely because those in power do not want a critical analysis directed their own way. Not all, but too many, anthropologists, sociologists, marketers or travel writers share a common interest in exploring the field, for pleasure and/or business and are perhaps particularly prone to independent travelling. Primitivist and discriminating comments and biases exist implicitly and explicitly both in scientific theory and in travel stories. Stereotyped images are used to describe the cultures of others and so forth. Analysing dominant and sometimes prejudiced discourses in this type of travelling is to turn the focus on those with power rather than those without.

This chapter has hitherto been an effort to describe the ontological and epistemological assumptions framing my work. Interwoven in this discussion I have also tried not only to position my own biases and the results of the project within a specific social scientific perspective, but also to link the topic and the position of research *per se* to matters of power and control. Below I will approach the topic at a more practical level.

## The ethnographic approach

In line with previous discussions I have approached the backpacker communities using a number of roads to get there. It has been my conviction that different sources of empirical information can only serve to increase the awareness of complexities but also of permeating systems of meanings within the topic of inquiry. Convinced that backpackers inform themselves and one another through reading, writing, talking and acting, such means have also been of interest to me. Thus, an ethnographic approach, allowing for methodological flexibility, has been most appealing. This includes observations as well as interviews and the reading of travel texts. Part of this was carried out during fieldwork while some interviews and reading were also done at home.

The following will describe more or less practical matters during the gathering of the various forms of empirical material. It begins with a rather detailed account of the entire process of interviewing, as interviews have been my main source of information. From there the chapter moves on to a discussion concerning observations during fieldwork in addition to finally discussing the simultaneous reading of travel literature.

## Backpacker interviews

There is nothing particularly easy about doing qualitative research, using its methods in general or interviewing in particular. The answers it supplies are often situated in particular groups, actions and settings in time and space, making an 'objective' testing of the scientific results on different empirical material useless and even unnecessary. The accountability of my interview interpretations, their relevance and capacity to describe matters, such as backpacking, in a truthful way is instead a question of validity and interdependency between the results and the context they try to describe. Thus it must be possible to link the theories, arguments and conclusions to the issue being studied. Needless to say, it is up to the researcher to be as meticulous and careful as possible both in relation to matters of empirical concern and to the presentation of the process and its results. It must be possible for the reader of a research report to 'test' and question the arguments, not on different material, but on and through the detailed account of how these arguments have been produced. This is not to say that some qualitative research work cannot to some extent be generalised, which is a matter I will approach in the conclusion of this chapter.

Thus, in remaining true to a qualitative and ethnographic spirit, a rather high level of on-going reflexivity has been needed both in the process of preparing for interviews, during the interviews themselves and after, in presenting the interviews. The following account of the interview process begins with a short presentation of the interviews, followed by a discussion concerning the possible consequences of conducting interviews during fieldwork as opposed to hearing retrospective accounts from former travellers. It will in this context be argued that both these interview situations have their own advantages and that neither is closer to a 'truth' of travel. Rather, it can be expected that they are situated accounts serving different purposes when told. Questions of selection and criteria will also be addressed and framed through the concepts of time and space. An account of the interview situations will finalise the discussion on interviews.

### *Framing the travellers*

All in all, the arguments in this research are based upon interviews with forty travellers. Eleven of these interviews were conducted in Sweden in 1996 with female solo travellers interviewed after their home-coming. They were found through advertisements in newspapers where I stated that I was looking explicitly for women travellers who travelled solo, that is without a predestined travel companion and for at least six months. While those interviews were carried out by me, two students of sociology at University of Kalmar, Helena Ahlgren and Elise Keränen, have kindly let me share the contents of another three interviews with solo travelling women and six with male solo travellers conducted in Sweden in 1998 (see also Ahlgren and Keränen, 1999). Although these nine interviews have been of much help in understanding both complexities and similarities within backpacker communities, they have contributed less with regard to generating theories and more as regards reference and

comparison matters. The reason is partly due to the difference in focus between the students' essay and my own dissertation. Our purposes and interests, which undoubtedly affect the direction of the interviews, only occasionally touched upon each other. Another reason was due to my own presence – or lack of presence – in the material. Reading and listening to my own interviews I often remembered the context in which they were carried out, facial expressions and mood changes, making it easier to bring intuition and sensitivity to details to life. This sensitivity was often lost when it came to interpreting the interviews of others. Thus I came to use Ahlgren's and Keränen's work more as reference material than as full narratives for analysis and interpretation.

In addition, 20 interviews were conducted during fieldwork in two backpacker areas in Thailand. Of these interviewees thirteen were women of whom six travelled solo, while four of the seven male interviewees had also left home without a travel companion. An absolute majority of the interviewees carried passports from nations in north-western Europe. A few carried North American or Australian passports. As will be argued elsewhere in this book (see Chapter 5), I do not regard the mixture of nationalities as a problem, although I have at times been approached with questions concerning the difficulties of drawing conclusions from 'material' with such differing cultural backgrounds. I have not seen, and still do not see, any serious problems with this. Naturally people are affected by the specific discourses of their home countries, that is their cultural (as well as social and individual) baggage, but my expectations in finding similarities in those potentially different 'systems of meanings' have proved to be correct. Consequently, I have not stressed nationalities or even ages in relation to testimonies when these specifications have not been important. This is perhaps slightly disturbing in a project claiming to be conducted in an ethnographic spirit and thereby calling for a vivid and detailed account of those involved. However, in addition to often seeing nationality or age as irrelevant, I have chosen a somewhat neutral and anonymous presentation of the interviewees in this dissertation. This is in line with the promise I hold to them – that their identities may not be exposed to a reader. Some of the interviewed backpackers have related quite 'unique' experiences and places, where the risk of identification by a reader increases with each detail I include concerning home, itinerary and so forth. While possibly some of the interviewees would even have preferred to have their names in the report and the report read by their friends and family, there are others who have been more comfortable with knowing they cannot be identified even if this book one day ends up in the hands of, for instance, their travel companions.

Age, in relation to backpacking, is worth some thought. The youngest travellers I interviewed were 19 and the oldest 71. Eleven were under 25 while six were over 35. Fourteen were between 25 and 35. As regards Ahlgren's and Keränen's interviewees, five were below 25 while four were between 25 and 30. Their selection was drawn from fellow students at the university so possibly this accounts for the relatively lower age among these interviewees. It is plausible that a statistical analysis of the backpacker practice would come to the conclusion that the majority of travellers are 'young', whatever that means once we rid ourselves of modernist discourses of linear time and per-

sonal development, but that has yet to be proved. Nevertheless, any person spending some time in backpacker areas will find travellers of all ages, just as they will of both sexes, making it worthwhile to approach the phenomenon from a more 'age-neutral' perspective. Yet backpacking is often described as a youth phenomenon and analysed as such, or as a preoccupation for 'young adults'.<sup>16</sup> I prefer to see youth culture as just one of many influences making backpacker culture what it is. Otherwise there is a great risk that we, by focusing so much on age (and adolescent behaviour as invariably an age expression), overlook other important and explanatory information. In addition, an all too thorough focus on age risks becoming biased by linearity, individuality and the taken-for-granted notion that life is a series of developments towards the better, the more mature and complete (see Gubrium, Holstein and Buckholdt, 1994). The introduction of concepts such as 'young adults' can actually be taken as an indication of change in ontological assumptions. The term young adults is used to categorise people who have passed youth, in age, but remained 'youthful', in mind, suggesting that there is a common frame of thought rather than of age which unites teenagers with the generation before them. Instead of talking about youngsters, young adults or possibly even young pensioners it would perhaps be more appropriate to find other commonalities than one that is so closely linked to age. Having said that, I have not avoided 'youth theory' when I have found it applicable. On the other hand – as I have already made clear – I have not approached the backpacker area with the intention of finding and interviewing only young backpackers.

I have, however, been rather particular on another issue, namely length of journey. As noted above I have placed a lower limit on the interviewees when it comes to the duration of their journeys. Initially I strove towards a travel duration of a year or more from the interviewees and, indeed, some of them have remained travelling for much longer than that. I also wanted them to be *solo* travellers. I found the issue of duration important, as I felt a long time span criteria would increase the possibility for me to meet travellers who considered the journey a more or less fundamental break with home *routines* and home *times*. Furthermore, I expected *solo* travelling to be experienced as a much stronger separation from home than is the case when travelling in company. At the time I was quite preoccupied with thoughts and interests regarding time experience and time consciousness, a curiosity which was additionally sparked after a few initial interviews where references to clocks, to *personal time* and to matters of routine were recurrent themes. Some of the long-term travellers even made a point of throwing away their clocks and watches and living in rhythm with 'body' and 'nature'. I have remained interested in time issues but have found the length of journey slightly less important than I did initially as my research questions changed from a focus on time to a focus on issues such as the construction of *risk* and *adventure*. Although definitely linked to matters of duration and routine, I have taken a particular interest in solo versus pair or group travelling and off-the-beaten-track travelling versus more institutionalised 'beaten-track' travelling. Consequently, the time criterion was lowered from one year to six months during the fieldwork in Thailand carried out in 1998. In addition, as I was now more aware of the importance of solitude and off-the-beaten-track travelling in constructing adventure stories, I made

it a point to widen my criteria rather than limiting them and to listening to voices from outside the focal points. In order to understand the importance ascribed to solo travelling or to off-the-beaten-track travelling it is – in a culture relying on mythologies as intensively as backpacking appears to do – equally important to listen to the non-practitioners as to the practitioners. Indeed, pair travellers in this project have given me many hints on beliefs concerning the ‘nature’ of solo travelling, and home-sick travellers refusing to leave the ‘safe’ surroundings of dense backpacker areas have taught me much on the status of the off-the-beaten-track traveller. Almost needless to say, female travellers have shed light on expectations on the male traveller, while male travellers have informed me of the norms of femininity.

Thus the criteria have changed during the project and I have, so to speak, remodelled the group of informants which is, again, an advantage of an ethnographic and interpretative approach in which it is possible, and even expected, to change both questions and criteria as understanding and interpretation develop (Davies, 1999). A similar flexibility has been present in the methods used to approach the informants and to encourage them to share their narrated experiences. Situation specifics, interviewee preferences and contextual matters have influenced the way stories have been presented to me, which the following will address.

#### *From one narrator to another*

As I stated earlier, the interviewees in Sweden were found through advertisements in newspapers where I asked for former long-term solo-travelling women to contact me. The interviews were carried out in the homes of the travellers in most cases and in my own home in one case as the interviewee had not yet found her own place to live. The interviewees found during the two month fieldwork in Thailand were approached using different methods. One was via a notice-board at an Internet café in the Banglamphu area in Bangkok asking for backpackers to leave a name and guesthouse address with the manager of the Internet café who had become a good friend during the many hours I had spent there contacting my husband, supervisor and other colleagues at my workplace in Sweden. The notice asked for travellers who had spent at least six months on the road and preferably had left home without a travel companion, but also stated that solo travelling was not necessary. Most of my interviewees were found this way while a few others agreed to an interview as a result of my approaching them in guesthouse or work settings. This method was used particularly on the island Ko Chang just outside the township Trat near the Cambodian border as there appeared to be no clear centres frequented by backpackers there.

All interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed forming material of well over 1000 single spaced typed pages of interview material. Most interviews took place in guesthouse rooms, my own or the interviewee’s. Occasionally interviews were, at the interviewee’s request, conducted in a more public setting such as a restaurant, a guesthouse sitting area or on the beach (at Ko Chang). The interviews lasted between one and a half to three hours and a few were even longer. While no talk or conversation is ever unstructured I have remained content with a rather loosely

structured thematic guide (see Davies and Esseveld, 1989). By that I mean that I have wanted to lead the interviews in to a number of central themes but as long as these themes were reflected upon I mostly let the interview take its own course and the interviewee run with the ball. Consequently, some interviews turned into more of what one might call life-story interviews in which stories about the journey were coupled by, and linked to, childhood experiences and future expectations. Other interviews were more focused on the matter at hand with detailed descriptions of the travel itinerary and experiences. This also accounts, at least partly, for the varying length in interviews. Some interviewees simply had a lot to talk about and I did not mind being both listener and participant in such conversations. After all, the stories I was given access to, were often exciting and thrilling both as accounts in their own right and as inspiration to interpretations and headways in theoretical thinking. Indeed, listening to people who are prepared to share their thoughts is in my view one of the major advantages of doing qualitative interview work.

One problem arising when interviews are conducted within a period and place of fieldwork is dealing with matters outside the interviews. What do you do with the stories that are told when the tape recorder is shut off? In my case, particularly if the interviewee stayed at the same guesthouse as I did, some interviews led to more conversations over dinner or a drink in the evening. It only took a few days of doing interviews during the field-work to understand that this was a matter of ethical concern as interviewees sometimes, not surprisingly, introduced interesting topics after the formal interviews were concluded (see Davies and Esseveld, 1989). I decided in those cases where I felt there could be a continued contact, to inform my potential breakfast, dinner or drink partner that I would remain 'in research' and possibly take notes of interesting conversations or events. In other words I let these travellers become aware of my presence there as a participant observer. This way I felt I had offered them the possibility of withdrawal, which as it turned out was not put into practice by anyone.

Summing up, this work rests upon a foundation of a rather flexible empirical interview material, ranging from retrospective narratives in Swedish homes to conversations of rather obvious 'presentness' and 'situatedness' in backpacker settings. In addition, while some interviewees have volunteered through answering advertisements, others have agreed as a result of my personally contacting them. While this has been well in line with my intention to frame the topic using a multiplicity of sources it is by no means unimportant. Different sources, such as retrospective and distanced stories told after homecoming or stories told 'in action' while in the backpacker context, seem to at least partially carry their own logics (see Andersson-Cederholm, 1999).

### *Stories from the outside and from within*

As mentioned above, most of the interviews were the result of travellers responding to my advertisements in the Swedish newspaper or to a notice at an Internet Café. It can be assumed that people answering these were travellers who felt they had a reason to tell their story and at first, during the initial stages of my research project, I thought there would be a connection between an interest in answering an advertise-

ment and the likeliness that the person would tell a positive story. As it turned out the place and time of the interview seemed more governing upon the mood of the interviewee, than the initial inclination to participate.

Indeed, the interviews carried out in Sweden were to a large extent positive accounts, stories mostly of exciting and favourable experiences. Initially too, I saw this as a consequence of selection methods, which it may possibly also be, but as I continued with my fieldwork I realised that this may not be the only, or best, explanation. After having yet again relied on the travellers' own initiative and interest to partake, through using advertisements at a place where backpackers gather, it was much to my surprise that quite a few were prepared to tell me just as much about the bad times as the good ones and some even more about the difficulties they experienced. Homesickness, illnesses and questions which can be summed up quite appropriately by the phrase 'the meaning of life' were rather recurrent. In retrospect I have come to realise that at least some of these interviewees may have regarded our meeting as a sanctuary for tension release, placing me in the role of Simmel's *stranger* (Simmel, 1911/1971), a person without local ties to which delicate stories can be told. In addition, the fact that the travellers on the road presented less optimistic, and in that sense more complex, accounts points to the advantages of approaching a topic via different empirical routes. Quite possibly the researcher's presence in the field, increases the prospects for more 'spontaneous' and straight-forward answers (see Burgess, 1982). A narrator narrating events retrospectively has had plenty of chances to reflect, rearrange and edit the story (including repressing sections which are unfavourable). She is, so to speak, narrating from outside her own story. The narrator narrating from within her story, that is in the travel present, has had less time and chance for narrative mending. This is not to say that one story is 'truer' than another, that interviews in the field are always closer to reality than those conducted outside. Truth is not a discoverable fact but rather the experiencing of something being 'as it is' within a given language or culture (Barker and Galasiński, 2001:20). Stories change and old truths die or are reincarnated when time and space are altered. The fact that a returning traveller, upon home-coming sometimes has forgotten, deliberately or non-deliberately, days of hard going, signs of weakness and times of unhappiness, does not make her a liar. The story she serves a year later is the story which gives her life meaning in the present and as such it is as 'true' as any account she would have given while remaining in the travel circuit.

Following upon this line of reasoning I want to stress that the distance, or indeed closeness, between the traveller and her experiences both in relation to time and space has not been regarded as a problem in this project (see also Andersson-Cederholm, 1999). Being able to present some sort of true account telling us what travelling really is has never been an expectation of mine. On the contrary, the sometimes contradictory and often complex stories that have appeared once the journey has been addressed from different angles have been treated as valuable and intriguing contributions to an ideal type journey story of both complexity and multiple meanings.

The same can be said about the matters discussed below. Gathering material through fieldwork is a far from straight-forward methodological process, implying

complex relationships between the researcher and the informants/observed as well as, at times, some very slippery roads to travel, through this timespace of reflexive participation (Burgess, 1982; Clifford, 1990).

## Leaking fields

I use the term *fieldwork* with some reluctance. Along with for instance Clifford (1990:65) and Mulinari (1999:43) it can easily be argued that the term fieldwork in itself is deeply embedded in various western discourses. In science, religion and the military, the field is more or less explicitly addressed as a (female) space to explore, to penetrate, dominate and investigate. It carries with it that same taken-for-granted logic mentioned earlier; the field as a reality out there, a demarcated space of a specific quality that the distanced researcher enters in order to extract some sort of objective knowledge. While there is always said to be the threat of going *native* while in the field most researchers also seem to be able to pull out unharmed and ready to produce objective knowledge of the material gathered. Such is not the field I entered. To again draw from Clifford (1990:64), it leaks. It so to speak spills over into the rest of life, the non-backpacking existence, in addition to being swamped by complex webs of 'non-fieldy' experiences, knowledges and existences. The field we are in when we do fieldwork is just as much an ideal construct as the categories and typologies we later construct when writing down our findings. This does not make fieldwork irrelevant, as ideal constructs are often the best available to describe social life, but it points to the need for reevaluation of the old simplifying descriptions of the field as a place 'outside' and 'away' which can be entered and left by choice. The following is an attempt to describe just how difficult it can be to identify and define the field I was expected to enter.

To begin with my field is far too big to let itself be studied as a demarcated zone. Researchers can let themselves be taken in a plane to Brazil, or to Thailand, India, Madagascar or Australia and they would still quite easily find the travellers' field of action. Backpackers tend to travel in most countries in the world. The researcher wanting to know everything in the *field of backpacking* would have to travel extensively and for a long time.

Second, once arriving, the field is not as easy to identify as it was in the plans made prior to departure. I have many examples from my work where I found myself talking to the wrong people or being in the wrong place at the wrong time, whether intentionally or unintentionally. I believe it is actually necessary at times to leave the field while in the field. My field, for instance, was initially the space in which adventurous solo travellers gathered, so those were the travellers I was hoping to meet and interact with. After a while though, I found that in order to get a more modulated picture of their situation I needed to talk to other travellers too, those who seemed to be in the same field, for example the same low-budget guesthouse and those that were in a slightly different field, for example a 'mid-range' guesthouse on a different street in Bangkok. The stories I heard from outside the field gave me valuable information

about the field and about my own position in it. Thus, rather than being absorbed by or having gone 'native' in the field, I found myself situated in a complexity of different stories, different lives and different values where my objective became to situate myself in many different contexts, doing rather frightening night excursions with the 'rough and tough' travellers in the backstreets of Banglamphu in Bangkok one night and spending safe and controlled evenings at European style restaurants with groups of young and fresh travellers another night. Thus, the backpacker field is less like a clear-cut space of particular quality and more like a web, where people, relations, values and places interact, unite as well as drift apart.

Third, the field I have entered is not only complex in itself. My own relation to it is equally hard to position. Using Goffman's (1959) terminology, it is possible to take (at least) three different positions within the field. While it is clear that most (qualitative) research strives to get behind the obvious and explore even the darkest corners backstage, it is most likely that researchers, at first, find themselves as observers in an audience. It takes time to be accepted frontstage, where the action is, or in the backstage rooms where you prepare for conduct. Even so, once researchers have been permitted entrance to the whole theatre and know the formal and informal rules that guide the action, the position within the setting will remain unstable. I was a participant observer at the best of times, joining travellers in their (and my) day-to-day business, while not really being seen as a researcher by others or by myself. Other times it was clear that travellers I was sharing a dinner with kept their private matters away from the conversation and made me part co-actor on stage, part audience, thus part researcher. There were times when I, myself, did not know exactly 'who' I was and in what position I was located. Here is an example taken from my field notes where I seem to be unsure whether I am a wife, a researcher or a backpacker. It was written towards the end of my fieldwork when my husband had come for a vacation and to spend a couple of weeks with me.

We were having a conversation with a German backpacker who just came down from Laos. After the conversation when we decided to go to bed, my husband took the hand of the German and shook it. A normal thing to do in Sweden but definitely not here, I realised as I watched the German's reaction and *felt* my own. How absolutely "backpacker wrong"! A meeting with a backpacker seldom ends with a handshake. More often with a hug or no touching at all. The handshake made the scene very formal and I found myself wondering how much a handshake works to keep distance between people. It reminds me, too, of the conversation I had the other day with two women travellers about how physical one becomes while travelling. I have found many of my interviewees reach over to *grab* my arm when they want to emphasise something and during the last weeks I've found myself doing the same thing, and not only with the people I interview. X [bar owner] and I often hold each other when we talk and X [traveller] and I sometimes hold on to each other, either to make our way through a crowded area or because we are emphasising something when talking (*italics added on later occasion*, Ko Chang 18/3/98).

The statement shows the mixed feelings I, at times, encountered. Emotions, memories, touching and spontaneity seemed unavoidable during the research process. In addition it shows the presence of my own past. The three years I spent as a backpacker at a younger age were helpful in many ways as they supplied me with an awareness

of the codes and expectations needed to fit in with the other travellers. Yet, this former travel experience sometimes challenged me. A particular smell, the heat, the sounds of Bangkok, the familiar appearance of new guests that had just entered the guesthouse carrying their backpacks in the morning could rock my research cradle. When, at times, I was struck by my own memories I could fall into intense feelings of the loneliness which seems to be present now and then for most solo travellers I have interviewed or by equally intense feelings of 'freedom', happiness and desire to move on. On such occasions, *au contraire* the expectations of good ethnography, I actually needed to regain distance, to walk away from the stage and its back regions and find a seat in the audience. I did this literally by sitting down somewhere in the area commencing to take notes or by a computer at the Internet café, sending e-mails to my husband, supervisor or colleagues at work.

Fourth, and related to my own acts of balancing between the researcher and traveller positions, are all the links between the actors in the field and their realities outside the field. Travellers and researchers alike are not only informed by the contacts with home environments, but also by their cultural (and social) biases, norms and structures of thought. The field, claims Clifford (1990:55) 'is more and more littered with "serious" ethnographic texts. One writes, among, against, through, and in spite of them'. The media of north-western Europe have 'been there and done that' already. Magazines and television programmes cater for all travellers' tastes. Thus, travellers to the tropics, be it backpackers or researchers, carry other peoples' stories with them, through which they filter their own experiences. In consequence, the field is never pure or untouched, neither to the people living in it, nor to the travellers who carry memories of the past as well as thought structures of north-western Europe with them. Most likely the future too affects the experiences as most travellers, backpackers and researchers, tend to see their visit to distant places as an occasion for investing in future symbolic capital through taking photos, postcard writing or, indeed, taking field-notes (Andersson-Cederholm, 1999; Bourdieu, 1984; Elsrud, 2001; Munt, 1994).

Far from being a secluded and demarcated area, the backpacker field is a web of complexities interfering with the particulars of time and place. Stressful as it is to not always have clear-cut answers to every question, I have not seen it as a problem for the research process and its outcome. The difficulty in defining an exact field is a problem for approaches other than the ethnographic and qualitative. An awareness about this difficulty is, on the other hand, an incentive to approach the place of research with respect and with the intention to make the best and most professional use of the situation. After all, ethnographic fieldwork offers possibilities of closeness to and insight into the everyday life of the informants, which few or no other methods can surpass (Davies, 1999).

### *All roads lead to Thailand*

Initially it was all but clear where the best place for participating in the backpacker circuit would be. The *fieldwork*, eventually, consisted of a two-month stay in Thai-

land in the spring 1998. Choosing travellers' areas in Thailand was the outcome of a number of considerations. Given the initial aim to study only (women) solo long-term and off-the-beaten track travellers I was looking for an area where I could most likely come across such travellers but not so many other tourists. I had the intention of finding a destination which in travel mythology, such as much of the information in the *Lonely Planet* guidebooks, was described as unique, hard to get to and off the beaten track. However, one of the very qualities making such a destination popular with these travellers is that not very many travellers in fact go there. Plans for heading to so-called 'peripheral areas' of India, to North Africa or to the Solomon Islands were thus set aside due to the circumstance that I would have had to spend a long time there in order to find as many travellers to interview as I needed. Given the situation I was in at the time it would have cost too much and taken too long.

The next option was instead to seek out the opposite, a place where 'all' travellers go, in order to have many travellers to choose from. My own experience told me that there are a number of travel areas in which many travellers, regardless of itinerary and intentions, congregate. These are the airport and/or train 'hubs' of Asia; large cities linking one part of the world with the other, one part of the country with another. Bangkok is such a place where a lot of travellers are united, often in waiting. While so-called off-the-beaten-track travellers may be spending a few days waiting for the next bus to the Cambodian or Burma borders others may hang around for the train to Malaysia and yet others, less eager to travel adventure style, may be preparing themselves for a plane to Bali in Indonesia or an air-conditioned chartered bus to Ko Samui. Having added the fact that I had spent some time in Thailand earlier, was familiar with a number of traveller areas and was able to speak at least a few words of Thai, fieldwork in Thailand seemed to be the better option. I did not have to spend as much time finding my bearings and settling in as I would have in a completely new place. I soon found that my assumptions were right; the crowded backpacker areas I stayed in not only harboured travellers claiming to be content with remaining in backpacker congregations but also those who claimed to be dissatisfied with the backpacker crowds they were in, who stated they would soon head for peripheral areas and more adventurous travelling. My initial aim to interact with and interview long-term solo travellers was therefore successful but I also had a chance to reconsider the criteria and include male travellers as well as pair travellers in my study. This did not alter my focus on and interest in solo, off-the-beaten-track travelling. Rather it enhanced it due to the centrality of that topic in most conversations regardless of the actor's preferences. The travelling adventurer appeared to be a strong social and cultural construction.

My work was carried out in two different backpacker areas in Thailand, one being Banglamphu in Bangkok, which is one of a number of areas in Bangkok crowded with guesthouses catering for travellers but with few charter hotels. The second area was the south-western shoreline of the island Ko Chang, outside Trat near the Cambodian border. According to narratives in both interviews and guidebooks the island is a popular destination for rather adventurous travellers. As it appeared, those constructions are now under rather serious threat from a reality in which regular tourists

from both Thailand and overseas have found their way to the island by way of, for instance, a recently constructed road and electricity supply. The following will describe the two areas in some more detail.

### *Banglamphu, Bangkok*

The main road in Banglamphu is called Khao San Road and is 'world-famous' in backpacker discourses. It is only a few hundred meters long but constantly crowded with travellers zigzagging between guesthouses, ticket agents, pharmacies, Internet cafes, restaurants, money changers, street vendors and the odd massage establishment. While prostitution is not banned from the area it is less dominant on the Khao San Road scene than it is in some of the tourist areas in the eastern part of the city. The road and its adjacent *sois* (little alleys through which you go on foot or on anything with two wheels) accommodate approximately 100 guesthouses according to some guidebooks and is said to be the best place in Bangkok for those travellers who are on a tight budget (see for instance *Lonely Planet's* guidebook to Thailand, 1997:246-247). This is also where the story in the popular book – and motion film – *The Beach* starts with the lead character being blessed with information about a distant and 'untouched' beach. Quite a few of the interviewed travellers were aware of this.

I had never stayed in the Banglamphu area when I spent time in Thailand 10 years earlier but I had visited Khao San Road in order to buy plane tickets. Entering now, I realised that the area's touristy touch has increased quite dramatically. The street and its nearby *sois* were crowded with backpackers every hour of the day and night. In the daytime the traffic was more intense with a lot of mini-buses and tuk-tuks (motorbike taxis) dropping off and picking up travellers. There was always a constant flow of slow-moving travellers with their backpacks making their way through the crowd of other luggage-free travellers who had already deposited their backpacks in a guesthouse somewhere. The street was just as crowded during the night with a large number of restaurants, cafés and guesthouses showing the latest videos or playing the latest music making the place as noisy as it was during the day.

I seldom encountered travellers who said they liked the area, or even Bangkok, which was often addressed as dirty, noisy and greedy. Yet, these same critics were certain they could not avoid it as this was the most practical place to be when on the road. Here you could buy tickets to anywhere, meet up with other travellers and perhaps wait in some comfort for a visa application to be accepted. In this sense it seemed Banglamphu lived up to the expectations the guidebooks had placed on it.

I used the area for observations of all kinds. At times I would sit in a restaurant watching a group of travellers reuniting. The area also has plenty of travellers' notice-boards, where you can leave a message hoping the person you are looking for will eventually read it. It was obvious these notice-boards were popular and functional. The following is an extract from my notes which will show what type of information I acquired from such places.

Have been in the Internet cafe and am now sitting in the rather popular backpacker restaurant outside. I just watched a rendezvous between a girl and a couple with a baby. The girl was in here when she cried out and ran out and across the street only to be met at the other side of the street by a woman who was soon joined by a man and a little baby. I thought about all the times people have told me that Khao San is where you meet up with people you know – intentionally or unintentionally. That is why many of the central restaurants have billboards full of notes for John, Franz, Anders, Louise and so on. On the one next to me I can read:

“We are staying at Sawasdee guesthouse until the 5th of March.”

“Joey you bastard, if you read this you made it in one piece.”

“Renate – I did it and lived.”

“Franc, we must leave, come see us in old, cold Sweden – Benny and the boys...”

“Samantha, it was blacker than hell. I am going to paradise. (turn over)”

“Toby! Come see us here in the evening on the 4th. Your fans”

(Bangkok 7/3/98)

At other times I would more actively take part in the action through socialising with travellers and joining them in day to day tasks and practices; finding a pharmacy or a place to wash clothes, buying a box to send things home in, going out to eat or having a drink and so forth. All in all I found Banglamphu in Bangkok to be an area quite appropriate for my needs. There were plenty of places to observe from, just as there were plenty of places to visit together with other travellers. In addition, it offered research conveniences such as computers and Internet access at the Internet cafés.

One topic encountered regularly in Bangkok was the notion of the beach. Small and large-size travel agencies advertised beach areas in their windows or on wooden boards by their desks and travellers made reference to them constantly. After all Bangkok, it seemed, was just a place of transit.

### *Ko Chang, Trat province*

There are plenty of places in Thailand which could be representative when it comes to finding a popular beach where backpackers congregate. Many of them, however, have lost traveller popularity due to the increase of non-backpacker tourists. Finding the adventurous backpackers meant looking for destinations that were located slightly off the beaten track. My choice fell on the island Ko Chang, an area I thought I was familiar with and which still was marketed and described as being adventurous and relatively ‘untouched’ by tourists (including backpackers). While it offers the traveller plenty of beaches it is also part of the Ko Chang National Marine Park, in addition to hosting one of Thailand’s best preserved rainforests, according to the *Lonely Planet’s* guidebook to Thailand (1997:384). Based on my own prior experience it has changed quite notably in the last ten to fifteen years. In 1987 it was reached through hitching a ride with a fishing boat or with the mail boat. There was no road reaching the island’s west and south-western coasts where the paradise beaches were said to be and getting there involved a fair bit of climbing and walking. The western shoreline, called Hat Sai Khao (White Sand Beach), was the home of only one small bungalow business catering for travellers in addition to a number of small fishing settlements. Electricity had not reached this part of the island. In 1998, while

my fieldwork was being conducted, a number of passenger ferries reached and left its north-eastern shore on a daily basis. Part of the mountain had been removed to make way for a road and there were plenty of pickup-trucks to take tourists not only to Hat Sai Khao but as far down as Hat Kaibae further south. There, however, the road and electricity ends and the adventurous status of Hat Sai Khao in 1987 seemed to have been transferred to the beaches south of Hat Kaibae, that is to what seasoned backpackers called Lonely Beach, or 'Nudy Beach', and beyond. Trekking was still required to reach these beaches and the few bungalow gatherings further south. The difference in preferences among visitors, between the electricity and road equipped beaches and the distant ones, were notable during the time of fieldwork. While Hat Sai Khao, and even Hat Kaibae at the end of the road, were fringed even by some mid-range hotels and answered to a multitude of tastes regarding food and music the places beyond attracted those travellers who claimed to be looking for solitude, authentic Thai style and a place to stay for a longer time. Again it was possible to participate, interview and observe rather disparate backpacker practices at one fieldwork location, although this time there was some trekking involved.

I spent two weeks at Hat Kaibae and its surroundings doing mainly interviews and observations. Although, at times, I participated in interactions among backpackers, I found it harder to do so after I was joined by my husband. It seemed that being in a couple, instead of solo, could work against making new acquaintances and approaching or being approached by travellers. I solved this to some extent by setting up a work schedule where I would spend time alone during the days visiting backpacker areas at other beaches or having meals by myself at any of the restaurants in the area. Despite the lack of open participation I found the weeks at Ko Chang very valuable from an observation point of view. Compared to travel areas in Bangkok, Ko Chang offered plenty of comprehensive situations to study and absorb due to the concentration of action in small spots, such as the Kaibae pier and the small number of travellers who used it to reach more secluded areas of the island, or the only restaurant at Lonely Beach where the travellers were forced to eat due to lack of alternatives. Being there usually meant being where backpacker action and interaction takes place, where itineraries are told over dinner-tables, travel preferences are aired out loud or meetings take place between travellers and residents, in most cases people in the tourism business.

### **Findings in fiction, books, magazines and other guides**

Parallel to interviews, fieldwork and analysis I have tried to read what the travellers claim to read themselves. I have previously described why I find the *voices of text* important in getting to know my area of research. Below I will give an account of what texts I have used and how I have used them. I have been rather selective in my choice of media, initially only reading the literature mentioned and read by the interviewed travellers themselves. Later on in the project I also read some material, which was not explicitly mentioned by the informants, yet deemed relevant, given my increased focus on adventure and risk.

### *Media capturing the spirit of backpacking*

Not all media seem to be worth the attention of the critical backpackers. I realised that it was as important for backpackers to demarcate themselves from other tourists through reading the 'right stuff' as it was through choosing the right accommodation, clothing, food and destination (Elsrud, 2001/Chapter 3). The first eleven interviews conducted in Sweden led to a subscription to *Vagabond*, a Swedish magazine, which at least in 1996 seemed to be writing predominantly for independent travellers. Although my interpretation is that it has moved 'up-market' since then and now also tries to reach charter tourists, it is still, as far as I know, the most popular Swedish magazine for backpackers. In addition to having collected five years of *Vagabond* I have, on a much less regular basis, read another Swedish magazine, *Res*, as well as the British equivalent of *Vagabond*, *Wanderlust* – more to locate the position and possible divergence of *Vagabond* and less to extract themes for my analysis. Towards the end of this project and the gathering of empirical material I also read some examples of adventure magazines from the United States, such as *Adventure* and *Escape* in search of stories that would question the views that I had focused on in the European magazines. I found little to challenge the 'European' messages and thus remained content with these the rest of the project.

During my fieldwork I read books mentioned to me by the informants, such as *The Beach* (Garland, 1996), *Are You Experienced* (Sutcliffe, 1997) and *On the Road* (Kerouac, 1957/1997) in addition to entire or parts of *Lonely Planet* guidebooks which are by far the most popular travel guides for backpackers (see Chapter 5). The most important guidebook to the project has naturally been *Lonely Planet's* guide to Thailand, but also those to India and Nepal have been scrutinised as they seem to have been rather important to some of the travellers I interviewed. Upon returning home I also watched the movie based on *The Beach*.

Towards the end of my research project I started using the Internet more than I initially thought I would, due to its quite recent and rapid increase as a tool for communication among backpackers. As will be argued in Chapter 5 on media creativity, texts on the Internet have, at least at times, a rather different character than those in magazines and books. Home pages of some of my interviewees have also been studied as well as Internet sites that are supervised and censored, as well as non-censored ones which offer travellers a chance to report on their experiences.

### *Selective readings and reading selectively*

As noted above my approach to the media has been selective and closely related to interviewee testimonies. Indeed, just as I described earlier when relating to the process of interviewee selection, I have been equally flexible in choosing which media texts to focus on. I have let new criteria and interests, developed during the whole research process, evolve into new directions and inquiries into the media texts.

I have (above all) focused on the media mentioned and related to by the informants, which means there is plenty more information available to travellers than I have scanned. *Lonely Planet* guidebooks have their competitors in for instance *Wilma*

*Guides* (mainly for Scandinavian travellers) and *Rough Guides*. *Res* may not be the only alternative to *Vagabond* in Sweden and *Wanderlust*, *Escape* and *Adventure* are far from alone in influencing the thoughts of travellers (and others) in England or the United States. However, a mapping of all available literature has not been relevant to this project. Just as I never have had the intention to say all that can be said about the life of backpackers, nor have I set out to find and present all trends/tendencies/topics found in travel media.

One of the great advantages of the ethnographic approach is not to make generalisations but rather to provide the possibility of getting close to the topic of interest. Studying situations, interaction and people at 'arms length', give valuable, complex and rather detailed information hidden to those researchers who work from within their academic departments, or choose 'neutral' areas for interviews. This is not the strength of fieldwork in splendid isolation, but is also true in relation to text analysis and media studies within ethnographically slanted projects.

There are a number of over-arching, as well as detailed, selections that have been made in relation to my reading/analysing guidebooks, magazines or movies. First of all there are the selections made by travellers. An example of this will be found in Chapter 5 where one of the travellers refers to 'the book' when talking about an experience he has had at a town square in Kathmandu. Later, I went through the *Lonely Planet* guide to Nepal (which is what the traveller referred to as 'the book') only to find the passage the traveller was 'speaking from'. The whole of the Nepal guidebook has never been read – I have concentrated particularly on the passages mentioned by the interviewees. Another example is my reading of the entire *The Beach* (Garland, 1996) as it has had such a dominant position in many of the interviewee testimonies. Other selections are 'suggested' by researchers, as when reading Bhattacharyya's (1997) critical interpretation of the *Lonely Planet* guidebook to India inspired me to read the entire guidebook. Finally there are the more or less self-made selections, but these have naturally been influenced by what researchers or travellers have suggested were important. An example of this has been the selective readings following up on my particular interest in time, gender, adventure and identity stories. Searching explicitly for texts relating to these topics I have left large sections of magazines – which did not contain relevant meanings or messages – unattended. All research processes, ethnographic or otherwise, must involve selections and limitations. The potential problems are not related as much to the subjective selection of texts (as long as these texts are linked to the matter of enquiry) as they are to the fact that reading texts does not automatically give a correct answer to how these texts are used by their readers. To use Hall's terminology, the processes of encoding and decoding can be and are often two completely different matters. Seldom do the two coincide to make possible a 'perfectly transparent communication' (Hall, 1993:32). This matter will be discussed further in Chapter 5, which deals with media messages, but I would like to point out here that if there is a method particularly suited to taking into account not only the cultural constructions found in the media but also how these are received, interpreted and even created, it is the ethnographic project. Triangulation, that is using a number of empirical sources and comparing these (Denzin, 1997), has served

this project with both confirmations and paradoxes, which would have remained unnoticed had I remained with just one sort of empirical source.

## Conclusion: a note on possibilities and limitations

This chapter has moved from an exposition of the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions informing this project to a presentation of practical matters involved in the gathering of empirical material. It has been argued that travellers are narrators, relying on the possibilities and limitations of language as well as of cultural and social structures of thought when telling their stories. While not being totally determined by previous texts and talk, it has been argued that travellers are at least influenced by discursive 'guides' to travelling informed by their positions in time and space. These guides, it has been argued, can and will expose themselves in a variety of voices; written texts, various forms of talk and not least through the voice of non-verbal communication, by which I mean aesthetic expressions such as body language, hair styles, clothing and so forth.

Needless to say, researchers, too, are influenced by cultural and social structures of thought and meaning. One important contribution to research that has been developed by feminist scholars and adapted by others, is the term *situated knowledge* (Haraway, 1991) or the awareness the term seeks to encompass. The results of research are situated in more ways than one. They are naturally informed and influenced by the very context they are developed in and from, but also by the baggage researchers carry with them, their personal, social, cultural and theoretical positions. Their habitus, but also their cultural and economic capital, to use Bourdieu's (1984) terms, influence the questions they ask, the empirical material they search for and the answers they find. The researcher is always a part of the result. The best way to deal with this unavoidable condition is not necessarily to find a 'truer' or more 'objective' method, but to be as reflexive and meticulous as possible in the research process and its presentation.

In this chapter I have wanted to open up an understanding of the necessity of a certain selectivity both in relation to empirical matters as well as to interpretations and theoretical approaches. Answers to many questions – that others would like to have seen – will not be provided. Some theories, preferred by others, will also remain silent. There are certainly additional modes and concepts through which the subject matter can be described and defined. While others have focused quite extensively on matters such as *authenticity* searching (Andersson-Cederholm, 1999; Cohen, 1979, 1988; MacCannell, 1976/1989, 1992; Meethan, 2001; Wang, 1999) or travelling as *gazing* (Urry, 1990) I have come to focus primarily on matters best approached with the concepts *identity*, *adventure*, *time* and *gender* and concepts related to these. Further, the concepts of my choice are limitations too. They are constructs seeking to frame and name aspects in common among a group or a text. They neither encom-

pass all aspects or complexities found within the empirical material, nor do they fit comfortably the experience of each individual. Often, too, they over-lap each other. As the reader of this book will find, adventure and gender are as interwoven with each other as are time and adventure or adventure and risk to name but a few of the many blurred and untidy borders within this project. Although I have tried my best to be 'true' to the complexities encountered and, when appropriate, to relate my findings to other research focusing on different aspects of long-term travelling, there will undoubtedly be times where some readers, including myself, notice unused opportunities for alternative interpretations or theoretical developments.

Thus, with this chapter I have pointed out some of the limitations involved in doing qualitative research, imprinted by the contextuality of fieldwork and the position of the researcher. I have wanted to point out the importance of such an awareness, as it is this awareness that actually also gives the very same project its benefits and advantages. While all research is a result of situated knowledge – influencing the questions we ask and the interpretations we make – only some methodological declarations seem to acknowledge the complications involved and, not least, the advantages offered. There are considerable possibilities for thorough and detailed understanding of complex social processes once situated knowledge is accepted and made to work in favour of the research project. Accepting, for instance, the fact that my knowledge is situated and positioned within my own life-experience as well as within the context where I do research has been an advantage and is useful both in the research process and in this presentation of it. It has definitely allowed me to enter backpacker areas making use of my former experience, rather than striving towards a goal of 'objectivity'. It has also given me the courage to dig deeper into some topics rather than trying to cover every possible topic in backpacking.

Furthermore, being convinced of the importance of situated knowledge in the research process and the implications it has for the type of understanding produced is not the same as arguing that it is irrelevant to speak about possibilities of generalisability. If by generalisability we mean that the exact same results will appear when the same questions are asked to another population by another researcher, we are still too entangled in the heritage left by positivist science. If, on the other hand, we accept the benefits of qualitative research and let it develop, as a particular science on its own terms, generalisability becomes a different matter (Alasuutari, 1995:143-157). Although this research project cannot be duplicated with identical results, I am certain that the discourses and the structures of thought that have been presented so far and that will be presented through the rest of this book can be traced in backpacker contexts other than those I have spent time in. Indeed, talking about discourses, narratives or whatever one prefers to name cultural language and structures of thought and meaning, is indicative of a belief in a certain kind of generalisability. Thought structures, those that we find in our research and those we construct through our research, carry meaning from one place to another and from one time to another. Not only would I expect to find traces of the same cultural thoughts (as well as new ones) in narratives, images and texts on backpacking, but as will at times be argued in this book, also in relation to other topics in society. It is possible to find wants and needs

expressed by backpackers in colonial writing of the past, rearticulated in contemporary employment advertisements at home, in political arguments relating to, for instance, migration issues in northern Europe and so forth. I do however not see structures of thought and meanings to be petrified, like cultural artefacts. They change over time and space, between different contexts, due to the activities of their supporters and challengers. Likewise, the qualitative researcher's work to find patterns and to conceptualise meta-narratives extracted from individual narratives is in itself a kind of generalisation. Often too, as when qualitative pilot studies are used as guidelines for survey questions, these concepts are rather un-problematically generalised to populations (Alasuutari, 1995).

Thus, qualitative generalisability relates to matters of abstraction and to types of content present in various settings, rather than to the exact quantity or proportions expected to be found. Having said that, I do not want to over-emphasise the importance of generalisability. While I am certain that some of the themes and discourses presented in my work can be traced in both related and seemingly unrelated fields of enquiry, the most important goal is that my work has a 'local explanation' (Alasuutari, 1995:152). By that I mean that the results should be coherently and logically tied to the empirical material and that backpackers reading the results will sense some sort of familiarity in relation to the topics. This again is the advantage of situated knowledge produced in ethnographically inspired projects.

Another strength I have tried to bring out in this chapter derives from the diversity of empirical sources. While not being a purely ethnographic study in so far as the results aim at a rather theoretical understanding and are not simply descriptive as is the case with many ethnographies, the turning to different types of empirical voices is the outcome of ethnographic inspiration. Given the ontological and epistemological conviction that language carries (cultural and social) meaning and that this meaning is voiced through text, speech and conduct, it is perhaps only natural that I see methods, which accept and cover all these voices within their methodological repertoire as the best inspiration for this project. Using more than one sort of empirical material offers ample opportunities for cross-examination comparisons, which in turn may expose complexities as well as similarities in a way that few other methods will. However, it is not the possibilities of triangulation and flexibility alone which I see as the major strength of ethnography. By far the most important advantage is the possibility of getting close to the topic, to develop knowledge through participation and close observation, to feel, smell, hear, eat, ache and sweat together with those people whose life one claims to know something about.

# Time Creation in Travelling: The Taking and Making of Time among Women Backpackers

'WARNING – NOTHING AVAILABLE NEXT 1000 KILOMETERS'. When you pass this sign, take a look in the rear-view mirror, because that is the last you will see of civilisation for quite a while. You are about to make a journey which will take you 30,000 years back in time. To the strange world of Aborigines. To the Australia which our type of civilisation has never touched. And most likely never will. (Eurocard advertisement)<sup>17</sup>

Eurocard have not invented a time machine. However, they claim that their credit card can open up a new (or shall we say old?) world for time travellers. With Eurocard you can book a 'dreamtime Safari' which will not only take you 30,000 years back in time but also make you 'feel like a real aborigine' by the 'campfire', even though you will not be expected to 'eat kangaroo every day'. The whole trip is said to be an experience you will carry with you for the rest of your life.

Their advertisement carries many connotative messages which are interesting to a researcher investigating travelling and backpacking through time lenses.<sup>18</sup> Not only does it suggest that we can move backwards in time, to a place outside or before our own 'civilised' time, it also awakens connotations of the 'primitive other', of men and women remaining in an 'uncivilised' state of being, while we, the travellers of the West, carrying our Eurocards, are free to move around in both time and space. We can buy time away from our employers and other duties, thus taking time (of our own). As travellers we can move around as we please, flying, walking, hiking, resting or, as in this case, making temporary visits to the slow pace of 'aboriginal dreamtime' and to the campfires of 'yesterday's' world. Thus we are also makers of time, creative vagabonds in search of bodily and cognitive experiences, which will both enhance the experience of the journey and add new merits to the 'stories of our life-times'.

Eurocard's advertisement, and this rather sweeping analysis of it, are indicators of what is to appear in more detailed discussions throughout this article in which long-term travelling is viewed through time lenses. However, before such a time analysis begins, the concept 'long-term budget travelling' must be addressed.<sup>19</sup>

Long-term budget travelling is used synonymously with 'backpacking', 'travelling' or even 'vagabonding' in this text, as often in other circumstances as well. Although it seems to be a practice with many names, as indicated here as well as in the narra-

tives given by the travellers themselves, the concepts encompass a quite specific group of tourists. This group has been both celebrated and criticised by scientists looking into tourism. While Said (quoted in Thomas, 1994:6) has described the traveller as a person who is willing 'to go into different worlds' and is capable of living in and adjusting to 'new rhythms and rituals', Clifford (1992:106) has argued that it is hard to 'free the related term "travel" from a history of European, literary, male, bourgeois, scientific, heroic, recreational, meanings and practices'. In my own opinion both these accounts shed light on the backpacker phenomenon. However, in relation to the purpose with this article it is sufficient to say, when referring to backpacking, vagabonding, travelling, backpackers and travellers, that I am talking about a group of tourists that travels (in this case to the tropics) for long periods of time, travelling and living on a 'tight' budget. They may also be working (legally or illegally) as part of their journey, which shows how difficult it is to fit this group into regular tourist/non-tourist categories. It is also superficial to regard travellers as members of a unified group. Travellers may carry motives as different from one another as the country of origin, the social background and the route they choose to travel (as noted by Cohen, 1979; Redfoot, 1984 and others). For the purpose of this article, though, it is sufficient to point out different temporal aspects found in travelling rather than aiming to identify a traveller's typology, as this text scans for many tendencies, instead of searching for a few answers. It should be regarded as an attempt to open up perspectives and not as an effort to reach any finishing lines.<sup>20</sup>

It is also my aim not to focus on clock-time but on other temporal dimensions found in human consciousness. With the aid of eleven Swedish women, who all gave 'life-story' interviews, I hope to highlight aspects of time other than those found when focusing on work and social relations in societies structured through, among other things, clock and calendar time. The women I refer to were backpackers aged between 22 and 71 when they left Sweden. My reason for interviewing only women about world travelling was not only that I was curious about travel experiences in connection to womanhood, but also because so much of the earlier research on travel and tourism has been impregnated with a male bias (see Clifford, 1992; Riley, 1988; Ryall, 1988; Swain, 1995; and Veijola and Jokinen, 1994).<sup>21</sup> Stories of (white) men conquering the world (of others) have been dominant, both in fiction and in research, since the days of colonisation and I am not disputing such a focus when analysing travelling. I believe, however, that travelling to other cultures is a complex matter which needs to be explored through as many perspectives as possible.

In the spring of 1996 these women shared with me experiences from their long-term budget travelling around the world. All but one travelled single<sup>22</sup> and all had the tropics as a definite destination, whether Asia, Africa or South America. Some of them travelled for relatively short periods, such as six months, while others stayed 'on the road' much longer. A couple of them spent four and six years abroad, both working and travelling with a backpack. Like other temporary visitors in foreign countries, they were tourists, albeit tourists of a specific kind. Most of them emphasised their desire to be 'participants' rather than 'observers' while travelling. Unlike the charter tourists on a week-long trip, who cannot expect to be living in close relation

to their hosts, these women spoke of themselves as prepared – and wanting – to change and adjust to a new cultural context.<sup>23</sup> One of the things they claim they left behind to a large extent was clock-time, and it is my hope that this article will move in closer on what they may have found in its place.<sup>24</sup>

One common concept used when studying travelling and tourism is ‘time out’. Travelling as ‘time out’ is found when we focus on travel as a withdrawal from clock-time and from routines of contemporary everyday life. ‘Time out’, in this sense, is closely related to ‘liminality’, a concept used to characterise periods in-between structures, such as the marginalised periods during rites-of-passage in African cultures (Turner, 1967/1989), as well as the time away from home in the pilgrim’s quest for spiritual centres (Turner, 1973). The concept has also entered the sociology of tourism where, for example, Cohen (1992) has developed it in relation to analysing different modes of tourism. The person experiencing ‘liminality’ is in some sense, mentally or both mentally and physically, in an unstructured state in-between two structured states.

At a first glance, a holiday spent away from home may appear as an unstructured ‘time out’, a longer or shorter period in which the traveller or tourist is physically, and partly mentally, distanced from the everyday structure at home (see Cohen and Taylor, 1976/1992; Curtis and Pajaczkowska, 1994). Even though time of both biology and nature influences the way we carry on with our lives, much of everyday living in the West (and in other industrialised parts of the world) is structured through different timing-devices, such as the clock, transport schedules, appointment schedules, calendars and other organising aids.

The quality of ‘time out’ may vary, however, depending on type of travel. For instance ‘time out’ while eating ‘Swedish meatballs’ or ‘English beacon & eggs’ during a charter week on Mallorca carries a different meaning from the ‘time out’ taken by a long-term budget traveller trekking in Nepal, living and meditating in a Northern Thai monastery or resting on a ‘semi’-deserted beach in the Philippines after a strenuous ‘bush-walk’. The long-term budget traveller can be said to engage in a more profound, but also less obvious ‘time out’, as it is a long period away from the (in my case Swedish) everyday structure, but also a period filled with other structuring devices, including time. In the words of Curtis and Pajaczkowska (1994:201):

Time is part of the value of travel – the ‘time out’ of vacation intensifies and extends subjective temporality in a way that is often then projected on to the holiday locale, as a place where time is condensed and diffused. Or, travel functions to delay or interrupt the otherwise irrevocable passage of time.

Viewed as such, the journey is a period of time that is not to any large extent structured around clock-time, duties and obligations of the home culture. Rather, it offers opportunities for structuring, both by individuals and groups. The backpacker culture creates and upholds its own structure through routines, common travel routes and mythology. Backpacker culture also tends to thrive on norms and values accrediting status to specific travelling practices (which are most commonly adventurous and hard to achieve), consequently pushing the *avant-garde* of global travellers forward into new ‘uncontested’ and ‘primitive’ territory, making more room for the

backpacker culture to grow. However, there seem to be times in travelling when both backpacking culture and old 'stock-of-knowledge' are short of answers. The individual backpacker, travelling alone and having taken 'time out' from her home structure – work, friends and family ties, and to some extent even norms and values<sup>25</sup> – is to a greater extent than elsewhere left in solitude to structure both her time and her action (Curtis and Pajaczkowska, 1994).

It is legitimate to analyse travelling as a 'time out' because the concept automatically raises the important question of what the traveller is actually taking 'time out' from. However, when conceptualising travel as simply 'time out' one risks being blinded by its connotation of timelessness and lack of structure, and therefore ends up turning a blind eye on the journey's constitutive qualities. Scanning the global journey through many different 'time lenses' does, I claim, not only give us interesting aspects to continue investigating, it also presents at least some of the travellers as quite creative human beings, rather than victims escaping a fragmented western world. Regarding the journey as a playing field for creative action means leaving the 'time out' concept behind, to look at travelling as an event '*in time*' or at the journey as a '*time frame*'. These two concepts are discussed by Adam (1990:30-32) in an exploration of different experiences of 'lived' time.

Events 'in time' have to do with a specific happening taking place within a much longer time span. We marry, divorce, become mothers or fathers, resign and get jobs within our lifetime. As researchers looking at events as events 'in time' we may ask ourselves how this event is related to history and the future, or how this event gives meaning to the life-story, or perhaps career, of the actor. 'Time frames', in contrast, have to do with a specific period and this period's content. Although Adam's (1990:32) concept 'time frame' is referred to as a recurring period of time, it is also identified by her as a specific period in which certain things occur. Emphasising the latter definition of 'time frame', we can regard it as the duration of an event, a day, a month, a temporary job or a journey. It is a framed period of time, in which different actions and happenings occur. When studying periods or events as 'time frames' we may be much more focused on the 'now' and the different meanings and symbols which are specific to the studied period.

Applying these concepts more specifically to the topic of this article we may find ourselves looking at travelling as an event 'in time' which concerns viewing the trip as a purposeful stage in one's lifetime from birth to death and as a career movement with significant meaning both to the relation between travellers and to the status of the homecoming traveller. The Australian slogan 'been there – done that' may be called out in irony and a twinkle in the eye when used in television advertisements for soda, but it can be serious information when coming from a traveller at a homecoming party. Although it is not within the scope of this article to concentrate on travel as an event 'in time', it is well worth mentioning that backpacker travelling seems to carry its own hierarchical logic. It is common to hear of hierarchical structures, of different types of budget travellers and of different rankings of travellers as they return home. Intercultural experience can be argued to be an investment in symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986), adding merits to the returned traveller. It tends

to take some work and effort to become a 'real' traveller. Curiously enough, high status seems to be obtained through lack of money rather than abundance and through rough living rather than luxurious visiting, 'Club-Med style'.

Travelling as a 'time frame' is more in line with the purpose of this article and will thus be developed through the following pages. Such a perspective regards travelling as a period, however liminal to everyday life, still holding many time dimensions and possibilities for constituting both time and action (see Adam, 1990, 1995).<sup>26</sup> Regarding the journey as a 'time frame', I will argue, is to set out on a hunt for content, which means we move beyond merely noting the absence of clock-time structuring. Rather, we are faced with complexities of other time dimensions and experiences, as well as meet travellers who express a freedom to create their own actions and structure their own movements. This creativity is also related to experiences and concepts of time. The backpacker does engage in identity work and constitutive action through experiences of 'time standing still' and 'time flying by' as well as through temporalities of the body and of nature, all within the 'time frame' of a journey to the tropics.

If we regard the journey as a 'time frame', it appears to allow us to use the other two time concepts as analytical tools. Travellers, it can be argued, are taking 'time out' during the journey, as when hordes of backpackers get together on the Thai beaches of Ko Samui, to rest and sun-bathe after intensive action while trekking among the 'hill tribes' of northern Thailand (see Cohen, 1982). Trekking among hill tribes may, nevertheless, be regarded as an event 'in time', as it can be viewed as one of those actions highly valued in a backpackers career and possibly also within the lifetime career of the western man or woman. However, there are within travel as a 'time frame' other aspects relating to the time consciousness of the traveller. Primitivism, as indicated above, registers in some statements about the 'authentic other' as one state of mind that is connected to time consciousness (Jordan, 1995). As such, it will also be addressed in this article. Rhythmicity of the body is another time aspect highlighted by travellers which will be discussed further. Travel also, almost automatically through constant movement, serves the traveller with emergent events at a speed normally much greater than everyday life at home can accomplish. This could point to travelling as a way of escaping empty presents, by filling them with emergent happenings, thus impregnating the now with the future (see Johansen, 1984).

Thus this article will implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, challenge the simplicity by which time in social theory is often reduced to a dichotomy of opposites – linear time against cyclical time, of progress against rhythmicity (see Adam, 1990, 1995). Also much of this article will argue that travelling is a way of gaining 'own' time. The traveller, I believe, is in a position very much to structure her own days and nights. The larger part of this text will be concerned with the journey as a 'time frame', giving both temporal and spatial room to be filled by the traveller herself.

However this cannot be done without a closer look at the 'time out' aspect. Without the possibility of taking 'time out' from clock-time and duties of contemporary western living, there would not be many travellers 'vagabonding' the world in search of new experiences, including experiences relating to time. The next part of this article therefore discusses a time aspect which is not as dominant in travel as in Swedish

everyday life, before we move on to investigate a complexity of time experiences found when regarding the journey as a 'time frame'.

## Time out from clocks and duties

To talk of travel as a 'time out' one has to assume that there is a time to take 'time out' from. Many aspects of everyday life, in Sweden as elsewhere in the industrialised world, are structured around the use of the clock. Clock-time has been interpreted, analysed and scrutinised as a resource to be fought over in the conflict over power, both in work relations and in other areas of social life in the industrial world.

'Time out', I wish to argue, is not only connected to clock-time. It can also be defined as a period away from the responsibilities to others. As Davies (1990) finds in her research among unemployed or temporarily working women in Sweden, women often feel that their time belongs to others. Supported by the culturally sanctioned normative systems, they are expected to give their time to others, be it children, parents or husbands in need of care, or governmental institutions, such as unemployment agencies, demanding their presence at certain times and at certain job-training courses. This also seems to apply to those with work who, despite their duties as employees, still are expected to take care for the home and children to a greater extent than their male partners. To take 'time out' from this type of time is not only to turn one's back on clock-time, but also to refuse responsibility for other people's time.<sup>27</sup>

The 'time of others', as conceptualised here, is complex. It signifies the punctuality closely linked to clock-time as well as the duration of time which, in this case, can be described as time spent on somebody else's behalf. Both duration and punctuality, however, are part of the time which controls the lives of many women. As Davies (1990) argues, women are to a much greater extent than men weaving strands between different points in time, creating a complex web attached not to women's own time, but more often to the time of others, such as husbands, children, employers, doctors, and so forth.

The way 'time out' is envisaged here, in relation to long-term budget travelling, expresses a break with duties that leave many women with little time of their own. Thus 'time out', in what follows, should be viewed as a period away from the responsibility to and control of others. This control can be imposed with the aid of the structuring clock, but also through the cultural codes defining women as carers in many two-parent families.

This article will not argue that women, more than men, could be seen as taking 'time out' when heading towards the tropics carrying a backpack. Men too may take 'time out' from different time-related duties and express the same arguments in favour of travelling. Rather, following the line of arguments presented above, I want to suggest that women in particular experience a strong sense of 'time out' on having left their duties at home, on having no other person to take care of but themselves.

Even though not all women (particularly young women) leave caring responsibilities behind, almost all of the backpacker women interviewed regarded their travels as a pause away from duties, or as a period to gather strength and self-esteem before becoming the caring mother and wife they thought was to be their role in the future.

Out of the eleven interviewed women only one was a mother at the time of the departure. This woman, Viola, was in her fifties and late sixties when on two occasions she travelled in South and Central America. She told of a former marriage in which the husband had the 'exclusive right' to travel and of her eagerness to 'take off' by herself the day her son was old enough to take care of himself. Three more women were mothers at the time of the interviews (which all took place a year or more after the trips were completed). Two of them had established relationships while travelling which subsequently led them into motherhood. Three of the women without children set out on the trip soon after relationships had broken up. One 'took a break' in a relationship she knew would last and make her a mother when she got back. The rest, mainly backpackers in their twenties, left Sweden as singles. It was obvious that motherhood, or potential motherhood, was a very important aspect in the minds of all these women, even those who had remained single after the trip. It is easy to agree with Leccardi and Rampazi (1993:365), when they claim that 'maternity is always perceived as a turning-point that restructures biography'. In their study of young Italian women, even those who were not interested in collective roots, or did not desire a steady job, or spent their time planning for the future, saw maternity as a crucial event in their lives. Like the Italian women, the young travellers saw maternity as a happening that would change their lives. The journey was expressed as a last 'time out' for the mothers-to-be and a final 'time out' for the divorced woman with a grown up child.

Travelling alone possibly added to the strong feeling of 'time out'. As, for instance, Deem (1996) argues, women travelling together with their husbands or families tend to experience little rest and 'free-time', because a holiday away from home still calls for organising, arranging, cleaning and feeding the family. This may not only apply to women travelling with families but also to those travelling with any type of company. Although they would not have to feed their travel partners, the single backpackers emphasised the need to move around alone, as any company would encroach on their sense of 'freedom' – described as the freedom of choosing company, route of travel and time schedule.

A woman backpacker, travelling alone for a longer period, could be seen as taking 'time out' in the senses discussed here. Many of the women interviewed, not only described the journey they took as a break with the structured everyday life at home, or as the last 'free time' before they became tied to a husband or to work, but they also told of how they engaged in a symbolic act as soon as they arrived in the tropics. They put their watches away, finding them only when they needed punctuality in relation to transport. Even though they still kept track of time, for instance through diary-writing, the hiding of clock-time was expressed by many as an important step in leaving everyday life in Sweden behind. As such, it is an act of ritual significance to mark the passage from clock-time structuring to 'time out'.

For a large part of the journey chronological time lost much of its importance, as did many of the regular routines of Swedish everyday life. The journeys were expressed as periods of freedom and of personal choice. The traveller was free to decide where to go, when to go and for how long. As will be shown through the rest of this article, this sense of freedom may not simply be a result of 'salvation from clock-time and duties'. Rather, the journey represents time *claimed* by the traveller, to be used as a frame for new experiences, a frame which also involves new or different ways of relating to and understanding time.

It becomes obvious that 'time out' is a matter of expression when trying to verbalise the feeling of leaving one's structure behind. The period of travelling can be claimed as 'time out' only in relation to the structural conditions the traveller has left. Focusing only on the experienced trip itself 'time out' becomes superficial, however, as the concept connotes a timelessness but, as is being argued here, clock-time is not substituted by no-time. More to the point, it is being pushed to the side and overtaken by other times. The rest of this article will attempt to highlight some of these other times by, firstly, taking a look at the mental construction of the past which guides some of the travellers in their quest for 'authenticity'. Next, the discussion moves on to the different experiences found when focusing on travelling in the present. Finally, the future dimension is examined as a prerequisite for experiencing progress in time and travelling.<sup>28</sup>

## Filling the time frame

The thought of travelling as 'time out' eventually fades away to be replaced by the realisation that time out is far from being timeless. The traveller encounters and constitutes many other times, both intentionally and unintentionally. This leads us to regard the journey as a time frame, pregnant with different time aspects, none of which appears to be the opposite of the other. Instead, many time aspects seem to be present simultaneously and dependently, and some of them will be addressed here.

### **Going back in time**

Many of the countries and cultures visited by the backpacker on her tour have been subjected by researchers to the classical sociological and philosophical urge to dichotomise, thus being categorised as bearers of a cyclical time consciousness (for a thorough critique, see Adam, 1990, 1995), or of a punctual time consciousness (see, for example Jacobsen, 1988; Johansen, 1984). Science has often reached the conclusion that the time of the less industrial world is cyclical, and people there orientated towards tradition, while western time is experienced as linear and western people orientated towards progress (Adam, 1990, 1995).

However well this bipolar thinking has been challenged, it seems as if the scientific 'our time' and 'othertime' (Adam, 1995:12-42) is found not only in science but among some of the travellers too. Women in the interviews told of places where time was 'standing still' or where 'rubber-time' ruled. While the former referred to places believed to show no signs of progress but many signs of a 'still existing' history, the latter referred to lack of punctuality. Both these views on time of the host cultures are heavily burdened with a linear time bias (they also deny the host cultures the possibility of actually having an orientation to time similar to that of the traveller). This became even more obvious in statements such as the following in which a 34-year old woman, having travelled for many years in Asia and specifically Indonesia, explains why she wanted to go to Irian Jaya in search of 'cannibals':

It would be totally cool actually. See something different. See how we have been, at one time. Although we weren't really like that. We were Vikings, weren't we? To see how one can cope without everything. All we have here, electricity, water, everything. They still eat worms. (Author's translation)

Other travellers also told of searches for what they thought had been lost in the industrialised world. They explained how they enjoyed what was 'natural', 'genuine' and 'real' and avoided places that were 'destroyed' by other tourists or by 'modernity' itself, or as one traveller explained: 'I am much more interested in real tribes actually (...) such real bush people than I am of just an ordinary Thai on a bicycle in Bangkok'. The quest for 'authenticity' is a well known topic in the sociology of tourism (see Cohen, 1988; MacCannell, 1976/1989), one that is still causing debate.

Rather than getting caught in different perspectives on the search for authenticity, the intention here is to discuss its connection to a specific time consciousness. For this discussion it is enough to regard authenticity as a 'gathering concept' for social constructions of what is thought to be original, as it has always been and as something found 'backstage' (Goffman, 1959; MacCannell, 1976/1989). What is considered to fill these criteria varies with context and values, but for many of the travellers authenticity seemed to have close links to 'indigenous people', to groups of people or isolated cultures untouched by what is often conceptualised as the 'modernity of the West', or to 'nature untouched by man'. Regarding authenticity in this light it is possible to make connections to the discourse of primitivism. Primitivism, in Jordan's (1995) sense, is a quest for the origins of mankind, one believed by people in the 'modern' and 'inauthentic' West to be found among 'indigenous people' in other parts of the world, or possibly in demarcated areas within the West (see also Torgovnic, 1997). According to Jordan (1995:283):

Primitivism is a search for origins and absolutes – for unspoilt nature and uncontaminated humanity, for the paradise that we modern, 'civilized' Westerners have lost. Primitivism is an anti-rationalist and anti-materialist philosophy, a revolt against the domination in the modern West of capitalist social relations with their basis in science, rationality, industrialism, bureaucracy and the city.

Jordan sees primitivism as a western tendency to place the 'primitive' in a static world outside 'modernity', a world of the 'Other' where another temporality exists, other meanings are being restored and where people are freed from the 'inauthentic' life of 'modernity'. By 'returning' to this primitive stage the 'modern westerner' believes she may gain back some of what she has lost, thus in order to go forward one has to go backwards (see also Curtis and Pajaczkowska, 1994; Torgovnic, 1997). Many of the women interviewed spoke of efforts to find 'hill-tribes', 'bush-people' and other 'natives' for various reasons. Meetings with these people would not only lead to a wider knowledge on the travellers' behalf but also to a heightened sense of joy if this meeting was experienced as unique, that is, if the traveller felt herself to be the 'first white' in the village. Travelling 'back in time' to a 'pre-modern' existence renders both wisdom and symbolic capital in a quest for increased status.

The experience of travelling backwards this way rests on the assumption that time is linear, a cognitive structure closely tied to the clock-time of the industrialised world. Progress and development are made by moving forwards in time, from a state of childhood to one of old age or from a 'pre-modern' state to a 'modern' one. Such progress carries with it an evolutionist assumption which has followed travelling from colonialism to some of today's travel (see Jordan, 1995). One of the interviewed excused the hosts in a forest area on Sumatra for having behaved badly, because they were 'only jungle people' who didn't 'understand any better'. Such a statement hints at what is hidden on the other side of the coin, behind 'travelling to the past' and 'primitivistic' thought; namely, that the culture of the 'Other' also belongs to a 'lesser world' lacking possibilities to reach the 'modernity' of the West. As Jordan states, the primitivism found in western thought and in the notion of travelling back in time needs the 'primitive' in the right place and at the right time. Only then can the 'desirable qualities of primitive culture, society and subjectivity' be 'recovered, preserved and used by the modern West' (Jordan, 1995:289).

Encounters with what was thought of as 'true authenticity' and the 'original life' of mankind, was often described as a difficult task. 'Bush people' and other 'Others' are seldom found near airports or close to the guesthouses in the bigger towns. The travellers were forced to get 'off the beaten track' and into 'native' country. One woman travelled by horse (for the first time in her life) in order to meet a group of Indians in a South American country. Another woman walked between villages in rural China and cycled the outback of Australia. Others got on local buses and told of the mixed feelings of happiness, eagerness and anxiety upon arrival at small bus depots at various places in rural Asia or Africa. Being women travelling alone they sometimes felt exposed to both stares and threats, but also to illnesses. The searches for 'native people' – and also for the highly valued signs of 'unspoiled nature' – were described as anything but easy. With little knowledge of the areas in which the traveller arrived, and of the norms and values that constituted the local culture, the travellers experienced a lack of taken-for-granted structure, which called for courage. To the traveller, an Indian train station, or a jetty on a distant island in Indonesia seemed a chaotic place. That is, as an 'anti-structure', where the traveller was pretty much left alone to do her own structuring, even though the people of the host cultures proba-

bly experienced the situation quite differently. This type of travelling was said to be so hard it often called for an immediate rest.<sup>29</sup>

Associated with the hardship, indicative of the search for the 'primitive', which is often referred to as travelling 'backwards in time', there are, of course, other time aspects operating. Planning for the next step after having just arrived at a train station, or searching for a place to stay, are actions that are much more orientated to the present or the future than to the past, even though past experience may give some extra comfort. The purpose here, however, has been to focus on the time oriented backwards.

Not everyone expressed a need or want to visit the past, and for those that did, meeting with the 'authentic Other' was but one of many wants and needs during the trip. Being in the present was expressed as another important treat that the journey offered the traveller.

### **Times and body appearing in the present**

As mentioned earlier there is no easy way of separating different modes of time consciousness from each other. The travel sensed as 'back in time' also carries presents and futures. However, there seems to be different experiences of time that dominate in different contexts. While searching for the 'primitive' can be argued as being experienced as travelling 'back in time', the strenuous movement in travelling or resting between searches can perhaps be seen as appropriate contexts for 'being in the present'.

One type of experience that was expressed in many of the interviews could be addressed as the awakening of the body. Many of the women travellers told of strong bodily sensations, relating to different contexts. For one woman, the most important memories of the trip were the scents of the marketplaces. For another woman it was the bodily ache during a long bicycle ride in Australia. Yet another woman best remembered the aches and pains during a bus ride in Sumatra. They also spoke of changes in their menstruation cycles which had become more regular and more 'synchronised' with the moon's cycle. Many said they started going to bed early and getting up with the sunrise, rather than keeping to a Swedish schedule. One 29-year-old traveller, having spent three years mostly in Asia and Africa, said:

I think, also, when one comes and lives like that, in nature, as one does when one lives in a palm-bungalow. What the heck, it's like sleeping under the bare sky almost. Then comes the body, sort of, the harmony, nature too. Like that. My period, I checked that too, it came...how was it now? I can't remember, something with it being full moon and this but it is like the whole body adjusts to nature in some kind of way. That is completely clear. (...) It felt very good. To be, somehow, to live without, outside somehow. And one notices that, that when it is dark one falls asleep and wakes up when the sun rises. (Author's translation)

This traveller saw closeness to nature as a means of experiencing intensified bodily sensations. Her statement is also influenced by time experience. It could be argued,

drawing on Adam (1990, 1995) and Rifkin (1987), that these intensified bodily sensations appear when clock-time is moved out of focus and the living becomes a 'being in the present'. As has been claimed by many (see Adam, 1990, 1995; Giddens, 1984, 1990, 1991; Lash and Urry, 1994; Mbiti, 1969; Rifkin, 1987), industrial clock-time is really an abstract measuring dimension, and as such a social construction with no connection to context. It is an abstraction, free of content, which has made itself indispensable in the industrial world.

Disguised as a social and economic reality, it has been internalised by us as actors. Internalised clocks do not only discipline us, they also affect our understanding of time. Our thinking about time becomes linear, our lifetimes become career possibilities and progress is always a movement forward in time (Frykman and Löfgren, 1979; Johansen, 1984), causing people to be future oriented and planning for days to come rather than days that 'are'. But this future orientation demands control or we would risk getting carried away on the 'spur of the moment' by a 'spontaneous' action in the present. This control not only affects our use of time, but also our social life as well as our bodies.

Clock-time has had a tremendous, and yet little discussed effect on social life, changing our living patterns and our trust in nature (Adam, 1990, 1995; Lash and Urry, 1994; Rifkin, 1987). 'Hidden from everyday understanding and social science concerns are the effects on our being to the very last cell in our body of our environmental rhythms: day and night, moons and seasons,' argues Adam (1995:16) This rhythm has, with our internalisation of clock-time as a means of control and discipline, been obstructed. Much of everyday life in Sweden, and elsewhere in the industrialised world, is regulated by clock-time and the future orientation that follows, rather than by other means such as natural signs or biological signals, given to us in the present. Many of us eat when it is 'lunch-time' and go to bed when the digits show our regular 'bed time', rather than when our body tells us to. Clock-time actually tells us not to listen to our 'body-presents'.<sup>30</sup>

The traveller, who to a large extent is turning her back on clock-time, may be experiencing an 'awakening of the body' in the sense that she has found the time and willpower to listen to 'body-talk'. This is not to say that there is a firm either/or relation between the power of clock-time and body-talk, but that, while they exist simultaneously in travellers as in others, one may very well be capable of suppressing the other given the right circumstances.

'Being in the present' seemed to be a prerequisite for experiencing bodily sensations. Some of the travellers described hard work, strenuous travelling and aching bodies as ways of reaching an enhanced communication with the body as well as simple feelings of having no future to worry about. Another place claimed by the interviewees as suitable for 'being in the present' and as an arena for bodily sensations is the beach. The notion of a paradise beach – a place where a traveller can put her or his feet up and relax in a present of sun and moonlit days and nights, of camp-fires shared by fellow travellers and of beach-walks in solitude – is quite different from those thoughts awakened by referral to trekking or road travelling (see Cohen, 1982). The relaxed stay at an Asian, palm fringed beach is described as a treat, and not a

waste of time. It is waiting without the guilt believed by some scientists to be found among members of societies outside the West (see Jacobsen, 1988; Johansen, 1984; Mbiti, 1969).

In a society permeated by abstract clock-time, as is found in most parts of the western world, what is done on the spur of the moment for its own sake is already partly destroyed, pierced by the seconds ticking through it. Also when no action is taken, time is wasted (Johansen, 1984; Weber, 1934/1994). Engaging in actions which are not sanctioned by the norms and values of a capitalist society, or taking no action at all, is a waste of time as long as time is seen to continue ticking. In other cultures, it is claimed by some scientists (see Jacobsen, 1988; Johansen, 1984; Mbiti, 1969), time consciousness may be formed from action rather than from the ticking of the clock. It is, according to Mbiti (1969), difficult to 'waste' time in many African societies as time is experienced only in connection to space and action. Unlike in the West where time has become independent and a commodity to be sold, utilised and bought, claims Mbiti (1969:19), the traditional African time can only be created or produced. Sitting down is never a waste of time, but 'either waiting for time or in the process of "producing" time'. This type of time consciousness could be expressed as 'action time' or time created through movements or events rather than through the steady beat of a clock. I regard the statements just made as both dichotomising and simplifying. Living, both in the West and in other parts of the world, usually means having a relation to clock-time as well as to body rhythms, rhythms of nature and other 'timing devices', even if different cultures may be prone to relate more to one than to another. However, the dichotomising reasoning here is used to indicate its own limitations, as what is believed by some to be African time consciousness may just as well belong to non-Africans. The interviewed women who described everyday life in Sweden as stressful and time as scarce seemed to have little trouble changing their attitudes while away from their home structure. While travelling they did not experience the rest in the present as a waste of time. Indeed, the stops made along the journey did not even seem like rests, as the women expressed strong emotional and bodily sensations that surfaced in stillness. Looking back at Mbiti's 'waiting for time' or 'producing time', both these concepts seem appropriate to use in the context. Travellers may be 'hanging around' waiting between eventful and intense periods, but also producing time, other than clock-time, through bodily sensations and engaging in routines. The travellers' experiences indicate that an orientation to time, often conceptualised as 'African', may very well be much more universal given the right circumstances.<sup>31</sup>

What has been argued here, in relation to awakening bodies and (to a certain extent) an unreflective being in the present, is that the women, when losing their clock-time structure and duties back home, actually experience a recontextualisation of the abstract timespace.<sup>32</sup> By recontextualisation I mean a situation where the traveller withdraws from thoughts of abstract times and abstract spaces, and settles in the present 'taking time and making space'<sup>33</sup>. The place and the time belong to the back-packer.

The traveller, like the woman finding her body 'harmony' in her palm-hut on the beach, turns her back not only on clock-time and routine activities of everyday life at home but also on other aspects of living in the industrialised world. The quiet guesthouse on a semi-deserted beach somewhere in Asia lacks many of the amenities of the West. Here media messages are absent or unimportant. For many travellers the future is the next step on the road of backpacker travelling rather than the reflexive monitoring of the Swedish job market or of other potential futures. Once embedded in timespace and 'being in the present', perhaps the mind will rest enough to let the body do the talking, creating and signalling its own rhythmical time. With clock-time structuring suppressed or ignored there is no need to compromise between a tired body and a mind that is awaiting 11 p.m.

Once more, there is a need to emphasise that time experiences are interconnected. On the beach a multiplicity of time dimensions is to be found, relating to both past and present. Many travellers catch up with their record-keeping here. Diaries are kept in which past travelling is structured and ordered. Letters are written in the present, telling friends and family about events of past, present and future. Conversations with other travellers sharing similar experiences will revive the past and open up for possible travel routes in the future, as well as forming the foundation when the travellers seek to establish hierarchical positions. Moreover, biographies are 'healed' in the present through narratives of the past. In Alheit's (1994:309) words:

The departure from routine appears to trigger off retrospective and prospective biographical analyses. The proverbial example is familiar to us all: the stranger in the train (in the plane, at the bar), whom I have never seen before and will probably never see again, but whose 'whole' life history I end up knowing. Being relieved, even temporarily, of the usual compulsions to act obviously creates a vacuum that has to be filled.

Many of the routines of everyday life at home are lost once the traveller starts moving, and although new 'traveller-routines' are created along the journey, periods of very little routine are common, in the experience of the interviewed women. Some of the women saw this as an important step in 'growing independent' during the journey. When faced with new situations the traveller is forced to engage with complex social dynamics, as noted above. This usually happened to the travellers when they were on the move, rather than on the beaches. In contrast it was on the beaches and at the guesthouses that travellers experienced 'exceptional' closeness to other travellers. Some of the women interviewed told of close friendships developing in a few hours and of an honesty among other travellers unknown to them before.

Perhaps it is possible to regard the beach as a 'mending area' drawing on Alheit's concepts 'everyday time' and 'life time' (Alheit, 1994). However clear our view of our biographical past and future, we need to feel a subjective continuity of the separate experiences during our life course. Our life time is our 'sequentialization' of experiences and action, into a sense of the whole (Alheit, 1994:307). Letting a stranger at the guesthouse in on your 'secret experiences' works to unite these experiences into a comprehensive biographical totality.

Another way of reconciling separate and contradictory experiences is by engaging in simple routines. Routine, or the much more cyclical 'everyday time', although contradictory, is needed to materialise and create continuity in the 'life time'. Individual routines, claims Giddens (1994:101), have a binding force as they 'are of basic importance for ontological security because they provide a structuring medium for the continuity of life across different contexts of action'. Routine creates order in everyday life, and order is needed to feel continuity in experiences and to make one's 'life time' comprehensible.

In contrast, then, with Cohen (1982:191-192) who has argued that the more routinised travellers' rest at a 'marginal paradise' (in this case the Thai beach) is 'an enjoyable break, but of no profound significance' as compared to 'hilltribe trekking', I wish to argue that the marginal paradise is a rather important place. It mends and organises the experiences picked up along the road, be it by engaging in routine, or by striking up close relationships, or by sharing biographical narratives with other travellers. Having argued that periods of intensive moving within the journey are often sensed as 'anti-structure' and lacking in routine, the tranquil beach with plenty of time for resting and doing 'one's own thing' could be seen as a place for putting together experiences into a biographical whole. This can be done through picking up routines, but also through narratives about one's (travel) biography (Alheit, 1994:309). This way, the action in the present gets connected to the past – and to the future which the action just taken perhaps renders more intelligible. Thus travelling may also be seen as a movement towards the future.

## **On the road to the future**

Even though the interviewees described lack of worry about the future as one of the big advantages of travelling, a closer look at their statements unveils future orientations that seem to be present in much of the travelling referred to in this article. Photographs were taken by many of the travellers. Although picture-taking can be seen as a method of keeping at a distance from the object, its results – the photo – have little use in the present. Rather, they are investments for the future. They not only help trigger memory but also work as proof of experience that will grant status among backpackers when developed on route, as well as at home (see Andersson, 1994; Crawshaw and Urry, 1997; Urry, 1990). A diary can be kept for similar purposes. It not only brings order to the past, but also makes the future explicable in terms of what has happened before. It helps the traveller bring structure to biographical worries and works as proof of any biographical narrative.

There is a future dimension in travel, however, which is carried out less consciously. Again it seems appropriate to talk about 'taking time and making space', in this instance referring to the intensive action of travelling. For a rather large part of the trip, the traveller is in one way or another 'on the road' to somewhere.

One interviewee is a rather good example of a woman traveller who experienced action while travelling. She was 23 years old when she headed out on her first 'solo-

trip'. It lasted two years and began with the Trans-Siberian Railway to China, followed by local buses and walking in rural China, before she got a job on-board a ship taking her to Micronesia, Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and eventually Northern Queensland in Australia where she bought a bicycle. This bicycle took her along the coast and inland all the way down to Sydney where she took a temporary job as a nurse. Later she found a boat to take her to New Zealand and another one that carried her to French Polynesia and Hawaii. From Hawaii she flew back to Sweden. This traveller, like some of the other interviewees, claimed she was given experiences for a life-time, within one or two years.

A journey such as this is full of happenings, events causing it to appear much longer than the chronological western time it actually takes to complete it. Within two years the traveller experienced many different climates, ethnic cultures, work-place cultures, bodily sensations, friendships, successes and failures and whatever else that happened to her along the road.

Turning the focus towards the intensity in movement and encounters that is part of the journey, we arrive at time perspectives about the existence of the human being and the time consciousness that follows. As Adam (1990) argues, time is not really the empty sequence of presents that are the consequence of clock-time and industrial time. Drawing on George Mead, she claims that 'time is not located in passage but in the becoming event (...). If we think we are measuring empty intervals we suffer a 'psychological illusion' since without emergence there is no time, not even a quantity to be measured' (Adam, 1990:40). Only through emergence, which is an indication of the future, do we notice that the present has become the past. Something has to happen in order for the present to end and become a quality which can be converted to time consciousness. Happenings create time; thus the traveller, engaging in many happenings, in many emergent events, is also constructing time. One of the travellers explained why a ('time out') holiday was needed within the journey:

Yes, this freedom of having a whole day ahead of oneself and then filling it with something. And it was well filled in China, with all what one could see and different excursions one could head out on. Then it was time for holiday. (Author's translation)

She saw 'filling' the day as freedom but also as hard work, work which created a need to rest. Perhaps this is one way of moving closer to an understanding of why most travellers spoke both of 'time going faster than ever' or of 'time standing still'.<sup>34</sup> Many emergent events mark the boundaries of the present, thereby enhancing a time awareness which leads to a feeling of time flying, but also causing the traveller to experience a two-year trip as equivalent to a 'life-time' at home. The density of happenings while on the road affects one's time judgement. The other side of the coin – time standing still – is a quite different feeling but it is also different from the western notion of 'wasting time'. The travellers noted that time appeared to be standing still. These were, for the most part, moments when the traveller sat down to merely be, with no guilty conscience, and without making a particular effort to anticipate the future.

Reaching for the future, claims Johansen (1984), may also be regarded as a revolt against clock-time. If that is the case, travelling offers many possibilities for this silent

protest. A view of time as lacking content due to the (clock-time) notion of time as an empty, abstract and linear dimension with no attachment to context, leads to an understanding of the present that is not filled with useful content as 'time wasting'. For Johansen, it is mostly the people of the West who cannot just sit calmly in the present if the seconds, minutes and hours that go by will be lost for ever.

Every second, hour and day spent in inactivity is dead time, claims Johansen, and facing the empty time, fading away in little ticks, is also facing one's own decay. So we have to fill time with content, through activity and consumption. We have to run 'forward' in order to experience a gain, rather than a loss. The emergent events we meet will give content to an abstract ticking time. The meaning for our present will be drawn from the future. Thus the future, rather than our present, becomes our goal. Only by transcending the present do we justify our existence and inject our life with meaning. This investment in the future, claims Johansen (1984:28), is a silent revolution against time linearity, which carries its own impossibility with it, as novelty loses its status as soon as it reaches the present.

## Taking time and making time

Long-term budget travelling is a complex matter, involving diverse practices over a long period of time. It is intensive, both in rest and in movement, both in the present and in the future. It holds an abundance of intercultural meetings. It immediately questions everyday routines left behind and constitutes new routines along the way. It involves a sense of lack of taken-for-granted structures, when the traveller is left to find her own way forward with the means she finds appropriate at the time. It also involves another structure; the structure created in reflexive movement from one place to another but also within a place, like the guesthouse or the beach.

All these aspects are pregnant with time, and having taken a look at the body talking and the 'guiltless' rest in the present, the 'primitivistic' search for the 'authenticity' of the past, and the intensive movement forward towards the future, it seems obvious that time is created within space. The travellers may to some extent be 'victims' of clock-time and other structuring instruments at home, such as duties and obligations, but the journey appears to release some of the pressures of home structures and open up new opportunities for individual re-creations of time. As mentioned earlier, travelling has been described as an act of 'regressive narcissism without the anxieties of responsibility' (Curtis and Pajaczkowska, 1994:207). However, it is too complex a matter to be left at that. Travelling may, among other things, be a quest to regain control of one's own life, characteristic of our time. It seems consistent with claims that individual time narratives have taken over where collective time roles have failed to adjust to societal changes (see Giddens, 1991; Urry, 1994a, 1994b). Thus, the travelling individual may be working on her own narrative, her own biographical

'life-story' (Alheit, 1994:306) where 'life time' is being reflexively monitored and changed through a self-chosen questioning of the routines of 'everyday time'.

Possibly this freedom to create individual time, and to make personal space, is a gender issue, as for young women this 'time out' from clock-time and the time of others may be experienced as the 'last' time out before they settle down as caring wives and mothers. When able to 'take time' (of their own) and 'make space' an awakening appears, of both the body and mindful creativity. Research done by Leccardi and Rampazi (1993:356) points towards young women adapting a flexible attitude to time, as they are used to reflexively relating to continually changing temporal priorities. Women, as mothers, or as future mothers, subjected to gender socialisation emphasising female care-giving, are faced with an ambivalence towards time orientation which may actually become useful at times when members of society are forced to do their own re-structuring of both action and time.

Travelling, in the way the interviewed women described it, becomes very much a period of 'taking time and making space'. It also constitutes, through its recontextualisation of time, a possibility of 'making time'. It seems, at least in part, to be, in Urry's (1994b:140) terms, a movement towards the 'reassessment of place' in which one can stroll and live as a goal rather than as a means on the road to elsewhere (see also Urry, 1994a:249-250). 'Disorganized capitalism' leads to a need for a 'revival of places', or more specifically, of places to visit rather than to pass through. This need has been created through a 'placelessness' caused by living in high-technology societies where both place and time seem transcendable. We can rewind videos as well as visit other worlds in nanoseconds with the aid of advanced technology. The 'revival of places' could be seen as a need to escape abstractions of both time and place through recontextualisation of time-space. Possibly, then, the paradise beach or other unique places along the road are like suppliers of time – to be taken – and space – to be made. In such a place, on a beach in the Philippines or on a Thai hill-tribe trek, the time of the present is experienced as full of time. Viewing the traveller as a vagabond looking for places to stay, actively searching for pasts, presents and futures to incorporate in an individual biography, the focus on time as a quality to regain and to reform becomes even more pronounced. The attendant forms of time are recontextualised and individualised. They are times created by the body, times created by contexts full of content, times created by movement. The lack of structure, due to the traveller's liminal state, is likely to be regarded as a safe platform for experimenting with time and biography, which leads this story to its closure, by letting ends meet.

## Conclusion

This article has moved from a rather narrow approach, where long-term budget travelling was considered as 'time out' from everyday life at home, to a more complex approach to the many time dimensions and experiences found when regarding the

trip as a 'time frame'. I have written it in the belief that men and women alike are creative human beings, especially when they are given enough resources, and if they can create action they can create time. Based on the assumption that clock-time in places like Sweden has had a strong influence on everyday life, my final argument is that 'the journey' may itself be seen as a means to create a recontextualisation of time and space.

The 'time out' perspective, as described above, is mostly a matter of time quantity, that is, where a quantifiable period of (clock-)time is 'taken' from life at home to be 'used' while travelling away. Long-term backpacking is thus 'taking time'. A closer look, regarding the journey as a 'time frame', reveals backpacking to be a form of 'creating time', which is a different matter. While taking time is related to the temporal structures that normally regulate one's daily life – be it clock-time or the caring for others – creating time is the process of recontextualising time with space. Responding to Giddens (1990, 1991), one can argue that travelling is an individualised act of reversing the disembedding mechanisms of high 'modernity'. Many aspects of the journey are involved in this production, as I hope this article has indicated.

Naturally the traveller still carries with her the cognitive structures influenced by clock-time norms and values, as well as other structuring factors indicative of the home country. However, the structures of home lose much of their potency when not practised and upheld in everyday routines. The journey becomes a means to escape some of the limitations of everyday life at home. It becomes an individualised time-space for experiments both with identity and movement. Moving from place to place, sensing a lack of taken-for-granted structure, the traveller is left alone to do her own creative structuring of itinerary and day-to-day existence.

Time is created in this structuring. The 'freedom', or rather control over personal time, gives the backpacker a unique chance to be in charge of her own action for a long period of time. Alternating between trekking hardships and peaceful rests, between high-tech cities and agrarian country-sides, between backpackers and 'authentic others', the backpacker is also experiencing different temporal sensations, most of them having less to do with clock-time than with rhythm, movement, rest, natural and biological signs. Time is experienced in relation to context, rather than to the even ticking of a clock.

It is important, though, not to equate the argument above with dichotic thinking, but to regard it as an attempt to pinpoint many different aspects of time, which may appear more clearly once the dominant forms of clock-time are displaced. The times discussed in relation to travelling are not opposites of clock-time, but rather they are temporal aspects of most human life, such as biological time, ecological time or the time of the conscious mind. Naturally, the travellers, when living at home, encounter many different temporal conditions. However, in travelling they may be sensed to a greater extent, as abstract clock-time does not hold a dominant position. The reasons for this have more to do with the travellers' experiences of 'freedom' and 'own control' than with the actual structure of the places visited. Thus these 'foreign' cultures – despite being interpreted as non-linear, timeless or even pre-historic – may very well contain an everyday life influenced both by clocks and linear time consciousness.



# Risk Creation in Travelling: The Taking and Making of Risks and Adventure

*To venture causes anxiety, but not to  
venture is to lose one's self.*

(Søren Kierkegaard)

The appearance of Kierkegaard's statement as a quote in the adventure magazine *Escape* (1988:13) is no coincidence. Neither is the connection between venturing and the 'self' (between adventure and identity) a surprise to travellers or to readers of travel magazines. Independent travelling, such as long-term global backpacking, is often presented as an adventurous lifestyle, accrediting the traveller with knowledge and a stronger sense of identity. In contrast to the tourist, who is often attributed lack of independence through terms such as 'mass', 'horde', 'package' or 'lemmings', the adventurous traveller seeks to get away from the rest, to discover a true 'self' (Dann, 1999). Such activity is rewarded. The adventurous traveller is usually regarded as a 'real traveller', a person interesting enough to write books and magazines about and to be followed around by a documentary film team.

This paper searches for an understanding of this phenomenon through regarding the traveller as a narrator, and the journey as a narrative. It describes acts as well as tales of travelling as meaningful symbols with which the travellers make statements about their identities. Identity is not regarded as a fixed state which is already within a person, waiting to be (re-)discovered, but rather as a continuous construct describing an ongoing life-process, multifaceted and changeable. As such, it is closely related to the 'life-story' concept encompassing not only an individual's biographical ordering of events (Alheit, 1994), but also all the bits and pieces, the discrepancies and the detours, which are healed and connected through self-narratives (Ochs and Capps, 1996).

The paper argues that 'risk and adventure narratives' used as identity claims within travelling can be understood as manifestations of a dominant 'grand narrative of travel' in which independent journeying to places described as 'Third world', 'primitive', 'poor' or 'underdeveloped' is seen as both risky and rewarding. This narrative will be

linked to its historical roots of gendered rights and experiences as well as to the importance of mythology and social construction for narrative survival. With such a constructivist approach, risks are sometimes nothing more than social or cultural constructions, with the conscious or unconscious purpose to maintain a cultural structure (Dake, 1992; Douglas, 1992/1996; Renn, 1992:61). Although risks in travelling are at times 'true', in relation to for instance accidents, health (Clift and Grabowski, 1997) and crime, this paper is focused on 'risk-taking' not primarily as a material, physical fact but rather as a device used to construct a story.

Although the text begins with a theoretical discussion which also acknowledges the possibility of narratives being contested, its main purpose is to dig deeper into one area rather than to scrape the surface. One is aware of the abundance of different traveller 'types' and 'purposes' encountered in any backpacker area, as well as the many efforts made by individuals to contest dominant ideas and perhaps to turn a journey as a modern project into a postmodern wandering about. However, these issues will not be addressed here. The focus is rather on how the risk and adventure narrative, as one narrative among many, is (still) being manifested and expressed within backpacker communities. This investigation is important as it increases the knowledge about the many creative yet unsensational acts through which individuals express cultural beliefs. Manifestations found in connection with places, other people, bodies, and aesthetics will be discussed, revealing the complexity with which identity narratives are made through utilising cultural raw manuscripts.

This text begins with a theoretical approach to risk and adventure as culturally defined narratives used in stories of identity and discusses how such narratives are manifested on an individual level, within the backpacker context. Although this paper, as most other theoretical approaches, strives beyond personal, lived experience, it is written in an attempt to demonstrate where and how theoretical knowledge was extracted. As Wang rightfully points out, a practice described as constructed by the researcher may be experienced as both 'authentic and real from an emic perspective' (1999:353). Statements from interviewees will demonstrate that no matter how much academic knowledge is extracted from their testimonies, their experiences are as valid and real to them as the construction is to the researcher.

## Seeking understanding through ethnography and narration

Building upon ethnographic fieldwork in backpacker areas in Thailand, this paper includes both observations of and interviews with long-term travellers. The aim of reaching an understanding through as many expressions of 'travel ideology' as possible also instigated a search for empirical material in travel-related texts in magazines devoted to independent travelling (to the tropics), such as the American *Escape*, the British *Wanderlust* and the Swedish *Vagabond*. Additional interviews were conducted in Sweden with homecoming long-term travellers, leading to a total of approximately

35 qualitative interviews with backpackers ranging in age from 18 to 71. Most of them were, at the time of the interviews, residents of northern Europe and a few came from the United States. Most were solo travellers and the majority were women, chosen purposely in response to the critique of tourism research being male biased (see Beezer, 1993; Clifford, 1992; Riley, 1988; Ryall, 1988; Swain, 1995; Veijola and Jokinen, 1994). The definition of a long-term traveller used in this paper is a person who is away from home for a year or more, although a few of the backpackers interviewed were, in that sense, 'short-termers' with journeys of six to eight months. They may also be defined as 'budget travellers', keeping some sort of low-cost budget regarding charges for accommodation, food and tickets (see Riley, 1988). Most of the interviewees had travelled extensively in tropical areas of the world, with Southeast Asia, South and Central America dominating their itineraries.

In the theoretical perspectives presented in this text the traveller is regarded as a narrator of identity. This indicates not only that the travelling individual is through acts and tales expressing a story about who he or she is or wants to be, but also that a special sort of language is used to express identity. Here, the traveller is seen as being engaged in what Giddens would call a 'self-reflexive project' (1991), or what Ricoeur would describe as narrating identity (1988). From their perspectives, which apply to travellers and non-travellers alike, identity is not given or static but rather experienced as a dynamic and time-dependent outcome of an ongoing creative process. It is a process of reflexive communication among the subject, the world and people around him or her.

While earlier generations are said to have relied upon an identity explanation that was offered to them externally (by authorities such as tradition, the village common good or the powers of religion), for contemporary generations identity and life-story explications have become an internal affair (Giddens, 1991). Individuals are left alone to create their own identity stories through the means they are offered by society. The clothes one wears, the job one gets, the music one listens to, the people one socialises with, etc., are from such a perspective part of a narrative about identity – just as the choice to go travelling is. Thus, acts become metaphoric in that they point to something slightly outside the momentary happening. The same can be said about verbal or written narratives, which both inform narrator and listener about a particular event but also symbolise something larger than the event itself: the identity of the narrator. This narrative is not only a courtesy to the listener but perhaps more a means for the narrator to order experiences and to reach a 'sense of continuity' in his or her identity (Alheit, 1994; Desforges, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Ochs and Capps, 1996). Through verbal accounts, diaries, articles and books, the narrator incorporates various acts and events into a 'life-story', an ordered account of a biographical whole.

Further, the traveller does not begin narrating without some sort of manuscript. In order to make sense of acts and tales – one's own or others' – the individual depends upon narrative-structures (see Gergen and Gergen, 1986; Murray, 1989). The acts and tales of travel, like the symbols used in language, require a common meaning in order to be understood. They would say nothing (or something completely different from the expression) to the actor or the spectator, had they not been products of

commonly shared manuscripts. These manuscripts, or rather 'grand narratives of travelling', work as systems of beliefs which unite people in some sort of common understanding about reality. They structure and define knowledge through their success in making real what is really biased.

Mythology is vital to narrative survival. As Barthes states, mythology making 'consists in overturning culture into nature or, at least, the social, the cultural, the ideological, the historical into the "natural"' (1977:165). Mythologies are thus social constructions through which dominant systems of beliefs (narratives) derive their nourishment and legitimatise their power relations (Dake, 1992; Douglas, 1992/1996). Such mythologies are reproduced in travelling and are also articulated in travel magazines, books, and other media.

Therefore, a person travelling from what is often described as the 'western world' to the tropics carries a mental luggage of grand narratives, which may seem quite objective and 'real' to him or her, but are influenced by a number of historically, socially and culturally founded mythologies. These mythologies – historical through tradition but re-articulated and possibly contested in the present context – position groups, people and acts hierarchically within the narratives. Values concerning gender, class, ethnicity, age, income, and a number of other 'conditions' define truths and possibilities within a narrative.

While Said (1978) has set the track for an investigation into orientalism narratives, and authenticity narratives have been analyzed in detail by tourism researchers (Andersson-Cederholm, 1999; Cohen, 1979, 1988; MacCannell, 1976/1989, 1992; Wang, 1999), an attempt to further explore the risk and adventure narrative is made in this paper.

## Risk and adventure narratives

Perhaps it is the most unwanted souvenirs that best embed one's journey in one's memory – and which, paradoxically enough, may be most status-enhancing. Malaria, or the scars from a knifing tragedy in Bogotá, are incidents which, mentioned in passing, make a strong impression and immediately promote the victim from tourist to traveller (Mathlein, 1998; author's translation).

According to this travel writer, the general idea is that risk and adventure separates long-term independent travellers from their bad cousins: the tourists. His remark is well in line with the arguments in this article, maintaining that the historically founded adventurer is still alive, but perhaps forced to be a little more creative in displaying the adventure identity.

## Gendered adventures in past and present

The view of non-institutionalised travellers as 'risk-takers' rests safely upon a historical foundation of colonial 'exploration' defined by (male) adventurers in which adventure and risk are intertwined in a quest for progress. The 'Wild West' of North America, or parts of South America, Africa or Asia (and large sections of Australia to mention a more recent case in history) was 'whitened' not by routine but by transcending the limits of the familiar. Although not much of the world is left to conquer in this sense, and although an increased global understanding has changed the way people enter into each others' territories, the connection between 'risk', 'adventure' and independent travel is apparent in interviews as well as in travel magazines.

A quick glance through travel magazines (such as Sweden's *Vagabond* and *Res*, or the British *Wanderlust*) is enough to find 'proof' that such values are dominant in backpacker communities. Solo or small-group-travellers are pictured facing the 'Other', or the 'untouched' nature or 'untouched' people appearing as objects available for comparison, reached after hard and strenuous walks or rides with local transport. Although observations from travel areas, carried out within this project, give evidence that some backpackers enjoy the comfort of air-conditioned charter buses when moving about, the ideal is still that of the individualistic, 'brave' and 'off-the-beaten-track' traveller. Riley, for instance, citing Vogt (1976:27) claims that, 'in contrast to the values of the institutionalised tourist, the non-institutionalised traveller values "novelty, spontaneity, risk, independence, and a multitude of options". The drifter is also more of a risk-taker than the others' (1988:315).

Usually the drifter is also more of a 'man' than others. As former adventurers were usually seen as men who 'penetrated' 'virgin' lands and risked their lives in the process (see Beezer, 1993; Blunt, 1994; Connell, 1995; Kaplan, 1996; Mills, 1991; Pratt, 1992; and Ryall, 1988), today's adventure story is still often burdened with predominately masculine overtones (see also Clifford, 1992, 1997). This is perhaps not surprising considering how deeply rooted stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity often are, equating the latter with nurturing, immobility, passivity while the former is ascribed aggressiveness, mobility, activity and change (Connell, 1995; Gilligan, 1982; Ryall, 1988). Risk and adventure in the perspective presented here (as venturing outside of the stable 'routine') then appear as the very essence of masculinity. Still, as this research project suggests, such a perspective is very much contested in today's long-term budget travelling. The interviewed travelling women and men alike appear to 'practice risks' in their travels and describe their journeys and themselves as adventurous. Although apparently no statistical material is available to support the statement, ethnographic observations in backpacker areas suggest there are perhaps as many solo females travelling off-the-beaten-track as there are males. A research project in Australia indicates that there are in fact *more* solo women from abroad travelling around the continent than there are men (Hillman, 1999).

Having suggested that both men and women are adventurers does not mean that their acts necessarily have the same meaning to them, or to the people who hear or view their stories. The consequences may, for instance, be different as Desforges

(2000) notes – in reference to a female ‘long-haul’ traveller who explained that she sometimes did not talk about her travels after homecoming as she found that her acts of independence offended others and some men in particular. Yet, beyond the gender issue, dealing with independent travelling as a risk and adventure activity means taking into account that the object of study is the result of subjective constructions (that is, historical, cultural, social and personal values influence the way the object of study appears). This applies not only to the gendered experiences mentioned above but also to the central concepts of risk and adventure themselves.

## **The risk and adventure of travelling**

Looking at adventurous travelling means investigating ‘active courting of risk’ rather than responses to ‘high-consequence risks’ (Giddens, 1991:124). Travellers are out there, congregating in guesthouses, precisely because they are members of a society which, preoccupied with an uncertain future, demands from them reflexivity and a ‘calculative attitude to the open possibilities of action’ (Giddens, 1991:28). It is, however, their active and creative use of risks as constructed ingredients in individual self-presentations that are addressed here. This approach allows risks to be, at times, nothing more than mental constructions and mythologies (see also Dake, 1992; Douglas, 1992/1996; Renn, 1992:61). This is not to say that ‘real’ risks may not come true at times (Clift and Grabowski, 1997), as evidenced by travellers interviewed who had experienced rape, malaria, dengue fever, abortion in unfamiliar environments and theft.

Turning to Simmel (1911/1971) and Goffman (1967) may allow an understanding of how risk consciousness is needed to construct an adventure and how the journey in turn becomes an excellent arena for such creative construction. As Simmel states: ‘the most general form of adventure is its dropping out of the continuity of life’ (1911/1971:187). Long-term travelling, or backpacking, is indeed a timespace experienced as a break with routine and continuity (discussed later). This break is needed in order for action to become risky, or in Goffman’s terms, ‘a threat to one’s bet’ (1967:151). He argues, that in routine situations ‘free from fatefulness’, the information concerning the actor lacks significant expression. It is in action, which Goffman defines as enterprises ‘undertaken that are perceived to be outside the normal round, avoidable if one chose, and full of dramatic risk and opportunity’ (1967:260-261), that a person can demonstrate a ‘strong character’. However, the risk has to be mastered in the proper way. A strong character is not generated through facing the risk with whining, shivering, and crying. It is demonstrated through displaying ‘courage’, ‘gameness’, ‘integrity’ and ‘composure’ (Goffman, 1967:229). This means that a person accredited ‘strong character’ is seldom a newcomer to the trade but, rather paradoxically, an experienced action-taker facing each possible obstacle as routine (see also Simmel, 1911/1971).

It is not necessarily the content of an act, which defines it as with or without risk. It is how the act is experienced, when and where it takes place, and what mythology

has to say about it that creates the definition. Thus, for instance, a bus-ride in India may be experienced differently (and as riskier) by a traveller than a bus-ride in England or Germany would, regardless of the actual danger involved. Furthermore this bus-ride, irrespective of the actual danger, can then serve as an important ingredient in an identity narrative, or as Goffman would have it, the expression of 'strong character' (1967).

This 'strong character' is in this text addressed as an 'adventure identity' and the demonstrative acts generating such character are called risk and/or adventure narratives. Lightfoot (1997) and Scheibe (1986) develop Goffman's perspective in claiming that these are more effective than most in creating life stories as they are full of events (which make a good story) and have a tendency to single out identities in a contrastive manner. The hero is usually alone in a surrounding which is both unknown and different, making the contrasts between self and the rest of the world as obvious as a black and white picture. Thus, risk-taking is a particularly strong story about the 'self', an 'adventure narrative' that can only be highly valued in opposition to something different: the non-adventure. When taking risks, life is carved out rather than merely lived in the imprints of others. While the Jones' waste their time in front of the television, adventurers create time. To them, thrill and fright are 'connected episodes which are bound to produce swings of value, and this is time filled and punctuated – existing becomes living' (Scheibe, 1986:136).

## Risk and adventure narratives in acts and tales

Turning to empirical matters, the aim is now to show how the risk and adventure narrative in travel is manifested through individual action and how culturally defined actions enable the individual to tell an identity story as well as position oneself within a hierarchical structure. These empirical examples will also point to the importance of mythology in the act of narrating adventure identities. However, before risk and adventure narratives are analyzed in more detail, the journey – as a possible timespace for adventure and 'identity work' – is addressed through the travellers' own definitions.

### **Time and place for identity work**

Although a journey is as much, and as little, a part of the traveller's life as all other activities he or she engages in, it usually stands out as a demarcated time and space, qualitatively different from the rest of the life course. It is claimed by many of the interviewees that this timespace, away from home, offers certain new qualities, or perhaps loses some old, in that it relieves them from a pressure (on identity). Jour-

neying is commonly referred to as 'freedom'. A female solo traveller, aged 25, interviewed after homecoming recalls:

I was naive, took many risks, but it was a part of it all and I should have regretted it if I hadn't taken those chances or those risks. (...) I was not out to follow a specific track or to see that specific temple, or see whatever. I sat down on a bus and went. (...) I think I placed adventure, I placed events ... that things would just pop up unexpected so to speak. (...) If I got into a difficult situation I said to myself: 'This you have to fix. Hang in there.' (...) I really wanted adventure. I wanted to live the unexpected, no plans, no responsibility, no ... I wanted this freedom, the full freedom, and it is largely because of that that I travelled alone. Had I travelled with somebody else, I would have lost that freedom (Author's translation).

When this traveller gains what she calls freedom, she also experiences control of her own situation. With a fellow traveller the control would be lost and the sense of freedom threatened, as she would have to adjust to the expectations of someone else. This 'free' and 'self-controlled' timespace, according to many of the interviewed travellers, supplies a requisite for creating a new or 'truer' identity. Another woman, 24 years old, says:

I just feel like I have no history with these people ... they haven't grown up and seen me stuff up with all these things and I have stuffed up. (...) It's like cleaning the slate and meeting these people ... and it's so exciting and it's so new and you can be yourself and you can be this exciting person and you're confident in your opinions at 24 that you're not ... I mean when you're 21 all you care about is if you look beautiful. I mean, I think women are victims of that.

This woman travelled without insurance or medication. She drove around Taiwan on a motorbike and picked up jobs as she moved along. Judging by the obvious criticism in this statement of the stereotypical female image facing women around the world, it can be assumed that to her the meaning of an adventurous identity is most likely gender-based. She is carrying out 'risky' tasks and is doing so against cultural norms and values, suggesting women should do more concerned with their appearance than with travelling.

In line with the purpose of this article, however, the emphasis is here put on her experience of the journey as a break with her own continuing life-span and as an opportunity to 'be herself'. She also calls herself an 'exciting' person, indicating that action is important to the image of the 'self'. The experience of the journey as a withdrawal from routines and continuity and as a timespace for identity creation becomes even more pronounced in a reply from a 36 year old American male solo traveller, when asked what makes a person travel:

I'm gone now. That's it. My mother has thoughts of me, my father does, my sister does, my ex-wife does, my son does. Everybody does. And I get to control my presence with them (...) It's all about control. It's control. Human life is a desire for control. So, people are a tyranny on you (...) And you get off the plane in Bangkok. Nobody has anything in their minds about you (...) You can be somebody new, you can be different. And you can change, and then, when you get back, you find that you have changed, and they'll see that you've changed. And so (...) I'm gonna get great. You see me in about 10 years from now, and I'll be really powerful. I'll know some stuff, man (...) It's a tyranny of the familiar. People that are familiar exercise tyranny against you,

they inhibit your ability to change, because they think of you as X, and they somehow force you to be X. When you are whatever you are, you're not X.

This traveller, having spent several years travelling, describes physical and temporal demarcation as a possible means of escaping external expectations upon identity and achieving 'freedom' to give effect to his own changing. To describe the journey, many interviewees use concepts such as 'a time bubble', 'a parenthesis' or they regard it as spending time in places where 'time is standing still' which implies a break with a life course normally seen to move in one direction (Adam, 1995; Elsrud, 1998). This features all the characteristics necessary to make it into an adventure within which the traveller can engage in risky and creative identity work. The journey becomes a spatial and temporal frame to be filled with identity narratives.

### **Narratives of novelty and difference**

One of the more obvious traits of an individual's journey to a place not previously visited is its promise to supply the traveller with experiences of novelty, of places never before seen, of situations never experienced, of people never met. To many of the interviewed travellers, facing what is experienced as novelty is related to an experience of risk. A solo 31 year old woman traveller says:

I mean, as soon as you leave Sweden you are away, so you have then already entered a risk zone, so to speak. At home there is nothing, but as soon as you land... I mean Denmark is enough, then you are already away. There is already a risk. And especially in Asia, even further away where things are even more different (Author's translation).

When asked about risk, another solo traveller, a man aged 28 interviewed in Bangkok after three months in India and Nepal, connected the concept to the unknown:

I've had some very strange feelings coming from England to India, to Nepal, seeing all the new sights, new smells, everything else. That's scary in a way because it's like, "phuu, what's going on, what's happening?". At one point in Nepal for example, this thing that I seen in the valley on the way to Pokhara, just a normal every-day outdoor setting with the river and the rock, but it was because it was something I hadn't ever seen before, smelt before or experienced before. It was like "wow", this is in a way scary because it's like all new. You don't know what to expect.

Risk according to the travellers quoted above starts as soon as you are away and things are new. The more different a culture is experienced as being, the more is felt to be at stake in each situation of interaction. Typifications and routines, internalised in the process of socialisation at home (Berger and Luckmann, 1966/1991; Goffman, 1967), do not necessarily give a puzzled traveller in a new situation the right answers. This really says very little about the 'real' situation confronting the traveller, which may be as routinely organised as possible for the residents. To the newly-arrived traveller it is still experienced as unknown territory.

However, novelty is not enough to turn a journey into an adventure. It requires difference as well. A number of interviews point to the importance of a comparable

'Other', *another* quality, *another* being, *another* state of mind, upon which the adventure narrative must build its foundation. Through establishing a (mythologised) image of Otherness, a story about self-identity can be told. Such images of difference appear for instance in relation to the residents in the visited countries. When asked what he considered risky, a solo-travelling man in his early thirties responded:

Travelling around among people you don't know, living in their villages where it is really very poor, without...anybody who knew where you were. That is really risky...totally alone, no tourists, no backpackers, just the locals. That is quite a big risk.

*Interviewer: 'What could happen?'*

You can get robbed. They can kill you. But if you don't take a risk you can't win (Author's translation).

His story does not contain actual risks, but it has plenty to say about mythology at work. Not only does it contain a distasteful (cultural) message suggesting the 'unreliability' and possible 'savagery' of 'the locals' as if they were brutal by simply existing, the story also betrays a very common (western) cultural value and norm taken for granted; in order to win, you must risk something. Thus the act of facing this 'threat' has the potential of actually accrediting the risk-taker with the identity of a successful individual: a winner.

This traveller above also describes himself as singled out without the security of tourists or backpackers. What he is instead left with is the difference between him and 'the locals', which he experiences as 'quite a big risk'. The same sensation seems to both attract and bother other interviewees as well. Two women travellers in their early twenties explain their mixed feelings towards certain people in Australia:

A: I read this really amazing book about aborigines in Australia and then I thought that; oh, when we get there I have to meet some of them but I have really heard many bad things about them so it would be fun just to see them. But maybe not to get to know them, no, no I think that would be a little bit too risky.

B: One day-trip, don't spend the night...just watching.

(...)

A: But I think it's most scary because it is different, really.

It seems obvious that in this meeting between traveller and resident, not seldom described in travellers' brochures as a possibility for unification with another culture, an accentuation of difference occurs in which the participants become aware of their own 'unique' qualities, through facing the (frightening) quality of others.

A move towards 'different people' becomes an act of distinguishing identity in which the traveller not only separates her- or himself from the local culture and people, but also from his or her own 'cultural belonging'. The 'boredom' of the mythologised Jones', from which the traveller has escaped through leaving home, is often addressed in interviews. 'Tourists' serve the same purpose. As noted by researchers and travellers alike, travellers do not take to that epithet easily (see Dann, 1999). Most of the interviewed travellers thought that the adventurous experience was lost in tourism areas. A tourist connotes a lack of independence and a mass of some sort

and one has to be set aside from the ‘mass’ or the uniqueness of the act and actor would be lost.

However, the Jones’ and tourists are not the only imagined ghosts upon which to build difference narratives. Many of the interviews include tales about a frightening experience of ‘being the first white’ in a village. These acts, which so clearly unite novelty with difference, were described as rewarding as they made the travellers and their journeys unique in comparison with other travellers who did not venture out on their own. Thus, it can be argued that fellow travellers may pose an equally or at times perhaps larger threat to the adventurous traveller as they too seek their experiences in ‘risky’ and peripheral areas, consequently pushing the *avant-garde* of backpacking even further. Although slightly ambivalent, as travellers also seek comfort in each other’s presence, the relationship between them is far from equal. Narratives of novelty and difference are as hard to separate from each other as they are from other narratives in this empirical presentation. They appear to be the very essence when narrating identities through acts and tales of risk and adventure.

## Place narratives

Travel articles and interviews are abundant with place narratives, of stories about places, which are seen as particularly interesting from the adventurous travellers’ point of view, as their qualities give meaning to the identity of the narrator. For instance, an island visit can be used as an identity symbol when the individual traveller wants to distinguish his or her own life story from that of other travellers. The Thai island Ko Chang (or at least some sections of it which are difficult to reach) near the Cambodian border, is according to interviewees ‘known’ for various peculiarities. According to travel mythology – and perhaps some facts – it is a hideout area for drug traffickers, ‘infested’ with a severe form of malaria, full of superstitious residents, and the scene of at least four murders of travellers in recent years. The malaria risk is iterated by doctors and by travel guides such as the commonly-used *Lonely Planet*.

During the field-study in Thailand in the spring of 1998, almost all the travellers interviewed had a relationship with Ko Chang. With its jungle-like interior, its ‘pristine’ beaches and (partial) lack of infrastructure (roads/electricity), it was seen as a ‘paradise’ by many, but only some considered going there, as the risks were regarded as too high. Others wanted to go, precisely for that reason. It was ‘worth the risk’ if it meant that they, by going to Ko Chang, could avoid both charter-tourists and ‘sun-sea-and-sex-backpackers’; the latter phrase a seemingly common insult used to separate experienced travellers from newcomers. Thus, by engaging in an activity regarded by many as risky, travellers can express to themselves and to others that they are both brave and experienced.

A similar connection between place and experience appears in many narratives about India, with exceptions for ‘touristy’ areas such as Goa. Some of the travellers had arrived in Thailand after spending a few months in what they considered a much

riskier and more difficult country. Two female travellers in their 20s had been to India and stated when referring to the average backpacker itinerary;

India and Nepal are not in it [the itinerary – author's remark] anyway so we feel a bit special. We feel as if we have been off-the-beaten-track (Author's translation).

They felt, as did other interviewed India-travellers, that having endured the hardship of Indian journeying made them more experienced than those travellers who stick to the 'average' route. Another traveller explains how he felt embarrassed arriving as a novice when all the travellers around him seemed so experienced and interesting. He was afraid to appear naive and for instance avoided talking to a man whom he knew had been 'on the road' for six years, with a large portion of this spent in India. The point is reinforced in travel literature such as the *Lonely Planet* guide to India, which describes the country as 'far from the easiest to travel around', the journey as 'hard going' and a challenge even to the 'most experienced travellers'. Despite this, it is 'all worth it' (1997:16).

The point is further stressed by travellers who claim that the reason for going to India may even be to suffer, rather than enjoy. One 25-year-old solo traveller describes after homecoming to Sweden why she went to India in the first place:

Yes, simply to find my limits and the limit that I really noticed was when the weakness appeared, (...) which it did in India. (...) It was there that I stretched my limits (...) In Munich I met people who had been travelling and they had told me. And I wanted so much to experience it by myself. I wanted to look for experiences, both positive and negative (Author's translation).

Interestingly enough, apart from a bad case of diarrhoea, she had what she describes many times throughout the interview, a 'wonderful' experience, making friends with residents and staying much longer in India than she had planned. Still, the stomach trouble is the first thing that comes to her mind when asked about the reason for going to India. Without trying to diminish the agony suffered through a severe case of diarrhoea, it is still worth drawing attention to the mythology production at work here. The 'state' of India is through stories in guidebooks, in articles and from travellers, reduced to that of a scout camp. It just is not proper to call a half-year stay in India a holiday.

Places such as India, as opposed to Thailand, or Ko Chang in Thailand as opposed to Ko Pha-Ngan in the same country, get their symbolic value through being ascribed various risky and adventurous qualities. Naturally these are not the only places for which this can be done, and not the most effective ones either, but they seem to work successfully as identity narratives for many of the interviewed travellers.

## **Body narratives**

While the tourist gaze, following Urry (1990), has become a well established concept in research, the tourist body has not attracted as much attention (Veijola and Jokin-

en, 1994). When approaching interviews and stories about backpacking, a number of themes appear which are related to the body of the traveller. Health risks, illnesses, eating habits and other bodily threats and practices are foundations often used to build identity narratives upon.

Travellers talk about attacks of diarrhoea, or risks of catching this or that, as the price you pay if you want to experience the real local culture. One solo traveller in his 50s hurt his foot badly when trekking on a 'remote' island of Indonesia. He was left behind in a village – where the men 'only wore penis gourds' – by his temporary travel companions who needed to catch a plane. He recalls:

And I had them cut me some crutches, so I could go out in the woods to do my toilet, and all this. And my leg was pretty bad, and after 2 weeks, I could still not walk. It was still swollen and hot, and I was a bit afraid to get cholera, dysentery, cos there were no, no showers, nothing. I sleep in the main hut, they never take showers, they take some ashes, or dirt ... But they were incredible people, and after 2 weeks, I arranged with 5 young boys in the village to carry me for 2 days, down to a mission where there was a plane once a week, a small plane into the town... But it was fabulous, staying there, eating sweet potatoes and carrots.

In this case, his body was very much a part of the experience as its 'collapse' was the reason for his ending up in this village in the first place. Regardless of that the story is, however, composed of a combination of health-risks, lack of showers and remoteness, much like stories produced in colonial travel writing. The distance (two days to the mission), the difference (between showering traveller and non-showering hosts) and the health risk together build a story and an experience that is 'fabulous', despite the pain of a severely injured leg. Neither the experience nor the health risk would have been as important to this traveller had there been a tourist bus arriving with new tourists every day. His experience is an act belonging to the experienced, off-the-beaten-track travellers alone.

Another health-related narrative, which appears in many interviews, has a moral dimension concealing its usefulness in constructing risk and adventure identities. Malaria and anti-malarial drugs were often discussed among travellers and in the interviews. Two women travellers in their early 20s explained why they were ashamed to take their malaria tablets when so many other travellers did not.

A: Yes, but also because there is a moral discussion which you get involved in after only a few weeks of travelling (...) When the malaria mosquitoes become resistant, there is no treatment for the people.

B: Then we have all the examples given by people suffering so severely from various side-effects that they have been forced to return home, due to their anti-malarial tablets.

A: But we are still far too fresh so we still take our malaria tablets, I have to admit.

B: And then we are rated into the FNG ranks (Author's translation [FNG = 'fucking new guy', a Vietnam war-term taught to many travellers through the backpacker novel *The Beach*, by A. Garland.])

Despite these two interviewees, who with a touch of irony admitted their pill-taking was an act of inexperience, most of the approximately 30 travellers interviewed in Thailand did not take their prescribed anti-malaria drugs due to side-effects and/or

to the moral issues mentioned above (including some who went to ‘malaria-infested’ Ko Chang.) Many backpackers claim that using the stronger drugs in cloroquine-, maloprim-, proguanil-, or even mefloquine- and doxycycline-resistant areas such as Ko Chang was wrong from a moral perspective. Better then, argued many, to risk getting malaria and if so receive treatment for it. This position is sometimes also used among medical practitioners. Regardless of the correctness of the moral and medical concerns, the acts linked to these arguments are meaningful in another sense. There appears to be an antagonistic relationship associated with the taking of anti-malarial drugs and travel experience. The experienced ones avoid anti-malarial pills, the inexperienced do not. Through taking a risk or by being more morally concerned – not taking anti-malarial tablets – a narrative is told, accrediting the narrator with the highly valued experience, while taking a pill reveals the beginner.

Identity claims can also be digested. Eating habits can be used as statements about the unique ‘self’. One 24-year old male solo traveller distinguishes between ‘street-smart’ travellers and other tourists by referring to food consumption. The latter ‘are those who sit and eat nice dinners while I am the one passing by to look for the cheap restaurants’.

Although there are factors such as economic values influencing such a statement, it points toward food as more than a culinary travel experience. In the statement, choice of food exposes a cleavage between traveller and tourist. Such gaps appear also when needing to distinguish between travellers. In Bangkok, four young female travellers were quite suspicious of Thai eating habits, which they considered ‘risky’ and ‘dirty’ due to mythologies they had encountered in the backpacker community as well as at home in Scandinavia. They would not eat meat as the mythology they had encountered branded it ‘stray dog’ rather than beef and the deep fried bugs being sold on the street appalled them. These bugs were sold at night in the backpacker area Banglamphu and were seen during the field study to be consumed both by Thai residents and travellers. The young travellers had heard that these bugs were picked straight from the ground and put into large woks in the back alleys without being cleaned only to be sold at night to customers, unaware of the nature of the bugs. What kept these travellers from eating, encouraged others to do just that. Two men, from USA and Canada, interviewed at a later stage, ate the bugs with glee because it brought them closer to Thailand and further away from other travellers. By relating to bugs and local food in different ways and the mythology surrounding them, these travellers told different identity stories. Dangerous or not, the mere fact that these bugs are considered ‘dirty’ and unhealthy by many means that consuming them becomes a rather strong statement about guts, bravery and experience. Through these practices and health-, drug-, and food-related acts and tales, identity stories are told in which risk and adventure are important distinguishing features, and here the experience of the travelling body is very much present. It is a powerful instrument in narrative practices. When turning towards its output rather than its input, its function as a language and storyteller becomes even more obvious.

## Appearance narratives

Bodily expression is another way in which a story of identity can be told through a predilection for risk. A common way to tell the world a story of bravery is to use the language of aesthetics which a stroll through a dense backpacker area will soon give away. If nothing else makes an identity-reading possible, clothes will tell the story. The following event, which took place after an interview with a solo-travelling man (X) in his late 20s, appears in the author's field-notes from Thailand:

A couple went past, both wearing clothes (shorts and T-shirt) quite different from what travellers wear. After they had passed X looked at me and shook his head. "People on package-tours, you can pick them out right away. They wear those shorts and T-shirt and then sandals with socks." He bent forward and looked at my 70 dollar Birkenstock sandals and said, "shoes like the ones you have but with socks in them".

It was the clothing which gave both the strolling couple and the author away, although some face may have been saved by leaving the socks at the guesthouse. A good way to remain within the respected category from an adventurous point of view seems to be to dress properly, meaning to dress down rather than up. Worn, ripped clothes tell a story of 'rough' living and 'adventure'. Some ripped clothes work better than others. According to some of the interviewees, the fact that India is so highly valued as an adventurous place gives clothes bought in India an even stronger risk dimension. As mentioned earlier, there is within the backpacker value-system a distinctly 'strong story' about India as a country making a traveller experienced, if not already experienced on arrival, as India is regarded as a particularly difficult country to travel in. A pair of Indian pants or a shirt testifies to the adventurous spirit of the traveller. The same two female travellers in their 20s who earlier admitted to taking malaria tablets give a hint as to how strong a connection there is between clothes, India and travel experience:

B: "Ah, you are new, aren't you?" [imitating a fellow traveller]. It is written on your forehead somehow; "we have just arrived, we have no idea, we have no knowledge of how to bargain, we don't know how to travel, we have way too much luggage, we have pre-booked tickets".

A: The fact is that it shows. Because in the beginning you show up with your Swedish clothes. You know, there are typical travel clothes, those that don't wrinkle so easily or they have spots here and there.

B: We really felt new the first weeks in India.

A: Yes, we have been thinking a lot about that. That the people one meets in India and Nepal are a bit different compared to here. (...) India is perhaps a country you go to after you have gone to all the other countries in South East Asia, after New Zealand and Australia. After you have seen most of it, then you go there. So there are many who are experienced there (Author's translation).

No matter how aware these travellers were of the 'rules' guiding adventurous backpacker behaviour, they submitted to the norm and learnt to dress correctly in order to send out a message of experience, which in this case gives credit to the India-trav-

eller. Just as a business meeting at home requires shirt, tie, skirt or blouse, a gathering of experienced travellers has its clothing requisites as well.

There are other symbols of risk and adventure expressed through 'body talk'. Extreme hairstyles are often equated with adventurous travellers, as are tattoos and piercing. These body signs signal individuality and difference but they also work as symbols of group belonging, or as 'body wrappings' indicating cultural belonging (Hendry, 1993). Svensson, in her work on the symbolic uses of tattoos, calls the act of acquiring them a 'sensual adventure', which marks the passage from normality and mundane living to that of novelty and adventure (1998:171). These markers of both difference (to non-experienced and non-adventurous) and of identification (with the adventure identity) work as story tellers. By adopting the right aesthetic appearance a story of experience can be told.

## Conclusion – travel narratives as acts of culture

As this text has included the individual manifestation of a cultural 'grand narrative of travel', it has also become a text about hierarchical positioning. By relating to a specific narrative – that of independent travelling as risky and adventurous – in individual ways, travellers can position themselves within a backpackers' hierarchy. Through symbolic expression, through the investment in travellers' 'capital' (Bourdieu, 1984; Desforges, 1998, 2000; Elsrud, 1998; Munt, 1994), a hierarchical value system is maintained in which the experienced, the *avant-garde* of tourism, define the 'do's and don'ts'.

Not surprisingly, as the grand narrative supporting these acts is mainly defined by western standards, this value system celebrating individuality and progress does not only work within backpacker communities. Risk narratives expressing adventurous identities may, apart from facilitating identity readings while travelling, continue to work after homecoming. Many of the interviewed travellers also believe their actions will work favorably for them when applying for jobs or when making new friends (see also Desforges, 1998, 2000). It will make them an 'exciting person' or 'self-reliant', 'powerful' and 'strong'. While narrative practice works to a large extent in the 'journey present' and is witnessed by other travellers and residents in areas visited, the tales carry the meaning of such action into the future and onto home. Through retelling an act, through postcards, photo-shows or article-writing, the traveller may carry out more identity work, this time in relation to friends and family at home (Andersson-Cederholm, 1999). In doing so the traveller also relies on cultural values on a grander scale.

The very progress of many western societies is often related to risk-taking. Progress, it is said, relies on people and society investing extra while hoping to gain even more, on individual effort expended in order to reach personal and communal gain, on moving ahead by daring to face novelty (see Johansen, 1984; Scheibe, 1986).

It relies on explorative science to give its people better answers. It needs people being drawn to novelty and change. It rests upon a picture of other countries as 'undeveloped' and 'primitive' and dependent upon the expertise of others. Not least important, the progress of contemporary society with its focus on individual rights and welfare and its dependence upon consumption supports the project. These traits and beliefs, including individualism, risk-taking, progress, effort, movement, exploration and primitivism, are dominant also in travel narratives.

Having argued that travellers creatively manifest a narrative, which is culturally legitimated in their home environments, one question still remains unanswered even at the conclusion of this text. Many women, being long-term budget travellers, narrate risk and adventure stories but to what extent they are conformists or reformers of cultural narratives depends upon matters outside the scope of this text. Through the manifestations of adventure narratives discussed in this paper, women appear to be as 'adventurous', 'risk-taking' and 'daring' as any male traveller interviewed, indicating that they are upholding the cultural narrative described in this text rather than contesting it. However, this ignores the possibility that the narrative itself may very well be gendered.

Further interviews with women regarding how their symbolic investment eventually paid off after homecoming would supply valuable information. Desforges (2000) hints at a possible answer when finding that, although some travelling women thought their experiences were rewarded, others chose to keep quiet about their actions after homecoming. This suggests that the historically founded 'risk and adventure narrative of travel' is still at least partly gendered, embracing its masculine supporters while excluding its female intruders. A glance at the *Wordsworth Dictionary of English Usage* (1994:12) may illustrate further:

**adventure** (...) *n.* a remarkable incident: an enterprise: a commercial speculation: an exciting experience: the spirit of enterprise.—*n.* **adventurer** one who engages in hazardous enterprises: a soldier of fortune, or speculator: one who pushes his fortune, esp. by unscrupulous means:—*fem.* **adventuress** (chiefly in bad sense).

If this describes a contemporary and accepted view on male and female adventurous activities, who wants to be an adventuress? It appears that adventurous women, expressing an emancipatory practice of rejecting dogmatic traditions (Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1995; Giddens, 1991), thereby questioning the male priority to such practice, may be caught in the intersection between tradition and opportunity. While given the possibility to stage their own lives, some of them may find that such creative engineering collides with systems of beliefs that have lagged behind. As long as adventurous women are defined as (negative) counterparts of male adventurers or as exceptional actors, be it by acquaintances or researchers, they remain the oddities upon which the traditional view can (re)build its logic.

Possibly this phenomenon accounts for some of the ironic responses encountered in the interviews with women. Although the material gathered does not include sufficient data to make a fair comparative gender analysis, it is interesting to note that it was mainly women who adopted an ironic tone when discussing risk and adventure

or the fact that they were actually partaking in an 'adventurous culture'. Irony, as a reaction to a collision between different systems of logic has the intrinsic 'advantage' of mediating between discrepant ideas (Davies, 1996; Lalander, 1998; Rorty, 1989). Possibly irony, through its dissociating properties, supplies the distance a woman needs when she realises that she has been given the opportunity to act, but in the process of doing so may lose her identity tale to a gendered construction.

# Gender Creation in Travelling, Or the Art of Transforming an Adventuress

**Adventure** (...) *n.* a remarkable incident: an enterprise: a commercial speculation: an exciting experience: the spirit of enterprise.—*n.* **adven'turer** one who engages in hazardous enterprises: a soldier of fortune, or speculator: one who pushes his fortune, esp. by unscrupulous means:—*fem.* **adven'turess** (chiefly in a bad sense).

The citation above, found in the Wordsworth Reference Concise English Dictionary (1994:12), points at the essence of the gender related problem this article emanates from. According to this dictionary definition the female adventurer – the adventuress – is a hard case to handle. As a female ‘soldier of fortune’ she is transformed into an insult. The adventurous woman of today, appearing here as a negative representation of the adventurous man, seems to be situated between moments in time and between different and opposing discourses.

I do not want to over-emphasise the importance of a single citation in a dictionary<sup>35</sup> but evidently the Wordsworth dictionary is not alone in downgrading the female adventurer. In the Swedish language, for instance, the word adventuress (äventyrerska), which should correspond to the (masculine) word adventurer, turns the female into a promiscuous adventurer in a world of sex rather than a world of travel. This is a practice of making cultural women into sexual women which is not unknown to gender interested researchers. While Wordsworth, and the Swedish language, are being rather explicit about it, the same tendencies to pathologise<sup>36</sup> the female adventurous act are lurking behind more ‘neutral’ statements in travel magazines and interviews with long-term travellers, as this paper will show.

Women, as well as men, do engage in adventurous activities and do narrate adventurous identity stories. Although the matter remains statistically unexamined, various estimations by other researchers do point to a fairly even distribution of solo women and men both on and off the beaten track (see Hillman, 1999; Jarvis, 1998). Furthermore, in interviews with travellers, most of them being women, it seems obvious that female travellers, just as male travellers, do engage in what is often described as adventurous activities. It appears obvious that as narrators of adventure stories and as consumers of adventurous ‘properties’ and experiences<sup>37</sup> – such as trav-

elling off the beaten track, interacting with residents, buying clothes symbolising 'rough living', staying at guesthouses lacking everything but the most basic amenities and so on – women are just as active as men. In this context there does not at first seem to be much that motivates a gender categorisation.

Nevertheless, as shown in the citation above, behind the actual acts lurks uncertainty and problems of definition. This is caused by a cultural frame of understanding, a discourse in which women of adventure are violating a practice – previously, but even today – protected as a playground for masculinity alone (see for example Blunt, 1994; Mills, 1991, 2002). Accordingly, what is usually not articulated in most texts about women adventurers, but is still very much present, is the astonishment set off by the gender of the actor, rather than by the quality of the act. While acting men are 'capable', women capable of the same acts are 'exceptional', 'extraordinary' or even 'fakes'. That is of course if they are acknowledged at all.

An inability to acknowledge adventurous women is present among researchers, who when examining the nature of 'adventure', have interpreted them almost exclusively as acts of masculinity (see for example Goffman, 1967; Scheibe, 1986<sup>38</sup>; Simmel, 1911/1971). Although males perhaps outnumbered women to a greater extent as travellers in past times, there were still enough mobile women to make them equally valid and interesting to study (Blunt, 1994; Mills, 1991, 2002; Swain, 1995). Unfortunately, and possibly due to the lack of research interest in the area of adventure and travel, this difficulty to take notice of female adventurous travelling is carried on into present day research. Potential sceptics should note that the women addressed in this paper are 'capable', capable of engaging in adventurous acts and tales. If at times, as when myths are used to enhance a good story, they appear as 'fakes', they are in the good company of just as many men.

There are two overriding motives for this chapter. One, I will show that the earlier historically burdened *masculine adventure discourse* is threatened but still alive. This cultural 'manuscript', guiding meaning and action, encroaches upon women's possibilities to manifest a newer discourse which expects people (in wealthy 'post-industrial' societies) to form and manifest their own identities, to create their own life-stories. The foundation to this discourse is described by Giddens (1991) in referring to identity as a *reflexive project* and by Ziehe's concept *makeability* (Fornäs, 1995; Ziehe, 1991). Makeability describes the experienced possibility for individuals in contemporary society, as opposed to traditional societies of past times, to actively create their own identities. Women are told they have equal rights to movement and to the public arena. However, as long as the old masculine adventure discourse is alive, the acts of adventurous women, demanding their rights to create and control their own identities, risk becoming ignored or ridiculed. The text will address how both these discourses are active and manifested in travel narratives.

The second aim is to address the various routes women travellers take in order to balance between these two discourses, an act of balancing which is often manifested in a challenging of masculine adventure stories. While the chapter will discuss some of the women's responses, which are quite according to expectations, it will continue into topics less investigated, one being the use of irony. Irony is a practice of distanc-

ing which in this case has a number of meaning-bearing qualities. Irony has the potential to work as an effective tool of opposition to those with the power to define but may also be used as a last resort when one just does not feel at home within the discursive categories.

The text builds its claims upon interviews with forty 'long-term budget travellers'<sup>39</sup> (Riley, 1988) predominantly from northern Europe, but some also come from Australia as well as the United States. Most of them are women and most of them were at the time of the interviews travelling solo. There are a number of reasons for focusing on women in this text as well as in the research project it emanates from. Tourism research has since its initiation been focused on travelling predominately as a male practice with a male bias (Beezer, 1993; Clifford, 1992; Mills, 1991, 2002; Riley, 1988; Ryall, 1988; Swain, 1995; Veijola and Jokinen, 1994). In feminist research it is often stressed that arenas such as the one described, that is contexts traditionally controlled and 'normalised' by masculine values which are now being entered and challenged by a large number of women, are important fields of research. The perspectives presented by women, in doing what traditionally has been withheld from them, offer researchers a possibility of broadened or even altered information about a phenomenon. At the very least it can increase our understanding of knowledge as both positioned and situated and of our research production as representations which are informed by, among other things, gendered subjectivities (see Hara-way, 1991; Keller, 1985; Skeggs, 1997; Widerberg, 1995).

## The setting

The interviews and observations this article builds its claims on were mainly collected during fieldwork in Thailand 1998. Staying at the same type of accommodation, as well as eating at the same type of restaurants and using the same type of transport and other ingredients as I found other backpackers doing, I focused on travellers who were away from home for at least six months and preferably much more and who expressed a desire to either travel solo or to travel adventurously. However, a few of those interviewed claimed to be doing neither. Some of the interviews this chapter is based on were also gathered on an earlier occasion, in 1996, when twelve Swedish female solo travellers were interviewed after their homecoming. A majority, 29 of a total of 40 interviewees, were women and 20 of these women travelled solo. Of the remaining thirteen male travellers ten were travelling solo. In the same ethnographic spirit, which has motivated prior work in this project, empirical material has also been found in newspapers, travel magazines<sup>40</sup> and not the least, in the *Lonely Planet* guidebooks<sup>41</sup>. Thus, I have used a qualitative and ethnographical approach, with life-story interviews as a particularly important source.

It has been argued that travelling backpacker-style is a privilege for the middle-class alone (Munt, 1994) and that adventurous action is above all a 'fat boy's revolt'

(Weber, 1971:98, cited in Scheibe 1986:140). My fieldwork both confirms and denies this leaving the gender aspect aside for the moment. Among 'western' travellers under investigation in this research project there are people from both blue and white-collar backgrounds and I therefore find a generalisation of limited use. This is not to say that a class-perspective approach would be fruitless. First of all, long-term travelling is a privilege for the (wealthy) few to 'explore' the (poverty of) many. People travelling in the opposite direction are seldom called tourists or backpackers but more often refugees or migrants.<sup>42</sup> On a global scale backpacking is therefore an 'upper-class' preoccupation. Secondly, the travellers from post-industrialised countries are undeniably privileged also in relation to many fellow citizens in their home countries. Far from all people in, for instance, England, Sweden, Holland or Germany, possess the economic and cultural capital needed to make backpacking into a desire and a possibility.

A class-perspective is definitely fruitful in relating the backpackers to those who do not travel, or who travel differently, and when discussing the meaning of a journey in a broader cultural context, that is as a tool to gain status at home. In studying the backpacker context *per se* though, I believe other types of categorisations are more useful as backpacking cultures 'in action' seem to carry their own logic when it comes to status. Even though initially used in a different sense by Turner (1967/1989) his concept 'liminality' is sometimes employed when addressing travelling (Andersson-Cederholm, 1999) as a time-space away from home and everyday structures (Elsrud, 1998/Chapter 2)<sup>43</sup>. However, while Turner's concept describes a demarcated time-space without hierarchical structures, the liminality of travelling is far from fair and equal. New structures in which travellers are ranked predominantly by their adventurous capacities are soon developed by the application of 'western' mythology to travellers' encounters and practices (Elsrud, 2001/Chapter 3).

A lot of time and thought has been spent on categorising backpackers into different *types* (see particularly the work of Cohen, 1979, 1982, 1988 and 1992). While such work of definition has been important in reaching the knowledge about different modes of tourism that we have seen until the present, other ways of approaching the field of research may be needed in the future. Given the contemporary conditions of fragmentation of 'truths', 'images' and life-styles available to backpackers and other tourists, it is hard to 'identify' a limited number of meanings within groups of individuals. Although it appears rather obvious that most backpackers regard themselves as a better kind of tourist than charter tourists (see Andersson-Cederholm, 1999; Desforges, 1998, 2000; Elsrud, 1998/Chapter 2, 2001/Chapter 3; Munt, 1994), the meaning they ascribe to various other aspects of travel seems to differ tremendously from person to person. The fieldworker will encounter a wide spectrum of travellers from backpackers 'on holiday', out to have a good time together with other backpackers, to '*avant-garde*' backpackers travelling 'off the beaten track' track in search of adventurous times and places (Elsrud, 2001/Chapter 3) and the 'authenticity' they feel is lacking at home (Andersson-Cederholm, 1999; Cohen, 1979, 1988; MacCannell, 1976/1989, 1992; Meethan, 2001; Wang, 1999). What is perhaps equally significant is that states of mind seem to differ within a traveller over a

period of time and at the same time. People are not always rational. Mixed feelings, interpretation hang-ups and hesitation at the encounter with rival options are as much a part of travel as of life in general. In which category do we place a backpacker who one month 'adventurously' wanders off by herself into border areas of northern India while mentally wishing she was home with family, friends and a sense of security, but the next month is in Thailand, staying at a beach area, paying little attention to the residents, while smoking gunja and eating magic mushrooms? At a stopover in Bangkok she joins a guided tour taking her around the most popular temples. While she certainly exists, it is almost impossible to place her in a category unless that category covers all eventualities and discrepant minds and acts.<sup>44</sup>

Instead of trying to identify a backpacker *mind* I prefer, in line with Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai (2002), to talk about a backpacker *form*. While *type* refers to the *mind* of the traveller, to expectations, preferences and values, *form* refers to structural – and often material – external conditions such as local transport, budget guesthouses, duration of travel, backpacks rather than suitcases and so forth. Thus, backpackers can be out travelling for a variety of reasons, but they seem to stick to quite similar structural arrangements. I am well aware that the *form* is as much a (scientific) construction as the old 'type' has been, but for the time being I find this a much better concept for understanding backpacking without over-simplifying the complexity of the phenomenon.

If there is a lowest common denominator in this empirical material it is not an expectation or view shared by many backpackers, but rather a common use of structural arrangements such as transport, accommodation and so forth. This does not mean that there are not structures of thought – discourses – affecting the minds of backpackers. Backpacking as an adventure is one such structure but, as this paper will address, there are various individual ways of responding to such cultural directives.

## Adventure as a narrative about identity

Before moving on to the interviewees' responses it is important to look into the nature of the adventure and define what is meant by being adventurous. In this project the backpackers themselves (and their texts in travel magazines and guidebooks) have defined the adventure as well as the adventurous act. Whether or not 'real' adventures exist is irrelevant to the arguments, as they may be used in identity narration just as created ones. Of greater importance is instead the fact that there are constructed ditos, acts transformed into adventures by the will and creativity of people. Independent travelling in itself is often equated with 'adventure' in interviews and in media texts. Its 'risky' elements, socially constructed or real, are highlighted as important components in building both adventure tales and identity stories. Frederick and Hyde (1993:xxiii) note when investigating female travel experiences and writing that

'[t]he journey is often presented not only as a risk but as a risk well worth taking, a means of self-transformation and self-discovery'.

The journey alone is, however, not enough to make a good adventure story. It also takes specific action and appearance (Elsrud, 2001/Chapter 3). In testimonies both in interviews and literature an image appears of the adventurer as a person in torn and worn-out cotton clothes<sup>45</sup> who travels 'off-the-beaten-track' to destinations that are often expressed as 'primitive', 'poor' and 'unexplored' (by 'whites'). The adventurer travels for a long time, without travel companions and mingles with the 'locals'. The adventurer takes 'risks' in encounters with nature, with local transport and in social interaction (with 'locals'). The adventurer does as the 'locals' do regarding health and food matters. Most importantly, the adventurer in media texts and interviews does it all with some style. It is the handling of novelty and risk with routine, which turns the actor into an adventurer (Simmel, 1911/1971).

Given the constructivist approach adopted here there is no such thing as an adventure until someone defines it as such. Adventures appear when people start believing in them, talking about them and acting them out. Only then can it be adventurous to eat worms but hardly escargots although the texture may be quite similar. Only then can it be considered adventurous to stay as the only stranger in an African village but not in a Swedish, English or German rural community of the same size and degree of familiarity. Adventure, as a concept applied all the way through this work, is thus a construction kept alive by many people believing in it.

A constructed adventure has any number of discursive narratives attached to it which work to enhance the action. By discursive narratives I mean individual expressions of culturally and historically produced belief-systems. These narratives, often describing the 'nature' of a people, a place or an event, do come across as 'truths' but are really social and cultural constructions. They work both as magnifying glasses and filters in that they may be used to make an event larger and more powerful than it is or discard unwanted particles and make disturbing impressions disappear. These discursive narratives structure expectations before as well as interpretations after the encounter with a particular image or event. In travelling they are often exactly what is needed to make an ordinary event into a narrative of identity.

Lightfoot (1997) and Scheibe (1986) argue that adventures are particularly effective in the narration of identity stories as they are usually pregnant with events. At the same time they place the 'adventurer' in the limelight, doing what others do not do (see also Elsrud, 2001:603 and Chapter 3). This is a somewhat paradoxical circumstance as the adventure is usually practised in an area separated from others both in time and space (Simmel, 1911/1971). The adventurer often practices adventure away from most of those people who are supposed to acknowledge the act. In Simmel's view it takes a separation both in time and space to turn the practice into an adventure as the practice can only be valued in the light of something else, in this case something that is 'not adventure'. It must therefore have a beginning and an end. In other cases it would spill over into the mundane and cease to be an adventure (Simmel, 1911/1971). Fortunately for adventurers, there are ways to overcome the obstacle of being unseen by both judge and jury. Not only are there photos to take.

There are also postcards and diaries to write supplying the non-adventurous audience at home with adventure narratives before or after homecoming (see Andersson-Cederholm, 1999). There are, not least, articles and books to write and get published which is a common future project mentioned in many of my interviews, as well as being an actual practice for many travellers.<sup>46</sup> In the last ten years or so the backpacker circuit has also seen a new development which may possibly eventually change the view of travelling quite drastically. The rapid growth of Internet cafés in backpacker areas around the world makes adventure narration to those at home much easier.<sup>47</sup>

## The adventuress – the illegitimate child of conflicting discourses

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, a semantic approach to the adventure topic reveals the inappropriateness of female adventurous actions. This could perhaps be written off as a sign of old sins but the incongruity remains an issue after a critical reading of media texts and oral stories. A way to theoretically understand how such a view of the female adventurous actor has emerged is to focus on her location, situated between two discourses as I have argued above. Drawing on Hall (1997:6), I use the term discourse as a concept describing ‘ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (*or formation*) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society’. Since these guides to speech and conduct are historically and culturally defined and re-articulated, rather than static truths, they are variable. However, as we shall see, discourses can be quite persistent ingredients in social life.

A practice – such as backpacking – may be attached to a system of discourses which define what can be thought, said and performed. Some of these discourses, such as those on primitivism or authenticity, are not under investigation here (but will be later to some extent). Others, like discourses of adventure and makeability, are the topic of this chapter. Furthermore, discourses present in the same context may be counteractive, which is the case here. While one discourse gives the travelling woman the right to practice adventure the other discredits her if she does. These two ‘antagonists’ will be addressed theoretically here prior to a presentation of traveller narratives.

## The new adventurer – a woman in the making

Our futures, as men and women, are said to be open and mouldable. No longer are we born into a given set of life circumstances. Numerous scholars, perhaps the most

salient in this specific context being Giddens (1984, 1991), Bauman (1991, 1997) and Beck, Giddens and Lash (1995), describe our time in the world as a time of *wandering* about both in thoughts and in space and as a time of individual *reflexivity*. Common to these scholars is the notion that the authorities of traditional institutions such as religion, extended family systems and local community dependency have lost their explanatory power. No longer are the number of individual options said to be limited by a restricting God or a restraining tradition in which children are expected to take over the fate of their parents, be it through adopting similar living conditions, locations or professions. The new world is a world emphasising individuals, their choices and actions. It is also a world of many 'truths' in which the individual is expected, often single-handedly, to reflexively monitor the options and chose the right action, an expectation causing opportunities as well as uncertainty and anxiety. The identity of a person has accordingly become *a project* demanding continuous remodelling and reflexive monitoring of the 'truths' at hand at any given time.

Accepting such a perspective it is however important to stress its *situatedness*. There are millions of people around the world who would contest such a description. Poverty, starvation, feudal systems and other (often gendered) inequalities outside what is often described as 'post-industrial' societies make a universal claim on the individual freedom to act, or even reflect, almost ridiculous. I believe that also inside these post-industrial contexts these claims should be made with care. As Furlong and Cartmel (1997) point out, to many this is a system of beliefs and not a reality (see also Davies, 2001). The young learn that they can make their own future and identity with the consequence that they also blame themselves when they fail. In reality, claim Furlong and Cartmel, their misfortunes are caused by unjust and unequal structures, which still exert authority over the individual.

Although advocates of late or postmodern 'reflexivity' do acknowledge the 'anxiety' (Giddens, 1991), 'ambivalence' and 'discontent' (Bauman, 1991, 1997) lurking in its backwaters, the criticism by Furlong and Cartmel (1997) points towards the importance of differentiating between the theoretical descriptions and lived experience. What I am arguing here is that regardless of how much the theoretical concepts of reflexivity and lives as identity projects acknowledge the pitfalls of late-modern awareness, the corresponding discourse of every-day life often comes without 'precautions' attached. Young people are expected to make active choices regarding future education and jobs. They are told they have the possibility of becoming whatever they want to become, while seldom being informed that matters such as skin-colour, gender, class or family background may pose a serious threat to their freedom of choice (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). Thus, there is a 'naturalness' about the narratives through which people of post-industrial societies speak and learn that they must and can make their own individual choices in staking out their life-tracks and actions. This mundane, seldom opposed belief in making your own future is fittingly addressed by the concept 'makeability' (Ziehe, 1991). Fornäs (1995:45) addresses this issue:

There are reasons to believe that both individualization and reflexivity have been extended and generalized in our time. Thomas Ziehe has added a third tendency, towards what he calls 'makeability': a demand and a capability to regard more and more things – like one's own or one's children's selves – as possible to shape and produce according to a project or a plan rather than as an outcome of natural developments or given traditions.

Acknowledging that this belief in self-shaping may be present in a number of discourses, such as discourses of masculinity, of femininity, of travelling, of youth and so forth, I have chosen to present 'makeability' as a discourse in itself in order to make apparent its cultural and historically founded constituents. It has without a doubt influenced the travellers in this research project. While it may have been true that men outnumbered women on the travel arena of the past, the travel scene today offers plenty of evidence of a large proportion of female 'participation'. Very much in line with the claims above, adventurous women are navigating in what they experience as a world of options and in the process entering areas which were earlier dominated by men, such as the independent journey. Lacking extensive statistical evidence it would perhaps not be right to claim that there are as many women as men travelling 'adventurously', in this case meaning 'solo', 'independently', 'off-the-beaten-track' and at 'risk'. Evidently, it would be equally wrong to claim that there are as many men as there are women travelling 'adventurously'. Although solo travelling in Australia in itself is not a measurement of 'adventurousness' it is an indicator of a development in travelling which has been ignored. In a quantitative master's degree study, Hillman (1999) found more solo women travellers than men in Australia. Although solo travelling in Australia alone is not a measurement for 'adventurousness', her findings are well in line with other estimates given by other researchers focusing on backpacking in south east Asia<sup>48</sup> as well as my own observations in backpacker areas in Thailand, in 'remote' areas of Papua New Guinea or on the outer islands of French Polynesia. There are, without a doubt, plenty of female adventurous travellers. At the turn of the twenty-first century these 'adventuresses' do not only navigate the outskirts of the institutionalised backpacker circuit. They also have to avoid the obstacles placed before them by the traditional and persistent masculine adventurer.

### **The masculine adventurer – a man of yesteryear?**

Getting to know the traditional (masculine) adventure discourse, some insight can be gained by reflecting once again on the importance of distinction when creating the adventure story. As noted above, the adventure comes into being by being demarcated from the non-adventure in time and space. The adventurer must likewise be demarcated from the non-adventurer, in other words defined by what she/he is not. Glancing at history and 'discourses' of colonial times there have been at least two non-adventurers upon which the adventurer can build an adventure narrative. It is now a well-known claim that the adventurer's traits, through colonial history, have been the 'antithesis of stereotypical feminine qualities' (Mills, 2002:72), thriving on assigned and assumed masculine qualities such as mobility, change, strength, risk and

courage (see also Beezer, 1993; Blunt, 1994; Clifford, 1992; Mills, 1991; Pratt, 1992).

But even if the discursive efforts to exclude women from adventurous acts were effective and therefore successful, one problem remained for the male adventurer having left home time and home space in a quest for expressive individuality. There were other men out there – local residents – who had to be kept at a distance in order to act out one's adventure narrative. Some researchers into colonial writing (and acting) have described this obstacle as one of the reasons why the adventurer has become such a masculine character. In order to distance the white male from the male of, for instance, India or Africa, an exaggeration of masculine features was stressed. 'Character traits such as strength and fortitude in the face of adversity were deemed important as one of the ways of making clear demarcations between white masculinity and 'native' males', states Mills (2002:70). Typical colonial texts describing the (masculine) adventure must therefore be understood as acts of differentiation, where white men of mobility and change were not only separated from white (and coloured) women of believed passivity and domesticity but also from any threat posed by men of colour or location. Enhanced masculinity was the main ingredient in these acts of distancing and separation.

Some time has passed between the 'struggle' of the adventurous colonial white man and the travelling off the beaten track, self-proclaimed 'adventurer' of today's backpacker circuit. Space has changed too and lost its sought after 'primitive' character. Opportunities for 'exploring' unknown territory have lessened (although being the 'first white' in a particular area is still often stressed by interviewed backpackers regardless of gender). Yet discourses such as the ones describing travel as adventurous and adventure as – normally – an act of masculinity seem to remain intact, despite efforts by many women to contest their very essence. This will be addressed in what follows, through various examples found in research texts, in other media and in travellers' tales.

## From adventurer to adventuress – emic perspectives

Since the theoretical arguments above, at least those relating to the masculine adventurer, are to a large extent based on research into historical conditions, contemporary adventure contexts are yet to be examined, and what follows is an attempt to do so.

Emic perspectives, gathered in the last years of the twentieth century, do not perhaps express gendered adventure stories as explicitly as they did in travel stories of yesteryear. However, it is obvious that the remains of a historical and cultural construction reserving adventure for men and masculinity are still present in many stories.

Less problematic and more explicitly expressed is the 'makeability' discourse, where travellers, regardless of gender, see the journey as an obvious example of a 'free-

dom' to reflexively choose among paths and to create identity. Here, in the discussion surrounding the journey as an arena for taking, making and creating identity, is where the emic presentation will also begin.

## Aspects of makeability

I will first of all address how some of the travellers like to see the journey as an opportunity to act out individual wants and needs, making it obvious that women of contemporary post-industrial societies see themselves as capable and competent actors in the process of making something out of their lives. One of them is the following traveller who states, during an interview in Thailand, that she is going home only to sell everything, including her home.

*Interviewer: You're going to sell everything?*

Yeah, I still got my house and my stuff now but I think I'm going to sell everything and travel for a longer time.

*Interviewer: Do you know where? Do you have any plans?*

S: No, no I heard a lot of stories where I was thinking about I want to go there. The south of Africa or South America or (...) it doesn't really matter. Travelling is just a good feeling and it doesn't matter where it is.

*Interviewer: What is it? What is the good feeling...with travelling?*

S: That there is no pressure. At home you always have pressure. You have to be like this you have to do that, you have ... and here you, you are, you don't have to be like what other people think. You can just be what you want to be or do what you want to do.

Similar statements are found throughout the rest of the empirical material. Many claim to be travelling at least partly because the separation from home, in time and space, is seen as a context for action and 'making' (of identity stories). From this perspective men and women stress the same thing (see Chapter 3). There may still, however, be a tangible difference here. Fifty, or perhaps only twenty, years ago a woman claiming she was going home to sell her house and spend the money travelling would have had a difficult time finding support for her act. It is possible that the woman cited above would have had an even harder time convincing a societal judge and jury had she been doing this in past decades as she comes from a working class background in Holland with a mother working as a cleaning lady and a father working as a manual labourer. The traveller herself had trained in nursing, but had not attended tertiary education. Independent travelling has, from the times of the Grand Tours of Europe (see Leed, 1991; Urry, 1990) until present-day backpacking (see Munt, 1994), been viewed as a preoccupation of the middle or upper classes of western society. While this may be true as a statement about proportions, this traveller, and quite a few others, show that a democratisation process is taking place and that hegemonic narratives are being threatened.<sup>49</sup> In this sense she is a 'true' representative of contemporary beliefs in the 'makeability' of identity and the freedom for (more and more) individuals, regardless of gender and class, to create their own life-stories.

While the above statement seemed 'gender-free' until I added a discussion about its dependence upon cultural and social norms and values, other testimonies explicitly refer to adventure as being an act of gendered subjectivity. Another traveller saw her journey as a quite firm statement about her identity as a woman when, at the age of 24, she set off alone on what she described as an adventure through Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia (Borneo), Philippines, Japan, Korea, India, Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa. She travelled for approximately three years with one shorter break at home during which she only found that she was not ready to settle yet. Her testimony clearly points towards the connection between adventurous acting and gender statements:

For some reason it is the toughest parts, where travelling is hell, where it is really hard, dirty and disgusting and you are so tired you're about to go crazy. It is those parts that you remember most and that give you most.

*Interviewer: What do they give you?*

A sense of strength. At the same time...you feel extremely strong and independent, don't you? And that gives an enormous sense of contentment...to feel that you can place me anywhere on this earth, no problems, I can make it...And I think that a woman feels this way, I mean there is a difference between men and women, here at home, isn't there. Women are supposed to be taken care of and men are taking care. You don't get a chance to learn that you can do it by yourself. But in those cases, you really do manage by yourself and it is an amazing feeling to know that whatever happens in the world, I can do it. I will never ever make myself so dependent upon another person in my whole life so that I can't take care of myself if all goes to hell.

*Interviewer: It sounds like some sort of emancipation.*

Yes, that is how I've seen it. Economically, no matter what, I can't even think of myself as a house-wife. I'd go crazy and my husband would get a divorce. I guess I wouldn't fall apart as a house-wife but I wouldn't do it because I'd get so terribly dependent upon him and that I don't want to.(...) I want to be independent. I can do it. Have I done it once I can do it again. (...) I think you get strong when you are travelling because you don't have anyone. You can't call mommy and say "what am I gonna do? Come and get me now. I'm sitting here alone in the middle of the night". It's no use. If you are sick and vomit and feel terrible riding on a bus and jumping off somewhere in Africa you know that you have to grin and bear it. It does you good to fight, doesn't it? You don't feel good by being here at home, whimpering. I can look at my boyfriend who loves to take care of me. (...) He is....I call him mom sometimes (my translation).

It is noteworthy that she describes men as 'care-takers' and women as taken care of. At first this seems to contradict common narratives in which women are the caretakers both in working life and at home. However she is here addressing 'womanhood' in a quite different sense, related to a previous discussion in the interview, where the woman appears as the bourgeoisie's 'weaker sex', needing a strong hand to guide her through the difficulties in life. With that in mind it almost sounds as if getting stranded in Africa or sick in India was part of this traveller's plan to gain self-assurance and independence in relation to two different control systems, the power of mothers and the power of men. This union of mother and boyfriend, expressed by her, is interesting and stresses, even more, the central meaning of dependence and power structure in her relationship to a man. The dependency she feels, and tries to escape, in relation to a man is impregnated with the subordination a child has towards a parent. This traveller's caring boyfriend sometimes feels like her mother and while acting out the adventure in Africa as a way of gaining independence as a wom-

an and from men, mother is the one she does not want to call when she is in trouble. Her adventure appears to be a revolt against future subordination and a cry for independence in relation to parents as well as to partners.

Not surprisingly, risk-taking has been seen as a useful tool to gain independence among adolescents (Lightfoot, 1997). Taking risks, real or constructed, is a way to stretch those limits and skip those boundaries, which previously protected and restricted the child. While this is probably an adequate interpretation of the adolescent risky act it would be a submission to western linear and developmental thinking to see this as something occurring only during adolescence (see Gubrium, Holstein and Buckholdt, 1994). Also it would lead to research overlooking the importance of adventurous action in declaring self-reliance, independence and control at all stages of a person's life, and in response to situations completely different than those power conflicts of adolescence facing a teenager. Although risky action, regardless of actual danger, may not be appealing to all people it needs to be stressed that it is definitely an act that finds its advocates in all age groups.

One traveller, for instance, was in her fifties and sixties when she went on yearlong trips to South and Central America. Looking back at her life she says that she had always had a 'free' spirit, doing odd things and stretching limits when she was young, just like those adolescent risk-takers discussed in research. Then she married and worked, mothered and stayed put for many years while her husband went on business trips. At one stage in the early 50's, before the couple had their son, she, at the age 26, decided to leave Sweden and go to the United States for half a year. Looking back at a time when her husband was always travelling but she was left behind she claims:

And then I thought; "oh yes you can travel but then I can go to America, because I have a couple of uncles there". Had, because they are both dead now, so therefore I got to America that time. And I could stay for half a year because you had to have a visa....and somebody who was responsible for all the crazy things you did while you were there too (my translation).

Among her 'crazy things' was illegal work, which led to her being caught by the FBI and being sent home before her tourist visa ran out. Then it would take 20 years before she travelled 'independently' again. She divorced, worked as a secretary and took care of her growing son.

[He] grew, he became 18 and he became of age. And got his own flat and I was no longer responsible for anyone but myself (...) And then it dawned on me; "am I to go here between the office and the flat the rest of my life" (...) And it came to me more and more that there must be something else, it can't be just this. (...) And then it was this, with the Indians in South America, which I couldn't quite grasp. I thought it sounded so interesting with those Indians. (...) But I knew so little myself, so then it started, then my interests were turned around and grew all the time and on one sunny day there was no going back (...) No, I can't stay here anymore. And then I began, I didn't know one single being on the whole continent so I started thinking about how to go about the whole business, how to safeguard oneself and yes, I had heard that there were missions there (...) and there was a Scandinavian church in Lima.

Her story tells us many things. To begin with, she is an early example of female 'makeability'. She is given and takes the opportunity to act adventurously<sup>50</sup> as early as the fifties. Secondly, her adventurous acts occur not only while she was young but also at later stages in her life. Thirdly, acting out an adventure not once but many times, she does so in relation to different circumstances each time. At one stage and at least in her mind, she travels to spite her husband who leaves her at home every time he goes on business trips all around the world. At that time she may have acted in order to – like many of the younger travellers in this research project – gain independence before starting a family. At another time though, and later in life, she is still heading for adventure but this time she leaves an empty flat behind. She may still travel as a statement of independence but definitely not from the subordination a child has to her mother or possibly a wife to her husband but rather due to the 'superiority' a mother has to her daughter/son. This shows how important it is to rid adventure and risk research, as well as backpacker research, from its strong age determinism and thereby its focus on risk-taking as a youthful defiance.

Another aspect of contemporary female (and male) 'makeability' worth noting in relation to adventure tales among backpackers is the very strong meaning ascribed to solitude, to solo travel. In *A Journey of One's Own* Zepatos writes (1996:11):

One day I decided to stop waiting and start traveling. As a woman, I had frequently challenged the restrictions others had placed on what I could do. While traveling, I challenged the limits I had placed on myself. I got tired of the way my own fears restrained my ideas of where I could go, with whom and how. My biggest fear was of *traveling alone*. Confronting and overcoming that fear *opened the door to remarkable adventures*. I took an eighteen-month trip around the world and found myself fishing off the west coast of India, traveling by camel across the Thar Desert near Pakistan, living in a tribal village in the Golden Triangle, hitch-hiking up the Malaysia peninsula, and trekking the high country of Nepal. Traveling changed my view of the world, and my place in it (my italics).

The author makes a strong connection between adventure and solo travel, via experiences of fear. Most solo travellers interviewed expressed a desire to travel solo. For them, pair- or group-travel was not an alternative. Solo-travelling seemed to be a prerequisite when it comes to experiencing oneself as 'adventurous' or to be described as such.

Declarations of independence need some kind of solitude too. Therefore, one should not be surprised by the strong connection between adventure and independence and certainly not by the fact that women, who throughout history have been referred to as members of the subordinate half of the human race, now claim their rights to half of the adventure cake. One solo traveller states when asked about the positive and negative aspects of solo-travelling:

You go home and you're so strong. Your friends just seem so weak cause they can't do anything without a guy or they can't do anything by themselves. Or they can't drive or something like... You're so strong, you know. And the worst part of being out and travelling by yourself...loneliness, I think is a big one. It's hard to be lonely. But I don't think that's specific to females though. But I know... I don't know. You really appreciate female company. I don't know why. Female company is a big one when you're travelling.

Travelling solo with no return tickets and no travel insurance, taking solo-trips for example on motorbikes through parts of Taiwan, was part of her project to become tougher, stronger and more independent. But her experienced strength has a price – loneliness – which is a frequent topic in many of the interviews with female solo travellers, but not with the male interviewees. A phenomenon adding to these circumstances might be the particular interest ascribed to female solo travelling, just because it is *female*. While male solo travelling is seldom an issue in its own right, female solo travelling is. In for example the Swedish travel magazine *Vagabond* or in the *Lonely Planet* guidebooks, female solo travelling is now and then discussed in separate issues or in specific sections, which to my knowledge has never occurred in relation to male solo travellers. There is a possible way of talking about female solitude which is not available to men.

The fact that society reacts with such an interest when the solo traveller is female leads to the next section of this text. This interest unveils that the adventurous act, carried out by a single female, is still not within the boundaries of normality despite the fact that there are at this very moment a considerable amount of women travelling solo. Women travellers still have to relate to adventurous practices as acts of masculinity. The next section will begin with a few examples from the media showing what travelling women – and men – are confronted with. It will then move on to examine the testimonies of travellers.

### *Crippled makeability*

A web-site on the Internet, the home-page of Kilroy Travels, sells tickets to young independent travellers all over the world. Arriving at the home-page you detect a moving object at the bottom of the page. Keeping your eyes on it you find that it is a male person beginning, in the left corner of the page and at the age of one, to crawl. Then he slowly moves towards the right and the age of five while standing almost straight. At mid section of the page this male passes the age of 15 with a stride and carriage that indicate the infancy of pride and self-confidence. When 21 is reached an erect penis appears. At the age of 27 the penis has started to go soft before the man, passing the age-mark 30, starts to crumble and then finally falls flat on his face when reaching the age of 33 and the very right corner of the screen (see also Egeland, 1999 for a gender analysis of other Kilroy messages<sup>51</sup>). Had you visited this homepage a couple of years ago, clicking on 'tickets,' you would also have arrived at a page where each statement was marked by an erect penis.<sup>52</sup> There is also a sign that says, 'go before it's too late'. Too late for an erection, or a journey to the tropics, or both?

It can possibly be discarded as a youthful sense of humour, a 'postmodern' ironic response to objectification of women's bodies. However it can also be read – as did the student who made me aware of it – as an indicator of a masculine preferential right of interpretation and as an insult on her as a female traveller (unless of course it is read as a suggestion to travellers that there are plenty of erect penises to chose from in the backpacker context).

I will here, without pushing the analysis of the reasoning behind Kilroy's homepage further, stress its symbolic value. First of all, Kilroy assume a man with an erect penis sells journey tickets. Secondly, Kilroy seem to have accepted masculinity as the norm, or a variety of other symbols indicating growth could have been used. Thirdly, one can also detect a common notion of time as linear and development as a line beginning with progress and ending with decay while time moves forward irrevocably (see Adam, 1990, 1995; Davies, 1990 and Elsrud, 1998/Chapter 2). Kilroy's message is clear. The traveller is young and masculine. While their targeting of youth is understandable as they sell tickets to young people, the focus on men is harder to explain. Kilroy's homepage is a sign of the old, historically constructed, story connecting travel and adventure to masculinity.

The same old story is told in *Vagabond* (1996, no 2), a Swedish travel magazine that at least in 1996 found most of its readers among Swedish backpackers.<sup>53</sup> In a special edition about female solo travelling their choice of headings are expressive. They open up the topic by describing Mary Kingsley's travels in Africa under the heading 'With an umbrella among the pygmies'. 'Lady-trip without escort' is the next heading overarching a number of shorter articles spanning a range of subjects in relation to solo travelling women. Here we find that 'Ingela saves animals' with the subtitle 'She hitch-hikes, rides a bike, takes buses, lives in shacks, goes camping in jungles and partakes in work where she can'. Those that find that a bit too much to handle may find comfort in the next heading; 'Laila travels slowly' and the subtitle tells us that 'She isn't very strong, not particularly brave and rather unsociable'. Stronger is perhaps the next travelling lady as 'Petra knows how to fight'. Finally the reader learns that 'Carina jokes back'. The topic is ended with advice to solo women travellers under the heading 'solo without pistolo'<sup>54</sup>. While the headings speak for themselves it is noteworthy that they all seem to be set against a known opposite which is not spelled out but which is tacitly understood. What the texts are saying is that one can of course know how to fight, how to travel fast and how to carry a gun (instead of an umbrella), but then one is usually a man. As so often in texts, both in everyday language and in science, women practitioners in what is silently agreed to as masculine areas are made into oddities, threats to normality. This is expressed very knowledgeably by Davidson, who crossed a large section of the Australian continent on the back of a camel and wrote a book about it. Despite the fact that the text is not that new it clearly unveils mythology and constructions which are still alive in other empirical material and relevant to today's research into independent travelling and adventure stories. In her book, Davidson (1980/1998:237) describes the situation of finding herself and her journey being chased and documented by the National Geographic:

And now a myth was being created where I would appear as different, exceptional. Because society needed it to be so. (...) And the term – 'Camel-LADY'. Had I been a man I'd be lucky to get a mention in the *Wiluna Times*, let alone international press coverage. Neither could I imagine them coining the phrase 'camel gentleman'. 'Camel lady' had that nice, patronizing belittling ring to it. Labelling, pigeonholing – what a splendid trick it is.

While the title 'camel-lady' has a nice ring to it, just like the 'noble savage' found in tales of primitivism (see Elsrud, 1998/Chapter 2; Jordan, 1995), it rests upon a long tradition of what is thought to be female inferiority. When independent travelling in general, and adventurous travelling in particular, are seen as acts of masculinity, women practitioners remain intruders and need to be neutralised in order to become less threatening. The same tendencies to make adventurous women into oddities are also found in present-day interviews. One traveller addresses the oddity you can find yourself transformed into by being a female solo traveller:

When travelling as a solo woman they may wonder what type of being you are. Why don't you travel with a girlfriend? Why do you persist in being alone? Or are you strange, a hermit, or what is wrong? Or didn't you have a friend to go with, nobody who wanted to travel with you or can't you be around people?

She is aware that reality is different from the constructed meanings ascribed to it. Others are less certain of the constructed nature of gender differences. Often the practice of constructing adventurous men and non-adventurous women is, as in most hegemonic circumstances, carried out as much by women as by men. Another female traveller says when asked if there are differences between travelling men and women:

Whereas a woman has to be a bit more careful. (...) Men are more adventurous. You find men doing more crazier things, and trying to, you know, their ego pushes them to climb mountains, or go trekking over like 3 weeks, or... Whereas you don't find so many girls that would do things like that, you know. Men go for more physical things and more (...) outrageous things that they want to do.

Her remarks are particularly interesting, as she appears to be an 'off-the-beaten-track' traveller, engaging in practices that other interviewees would most likely consider quite 'adventurous'. This traveller had a working class background as well as an abusive relationship behind her when she started travelling. At the time of the interview she had spent 6 years travelling all over Asia and South America with various long and short stops along the way to work and earn more money. Most of the time she travelled with a man she had met five years earlier but she also took off by herself from time to time as she felt she needed time and space to be alone. One such time was in a Central American country where she had left her company in anger, jumping off a bus 'in the middle of nowhere'. With almost no money she made it to the USA. She still thought male travellers were more adventurous. One explanation can be that she herself puts more emphasis on the adventure as something 'physical' and 'constructed'. Another reason can be that she has accepted the masculine adventure tale and that she as a female traveller is therefore doing something different than the male and thereby retaining the old adventure story.

Two rather young travellers, 19 years of age, share her view. While being proud that they are not adventurous they still use their 'non-adventurous' travel to gain independence, leaving the 'hot stuff' for the 'guys'.

A: If you can handle it and everything turns out, well, it's good. You'll feel good about yourself and I think it'll make you stronger. But if you give up and you say "I couldn't do it. I have to go home. This is too much for me." I think it will destroy your confidence in yourself because it's like "I failed, I couldn't do it" and then it'll be a very bad thing (...) You have to pull through, you have to do it otherwise it'll (...) be like quitting. I would feel like a quitter if I went home.

*Interviewer: Do you think it's the same for women and men in that perspective?*

B: Mmm, we've been talking to a lot of guys travelling (...) and they don't have the same problems as we do because we can't, we can't wear shorts and go in the street without being hassled and we have to face some other problems than they do. I think it's different.

A: Yeah, but I also think that a girl's mind works different than a guy's and the guys that we've met they have been really proud because they went trekking and they did some REALLY hot stuff...

B: Macho stuff.

A: Yeah, it was like that was giving them an image because well they saw a snake and they ate snake and....

B: They were drinking whiskey with the locals.

A: It's different values (...) so in that sense I think that girls are more sensitive when they are travelling and maybe, I don't know, I wouldn't say weak but maybe more vulnerable than men.

B: And maybe more careful.

In their view women are both sensitive and vulnerable. Maybe that is why they feel that no risky activities are needed for them to use the journey as a means of gaining confidence and self-reliance. Their journey, which stuck to the 'beaten track' and was planned ahead, was enough to make a good identity story. The consequence of their reasoning is, however, maintenance of the masculine adventure discourse.

Another perspective on the masculine adventure is presented by a male solo traveller, aged 36, who seems to find the difference between male and female travelling best expressed in sexuality as well as in female and male sociability needs.

So male traveller versus the female traveller? A lot of female travellers believe that all guys are out to have sex with 'em. And of course, some it's true. If they're really beautiful or whatever, but yeah, I mean, it is a different experience. Just this morning, a Swedish lady walked in and sat down across from me. And she was making movements of availability. I can't describe it any better than that. Her body language or her movement of her eyes and head indicated that she was on the lookout for some companionship. And so there evolved a competition between me and an English guy for her interest and attention. And he ended up with her, but I've got somebody else, so (...) I let him have her! And so, I find this distinct difference is...a lot of girls travel together in duos, you know. You're doing that, aren't you? No? Eeeh... A lot of guys do that too, but it's a different thing, but it can be the same. (...) I think, to get to my point, my view of the world would be more difficult for a woman to do and would take longer. Because I'm a guy, and because of my past, I can live without close interpersonal relationships for a longer period of time, without feeling horribly lonely or wanting. I can get what I need from a kid or a cleaning lady, or an old guy, just by talking to 'em and sharing with 'em. I can expel the feeling of loneliness in that way and others. Women and stuff, it's harder to trust people.

His view can at first be interpreted as rather 'extreme'. None of the other male interviewees have spoken as openly about women as available or non-available objects of desire. However the underlying themes are present in many interviews with both men and women. These themes suggest that travelling women are at risk of being chosen (for sexual acts) while travelling men, as well as local men, are choosing. Trav-

elling women need interpersonal relationships (in private) while travelling men can do just as well with all the acquaintances they make (in public life). The result is that women are seen as more restricted in their travelling acts and therefore do not experience as much as men.

Another contemporary way of protecting the masculine adventure from female trespassing is presented by Göran Kropp, a Swedish 'adventurer' who travelled independently from Sweden to Nepal to climb Mount Everest without oxygen tanks. In a book about his adventurous journey he sees the mountain and exclaims (Kropp and Lagerkrantz, 1998:78):

There *she* is. There *she* is. There are times when I envy Mallory and his colleagues who first found a way up the mountain, who stepped out on *virgin* soil and placed the first footprints on the north side of the mountain. Nowadays there is not much *virginity* left on the mountain (my translation and italics).

As a rather recent example of adventure travel literature it is interesting to note that old colonial metaphors – feminising the land of exploration – are still very much alive. Not only does the language indicate a return to colonial expression. On several occasions in the book women in the adventure-surrounding – climbers and non-climbers alike – are judged by their appearance while men are usually referred to with just a name. Although it is not articulated outright, women are not welcome on the mountain. Women about to climb the mountain are ridiculed as incompetent or as too vain to be there.<sup>55</sup>

Many men and women – travellers, researchers and others – do not, however, accept a perspective where female experiences are reduced and generalised and where women are deprived of their active partaking in time and space, in action and knowledge production. As travellers in the age of makeability they are forced to find ways of dealing with the reductionism and pathologising of the female act, facing travelling women in a long-lived discourse of (masculine) adventures.

## **Transforming the adventuress**

There are a number of ways, used by the travellers in this research project, to deal with the collision between late modern 'makeability' beliefs and the old discourse of masculine adventures. Aware of the sometimes insufficient qualities of ideal type generalisations I still find that a categorisation into four different responses covers most of the perspectives presented by the interviewees. This is not to say that there are not any number of women, in this project as in other research, who have found completely different ways of dealing with the matter at hand. Thus, the following text will deal with some of the ways the interviewed women use to protect themselves from the risk of being negatively labelled in their adventurous acts. There are most certainly others, left for others to address in more detail.

### *The masculine adventuress*

One detectable strand in the interviews is that of the female traveller who is not very feminine at all. In these cases the female transforms herself into a 'tomboy'. This issue comes to mind, for example, when a female traveller says that she prefers to team up with male travellers as they are more like her or when female travellers explain that they avoid female company. The issue also appears in discussions about the traveller's identity as in this testimony. This traveller regards her journey as an adventure and herself as an adventurous type of person:

I don't think you should exaggerate the difference between women and men. I think it is very individual. I have many times...I mean afterwards...yes as a very good friend of mine said; "I experience you as a woman, as a girl who would like to be a boy." I think that I have always been very masculine both in my ways and...because I have never accentuated my femininity. And I socialise a lot with boys and it is maybe not because I have socialised with them that this is so. I've sought them out. So I'm *not a typical female*. I thought...last autumn I said that I should convert into a woman (my translation and italics).

Her sense of belonging seems to be among the boys, on the road as well as at home. As a tomboy it is less contradictory to engage in adventurous practices. She did not spell it out as such, but the tomboy package is sometimes encouraged by a mythology based upon notions of a disagreeable or unpleasant femininity, also from those that do not describe themselves as tomboys or strive to do a 'masculine adventure'. One traveller, who clearly distanced herself from such adventurous practices, comments upon the difficulties of making female friendships in the backpacker context:

By the end of the holiday, the only people I was talking to was guys, I didn't speak to one girl. Two girls were travelling, but they didn't come towards me, because, it's like, they have their own little thing, so they don't want to let a third person in, *you know*. Because there might be like a little friendship struggle....

The men in her case were open to contact while the women seemed much more conspiratorial. This may have been the case in this particular event but her rather frequent usage of irony and phrases appealing to a common understanding (see italics above) during the interview indicates that this is a scene to be expected in similar contexts. Stories like these enhance the opposition between the outgoing, active male and the inert and passive female. Such bipolar constructions seldom fit the complexities of reality.

Downgrading women, and/or what one considers to be femininity, may actually be an effective tool to upgrade one's own identity and actions. Expressed awareness about the faults of one's 'own kind' raises the aware person above the 'ignorant' rest. When effective, criticism distances the critic from the criticised and places him or her in a superior position/group. From this perspective the adventuress is not really an adventuress. She is an adventurer. Downgrading women or femininity was, however, by no means the only available tool for transforming the adventuress.

### *The non-adventurous adventurers*

Not all travellers find the adventure worth striving for though. Some of the mainly young interviewees regarded the journey as hard enough without any extra risks added, real or constructed. Two 19-year-old travellers, who previously testified that the 'hot stuff' was for the guys, saw adventurous acting as a preoccupation for those with something to prove.

A: You can find more adventurous backpackers than us.

B: (...) I think the people doing that have something they need to prove to themselves. But it's like I know already that I'm OK and I know that I like my life and I like what I have. So I'm doing this to see things and experience things.

A: To meet people.

B: But I don't have this need to play with death.

A: Of course if there are tigers out there it's because they are there. We aren't going to see them. We talked to two Scottish people and they were... they went on this Safari where the guide took them to seek out the crocodiles, to fight with a tiger. (...) And two Australians where the guide dug up a scorpion so they could get a little scared. But that's not what we want.

B: But why do people want that? That guide dug up a scorpion that is deadly. That's just so you can say: "Oh, I was near a deadly scorpion!". (...) They do it so they can tell other people but I think none of us have the feeling that we need to impress people. We are both brought up in such a relaxed way that if people don't like us that's just too bad. And I think that is a very healthy attitude.

*Interviewer: I think so too. What do you think? Why do people want to dig up scorpions?*

A: They have this need to prove to themselves that they can do it. They are never really satisfied until they have climbed Mt. Everest.

B: Also so they can brag about it because they always do.

This testimony is rather contradictory to their previous statement in which they claimed that a failure in their own non-adventurous trip would strike at a personal level, ruining the previously built-up confidence. While they said they did not need the adventure as they had a 'relaxed childhood' their journey still seemed like an important identity project well in line with what they 'accuse' adventurous travellers of. There is thus a contradiction in their testimonies but this does not conflict with the 'non-adventurous' qualities of their journey. These travellers avoided most practices that are interpreted as 'adventurous' in a backpacker context. They always travelled together, stuck to the 'beaten track', refused to eat most meat in Thailand as they were not sure what animal it came from and spent a little extra on accommodation they thought was cleaner and safer.

But not only non-adventurous travellers claim that they are not adventurous. As exemplified by some of the previous reasoning rather 'adventurous' women still see adventure as a male practice. Another rather young traveller, aged 21, gives a similar testimony. Having travelled by herself for a while, she had settled on a Thai island together with her Thai boyfriend at the time of the interview. This island is accredited with plenty of adventure status due to myths surrounding its inaccessibility, its hostile malarial mosquitoes and its superstitious inhabitants. Her presence seemed to be a recurrent topic in conversations among backpackers who ate at the restaurant where she sometimes worked to support herself. She spoke Thai, which perhaps in-

creased the difficulties other backpackers seemed to have in categorising her. Most conversations were concerned with her reason for being there. How had she ended up there? Who was she? She seemed to be analysed either as 'foolish' for being there 'all by herself' or 'adventurous' for living and working with local people. This is however how she describes adventure and her relation to it.

I think men are more into the...yeah they go for it I'd say. They really go for it. They want the most of everything. As I say, when they smoke gunja or whatever, they go to the places where everything is really crazy about drugs and things like that. I think there are quite a few of them. I think women are more, more sort of laid back, more careful I'd say.

She emphasised many times in the interview that she was not the adventurous type. Yet she appeared as such – or as a fool – to other backpackers. Thus, some female travellers who do act adventurously according to common backpacker definitions of what it is to be adventurous, do see adventurous acts in others (at least men) but not in themselves. More often than not the gender of the actor will define whether or not the act is adventurous, pointing at the constructive character of 'adventurism'.

One consequence which the above reasoning has on the status of the adventuress is that she is best off non-existing and erased from the vocabulary. If she still appears in the backpacker circuit one can always pretend to ignore her.

### *The emancipated adventuress*

While the tomboy response tends to quite explicitly downgrade women, the non-adventure response places women in a different sphere in the best case and as a weaker and lesser being in the worst. These are responses which uphold the old *gender contract* in which men and women are seen to have different obligations (Hirdman, 1996). But there are other responses and other travellers who practice a different kind of femininity criticism that does not necessarily downgrade women. Not all criticism of femininity is directed at the female being/acting *per se*, but at the stereotypical images of femininity, which to varying extents put restrictions on women's lives. Some of the interviewees certainly saw their journeys as a way of strengthening their identities so that they could stand above the stereotypical norms placed on women by society. Another interviewee, devoted to canoeing in Nepalese rivers and a solo traveller who had gone on a couple of half-year journeys, was one of many interviewees who saw travelling as a way to escape the gendered pressures expressed through consumerism of home. She states:

And then you come home, especially to Oslo and the girls are so extremely dressed up. (...) The values are so very different, the outlook upon life. Somehow it doesn't matter any longer, to be nice looking that is. You dress up if you feel like dressing up. When you want to look good you dress up. But if you don't feel like it you wear your worn out jeans, a T-shirt or whatever. I think that was a bit of a shock when I returned to Oslo, you look around or you read Ellos [a clothes-sale catalogue] and you wonder, are people really caught in this. This has been totally gone and then you come home and wow, talk about pressure (my translation).

Her critique is directed both towards the pressures of consumerism and materialism in general and the demands on female aesthetic representation. The journey is experienced as a timespace in which these pressures can be held at bay.

It is very likely that adventurous acting enhances the feeling of having escaped the restrictions of home. The border-transcending nature of the adventure may be just the context needed to stimulate and encourage opposition and the questioning of (gender) norms. Another interviewee who travelled rather 'adventurously' called women 'victims' of society as all they care about 'is if you look beautiful'. She explicitly said that her own journey made her braver and more mature which meant that she could go home and stand up against the pressures that victimised women. This recalls an earlier statement in this text where an interviewee claimed there is a difference between men and women at home (in this case Sweden) where women are supposed to be taken care of while men are the care-takers. She is not referring to taking care of the household but rather to the unequal relationships many couples experience in most cultures where the female is regarded as the weaker sex and therefore needs male support. As she never got a chance to 'learn to do things' herself at home she saw the adventurous journey as a way of becoming independent and being able to return home as a person who can always take care of herself.

Most of the female interviewees argued in similar ways to the ones just described. At home they are to some extent victims of gendered pressures. The (adventurous) journey provides them with a chance to express their potential strengths. From this perspective the journey most certainly seems like a state of 'liminality' in which many women experience time and space as a way to upgrade femininity or to erase the traditional dichotomy between male and female. Regardless of this, the adventuress becomes equal to the adventurer.

### *The playful adventuress*

Other travellers practise another way of questioning stereotypes and threatening the old masculine adventure discourse. These are the playful 'adventuresses' who keep the adventure trail warm, but do it with their mind partly elsewhere. The adventure is there to be manifested and experienced but it is masculine and has to be ridiculed. Two travellers in their early twenties and travelling together are very certain of the gendered nature of adventure when they recall a meeting with an adventurous traveller in India:

A: Then I think that many times we've found ourselves travelling because, not totally but almost, because we want to be able to say that "we have done it, now we have a photo of it and now we can say it and think of when we will be able to tell about it". You almost forget the experiences when you are in them, to make the most of them. It is more of "aaah, now I can tell them about this afterwards".

B: We have the feeling when we meet other travellers... like with those dangerous bus-rides on the roofs of Nepalese buses... that it is mostly because they want to be able to tell someone about it afterwards. That's why he did it, so he could sit at the café in India and tell us about how he almost died.

A: That's like the same as with the guys and their adventures when they come home and tell about it. Aren't they cocky then (my translation)?

Despite their critique of a masculine adventurous way of travelling they practised 'adventure' themselves. Many times through the interview they, with a clear tone of irony, told of their own attempts to come across as adventurous and 'off-the-beaten-track' travellers. They spoke ironically of their efforts, as fresh backpackers, to buy new clothes in India hoping they would appear as more adventurous and experienced backpackers. They talked about the inspiration they had found in books such as *The Beach*, yet laughed at the immaturity they felt present in the very same story. In addition they spoke with irony about such efforts, as being masculine and more or less ridiculous. Similar ironic statements came from other, predominately young travellers and more often from women than from men, although it should be remembered that men are underrepresented in the empirical material.<sup>56</sup>

Clearly irony is a process of distancing oneself from the act (of 'self' or 'other') as opposed to being an ignorant prisoner of action. These travellers are not what Goffman (1959) would call 'duped' by the act. Rather, they are reflexive to an extent where most acts seem like play rather than reality. Therefore, these travellers can continue on an adventure quest while their irony distances them from the foolishness often ascribed to the adventure act. In Cohen and Taylor's (1992:52) words the ironic traveller is busy 'creating a zone for self', through expressing awareness of and distance to the acts of others.

Irony in this case implies a power relation. Risking being interpreted as the unworthy (female) intruder into a masculine adventure practice, the ironic female places herself above the ridiculed act of the 'other', or in the case of self-irony above the ridiculed act of the 'other' located within and adapted by the ironic self (Melucci, 1996:135-137). Consequently, to laugh at one's own efforts is, in addition to distance oneself from them, also an act of hostility in disguise. The self-irony or laughter neutralises the aggression directed at the 'other', socialised into the 'self'. The playful and ironic adventuress can actually both have her cake and eat it – she can continue the ridiculous adventure while being immune to the criticism directed at it.

## **Editing the adventure discourse**

Having presented four detectable responses to the collision between two structures of thought – the hegemonic masculinity of adventure stories and the belief that life is a 'makeable' project – it is appropriate to discuss the consequences of such responses.

Evidently there are signs of both conformity and contestation to the old adventure discourse in the responses above. I shall begin here with a short recapitulation of the responses bearing conforming qualities before moving on to a more thorough discussion about the responses I see as more of a challenge to the (masculine) adventure discourse.

### *Conforming to the adventure discourse*

There are two of the above-mentioned responses (to the idea that the adventure is a masculine preoccupation) that carry little, if any, 'emancipatory' power – the 'tomboy' narrative and the 'non-adventure' narrative. The 'tomboy' narrative, in which women describe themselves as not-women and accredit other women with negative qualities, has the effect of placing the narrator in a favoured position above her sisters-in-travelling. These women avoid subordination by adapting to masculine standards (see Lalander and Johansson, 2002:153-154). As such their efforts can be interpreted as acts of personal resistance towards hegemonic masculinity, in that they lift the narrator above the downtrodden, but this also occurs at the cost of stigmatising other women. Unquestionably, however, the consequence of this is an emphasis on the old adventure discourse in that it stresses the superiority of the masculine adventurer while actually down-grading not only femininity but women in general.

The 'non-adventure' narrative was exemplified above by the two young travellers who claimed to be 'relaxed' enough not to need the adventure and by the woman practicing 'adventure', yet claiming to be 'non-adventurous'. Like 'tomboy' narratives the 'non-adventure' narrative in relation to female adventures also stresses the masculine adventurer discourse.

In summary then, the narratives above are examples of compliance to a hegemonic masculinity built into travel practices and as such they do not come as a surprise. The other responses addressed in this text are, on the other hand, more interesting to investigate as they appear to be examples of strategies that will propose a future challenge to structures of inequality.

### *Challenging the adventure discourse*

In this material there are two ways of resistance to the old adventure discourse, one rather 'diplomatic' and one much more aggressive and threatening. The former is the effort to get a 'piece of the action' while leaving the men to continue what they are already doing. This is the response described above as a critique of stereotypical femininity and as an effort to emancipate the adventuress, that is to free her from her negative burden. These 'adventurous' women travel along-side 'adventurous' men, without questioning the men or the adventure, but rather demanding a piece of the action for themselves. They want to walk the adventure trail in a serious and sincere effort to prove to themselves – and the world – that they can do it too, as competent women rather than lesser men (expressed in the 'tomboy' narratives). Their critique is not directed against the adventure discourse as such but at the stereotyped femininity of home. Through their actions these women hope to gain either a femininity or a neutral position unburdened by traditional expectations on gender. As 'freed' these women edit the adventure discourse from its masculinity, making adventure into something both men and women can do.

A larger threat to the discourse is proposed by the last category, which is the effort to ridicule the masculine adventurer – as well as the feminine – by jokes and irony, consequently threatening those who have previously set the adventure standards. Un-

der attack from irony – the mischievous twin of reflexivity – no one, regardless of gender, can continue to practice adventure undisturbed. The emperor has definitely been robbed of his clothes. The discourse is under serious threat.

The 'ironic' traveller is despite her efforts to gain power also a victim of the very language (and action) she ridicules. Rorty (1989) may help us to a better understanding of the irony present among the travellers in his suggestion that the ironic person is worried about having been initiated in the 'wrong tribe, taught to play the wrong language game. She worries that the process of socialisation which turned her into a human being by giving her a language may have given her the wrong language, and so turned her into the wrong kind of human being' (Rorty, 1989:75). From this perspective the ironic individual is homeless. Using Bauman's reasoning we may be talking about a person who has penetrated and unmasked the categories with which we order language and life. He states (1991:1):

To classify means to set apart, to segregate. (...) To classify, in other words, is to give the world a *structure*: to manipulate its probabilities; to make some events more likely than some others; to behave as if events were not random, or to limit or eliminate randomness of events. (...) Language strives to sustain the order and to deny or suppress randomness and contingency. An orderly world is a world in which 'one knows how to go on'.

I believe the irony present in this material is not only a defence against subordination and a way to take charge over the right to define, but also a sign of a rather sorry state of not belonging or wanting to belong in a category. Irony, as a means of gaining individualism when the categories feel unsuitable, is from such a perspective a sign of ambivalence to use Bauman's (1991) terms again. While quite efficient as a tool for gaining power in interpersonal relationships, irony may still leave the ironic individual with the unpleasant feeling of not belonging anywhere and not knowing how to go on. The traveller, using irony to mock both other adventurers and her adventurous self, will most likely find it very difficult to let herself be carried away by the act.

Regardless of the positive or negative consequences of irony it is interesting to note that the method as such is quite common among many of the female interviewees in this project. Perhaps this female irony is also a sign of what Felski (1995) addresses as an exclusion of female activity in theories and narratives of modernity which are instead products of hegemonic masculinities (see Connell, 1995) and masculine interpretations. This is most likely also the case with the theories and discourses concerned with masculine 'adventurism', built at least partly on a belief that women are less mobile and prone to change and more caring and inbound. These have been carried through the history of theoretical development in the hands of such influential historical figures as Freud, Marx or Simmel (see Felski, 1995) to more present-day theorists on 'adventure' or 'heroism' (for instance Featherstone, 1995; and Scheibe, 1986). It has been hard to see the women in theories of male heroic life, not only when they have been busy elsewhere but also when they have been present. Female travellers practising what many still understand to be a masculine adventure may have to turn to irony when they realise the activity does not belong to them.

Being a discourse by men for men it can never account for the female reality, leaving her with the options of trying to redefine or to question the discourse all together. Both these options have been present here. If female travellers feel they have been given a discourse which does not match their experiences, wants and needs, they may very well express irony, as a form of distancing from language and structure and as sign of the efforts to cope with a life in the 'wrong tribe', in this case the tribe of mobile masculine adventurers. The travellers who escape stereotype femininity and thus redefine what it is to be adventurous are, on the other hand, questioning the discursive narratives on home-keeping feminine care-takers.

## Conclusion – many research roads to travel

Having reached a state of conclusion in this text I would like to point out what I see as four major arguments of this text worthy of attention and future awareness. The first deals with the diversity of narratives and the opposing structures of thought present in the field of research. The second addresses the 'two-gendered' nature of hegemonic reproduction. The third deals with the diversity and individuality of the field practitioners while the last re-stresses the consequences should we ignore this diversity.

This research clearly shows that most travellers, when they start their journey, regard it as time and space for experiencing 'freedom' or in other words the cherished possibility to create new exciting identity stories. This creativity we can call identity play and the practices are in many cases identity statements, expected to remain with the traveller and render status even after homecoming (Andersson-Cederholm, 1999; Desforjes, 1998, 2000; Elsrud, 2001/Chapter 3; Munt, 1994). Many travellers, hoping to explore the unexplored and travel roads not travelled (by 'travellers'), will find to their disappointment that the road to adventure is rather crowded these days. Travellers on a quest for individualism are no exception to the rule that many people telling similar stories and practising similar discourses do eventually become aware that they are forming a new structure (Simmel, 1911/1971). The adventure discourse is one such structure of thought brought from home – a home pregnant with adventure stories in socialisation agents, in media and conversation – and renegotiated among the travellers *en route*.

One of the arguments I would like to stress further is exactly the renegotiations of this discourse brought to the fore by the opposing 'makeability discourse' making women believe they have equal rights both to and in previously masculine arenas. The discourse is by no means unproblematic and a gender perspective makes it even less of a clear-cut case. This chapter has not only dealt with traces of similarities found in the backpacking practice but also with the differences which appear once the focus is turned toward contesting statements, anomalies and other deviations from the most common denominator.

Evidently the similarities are found in relation to the presence and awareness of the survival of the masculine adventure tale. Had the text stopped at that, this would have turned out to be a rather sad chapter on the victory of structure over agency. But this was not the case as the focus turned to acts of resistance to the adventure discourse. It is in the challenging of the masculine adventure discourse that the difference becomes apparent. Although some of the responses presented here have opposed categorisation on an individual level, they have remained obedient on a structural level. Declaring yourself a tomboy to escape categorisation often involves negating the feminine. Pronounced and unrestrained, this reaction, together with the 'non-adventurous female' responses, would lead to the adventure practice remaining a strong gender statement. Other statements have been oppositional both on individual and structural levels. The victory of the female adventuress, making adventure into a statement about a strong femininity unburdened by the stereotyped femininity of home, promises an adventure, which is genderless. Most threatening to adventure survival is however the ironic travellers, ridiculing the very essence of the masculine act. When they are done, the adventure becomes useless. Mocked and ridiculed it is no longer an act to lose oneself in.

Understanding these different ways, as well as others, to approach persistent discourses which encroach upon, in this case, female inventiveness and emancipative action in travelling is important in order to understand backpacking. However, understanding these female negotiations with contradictive discourses can also give some general clues to an understanding of identity creation in general and gendered identity creation in particular, while supporting research into other areas of life where women in larger numbers have entered arenas previously considered masculine domains.

The second important issue I would like to make topical supports theories claiming that it is hegemonic masculinity rather than patriarchal circumstances that constrict the lives of many women. This research stresses the complexity of power relation, contradicting perspectives in which women appear solely as victims of oppression,. As has been apparent, women are sometimes active as oppressors and in keeping the old masculine adventure tale alive through devaluing the female adventure act or even the femininity of the acting woman. The power of hegemony is thus manifested in tales and acts of both genders. This is, however, not an either/or case where some women are the oppressors and other women are the oppressed. Negating women as a group is a sign of hegemonic masculinity and male norms being present. Women claiming that other women do not belong in the adventure trail, nor possess the right characteristics, are often victims too – to the 'male in the head' (Holland, Ramazanogly, Sharpe and Thomson, 1998). In Mead's (1934/1972) words we might conclude that this can be expected as long as the 'generalised other', occupying the individual 'mind', remains to some extent a man in narratives of travel. The male in the head needs to be identified and his voices, when oppressive, need opposition regardless of which sex they speak through.

The third aspect I want to stress is related to the above discussion that there are different ways to relate to and oppose a dominant discourse. This project shows that

adding a gender perspective may in fact leave us with many different stories, not only distinguishing between men and women but also between women and women. Not only are there many different ways of travelling present in this material, and many different ways of responding to, in this case, a masculine adventure tale, but there are also complexities found within individual tales of travel. One traveller can one minute defend femininity in efforts to ridicule the (male) adventurer while the next minute ridicule women for not being outgoing enough. Another traveller can ridicule the adventurous act only to turn around and practice such adventure the next moment. Without question this calls for a future awareness not only of the fact that women are just as individual as men (see Felski, 1995), but also of the complexity of the individual 'nature', of action, reasoning and expectations. It seems obvious, yet sometimes overlooked in research, that any number of opposing standpoints may be present, not just in culture but also in a cultural being.

One important question remains unanswered when this text closes. This work has presented a number of women and men narrating similar adventure stories, expressing similar beliefs in the adventure as a way to express identity. Still, similar acts may not always lead to similar consequences for the actor. As Desforges (2000) notes, the journey is expressed as an investment in symbolic capital to be used after homecoming also by women. However he also interviewed women whose narratives fell silent upon homecoming after having been confronted with negative responses to the female travel act. Further research into this issue will supply more knowledge into just how persistent the old masculine discourse is, also outside the adventure trail.



# Media(ted) Creativity: The (Re)production of Travel Mythologies

Someone was telling me the other day the aborigines ask people not to climb on Ayers Rock. And I never knew that. That shows how naive I was at the time, you know, it was just like I had to climb on Ayers Rock. I didn't know anything about the culture, I knew nothing about the aborigines, I was the tourist that was out to do her thing, and have a photo of her next to Ayers Rock and sign the book at the top, you know. (28 year old traveller)

There is a book on top of Ayers Rock, or Uluru, in Central Australia. It is full of names belonging to travelling people from all over the world, having 'conquered' 'the rock' during their travels. A closer examination of its content would most likely come up with an interesting pattern regarding the presence and absence of different nationalities and cultures. Not everyone finds it necessary to sign a book on top of a rock. Indeed not everyone finds it necessary to climb the rock. It is thus an act as well as a book with great symbolic value and indicative of a special frame of mind.

Signing books, writing texts, presenting pictures are acts of authority, often carried out at the expense of the unauthorised. A traveller signing the Ayers Rock guestbook may do it as an act of self-acknowledgement and self-perpetuation or for the sake of adding more symbolic capital to one's list of travel references. Still, it is also an act of violating others, in this case the most obvious being an encroachment on local residents, who regard the rock as a sacred site. Signing, like conceptualising, functions in the service of definition. It is an act of appropriation.

The signing of a guestbook on top of a rock is but one of many examples of how the use of language, of conceptualising, of writing – and reading – are used with the conscious or unconscious purpose of remaining in charge of definitions. This chapter focuses on travel media as a self-assumed authority writing and framing of others, and on the help it gets or the challenge it encounters from its readers and writers. I will approach the subject by addressing mythologies in the media and how they are presented to and used by a backpacker audience. While having made reference to the media in previous chapters of this book in approaching specific backpacker topics I have not explicitly addressed the role of the media when it comes to transporting ideas, meanings, that is social and cultural constructions, over time and space. While

word of mouth spreads a limited amount of information to a limited number of people, the media is by definition the means of transporting a large amount of information from one culture to another and from one station in time to another. The media is in this research project the missing link in an open-ended system of meaning production. By this I mean that the media, despite their central role in maintaining meanings and values among large masses of people, also carry with them the potential for change and contestation. As Foucault has noted, it may just subvert its own order (Foucault, 1983) in that the reading of media texts may open up for new ideas, new frames of minds, which will eventually enter into the media as new texts, thus creating an 'open-ended' or spiral formation of meaning production. Questioning old mythologies, or discursive narratives if one prefers, may therefore take place on the media scene. Yet, as indicated by the word (re)production in the title, this chapter will address how the media often works to maintain tradition and stubborn 'discourses of difference' (Mills, 1991) through looking at some empirical evidence thereof.

Evidently the media are not agents in themselves. They are dead system of technical components and matter, which is given life and put into work by people. Neither production, nor reproduction can be carried out without the active participation of, in this case, the travellers. It (normally) takes a traveller to write a travel story and it takes a reader to get something out of it. A status quo of mythology therefore is the result of an unreflective attitude to earlier stories by travellers, travel writers and readers, while a challenge of mythology is produced by reflexive travellers, writers and readers. One of the more peculiar findings so far in this project is that the individual travellers often seem to reflect more than the media. This is well in line with the reasoning by Fürsich and Kavoori (2001), who have found that travel media, much more than the average tourist, is focused on stereotypical images of 'otherness'. Part of what follows will therefore approach ways of understanding such imbalances between the media and the reality it fails to describe.

In previous chapters I have presented examples of mythologies found in the media which are related to the specific topic under investigation. Here I will continue to present empirical evidence from media texts, but by far the most important purpose is to focus on how media texts are related to the minds of travellers and how travel practices are formed and form the media mythologies. As will become evident, the relationship between media texts and travel experiences is close and fluent, despite the fact that some travellers do question the media content, thus breaking new paths for new mythology formation.

References to media have been common throughout the presentation of this research project. While discussing individual topics found among interviewee testimonies I have, in an ethnographic approach, also made references to a variety of texts: journalistic articles in newspapers as well as travel magazines, narratives of travel in travel anthologies, travel writing in personal books and guidebooks and on the Internet. To this, I should add and stress, I have sometimes added travel writing in advertisements, which unfortunately is not very divergent from the content in journalistic texts. In addition, in this chapter I would like to add another form of 'writing' – a travel medium 'realised', or of dreams and fantasies. Numerous travellers have

stressed their intentions to write a book, to turn their diary notes into a public text, to make homepages on the Internet and so on. Regardless of the success of their efforts, it would be embarrassing to overlook the importance of this topic, as it is these dreams which sometimes come true and (re) produce the systems of mythology.

The empirical and analytical presentation will begin with looking at ways to understand how media can work as a vehicle both for maintenance and change of meanings, of culturally and historically situated systems to guide thoughts and actions.

## The media as a vessel of mythology

The media play an important role in transporting systems of thought between people, cultures and times. These systems I have previously called discourses, drawing on Hall (1997). The focus in this chapter is turned more on language and text than on action. Continuing to borrow thoughts from Hall, I will therefore use the semiotic term *mythology* as it has been coined by Barthes (1972, see also Hall, 1997). This is to say that I see a very close relationship between the two concepts *discourse* and *mythology*, as they both address socially and culturally defined systems of meaning within any given 'culture' (or 'subculture'), whilst I also acknowledge the differences. The concept of mythology, as Barthes has employed it, applies to language and text primarily and to how meaning is inscribed into the words, images and grammar of that language. Discourse on the other hand is a concept encompassing both language and the action it gives rise to (see also Dijk, 1997). As Hall (1997) argues drawing on Foucault, an analysis of discourse and discursive narratives focuses to a large extent on elements of power, struggles and conflicts between definitions present in a system of thought – and action – at any given time.

The reason for using one and not the other is mainly of empirical concern. Since this text is preoccupied with the creativity of the media I have chosen to talk about mythologies. As we shall see, though, mythologies are often transferred into 'discourse' when media texts are used as scripts for action in the backpacker circuit. This is also the instance in which they become political on a personal level as well as in broader contexts. This is a clear indication of how difficult it is to separate the two concepts, as indeed the conflicts and power struggles carried out within discourses are often manifested through mythological (textual) representations, as much as mythological representations are acted out through discursive practices.

In previous chapters I have both explicitly and implicitly talked about the journey as an identity project and about travellers as people who are acting out some sort of *cultural* script on an individual level. By cultural scripts I mean systems of meaning, labelled either 'mythologies' or 'discourses' depending on approach, which are understood and related to within a given community. This community does not have to be a community in a geographical sense but can also be a congregation of people who understand each other via means of, for instance, the Internet. *Culture* does not nec-

essarily mean 'nation', nor does it mean 'ethnic group' or any other attempt to group people in some sort of geographical, physical or biological framework. If at times the frames of culture run alongside the borders of a nation or an ethnic group it is not because the people inside share the same passport or ancestors but because they think alike or quarrel over the same topics. Again Hall (1997:2) is a source of inspiration as he argues:

Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings – the 'giving and taking of meaning' – between the members of a society or group. To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other. Thus culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and 'making sense' of the world, in broadly similar ways.

Hall continues by pointing at the presence of a 'diversity of meanings' about any given topic within a culture as well as the appearance of different interpretations and representations. Indeed Asplund (1987b) has very effectively shown that people are never as closely linked as when they quarrel. A common understanding is a condition for interpreting an insult as an insult at all. Thus the definition of culture employed here is an expression of what has been called the 'cultural turn' in social sciences. Meaning has become central to its definition at the cost of material objects, of art, literature or artefacts. Such objects are of importance only as far as they are manifestations of ideas, values, meanings, feelings and emotions.

With this in mind, I have focused on two cultural homes – two landscapes of cultural understanding and 'belonging' – which supply the backpackers with systems of meaning. One cultural home is in what is often referred to as the 'west'. The west is a problematic term as it neither describes an exact geographical position nor does much to overcome old dichotomising understanding. It is, however, difficult to find an alternative, unbiased term that manages to describe the common notion of a split between those nations with the power of definition and those without. I will continue to use the term, aware of its connection to biased understanding as it remains a (socially constructed) concept both among researchers and those that I have interviewed. While other concepts such as post-industrial or capitalist may fit better at times they too carry their own problems of definition.

Having said that, I do to an extent agree with Fürsich and Kavoori (2001:151) who point out that international tourism is 'no longer practised only in the western industrialised nations or from "the West to the rest"'. 'Hosts' of previous tourism destinations are now becoming 'guests' in their own travels. Nevertheless I would like to claim that backpacking, as a spearhead, yet rather marginal phenomenon in tourism, is still very much informed by these traditional so called 'western' values. Predominantly rather affluent people from European countries, USA, Canada, Israel, Australia, and New Zealand travel to economically poorer nations in tropical zones.<sup>57</sup>

These travellers naturally differ in viewpoint due to the uniqueness of their home societies and of their individual dispositions but there are many scripts for common understanding oblivious to national borders. These scripts unite the travellers and fa-

cilitate a second cultural home, that is the backpacker context in which backpackers from different nations seem to have more in common than not. Thus, I argue that the backpacker culture, as expressed in action and in travel tales which are meaningful to people of various nations, is informed by meaning systems of home. Rather obvious examples of such cultural meanings in backpacker contexts are adventure tales and practices (Chapter 3) or expressions of primitivism (Chapter 2) or the search for authenticity (Andersson-Cederholm, 1999; Cohen, 1979, 1988; MacCannell, 1976/1989, 1992; Meethan, 2001; Wang, 1999). We can call these cultural scripts discourses or mythologies created and recreated both at home and away. However it is very likely that these scripts do come up against more powerful opponents once they are tested, by travellers, against reality. A backpacker culture with a 'western' heritage thus has the opportunity at least to distance itself from the old cultural scripts.

Having said that, the question I am concerned with in this text is how scripts, those that support the view of home and potentially those that do not, are carried over time and space, from one traveller to another and from one generation to another, from Thailand to Sweden and back again. The media, I claim contribute extensively to this transport of meaning – of mediated mythologies.<sup>58</sup>

## Mediated travel

The perspective presented so far is one emphasising action and practice in the construction of meaning, mythologies and discourses. Media mythologies, both reproductions and those in the process of becoming, need an active subject to read, write, tell, experience and practise them. Mythologies, just like 'traditions,' exist only in so far as they are retold and re-enacted over time. It is through repetition that insults or distorting comments are transformed into segments in a mythology. I say segments because mythologies, as they have been defined in this text, are systems of stereotypes, if not to say disguised lies, concerning an issue, rather than single statements. The media are, as argued above, used in this (re)production of mythologies in travel. Here, I am referring to the media in a very broad sense. Travel media relates to all forms of written and broadcast information concerning travel as a form of tourism.<sup>59</sup>

### **The journalism/advertising alliance**

Any researcher into the culture of backpacking or long-term travelling will come across a number of different text sources used by travellers to learn more about their destinations. True to the ethnographic spirit, which has guided this research project and parallel to interviews and one fieldtrip I have studied travel media such as *Vagabond*, a Swedish travel magazine, which at least previously targeted so-called inde-

pendent travellers. I have also periodically read English magazines in the same trade, such as *Wanderlust*, and the American Magazine *Escape*. It is my conviction that these sources, along with travel television – and the Internet as will become obvious later in this text – are influential in the backpacker communities. Being (mainly) journalistic products they deserve close attention as, despite their close relationship with the travel industry, they are often read as ‘true’ accounts of the places and people portrayed. Yet, non-fictional travel accounts are, as Spurr (1993:2-3) has so successfully shown, despite conventional expectation, permeated by ‘myth, symbol, metaphor and other rhetorical procedures more often associated with fiction and poetry’. Spurr, having analysed contemporary travel journalism in a variety of forms and newspapers/magazines, finds an old *colonial discourse* still very much kept alive by the authoritative voices of the journalists. There is, he claims (1993:3), ‘nothing especially conscious or intentional’ in the use of rhetorical modes in journalism. Rather ‘they are part of the landscape in which relations of power manifest themselves’. Such a perspective proposes a view of travel journalism as a vehicle of imperialistic presumption. My own research has not disputed such a perspective. On the contrary, journalistic texts in both newspapers and magazines tend to make use of an authoritative voice and *von oben* perspective in referring to either the people living at tourist locations or the space they inhabit. As Spurr (1993) notes, travel journalists often seem to regard locations and people as objects for consumption and enjoyment. Not surprisingly then, there are researchers who have commented on the close alliance between travel journalism and the (moneymaking) industry. Fürsich and Kavoori (2001:154), for instance, address this matter:

Travel journalism needs to be closely evaluated for its tacit allegiance to both advertising and the travel industry. In fact, travel journalism is a highly charged discourse beleaguered by the public relations efforts of the private travel industry and by government-sponsored tourism departments....[W]e need to ask in the context of international communication research what discourse is created in media representations of travel? What are the cultural and ideological assumptions on which such constructs are based?

While it could be assumed that travel journalists, as well as other journalists, do approach their field with a high level of reflection and a critical stance, research so far has found little cause for celebration. Thus it is rather peculiar that travel journalism despite its mythologised representations of the ‘other’ and its power of penetration even into non-travelling groups has, relatively speaking, elicited so little interest from critical scholars. Along with Fürsich and Kavoori (2001) I believe that this type of journalism (like sports journalism or the frequent presentations of new wines on Swedish editorial pages) suffers from its close connection to free time, leisure and a scholarly, perhaps Lutheran obsession with the areas of production and work.

Having so far argued for a somewhat structural perspective it is, however, necessary to point out that I believe the potential for change is intrinsic in writing and journalism. As Spurr claims, (travel) journalism has a double nature in that it is both a text to be read as a literal statement (of violence and colonising order) and a gateway to thought and action outside the moment of reading. Citing Foucault he suggests

that it ‘opens up “a whole field of responses, reactions, results and possible inventions” (1983:220), including the subversion of its own order’ (Spurr, 1993:3). Thus texts can either (re)make a mythology or make a difference. As a result of the findings in this research project the remainder of this paper is, however, written in the conviction that mythologies more often than not tend to be reproduced. The challenging task for me has been to seek an understanding of how this reproduction is enacted, in real life, by real people who are not necessarily linked to the industry, yet do their business for them.

Before moving on to this discussion there are however additional media sources which seem to influence the minds of travellers and therefore require a presentation. Discourse, or mythology if one prefers, is transported through a variety of texts. The power of one (or more cultures) over another works through a complex, holistic system of interpretation and representation (of the other). Discourses of colonialism are, claims Spurr (1993:4-5), ‘produced in such forms as imaginative literature, journalism, travel writing, ethnographic description, historiography, political speeches, administrative documents and statutes of law’. Quite a few interviewees have been informed, and I might add much influenced, by fictional literature such as *The Beach* (Garland, 1996), which has now become a film. Sutcliffe’s (1997) rather ironic account in *Are you Experienced?* has been read by some. There are yet other books mentioned as being inspirational: writings by, for instance, Lawrence Van der Post and Joseph Conrad. Still the number one source of information that travellers rely on are undoubtedly the *Lonely Planet* guidebooks which therefore deserve special attention. The voices of *Lonely Planet* guidebooks have much in common with travel journalism in that they present a rather authoritative voice (Bhattacharyya, 1997) and claim to be non-fictional and factual. Like travel journalism they are, however, loaded with stereotypes and the seemingly never-ending preoccupation with ‘difference’.

## **Lonely Planet – guiding masses to independence**

One recurrent theme when entering the world of backpacking and the stories of travellers is the reference to *Lonely Planet*. *Lonely Planet* Publications is an Australian based company with offices in a number of other countries, supplying the market with guidebooks to almost every thinkable destination – and activity. It has rivals, such as the *Rough Guides*. A couple of the travellers interviewed claimed that they preferred these to *Lonely Planet*. The vast majority though, both interviewees and observed travellers stuck to the latter. Given the large amount of *Lonely Planet* guidebooks and their wealth of detail and instructions to the traveller, it is almost impossible, and not even desirable, within the scope of this research project to give an account of all aspects of travelling which would emerge in a close reading of this literature. A very informative analysis has, however, been conducted by Bhattacharyya (1997) on *The Lonely Planet* guide to India. Although the findings in Bhattacharyya’s work cannot be unconditionally applied to all *Lonely Planet* guidebooks, I have

found it very useful in helping me detect mythologies in their guidebooks to for instance Nepal and Thailand as well.

Concerning the *Lonely Planet* guide to India (1997), Bhattacharyya (1997) finds that the author(s) speaks in an authoritative, 'know it all', yet personal voice, turning writer and reader into kindred spirits and friends, while hiding from the reader the fact that he or she is being manoeuvred onto a specific course. While other travellers seem to be potential buddies to the writer – except women travellers at times, who are to some extent subjected to specific moral and ethical prohibitions – the local inhabitants appear as objects and commodities (1997:385) and as either *middlemen* or *tourees* (1997:383). The touree, is a 'picturesque other' (term from Van den Berghe, 1992, quoted in Bhattacharyya 1997:383), expected to entertain the traveller simply by being different and representing either a stereotyped ethnic or exotic group. Middlemen are, on the other hand, regarded as ordinary, non-ethnic and of less interest as objects of the *gaze* (Urry, 1990). As such they are more fitting as 'servants' making sure the traveller eats, sleeps and travels inexpensively and well. Further, as a survival strategy, the *Lonely Planet* guidebook to India stresses the risks, threats and difficulties in travelling in this country, turning it into the 'survival kit' it claims to be. Such mythology is also stressed by interviewees in this project, claiming India to be a place for experienced travellers only (or those who want to pass as such). Contrary to conventional beliefs, claims Bhattacharyya (1997:383), the *Lonely Planet* guide to India widens the gap between traveller and people at tourist locations. Guiding so thoroughly both thought (concerning the 'other') and action (where and how to go and act) the *Lonely Planet* does in fact make face-to-face interaction feel both unnecessary and threatening to expectations.

I have found little reason to question Bhattacharyya's claims, even when applying them to other guidebooks. The *Lonely Planet* guidebooks to countries such as Nepal, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Thailand and Australia do carry similar messages and voices. In the following I will add a few more perspectives, taken mainly from the guidebooks to Nepal and Thailand, which are worth some additional interest.

To begin with, though, I would like to address the link between *Lonely Planet* and the often adventurous travellers who are the focus of this research project. The following citation comes from the *Lonely Planet* web pages on the Internet:

Lonely Planet publishes the world's best guidebooks for *independent travellers*. Our books are known worldwide for reliable, insightful, pull-no-punches travel information, maps, photos, and background historical and cultural information. We've got *every continent covered* (yep, Antarctica included) with an ever-increasing list of travel guides, atlases, phrasebooks, travel literature, restaurant guides, videos, world food guides, guides for handheld computers, hiking guides, coffee-table books (my italics).<sup>60</sup>

*Lonely Planet* thus make it their main issue to supply the traveller with reliable information from all corners of the world. However, they do not print books for the 'ordinary tourist', but for the 'independent' ones, thought to be able to negotiate their own paths around local markets in faraway places as well as around the globe. If you are independent enough to construct your own itinerary and actions, *Lonely Planet*

will guide you in Papua New Guinea, in Sweden, Kyrgyzstan or Suriname. There are books, which focus on trekking, on diving or on health. Given the content of the books, made up primarily of very detailed information, they work much like substitutes for a tour-guide. Below is a rather typical example of detailed information picked from *Lonely Planet's* guidebook to Thailand in the section describing the town Prachuap Khiri Khan (1997:414):

Local resident Pinit Ounope has been recommended for his inexpensive day tours to Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park, Dan Singkhon and to nearby beaches, other national parks and waterfalls. He lives at 144 Chai Thaleh Rd near the beach in town and invites travellers to visit him. His house is rather difficult to find, so take a tuk-tuk or a motorcycle taxi.

This type of information is plentiful, seemingly covering all there is to see and do in all the cities, villages or other places that are mentioned. The information, despite its mass production, comes with an air of uniqueness attached. You get on a motorbike and find your way to Mr. Ounope and you can expect an experience which 'regular' tourists do not get. What the reader does not receive, however, is information about all the places which the guidebook author has chosen to leave out, such as places and people the author finds uninteresting. Other omissions are, according to Bhattacharyya (1997), descriptions of ordinary life, of normative cultural patterns, of contemporary sociocultural patterns and of individual, personal and unique qualities of local, human life.

Countries are portrayed as 'arenas' within which the traveller can expect to fulfil particular needs – or indeed all needs. The following citation, appearing on *Lonely Planet's* web-pages, stresses the view of travelling as a source of individual satisfaction as well as consumption of time, places, goods, services and experiences:

Beautiful, Buddhist Thailand is the original multipurpose destination – you can trek and buy handicrafts in the north, laze around on stunning beaches down south, buy brand fakes and choke on diesel fumes in Bangkok, party in backpacker resorts, meditate in peaceful temples, and eat and drink yourself silly absolutely everywhere.<sup>61</sup>

The text thrives on individual choice. While being a country like most others with restrictions, norms, duties and obligations structuring the life of many of its inhabitants, the travellers' Thailand is a 'multipurpose' destination, becoming whatever you make of it. Not only does this appear as rather obvious evidence of the often uneven power relations that structure tourism, it also enhances the picture of an objectified destination, a setting of accessible land and humans transformed into 'specimens' (Said, 1978:142), waiting there to be used by the visitors. This type of independence stressing and objectifying information is recurrent in many *Lonely Planet* books, as is the emphasis on difference and extraordinariness (of the 'other').

Many *Lonely Planet* authors seem quite familiar with historical and cultural events and can name and date many of the local ceremonies as well as figureheads. They are also aware that many of their readers can be female, travelling with children, and/or homosexual and therefore perhaps requiring specific information. Most guides analysed have sections such as 'women travellers', 'gay and lesbian travellers' and 'disabled travellers' containing information which may be of particular interest to these

groups. Yet the consequence of this is that women, as Bhattacharyya argues (1997), just like gays, disabled and lesbians, are directed and even moralised to, while the rest (that is 'heterosexual' and 'able' men) need no help in finding their way on the travel arena.

In addition to Bhattacharyya's remark that the *Lonely Planet* to India portrays people as ethnic and/or exotic groups and as objects for the gaze, I would like to quote some passages from another *Lonely Planet* guidebook related to this topic. The following passages are found in the *Lonely Planet's* guidebook to Nepal (2001:38-44, my italics) under the section 'People':

Each zone is dominated by *characteristic* ethnic groups whose agriculture and lifestyles are *adapted to suit the physical constraints of their environment*.

Tamangs are the largest Tibeto-Burmese ethnic group in Nepal, but *little is known of their history*. Tamangs are now sedentary farmers and labourers. Their *appearance*, language and Buddhist beliefs all bear testimony to their *origins*.

Not all sherpas – the small-'s' word describes a trek guide or mountaineer – are Sherpas, but many of them are, and they've won worldwide fame for their *skill, hardiness and loyalty*.

Although most Newars have *Mongoloid physical characteristics*, some don't, so their *origins are shrouded in mystery*. It is generally accepted that they are a mixture of many different peoples who were attracted to the valley, possibly originating with the Kiratis, or an even earlier group. Perhaps the Newars' most *striking characteristic* is their love of communal life[.]

One of the most visible groups in the Terai is the Tharus, *a race* who are believed to be the *earliest inhabitants* of the Terai (and they're even thought to be immune to malaria). (...) Most have *Mongoloid physical features*. Nobody is sure where they came from, although some believe they are the descendants of the Rajputs [.]

The traveller going to Nepal carrying the latest edition of the *Lonely Planet* guidebook gets a rather essentialist view of the people at the location. While the independent traveller is expected to be individualistic, choosing reflectively among the many offered opportunities in the books, the local residents seem to have become stuck in time. As in most accounts with a primitivist slant they are portrayed as ancient, existing in some ever-present, ahistorical and unchangeable condition; sometimes with some unknown past and sometimes with an almost eternal past which seems to have been carried into the present (see Elsrud, 1998/Chapter 2; Jordan, 1995). Furthermore, they are inseparable from their 'nature' and their 'race' is given away by their physical appearance. While culture has the opportunity to change, nature is what it is. Thus we should not be surprised that the Newars above are stuck in a love of communal life, that other people remain farmers or labourers or that their actual appearance is what gives them away. The essentialist view presented here is not much different from what one finds in old accounts trying to legitimise colonial undertakings or slavery. Hall (1997:245) notes the following in a discussion on popular presentations of daily life under slavery during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

For blacks, 'primitivism' (Culture) and 'blackness' (Nature) became interchangeable. This was their 'true nature' and they could not escape it. As has often happened in the representation of women, their biology *was* their 'destiny'. Not only were blacks represented in terms of their essential characteristics. They were *reduced to their essence* (italics in original).

Hall further addresses how stereotyping was used to legitimise the exploitation of blacks by ascribing them essential characteristics which could defuse the situation they were put in. We see the same mechanism at work above, when sherpas are given similar characteristics – skill hardiness and loyalty – to suitably serve their contemporary masters.

I believe this is how we must understand the *Lonely Planet* guidebooks, as fairly comprehensive documents of surviving old sins as well as of a few newer developments in which travellers other than European, white, male, heterosexuals are recognised (yet patronised). Naturally much more can be said about their content and in much more detail but for the time being it is enough to point out that although recurrent new editions for most countries appear, *Lonely Planet* still serve their readers with mythologies of the past, but as Eade and Allen (1999) have pointed out, so do many other popular descriptions in places travellers call their homes. Ethnicity is still, they claim, commonly linked to biology, race and essentialist traits, in popular debates in, for instance, contemporary Great Britain. The purpose here however, is not to continue a more thorough investigation into the *Lonely Planet* contents but to seek an understanding of how such a mythology production as we have seen above is informed by, and informs, its readers and writers.

### *Lonely Planet as tie-sign*

Returning to the importance of the *Lonely Planet's* books among backpackers I would like to give a couple of examples from my observation notes from a guesthouse in Bangkok in the spring of 1998. The first one was written down upon arrival at the guesthouse where I spent most of my time in Bangkok. In it I describe my first impression of the guesthouse. The second is an extract from an observation in the same guesthouse a little while later.

I was also advised to put padlocks on my door, on the outside when I go out, and on the inside when I'm in, as thefts are not uncommon in the area of Khao San. The restaurant area on the ground outside the 'reception' was full of travellers, busy reading the *Lonely Planet* guidebook to Thailand.

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They were going through a *Lonely Planet* guidebook to Nepal when I first sat down. The German (in his fifties) was the experienced one and advised the Australian girl where to go. I could sometimes here her cry out "Did you go there! Wow" or just "wow!". Her male travelling companion stayed out of the conversation while reading a magazine. At one time in the conversation I sensed some criticism coming from the German to the Australian couple.

'You don't want to stay there though', he said to the woman.

'What do you mean?' she asked.

‘Well, not when you stay in a nice place like this’, he said and was referring to the guesthouse where we are all having our breakfast and if I’m not mistaken, all living.  
When I left my table they had moved over to the *Lonely Planet* guidebook for Laos.

The meeting above, between three so-called independent travellers, is very much structured by the *Lonely Planet* guidebook and the reading it encourages. Experiences and expectations of two different countries – Nepal and Laos – are thereby set and compressed from the length of a trip to a few minutes. It is almost needless to say that, this is how written information almost always claims to work – as some sort of shortcut to real life. Given the popularity of the books they serve this purpose well. Many of the travellers refer to ‘Lonely Planet’ as ‘The Bible’ or simply ‘The Book’. Asking ‘what book?’ would definitely place you in a lesser category among the inexperienced, the non-adventurous and the novices.

Apart from being a source of quite detailed information and through their popularity the *Lonely Planet* guidebooks work as a symbol of backpacker travel or in Goffman’s terminology a very efficient ‘tie-sign’ in backpacker communities. A tie-sign is ‘evidence about relationships, that is, about ties between persons, whether involving objects, acts, expressions’ (Goffman, 1971:194). Intentionally or not, a backpacker carrying or reading a *Lonely Planet* guide does express a belonging of a specific kind – to other backpackers and to the belief in ‘independent travelling’. Simultaneously, charter tourists and other package tour groups, are excluded. Regardless of the book’s function as a ‘tie-sign’ and symbol of belonging and as a tour-guide, many travellers have accepted its stress on independence and use it in efforts of individualisation. Some use the book’s content literally as a map for individual self-expression. Others carry out a more ‘critical’ reading and question its content. These issues will be addressed below.

## Mythology in motion

The heading of this chapter carries two meanings. For one thing mythology plays a major role in the production of knowledge in tourism in general. There are few opportunities for an audience to check out the reality for themselves and thus question the content. Secondly, mythology must remain in motion or it would cease to be. Travellers are, like the media, its vessels.

The remainder of this text will deal precisely with how travellers, as readers and as writers, become the mythology carriers – or challengers – between instances in time and between printed editions of travel media. The following is a ‘compressed’ example of how this can work. It is a rather detailed account of one traveller’s relation to the guidebooks. As such it is also an example of using the guidebook as a script for identity statements and a quest for individuality and independence. To illustrate this clearly it begins with a look at a passage describing the arrival at Pokhara in Nepal found in the *Lonely Planet* guidebook to Nepal (2001 edition: 271):

Damside, at the south-eastern end of the lake, is more popular, and many of the touts who meet the tourist buses from Kathmandu will insist that this is the place to go. They will be at pains to point out that the distinction between Damside and Lakeside is meaningless. In one sense they're right (it is a continuous body of water we're talking about), but in several others they're wrong because Damside has a completely different atmosphere from Lakeside.

Below is a testimony which describes how this particular traveller makes use of the information in his quest for independence:

Mm, I think I'm becoming more independent. I'm not depending on anybody else. I'm following what I like, what I really like and don't like. For example I got caught in Pokhara in Nepal. Well they've got two areas, one is damsideside and one is lakesideside and the damsideside is basically the hotel owner's consortium, trying to get the tourists to go there because they are trying to get us away from the lakesideside, saying you can still see the lake. But as it says in the Lonely Planet, "the lake is fine and I'd rather sit without the dam, thank you". When you get off the bus in Pokhara there are some very strong-willed touts there who want to take you to their hotels; "free taxi, da, da, da, come here"(...) I said, "no, no way, sorry mate, do what you like, I don't care." I didn't even mind if I offended the bloke. It was like "don't give a shit, I'm off to lakesideside, see ya" (...) In my shower I thought "done something myself" and that sort of feeling was quite new as it were.

In the same *Lonely Planet* guidebook to Nepal (2001:152), now describing Kathmandu, we can read:

It's easy to spend hours wandering around the often crowded Durbar Square and the adjoining Basantapur Square. This is very much the centre of old Kathmandu and watching the world go by from the terraced platforms of the towering Maju Deval is a wonderful way to get a feel for the city.

The same traveller as above has the following to say about Durbar Square and the Maju Deval temple:

I've got the Planet-guide and have a look through. I don't know, I'm not much into temples and religion at all. So I give those a miss, but saying that, in Kathmandu, all these fantastic..., some of the temples they had and Durbar Square with it's... Ah, I can't remember what it was called now... But one of the big temples. You sit on the steps and....and as *it says in the book* "just sit there and watch the world go by"....and I'm just sitting there and it's like.... "ah, it's pretty cool, I'm in Kathmandu", cause that's what I found.... the first couple of days; "ahhh, I'm in Delhi. This is it. Excellent. I'm in Bombay. Ah, this is really...." Something I thought I'd never say (my italics).

This traveller is however not only a reader. He is also a writer, hoping to be published one day:

I spend a lot of time here...I'm at the beginnings of a book. I've actually attempted it, I got about ten chapters done, between five or ten chapters.

(...)

*Interviewer: Have you read The Beach?*

YES! And there is another inspirational book to get me writing again.

This traveller points out the essence of the arguments of this text. While being a rather uncritical reproducer of existing mythologies and/or discourses he clearly gives an interesting example of how mythology is acted out, how it is internalised as well as externalised by the individual traveller. The above citations, in combination, point towards the clear connection between the traveller as a reader and as a writer as well as an actor of mythological messages.

## Reading the world

I would first like to remain with the above traveller who appears to use the guide-books almost without reflection, as paper versions of the truth. The connection made between a) reading the book, b) finding the context it refers to and c) thereby experiencing a presence and a 'true' situation is evident. Such a close connection accompanied by a rather uncritical reading of the media content appears similar to a profane version of religious fundamentalist reading.

### *The fundamentalists*

The traveller's testimonies above were chosen because I was able to find the passages in *Lonely Planet* that they referred to. I would like to point out that there is an interesting time and space perspective here. This interview was carried out in 1998 in Bangkok. Only hours after the interview I checked the sections on Pokhara as well as on Durbar Square in Kathmandu in a *Lonely Planet* Guide to Nepal which I found in a bookstore in Bangkok. Then, as now in the 2001 edition guidebook picked up in Kalmar, Sweden, I found the passages the traveller was referring to. The same text, encouraging travellers to fight off the 'touts' and go to the Lakeside in Pokhara and to sit down and watch the world go by Maju Deval in Kathmandu, appears to repeat itself over time and over space. Rather than encouraging new ways of travelling, new ways to relate to events and places *Lonely Planet*, in this particular case at least, seems to institutionalise not only the backpacker track but also expectations and experiences.

The interview with this traveller gave many more examples of a fundamentalist reading of travel literature. Not only did he describe *Lonely Planet* as a travel manual but he was also inspired by books such as *The Beach* (Garland, 1996) to the extent that he was attempting to write his own travel book. Experienced travellers were referred to as people who had 'been there, done that, read the book sort of thing' pointing at the close connection between reading and travelling, between travelling the world and reading the world.

There is also the rather paradoxical phenomenon that a close reading of a guidebook which is used by a large amount of other travellers, thus guiding many to the same place and to similar actions, can be seen as statements of individualism and independence. The traveller above clearly sees a manual, used by many, many thousands of other travellers to the same area, as a means to individual expression. An im-

portant conclusion, in this respect, is the call for an awareness of different interpretation levels present in the material studied. This traveller was not about to have his experience diminished by an insight into structural conditions of human action and existence. His action was, to him, an act of independence and as such it was effective and rewarding. There is nothing to say that a theoretical perspective, revealing paradoxes, makes an emic perspective less interesting or important.

However, critical readings exposing paradoxes have the advantage of unmasking hidden consequences and unequal power structures. A fundamentalist reading can for instance have quite significant consequences both for the reader and the (often local) people that are portrayed in a text. Below is a statement from a traveller in Thailand who changed her mind about type of transport after having read the *Lonely Planet* guidebook:

I had to go on the bus and I booked the bus and then I read in the Lonely Planet “ah, beware of these V I P buses they leave people stranded somewhere on the road. Don’t take ‘em” or something. I read that and I thought, “oh my God maybe I shouldn’t go on the bus. Maybe I shouldn’t go on the bus. Maybe I should grab a flight”. So I went back to the information office and I said; “can I change this? I’d rather fly”, I said, “because I don’t trust this”. And they said; “oh today is Sunday and we cannot telephone the airlines to book you something”. But I just had to go but the whole time I thought; “this ticket I bought, will that really bring me where I want to go?”. Because it’s just...we had to change buses so many times and every time I thought; “is this the right bus I’m getting on?”

This traveller clearly believed that the advice given by Lonely Planet was true, to such an extent that she (unsuccessfully) even tried to change the type of transport. As it turned out the journey was free from obstacles. Still it changed her experiences of it – prior to departure, during the journey and most likely after. In addition, she told the information office employees that she did not trust the bus, possibly creating distrust between herself and them which possibly lasted long after the actual incident.

Nevertheless, far from all the travellers interviewed do use the guidebook as a paper version of a ‘truth’. These would possibly prefer to see themselves as nihilists.

### *The nihilists*

A nihilist believes in no authority but her or himself. While originally a term categorising those people who reject the power and authority of religious texts, it fits to describe those travellers who reject the scripts of *Lonely Planet* in a quest for personal freedom and individuality. There are quite a few travellers who make efforts to avoid authority by rejecting the content of ‘The Book’. Thereby such an act becomes a statement of independence.

The guidebook has become more and more popular among independent travellers. Meanwhile the institutionalisation of the backpacker movement has increased rather obviously. Encountering areas dense with backpackers, and *Lonely Planet* guidebooks, appears rather disturbing to some travellers. The independence that used to be symbolised by carrying the book is under threat, which some travellers have understood and used in yet another type of identity statement. One rather ‘ad-

venturous' traveller with several years of solo travelling in places hard to get to has at the time of the interview taken a job in Thailand. She is disappointed with the travellers she meets through her job and states:

I mean, I serve breakfast here and meet those travellers and do my usual talk; "OK, how long have you been here and how long will you stay and are you enjoying yourself and oh, that's good". But you definitely don't talk travel experiences with them, as you have nothing in common with them. Some, yes, but they have seen all the temples and they have followed 'the Bible', that is *Lonely Planet*, every one of them. They all meet the same people wherever they go. I mean there is no one who does a detour to see something, if they were interested in anything. It is just; "oh no, you know, now it is time to take off for Ko Samui 'cause I'm meeting Britta there" (my translation).

The presence of *Lonely Planet* seems to indicate dependence and signify a lack of free and individual will. The absence of *Lonely Planet* on the other hand accredits the non-user with character. It will most likely add merit to the symbolic capital of an adventurous and independent traveller (see Bourdieu, 1984; Desforges, 1998, 2000; Elsrud, 2001/Chapter 3; Munt, 1994). When asked what high status in the backpacker context is, another traveller answers in the following way:

High status is when you go without your *Lonely Planet* guide and go with all the local buses and find everything on your own and yeah. Like people tell about it "Oh I was there and there and I was on the local bus and I was in this local..." Yeah.

Quite a few of the travellers interviewed who described themselves as 'adventurous', off-the-beaten-track travellers have thus found a new use for the *Lonely Planet* guidebooks. They claim that they do not use them.

There are yet other ways of relating to these guidebooks. One is to use them to see what places are mentioned so that they can head for the places that are not in the book as the traveller in the following observation note (Bangkok 20/2/1998) does:

I also spoke to another traveller over breakfast today. She sounded German by her accent and she was on her way to Laos. I found no seat and had to sit down by her table to eat, which was then covered with maps and a *Lonely Planet* guidebook. I asked if she was happy with her *Lonely Planet* and her reply was interesting and amusing. She said she only used it to avoid other travellers. By comparing the places mentioned in the guidebook with a map of the same country she could pick out those places that were not in the guidebook. These unmentioned places she then circled on the map and it was to these places she headed, hoping to avoid all the *Lonely Planet* travellers.

This traveller had, according to her, found a reliable source of information in order to avoid other tourists, both travellers and package tour tourists. Her journey had all the potential that the *Lonely Planet* readers did not. From an individual perspective she was 'free' of constraints, but structurally speaking she was entangled in the book in much the same way as the fundamentalists. The difference being that she was stuck in-between the lines, metaphorically speaking, rather than in them. It is quite possible that even the most 'pure' nihilists are cheated when it comes to the sincerity of their actions.

Having presented two versions of quite extreme readings it is time to consider the less problematic but fairly common reading I have come across in the interviews, namely that carried out by the doubters.

### *The doubters*

The doubter possibly takes on a more reflective approach to the guidebooks than the previous two. At the same time, it can be argued to be a much wider category, thus being more difficult to define in terms of opposition or conforming to the scripts. Rather than being a particular type of reading it is a category containing a spectrum of readings from the very strict critics not reading the *Lonely Planet* at all to those that believe most of the content but still find reasons at odd times to question it.

One common reason given for doubting the guidebooks is that they fail to give a correct description compared to the reality they try to describe. A married couple recall their visit to Vietnam and the incapability of the *Lonely Planet* authors to give the right information. The length of their statement is required here in order to point out the difficulties involved in trying to protect yourself from a powerful mythology.

A: No, and I think that the best time we had there [in Vietnam] was when we just...we rented a bicycle...no a motorbike and we just went on our own.

(...)

Everybody had a Lonely Planet in Vietnam and like...

B: And I have to say the Lonely Planet in Vietnam is a bad book. It's not good. (...) Not...like the Lonely Planet to India is good.

A: It doesn't give you the right image of travelling there. (...) Because I think we had expected something different after we read the book, because we have had the book with us before.

B: It gave us the wrong idea about the country and they speak so much bullshit in this book it's just amazing. (...) It's not truth.

(...)

A: And, and you know a lot of people, I mean almost everybody we met, they had the same...I think people...so many people were a little bit disappointed with Vietnam because of this.

(...)

But it doesn't encourage you at all to travel on your own in Vietnam. At all! That is so strange.

B: It's like they get commission from the cafés.

A: You really had the feeling sometimes when you were reading the book because they say "you can go there or there but if you do it with one of the cafés it's the cheapest way you could do it and you couldn't do it any cheaper on your own" you know. That's what they say about everything.

B: They say; "rent a motorbike but – but they will steal everything from your motorbike and the police will charge you some extra tax and stop you and you pay. It goes right to their pocket". But we didn't hear any stories about this. People didn't have any problems about travelling with motorbike. We didn't have any problems.

A: Just somehow you just, you know, you just stick to this book but...

B: You believe them and then you start to realise it's not true.

A: And then afterwards you think, I mean, if I go to Vietnam again I would do it totally different.

B: Totally different.

A: But we had it [a Lonely Planet guidebook] in India and it was very good in India.

According to these travellers, ‘everyone’ (meaning all travellers they encountered in Vietnam) had a *Lonely Planet* guidebook, yet many of them seemed to be unhappy with it. The couple above obviously doubted the knowledgeability of the *Lonely Planet* authors, and even their honesty, suggesting they were commissioned by the cafés. Obviously too, they experienced that they had revealed some of the mythologies present in the guidebook, such as stereotyping local inhabitants into being corrupt and/or criminal.

Yet, with the exception of a motor-bike rental, they were unsuccessful in freeing themselves from the structure of the book, continuing to make the mistakes they felt the guidebook directed them to. One of them states that ‘somehow’ you just ‘stick to the book’ as if the book exerts some sort of power and control over the reader. Next trip however, they would ‘do it different’. While this may very well be the case, their testimony suggests that a critical reading does not always provoke an altered act.

Another traveller, also having experienced that the *Lonely Planet* does not always describe reality, actually suggests that these guidebooks have the potential for altering reality. Below he tells me about his arrival at a station in Kathmandu and his efforts to get to the Kathmandu Guesthouse which is highly recommended by the *Lonely Planet*.

So I grit my teeth and I step out and I say: “How much to the Kathmandu Guesthouse?” – “Sir, you don’t wanna go there...” [imitating a Nepalese taxi driver] I say, you know, “I knew you were going to say that.” They say that everywhere. Let me tell you, first of all there are four places that call themselves Kathmandu Guesthouse because the *Lonely Planet* said “go there”, so these places open up, the New Kathmandu guest house, the Kathmandu..., you know, the slight variations on the name and no regulations.

This traveller had learnt that the receiving end too, that is to say the guesthouse owners, made use of the *Lonely Planet* just as the travellers did. According to him, if the guidebooks promote a specific guesthouse by providing it with a good reputation, other guesthouses with the same, or very similar, name will soon appear wanting to get their share of travellers. In this case the *Lonely Planet* takes a very active part in the formation of a tourist destination, which is also a claim supported by Bhattacharyya’s (1997) findings. The voice of *Lonely Planet* authors is so authoritative, yet confiding, that it has the power of deciding who will remain in business and who will not.

Other doubters are ironic readers of these texts. They use the information they get from *Lonely Planet*, but also from other texts such as *The Beach*, to mock the institutionalised (and masculine) traveller:

A: We sat and talked about mosquitoes; “aaah, you take malaria tablets. It is not the right season now” and then they turned up their nose at us. That’s when you feel a bit fresh and new.

B: Have you read *The Beach*?

Interviewer: *Mmm.*

B: So it is FNG:s, that’s exactly how we felt then.

A: Fucking new guy, the Vietnam term.

B: From Vietnam. Then you know when somebody has just arrived. It was used before. People appear as fresh travellers who don’t know anything. But we like to think that after our seven week

anniversary which we have today, that we are a little more in to it... (laughter)

A: That we are not FNG:s any more, that it doesn't show that we are new (my translation).

After a short discussion about something else they return to the topic of what is considered high status in backpacker stories and relates this to travel literature:

A: To be able to say afterwards that I got malaria in Indonesia.

B: Exactly. As he writes in *The Beach*, there are things he wants to experience in his travels. He wants to see extreme poverty and I can't remember what else but the last thing he mentions is that he wants to experience riots. Riots, I remember when there was so much talk... We had our ticket to Indonesia (...) but we changed it to Singapore. Then we met a Mike in India with whom we travelled in the beginning. He was really 'off-the-beaten-track' and dreamt himself away from others.

A: He had travelled for a rather long time.

B: He had been out for 14 months or something. We almost laughed at him at times because it all went very far all the time and everything was as extreme as the book describes. It went too far. He said "But go to Indonesia. God, how awesome. You may be able to be in a riot". And we thought...well that is not what we want. I'd rather feel safe (my translation).

They later address the same man as a person caught in a masculine adventure, influenced by *The Beach* as well as by his grandfather who had participated in a war. These travellers used literature as a point of reference to their own travel stories but also sufficiently distanced themselves from it so that they could mock other travellers for being victims of the media.

Other doubting readers emphasise the difference between reality and the guidebook, by drawing attention to a different source of information – other travellers. The traveller below got robbed in South Africa:

Yes, I got robbed. And I heard a lot of people... something that is quite different about African travelling rather than Australian in that...have you been to Africa?

*Interviewer: No.*

...in that every hostel you go to, everyone is interviewing each other for the directions because there are a lot of potential dangers. Especially in South Africa you need the latest advice. So you don't get that from the Lonely Planet. You get that from others travellers that have just come [from an unsafe place].

According to her, the *Lonely Planet* can never be up to date enough in countries that she sees as 'risky' in terms of crimes or other 'potential dangers'. Other travellers who have just been to the potentially dangerous area are on the other hand a good source of information. This is stressed by others to be a fact not only in risky areas but in most places to which one travels. The traveller below, travelling with a friend, claimed that other travellers were always better at giving information than the *Lonely Planet* guidebooks.

Yeah (...) generally backpackers are open to one another because it's important for everybody to hear the others' experiences. Like when we went to Chiang Mai we talked to people from Australia, Scotland, Israel and (...) at cooking class we talked and they had been to Indonesia. I'm going there so I asked them what it was like. How it was. Cheaper or more difficult to travel? Others' experience can be more useful than the Lonely Planet book.

(...)

“Where have you been and where are you going?” It’s really important too. Like all we know about India is something we’ve learned from other backpackers after they left and what we want to see in Vietnam is partly because we met a Danish girl who had been there and she said you have to see this and this. Others’ experiences are more worth than any guidebook. So generally I think people want to talk to each other.

These last testimonies support Riley’s (1988) suggestion that backpackers congregate partly to exchange information. Sharing information with other travellers is indeed highlighted in many interviews. Guidebooks, such as the *Lonely Planet*, or other travel media do not have sole rights in defining the discourses and mythologies of travel. Narratives over the campfire – or indeed at a pizza place in the neon-lights of Banglamphu in Bangkok – are effective vehicles too. This circumstance is however not to be confused with an automatic challenge to mythology within or outside the media.

Not surprisingly it is often in these personal narratives that new texts are constructed – in travel literature, guidebooks and web pages. Most travellers who read the world also regularly or occasionally write it.

## Writing the world

Travellers are not just receivers of pre-existing mythologies and media texts. They are their creators too. Very often it is travellers themselves who have written *Lonely Planet* guidebooks. On their web-page there is information on who the writers are as well as on how to become a *Lonely Planet* writer:

*Lonely Planet* authors are *seasoned and enthusiastic travellers* with an eye for useful and interesting information and quirky titbits in the destinations they cover. Rather than trying to lead travellers by the hand, *Lonely Planet* authors recognise that a large part of being on the move is making your own discoveries. With this in mind, authors gather accurate information to make the practical aspects of a journey run smoother, and historical and cultural background to enrich the travelling experience.

Most of our 200 or so authors work on a contract basis: they are based all over the world and tend to spend a large proportion of each year on the road. It’s also *Lonely Planet* policy to give in-house staff members the opportunity to work as an author. Some ‘jump the fence’ and never hop back over; most go back to their regular work as a salaried gump (my italics).<sup>62</sup>

It takes a seasoned traveller to make it into the list of *Lonely Planet* writers. A seasoned traveller is a person who has travelled a lot, a person with a lot of experience. In the backpacker circuit this often means the more adventurous type of traveller. Coincidentally or not this restricted access to the media seems to be reflected in the travellers’ attitudes to writing. Travellers describing themselves as adventurous, off-the-beaten-track solo travellers are also writing, or planning to write, material to be published, while the less adventurous travellers appear content with writing manuscripts for a smaller audience. This text will first address the latter.

### *Closed circuit manuscripts*

The travellers interviewed in my study with few exceptions do some sort of writing and documentation. There seems to be a naturalness to documentation which few travellers question. I have elsewhere (Elsrud, 1998/Chapter 2) addressed the paradox that travellers, although they often describe the journey as 'living in the present', do gather pictures, send postcards and take notes in order to project the travel events onto home and into the future. This indicates that the future is seldom far away in any present moment.

As a matter of fact there seems to be considerable empirical material and theoretical reasoning suggesting that travelling is very much an investment for the future, or to use Bourdieu's terms, an investment in symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984; see also Desforges, 1998, 2000; Elsrud, 2001/Chapter 3 and Munt, 1994). The encounter with 'risk', 'authenticity' (in people and nature) and with the difference of 'otherness' seems to make good material for an elevation of the self or to acquire a higher status both during the journey and at home. The encounters, however, have to be proven somehow or they will be recognised by nobody. Writing and taking photos will help the transport of this information from the distant setting to the audience of home which has been discussed in more detail by Andersson-Cederholm (1999). Such work for the future often intrudes on the journey present. Two travellers, who earlier had claimed they were not much for documentation during the trip, still seemed to be rather future orientated:

A: Yeah, but when we come home we can make a scrap book and show it to our grandchildren or something.

B: Yeah, we also keep some tickets or maps and some things but we don't keep everything because that will be too much.

Gathering tickets, maps and other souvenirs was done with a very distant time in mind. These travellers, in their early twenties, were already thinking about having something to show their grandchildren from their trip around the world in 1998. This hints at the importance of producing evidence which outlives the actual experience and transports the present into the tomorrow.

While far from all travellers mentioned their grandchildren as a potential future audience, many did feel it was important to describe their journey through pictures and post-cards to friends and family. As Andersson-Cederholm (1999) notes in her work on backpacking, slideshows after homecoming are a highly appreciated form of getting the message across. This is stressed among some of my interviewees as well.

Another way to project the future onto the present or to bring the present into the future is by making a manuscript in the form of a diary. Almost all of the 40 interviewees in this project kept a diary of some kind. While few explicitly said it would be read by others in the future, many saw it as a way to remember, to keep track and to be able to retell the events over time and distance. The diary, as a written 'documentary', thus appears to be a witness to the travel act which lifts both journey time and space into home time and space. Another function of the diary is to help the

writer with the structuring of events into an ordered life-story. By joining and ordering discrepant and varying journey happenings into an intelligible whole the identity story based on journey events appears clearer and more coherent (see also Alheit, 1994; Elsrud, 1998/Chapter 2).

While the methods above – gathering of souvenirs and memories, taking photos and writing of letters, postcards and diaries – obviously do transport events over both time and space a rather new phenomenon has increased the disembedding of time in space (Giddens, 1991). The invention of the Internet, e-mail and Internet offices in backpacker contexts around the world has made it possible to keep the family at home up to date on a frequent basis.<sup>63</sup> Internet cafés are a rather new and rapid development in backpacker areas. A number of Internet offices or cafés fringed the Khao San Road in the Banglamphu area which was a temporary home for many backpackers in Bangkok when I was doing my fieldwork there in 1998.

Through e-mail and chatting on the Internet, distance is conquered at a much greater speed and on a much more regular basis. The previous dependence upon telephones in order to contact home had a built in ‘system of limitation’ through the fairly high costs of international phone-calls. As the backpacker culture is partly sustained through both tacit and announced agreements of budgeting various costs (see Andersson-Cederholm, 1999; Riley, 1988), frequent phone-calls, at least in public, are avoided as it could easily make the caller a ‘lesser’ backpacker. Internet, on the other hand, is normally relatively cheap and perhaps also more in tune with contemporary life-styles in which it is not disgraceful to log on and chat or write e-mails once a day at an Internet café in an Indonesian beach area. This phenomenon, that is the use of e-mail in backpacker contexts, is a fairly new sight in the field of backpacking, and it is perhaps too early to talk about the consequences, but conversations with backpackers at an e-mail office in Bangkok do point towards less distinct borders between home and away; between travel friends and friends of home, between travel time and home time and between travel space and home space. The following is an example of one such conversation and an extract from my field notes in which I, too, take a rather active part in the reasoning:

I started talking to a German couple who were waiting their turn on a computer. They had been travelling before, not together, but as backpackers. We talked about the difference between backpacker travel in ‘the early days’ when one went to the General Post Office in a big city hoping for a bunch of letters *Poste Restante* and today’s Internet services. They saw it as more convenient than ‘snailmail’ and much cheaper than phoning but still they have some problems with it. It makes them feel as if they are not really travelling independently anymore. If I understand them properly the constant contact with home makes them feel watched and not ‘free’. It becomes hard to see the difference between journey time and home time, between leisure and everyday life at home. They said this is particularly so with the ICQ and its possibility to chat in real time. Still they thought it difficult to avoid using these services. They are easily accessible and cheap which is all too tempting for budget travellers longing for their family. I can relate to that. Although I’m here to work and not for leisure my frequent Internet use to keep in contact with my husband and my supervisor annoys me – especially the ICQ service. The other day, when I was e-mailing work, Tommy the café owner who knows me – and my husband I should add, after frequent ICQ contacts –, and who was on another computer, noticed that my husband was online, ICQ, and sent him a note saying “your wife is here now”. It actually made me upset and

I've been trying to understand why. Perhaps it is because I feel the control over my own time is what I get for putting up with two very, very hot and fummy months in Bangkok, and being made visible from Sweden violated that right. (Field-notes, Bangkok 3/3/1998)

The above is interesting in that it not only hints at the less distinct borders between home and away, but also at how this new technology stealthily encroaches on the minds of travellers (and travelling researchers). Something does not feel right, but it is hard to put a finger on what. My suggestion is that this something, which seems so hard to concretise, really hits right at the core of this type of travelling. The experiencing of exclusivity of both the journey and the seasoned traveller/researcher is threatened in that the medium bridges the gap between home and away both in time and space.

Nevertheless, the e-mail function of the Internet remains yet another example of what I call *closed circuit manuscripts*. What unites e-mail with postcards, letters and slideshows is that they have a known and limited number of receivers. Normally they are directed towards friends and family and not least to other travellers who the writer has met and possibly expects to meet up with at a later stage in the journey. Another commonality is that these are to a certain extent uncensored narratives of travel in that the traveller decides the content. Sociologically speaking though, a form of censorship is always operating through the discursive understanding that guides each traveller. Yet it remains clear that *closed circuit manuscript* writers do not have to ask an authority for permission to publish. That, however, is exactly what awaits those travellers hoping to get their books and articles into print.

#### *Mass communication manuscripts*

Some travellers do not settle for keeping their experiences within closed circuits. For various reasons – interestingly enough money is seldom expressed as being one of them – these travellers want to publish in a wider context. They are working on *mass communication manuscripts*.

These differ from the manuscripts mentioned above in that the receivers of the texts are mostly anonymous, though one might conclude that they are written with the prospect that friends and family read them too. There are various types of mass communication forums with books, travel magazines and travel appendixes in newspapers highly prioritised by writing travellers. Consistent with the previous reasoning in earlier chapters I regard all manuscripts, personal or otherwise, as to some extent censored by restrictions that are intrinsic to language and to the systems of meaning within a given culture. An additional censorship applies in both book and article forums, which have in common that they are accessible only by permission from somebody else; an editor of a magazine or a publishing company. Thus this channel from the individual traveller to the masses is protected by an *external* censorship. Given that the nature of media is to gain profit by selling their product one can assume that those texts that make it to the readers are texts which are expected to have a selling message.

### *Media censored manuscripts*

It is probably quite a credible assumption that most potential manuscripts never make it to the printers. The initial paragraph, found at the webpage with directions for potential contributors to the British magazine *Wanderlust*, hints at the difficulty to get a travel text published:

We only rarely accept unsolicited material. Realistically you have a one in 800 chance of a manuscript or photograph being accepted. Please read our guidelines for contributors below carefully and note that we do not accept enquiries or proposals by telephone or email. Nor do we respond to postal contributions unless a SAE (self-addressed envelope) or IRC is enclosed.<sup>64</sup>

The discouraging tone is obvious through the negative statistical information and the number of negations present. If the text is right – a one in 800 chance of acceptance – most likely very few of the travellers interviewed will have a chance to publish, at least not in *Wanderlust*. Most of the travellers who planned to write books or articles had in common that they appeared to be, as *Lonely Planet* put it in a previously used statement, ‘seasoned travellers’. They had, so to speak, been around a bit. One of them had kept himself on the road for many years by taking on journalistic assignments. He saw himself as a citizen of the world rather than of the United States which was where he grew up:

*Interviewer: Do you think you could actually settle down somewhere?*

No. (Laugh) I’m always... I’m a citizen of planet Earth, that’s it, I’ve claimed every square foot of planet Earth, that’s my... and I’m only a temporary visitor on Earth. I will die eventually. (...)

*Interviewer: What countries have you been in?*

You name it. I mean, all over Europe, you know. You know, England... I haven’t been to Sweden. I’ve been, you know, England, France, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Greece, Yugoslavia, you know, East Germany, Hungary, eeh... I haven’t been to Russia yet, and then of course, all around United States, Mexico, Canada, Alaska. Been in Asia, of course. All over China, you know, Hong Kong, and the Philippines, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, eeh, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Australia. Haven’t been to India, haven’t been to Africa. So I’ve got... I got some places to go, yeah. India doesn’t turn me on so much.

To this traveller journalism and writing books were inseparable from the journey. In many of the places he went to he did some type of journalistic work and also had it published. With his long experience of being on the road as well as longer stops in each place he appeared as the type of writer the media claim to be looking for.

Built a cabin in the woods up there in XX [area in Alaska], had some skis, did everything you can do in Alaska, and then, Hong Kong, I went to Hong Kong, then I flew here to Bangkok, then I went down to Malaysia, Singapore, worked on a container ship, they took me to West Australia, got off the ship there, and then I wrote about the America Cup races for a newspaper back in Alaska, and then I travelled across Australia by train, went to Tasmania and did some other interviews with people (...) and then pursued a journalism carrier, eventually came back to Hong Kong, got a job there, spent seven years there, and I covered the hand-over for the XX [large American newspaper]. That’s the last thing I did.

This traveller had also written books on different topics from various countries and was planning to return to the United States to become a screen-writer. His appearance and manner made him stand out in a crowd. When the interview was carried out in a Thai café he occasionally had the whole place listening to his stories as he was very expressive both in words and body language. Like the other interviewees who planned book projects he sent out a message of independence, strong character and adventurism. Unlike many though, his stories actually did make it to the printers.

The fact that it is difficult to get your stories in the press does not seem to discourage the writing travellers. Publication difficulties were just never stressed as a worry. The following traveller prefers the idea of a book, rather than a diary, because among other things it will keep her nearer to the 'truth', but perhaps not near enough:

*Interviewer: You said that you were writing a book.*

Yeah. I've written a book.

*Interviewer: Instead of keeping a diary or are you keeping a diary too?*

The book is, yeah. It is documenting travel stories, people's travel stories. Because I find them so interesting that it just seems like a real waste that all these stories...and no one else is ever gonna hear them. But I don't keep a journal. Probably cause I never keep to the truth (...) When I keep a travel diary I'm not truthful. I don't know why cause no one else is gonna read it. But I don't know why I do that. I just lie about it or exaggerate or I don't know. I just never am truthful. Because I'm a writer I'm prone to exaggeration. I'm prone to changing the end results so that it's funny or something. I just... It wouldn't be honest if I kept a travel diary. I've tried to do it all my life and I'm just not honest. I don't know why that is. That's the creative side of me, I think.

*Interviewer: So this book, is that both fiction and true stories. I mean is it...?*

It's true stories but because I'm... I write with humour. I am a humorous writer. I always change them. Just little things to make it have a funny outcome. But in essence they are true stories. In essence and I'm trying really hard to keep that true essence thing happening. Ha ha.

*Interviewer: Is it your own stories or is it other people's stories as well?*

Yeah yeah. But I don't put my name to my stories because I feel like I'm talking about myself. It's just too personal. So I just say it's another person. Cause I have got some funny stories that happened to me.

Her reasoning is paradoxical in that she on the one hand does not write a diary because she cannot keep herself from lying. On the other hand she is writing a book in which she, due to her being a humoristic writer, cannot keep from spicing up the stories a bit. However, on such occasions the lies are not seen as lies but rather as occasions of stretching the truth in order to make a good story even better. One way of understanding this is to make a distinction between different written discourses. A *diary writer's discourse* directing the writer towards 'truthfulness' (to the self) will perhaps cause the dishonest writer anxiety, while a *book writer's discourse* is more generous to the writer who is prone to exaggeration.<sup>65</sup> Such a perspective would also add substance to the argument that mythology often travels comfortably in media texts and books. Another look at *Wanderlust* may shed more light on this:

Study a copy of the magazine before considering a submission. It is no coincidence that the majority of our contributors are regular readers. With the exception of 'City Guide' or purely practical articles, do not disrupt your text with facts and figures. *Wanderlust* aims to be an *entertaining* read, even for those who have no intention of travelling to the destinations described, so keep

your narrative flowing by cutting down on statistics and including personal observations, anecdotes and conversations. We also aim to be as unbiased as possible so we never ‘plug’ (my italics).

Claiming to be ‘unbiased’ and therefore not ‘plugging’ *Wanderlust* still requires some quite ‘structuring’ principles in order for a text to be accepted. First of all, it requires sticking to a familiar form which makes publishing smooth but diminishes change and challenge to old textual structures. Secondly, it needs to be an ‘interesting read’ through emphasising anecdotes and ridding the texts of less personal observations such as statistics. There is no attempt to address the danger of personal ‘unbiased’ observations and anecdotes becoming stereotyping mythologies. On the contrary the magazine encourages the personal over the factual.

If the media industry, the publishers, the writers and the readers agree that a text on travel can be spiced up a bit to make a better story, which is usually done through personal anecdotes, the chances of critical and nuanced presentations diminish. Mass communication manuscripts become the proper forum for mythology production and reproduction. The form in itself, and the meanings ascribed to it, actually thrive on anecdotes, peculiarities and other often stereotyping practices.

I would like here to look back to the traveller above whose statements opened up this exploration of readings and writings of travel mythology. He had written about ten chapters of a book and was greatly inspired by *The Beach* (Garland, 1996). The following is an excerpt from a discussion regarding the contents of his book:

*Interviewer: [Is the book]...about the trip?*

About *a* [said with emphasis] trip anyway. It’s including things like Goa, the parties and the drug scene, then it goes back to what I used to do ten years ago, where I got my ideas from, then I lead it back up to how I got to Goa and then from there go into wherever. It’s just an idea which I toyed with in India.

This traveller seems unsure of whose story he actually wants to write. The book will be ‘about *a* trip anyway’, if not the trip he is on when the interview is taking place. He did actually go to Goa in India and spend time there, joining the drug scene so he may try to stick with ‘the truth’ as he experienced it. On the other hand he is inspired by *The Beach*, which is a fictitious book (regardless of the constant references to it by interviewed travellers who seem to use it as a guide to travel experiences). He also seems unsure of where the book will go after Goa, despite the fact that he himself must have gone somewhere else or he would not be in Bangkok taking part in an interview. Also, it is an idea he ‘toys’ with, indicating through the choice of word, that it is a non-serious project. Undoubtedly, there seems to be room for negotiation, re-routing and adjustments to actual travel plans within the project of writing a book.

Another way to bend the ‘truth’ a little is to borrow stories from different people and make it into one story. I have come across this reasoning in conversations with travellers who hope to write books in which they plan to weave together travel stories of different people making it appear as if all happened to one single individual. The outcome will most likely be a story full of juicy parts while the days of loneliness, of dull and grey and lack of action which accompany most long-term travellers from

time to time become diminished. Presented as one person's journey it is a good story, but a false one adding to the process of naturalisation of travel mythologies.

Common to the manuscripts discussed here, regardless of whether they are printed or not, is that in order to reach a mass audience they must qualify. At the end of the line there will be a person who exercises censorship, who has expectations about what a travel text is and has the right to turn a writer down. Such a system is by definition elitist in that there exists a ruling voice with the power to exclude. This is true of the media in general which give more voice to those with power than those without (Mathiesen, 1989). It is also true of specific media such as those publishing travel writing (Fürsich and Kavoori, 2001). This view is further supported by the guidelines to potential writers presented above. If 'seasoned travellers' are what the media demand, it is the views of a specific and (travel) elitist group that set the agenda for travel writing.

### *Self-censored manuscripts*

To other travellers, who do not comply with the standards of the censored travel media or who do not for other reasons want to publish in the forms described above, there is another and newer communication medium available through the Internet. Texts of this kind are more or less self-censored. By self-censorship I mean that it is the traveller who decides what to write, restricted of course by the linguistic and discursive frameworks that structure thoughts.

A number of the interviewees narrate their travel stories on their own home-pages on the Internet. Instead of telling me about his preferences for Thai food, one man directs me to his homepage where I can read what he wants me to know.

I enjoy curry, I enjoyed India, but I was so anxious to get back here... I...I'll fore you my, you know... in addition to having all these writings on my page, I've written much about this trip that eventually will be updated to my web-site. There's a link for the 97 - 98 updates, but my friend at home hasn't done it yet, and may not get to it, cos he got nil. But I have them in a document form, to be read. And in the last part of it, chapter 4, from India, I said I'm gonna really look forward to the Thai food.

This traveller kept a travel diary on the Internet although it was not completely up to date. The Internet was more than a travel diary platform to him as he used it to make a living through constructing homepages for other people and businesses. He saw his future in terms of being able to travel and work at the same time – hinting at another sociologically interesting consequence of the information technology, namely the collapse of the division between work and leisure/tourism both in time, space and practice characteristics. The Internet not only brings the world of leisure to the world of work, as when people of wealth can travel the world (of the poor) via a computer screen,<sup>66</sup> to a privileged few it brings the world of work to the world of leisure.

Other travellers find other ways of expressing themselves through the Internet. Many of the travel magazines, as well as guidebooks, offer Internet forums to which the independent traveller can write and expect to reach a mass public. In addition,

there are a large number of other independent platforms – some of them appealing to backpackers in general while others appeal to niche backpackers searching for adventure, danger or eco travel. Some of these do, however, also exert some sort of censorship in that most information sent in is examined before publication on the net.<sup>67</sup> A relatively new development in this context are platforms for keeping individual up-to-date travel logs. Travellers can, while travelling, report to an (unknown) Internet audience and even receive comments from readers. This development opens up the possibility of daily and public reporting of rather private and ‘uncensored’ matters. The Internet page found at [www.resboken.com](http://www.resboken.com)<sup>68</sup> offers free membership, an online travel-log, a guestbook for friends and others to write in and a place to publish your photos. Here are a couple of postings written with only one day between them by a woman travelling to Bali:<sup>69</sup>

Now we are in Ubud, which we really like. Actually we should have gone here last Monday but when I woke up I wasn't feeling very well. So the first thing I did was to puke. (...) We asked a guy who worked there where you could see rice terraces. So then he fixed two buddies, then we paid a small sum and could ride with them on their motorbikes. We went outside Ubud, it was really fun to see how the inhabitants live. There were bunches of people in the rivers cleaning themselves and in the rice paddies people were working, it was really as beautiful as can be. *Written in Indonesia 2002-05-01 at 21:02:55 (local time).*

A day later she writes:

Then we went into a temple. Our motorbike-boys had dressed really nicely and we were forced to wear sarongs and borrow their jackets. When we got into the temple everyone was really cute except us, you should have seen us. We had to buy a strap that we should carry around our waists too, you would have laughed yourselves to death if you had seen us. Everyone was just looking at us, we were the only tourists there. Then we had to sit down and pray and flowers were put in our hair. And they sprinkled water on you and then you got something that looked like rice which you could eat and put on your forehead. Then you walked around with grains of rice in your forehead and hair. But it was really interesting. All the children were so cute. At home you save money to go travelling, and you save money here to be able to spend them on different ceremonies, a little different. But it is really fun to see how it really is so that is something one will remember the rest of one's life. After that we went home, a beautiful road home where you saw a bunch of rice paddies and people were working. Now it is evening and we are going to get something to eat. Tomorrow we are going back to Kuta, now some more of the people we know have arrived. *Written in Indonesia 2002-05-02 at 19.21.16 (local time).*

I would first like to make a few comments concerning the implicit messages in the text. The statements support claims that travellers – and guidebooks – carry a view of the people who live there either as service personnel (Bhattacharyya, 1997) or as objects for the tourist gaze (Bhattacharyya, 1997; Urry, 1990). They asked a ‘guy who worked there’ where they could *see* rice terraces. There is an unquestioned naturalness about wanting to *see*, signifying the distance between the tourist and her object – in this case the workers in the rice field. She could as easily have asked to partake in harvesting rice but she did not, as such a question falls on the outskirts of those discourses that form touristic meanings (unless she placed herself among the more adventurous, periphery travellers aiming at interacting with the people at the destination).

There is also a touch of nostalgia intermixed with the distancing of the 'other' in that the work of the rice harvesters seems to have stricken the traveller as a sign of 'beauty'. Nostalgia has appropriately been defined as memory with the pain taken out of it (see Urry, 1994a). Without nostalgia it would be difficult to turn battle fields, prisons or coal mines – places previously homes of death, illness and other suffering – into popular tourist destinations. Nostalgia is very much a component in discourses informing backpacking too. Poverty and hardworking locals are signs of beauty rather than testimonies of the uneven power-structures dictating living conditions both on a local and global scale.

Further, 'our motorbike-boys' is a linguistic usage making the two men driving the travellers on their motor-bikes appear both as servicemen and owned. According to Bhattacharyya (1997) guidebooks such as Lonely Planet's India supply the people at the destination with only two options. They can be 'tourees' (see also Van den Berghe, 1992), which often means that they are living under 'tribal social structures' and/or are categorised as 'fourth world people', thus being the true objects of the tourism industry. The only other alternative available is to be portrayed as a service person, being described as a person who can in some way help, entertain – or disrupt – the traveller. In analysing this particular statement it is tempting to join forces with Nash (1977) equating tourism with imperialism.

In reference to Bhattacharyya's (1997) critical reading of a *Lonely Planet* guidebook it can thus be concluded that travellers who are freed from the censorship exerted by the media may be equally prone to reproducing travel mythologies. In the statements above there is little challenge to the mythologies presented by the media even though they are an example of an 'uncensored' and personal account. It is likely, though, that a more thorough analysis of diaries on the Internet would come up with many examples of both mythology reproduction and questioning. However, the issue here is not to estimate the occurrence of either this or that but to focus on some other aspects of this rather new possibility of making the personal public.

What I am focusing upon in particular here is the occurrence of rather private accounts in a mass arena such as the Internet. The presentation is chronological, aided by concepts such as 'then' and 'after that' giving it a diary-like structure. However, the text is directed towards a reader rather than the self, which is normally the case in a personal diary. The text is directed towards a 'you' who can, given the nature of the web-site, send a reply. The person behind the 'you' may either be an acquaintance of the writer or an unknown reader, which is only natural in a text directed towards a mass public. What is less natural, however, with reference to prior conditions of mass publications, is the possibility of reaching the mass public with rather personal accounts. There is no way for the writer to select her readers. Still she chooses to speak of her stomach problems as well as the times she feels like she is making a fool of herself, information normally used, to cite Goffman (1959), 'backstage' and away from the public arena.

The increased exposure of personal matters to a mass public is not a new phenomenon, as for instance Meyrowitz (1985) has shown. The invention of television has certainly blurred the borders between the private and the public. Exposure of person-

al and private matters, previously more or less controlled by the individual, has challenged figures such as politicians and celebrities with both threats and opportunities. It was easier, prior to television, for a person in the public eye to hide those traits that might appear unpleasant to the public. Television has narrowed the gap between viewed and viewer, exposing many of the disadvantageous aspects of a person's life, which were previously hidden between the lines in books and speeches to the public. While many celebrities have testified to the difficulties of not being able to keep their private lives private, others have learnt to make use of the new medium through presenting favourable matters about the private self. Yet, the use and control of the media in the latter sense has been a privilege primarily for an elite. In examining websites offering uncensored space to travellers, it seems that the Internet has provided a democratisation movement in terms of private accessibility to the public arena, and vice versa. People, who would otherwise not qualify, manage or want to appear on the regular media stages – in this case as travel writers, travel journalists or guidebook contributors – have an alternative arena for self-expression.

The popularity of these Internet arenas for the travellers' self-expression (as these types of web-pages are obviously increasing) is sociologically interesting in that they, like television docusoaps, provide examples of individual efforts in making the private public. Much sociological thought has been directed towards the opposite movement: the system of institutionalised knowledge penetrating the life-world of the individual (Habermas, 1981/1987), the frontstage regions obscuring the backstage (Goffman, 1959) or abstract sociality invading concrete sociality (Asplund, 1987a) to mention but a few.

Travellers expressing personal and/or private matters in a mass arena support this blurring of the normative borders marking a difference between the public and the private, through turning their backstage activities into frontstage storytelling. These are, therefore, examples of individual appropriation to institutional developments. In Asplund's modernity, as well as in Simmel's (1911/1971) cosmopolitan surroundings, or on Goffman's frontstage, the individual has become a role-player, an 'inauthentic' being searching for arenas to be seen and to express the self. As much as the journey is a way to acquire status and symbolic capital (Desforges, 1998, 2000; Elsrud, 2001/Chapter 3; Munt, 1994) it is also an arena for self-expression; a forum through which stories about the self can be exposed. The Internet has provided a tool for carrying such self-expression even further, by reaching a much bigger audience than before, which has led to new questions for tourism research and social science research in general.

## Conclusion

In this text I have tried to approach the topic of mythology production through focusing on two different matters. First of all, I have tried to illustrate the occurrence

of mythology presence in travel media through pointing out examples both from previous research as well as from the empirical material in this research project. Second, I have attempted to address how media content is a consequence of and a product of readers and writers. Within this second aim I have pointed out a complexity within the reader group as well as within the writer group. Not all readers are 'true believers' of the texts they read and not all writers write texts that are accepted or aimed at the censored mass media market. In this context I have addressed the Internet as a new means of reaching large audiences or groups of readers with personalised (closed circuit) messages. This calls for a future awareness of the border dissolving powers of the Internet. While threatening the traditional dichotomised relationship between the private and the public it should be added that it also works in the service of the powerful in globalising movements. This project has so far not supplied any information at all which could challenge the view of Internet as yet another tool for the success of some (capitalist and market-oriented) culture(s) over others. Mythologies stressing various perspectives, in which the travellers/tourists have the right to define, use, mock, or indeed empathise with the poor and unfortunate, are also very much present on the Internet. So called 'locals' seem to remain as servicemen or attractions in stories on how the west visits the rest, as Bhattacharyya (1997) claims regarding the *Lonely Planet* guide to India.

Yet, there are critical readers of travel texts which this project has also shown and there are interviewees who are much less mythology burdened than the media appears. This is an indication of what Fürsich and Kavoori (2001:163) argue when they claim that '[i]t seems that travel journalists, even more than the "average" tourists, are trying to fix the "other". Their professional purpose is to come up with a narrative, a well-told story about other cultures, the past or distant places – in short, to package culture'.

I believe one of the answers to the prevalent mythology reproduction is found within the restrictions put upon reality by the media form itself and within the form of language it encourages. Spurr (1993: 25) notes in relation to news reporting that:

[W]hile calling attention to suffering, they [visual framings and metaphorical transformations] also show it as *out there*: contained, defined, localized in a realm understood to be culturally apart. But the speed with which these images are brought to us do not bring us closer to that world or make it more real for us. On the contrary, the technology of the modern media alienates us from the reality of the foreign and remote by the very ease with which it produces images of that world; the images are produced at random and can be made to disappear by the turn of the page or the dial.

Spurr, like Urry (1990), also regards the eye, or the gaze, as a means through which the tourists 'establish knowledge' and exert power over the people encountered. The combination of the gaze, the fast images of the media form and the lack of connection between the news/images/texts, leads to a view of the 'non-western world as an object of study, an area for development, a field of action' (Spurr, 1993:25). I would like to add here that, when no other obvious links are attached to the discrepant images of a world experienced as distant and 'unknown', mythology becomes all the

more important to help create connections, meanings and generalities both for the reader and the writer.

In addition to this, the 'narrative' and the 'well-told story' that Fürsich and Kavouri (2001) talk about is a restriction placed upon each text alone. Only a given number of narrative forms are accepted in the travel media. Just as it is difficult to begin to speak a foreign and previously unheard language, it is equally difficult to perceive and utilise a foreign and previously unheard understanding or order of things. And, once you begin speaking, there is a long road to travel between practising your new knowledge with your friends (or an interviewer) and attempting an official version for a mass public. The media can from such a perspective remain unreflective much longer than its readers.

Above all, one rather obvious reason why travel journalism and writing are less prone than other media to critical examination or to giving both sides the possibility to speak, lies in the fact that the story can seldom be checked. This is undoubtedly a matter where one party has taken the power to define the other, leaving no chances for the defined to interfere in the story. Distance and lack of commonly understood systems of meaning and of language, serve as a protective shield against criticism aimed at the writer. Reader/listener/viewer and object can seldom meet to work out a 'truer' version than the one presented by the media. If ever there was a chance to 'mythologise' without risking exposure, travel writing and journalism provide the opportunity. A reporter working at home must, at least to some extent, weigh the facts and risk being proven wrong by both readers and those who are in focus in the media text. The reporter working away from 'witnesses' can get by on simple mythology without appearing to be a fake. In reality, the travel writer, much like the 'adventurer' (see, Elsrud 2001/Chapter 3), is dependent upon solitude to make a good story.

# Travel and Power: Conquering Time, Space, Self and the Other

*Our most creative constructions and achievements are bound to turn into prisons and whited sepulchres that we, or our children, will have to escape or transform if life is to go on.*

(Berman, 1988:6)

Berman has, slightly dramatically perhaps, managed to capture one rather basic contradiction in contemporary, so-called 'modern', 'western', existence, which in the case of travel interpretation is still quite relevant. The constructions, creatively built to worship progress, linear development and 'western superiority' have the peculiar tendency to attain a life of their own. Like Frankenstein's monster or Marx's Juggernaut they may even turn against their masters and become machines of self-destructive qualities. What Berman suggests is that the control, order and notion of progress used in constructing and managing society and its institutions, become over-rigid and oppressive to its members. This paradox appears in full scale in long-term travelling where the 'west' for the travellers seems to represent both progress and decay, while the 'other' represents both 'salvation' and collective 'retardation'.

Facing a quite extensive empirical material, full of complexities, contradictions and tendencies, one encounters practices and narratives pointing in many different directions. Some narratives suggest that backpacking is a way to escape, challenge and criticise the social and societal qualities in places the travellers call home, normally referred to as the 'west'. Such narratives appear to be a reaction against materialism, lack of individual control and meaning. From this perspective it is relevant to speak of this type of travelling as a mending practice, an attempt to heal and replace that which has been hurt or taken away by what is believed to be the progress of the travellers' home societies. This chapter will argue that backpacking becomes a case of individual empowerment. By conquering time, space and the 'other' within a journey, the traveller appears to experience an increased sense of individual control

and an intensified feeling of 'being and belonging'. This will be investigated below, by addressing the topic as a case of individual empowerment and as a political act at the level of the individual.

However, other narratives suggest a less appealing interpretation. In order for backpacking to be seen as a source for mending and a practice which grants the traveller not only increased control but also a strong and favourable identity, 'crude' acts of travel have to go through a conversion process transforming them into strong symbolic expressions. This chapter will argue that travel acts become strongly symbolic through primitivist notions, having remained within travel practice since early science and colonisation. It will be suggested, based upon Bourdieu's (1986, 1991) reasoning concerning the symbolic qualities of language and the production of belief, that this primitivism has 'magic' qualities, presenting to its believers illusions rather than realities.

Unavoidably, concentrating on primitivism in backpacking also means focussing on aspects of power and empowerment which are hardly flattering, to neither the travellers, nor the societies to which the majority of them belong. Primitivism, I suggest, should at times replace, or at least complement, the concept of authenticity in tourism research. While the authenticity concept manages to capture the longing for objects and experiences constructed as 'real', 'pristine' and 'untouched' which is so evident in travel stories, I feel it fails to direct attention to the structures of power and dominance underlying much of tourism movements from 'west' to the 'rest'. Primitivism, on the other hand, acknowledges the often tacit and unconscious agreement among tourist groups and societies that only some people have the right to be 'tourists' while others remain 'objects'. Notions of primitivism, this chapter will argue, supply travel with constructions which grant the believers in primitivism the right to define, while the 'objects' – the people thought to be primitive – remain unheard and beyond self-expression. Primitivism, as opposed to the more 'innocent' authenticity, is constructed upon hierarchies and the ranking of some people above others. Undoubtedly primitivist notions have been evident in many of the travel stories studied in this project, sometimes challenging less critical interpretations and other times supporting them.

Subsequent to acknowledging collective notions informing individual action, this chapter will present a view of travelling not only as a case of individual empowerment, but also as a matter of power on a structural level and in doing so it may perhaps be interpreted by some as provocative. While I am aware that the 'others', often presented as dwelling eternally at the destination, are active participants in the tourism phenomenon, and that they probably ascribe stereotype qualities to people around them, just like travellers do, structural conditions still remain that grant access to the global world on unequal terms. It seems forgotten, or irrelevant, in some strands of tourism research that some people have the money and time to travel, while others do not, and that these circumstances affect the way individuals react to, act in and experience tourism interaction as well as everyday life at home. Furthermore, there are plenty of tributes to backpacking in everyday life in Europe and elsewhere. I too could have chosen a number of other roads – including some less critical

– in order to conclude this work. Yet in doing so, the complex – and evident – inter-connection between power and travel would have remained ‘under-developed’ in this project.

This is, however, not the only purpose of the chapter as I hope it will also make evident the complexities inherent to the backpacker phenomenon as such, as well as within singular travel practices. One act can have multiple meanings from the perspective of the actors, as well as different consequences for different people. Being a woman practicing adventure is often not interpreted the same as if had she been a man, and practices carried out in an emancipative and liberating quest may be done at the expense of a constructed ‘other’ and so forth. It will thus be argued that a search for complexities rather than easily grasped simplifications is important if we are to become aware of the delicate web of power relations keeping phenomena alive.

The chapter will begin with a recapturing of some of the topics presented earlier by addressing a number of qualities I have found prevalent in long-term travelling, while making obvious the strong connection between these and individual empowerment and control. Travel, I will argue here, offers abundant opportunities for experiencing a sense of *being* and *belonging*, of control over time and space, opportunities seemingly scarce in places the travellers call home. Second, I will draw attention to cases of structural dominance exerted by and through this type of travelling by linking individual action to a primitivist train of thought which serves to (re)position a ‘western’ identity as superior to the ‘other’ at tourism locations.

## Individual empowerment in travelling

In this dissertation I have addressed a number of topics which I have found either to be central, sociologically interesting or tendentious in so called long-term travelling, or backpacking. I have discussed the ‘taking and making of time’ as one of the central themes in backpacker interviews. I have embarked upon a discussion concerning the centrality of adventure stories in backpacking and I have found it interesting and worthwhile to relate these to stories of gender. The media have been presented as a common denominator in (re)forming backpacker discourse and so forth. Here these issues will appear again, but in this context as a means to individual empowerment, born into a timespace of uncertainty and multiple choices.

### **Taking ‘my time’ and making ‘their time’**

Applying time perspectives to travelling is, as I hope I have shown in Chapter 2 (see also Elsrud, 1998), a meaningful way to address issues relating to long-term travelling that have hitherto not been problematised. Time is one of the most fundamental means through which an individual can lose control, or gain it. It is the importance

of time control in relation to individual empowerment that will be further developed here. The linkage between time control and individual empowerment is also crucial for structural domination, but this line of thinking will be further explored later in this chapter.

Taking control of one's 'own time' is a common explanation given by many travellers for why they embark on a long-term journey. They stress that travelling is a period of 'own time' as opposed to the time of home – belonging to family, partners, employers and one might add, the routines of everyday life. This phenomenon has at times been interpreted as a case of regression from early adulthood to an immature childhood requiring no responsibilities or obligations (see for instance Curtis and Paczkowska, 1994) but such a perspective directs the focus mainly on the actor and not on the society he or she responds to. A more sociological interpretation would be to also, or instead, regard it as a reaction to those oppressive qualities in home environments leading people to experience loss of time control. Time control is undoubtedly an effective method used to structure the lives of others. With the invention of linear (clock) time, and later its popularity and extensive use, the means were created to perfectly organise most of social life including work-life (see Adam 1990, 1995; Davies, 1990; Johansen, 1984). Clock time, as a measurement of evenly divided units, made it possible to regulate people according to the demands of a growing capitalist society. Johansen (1984:140) writes 'now one can measure, coordinate and calculate activities so that they can be packed together as tightly as possible. Time can be divided into periods, reserved for specific purposes' (my translation). While the implementation of clock-time and clock-time scheduling in social life once caused uproar and demonstrations, its use today – to regulate people's presence at workplaces, schools, hospitals, unemployment offices, child-care centres and, subsequently, the presence one is allowed in one's own home – has become a normalised and taken-for-granted fact of everyday life. Many travellers have thrown or tucked away their watches when embarking on their journey, indicating that this type of travelling is indeed often a contesting of power and clock-time oppression. To walk outside scheduled (clock and calendar) time is to shake off the oppressors. It is in this sense relevant to speak of travelling as 'time out', a period of liminality (Gennep, 1977, Turner, 1967/1989) and the experiencing of a privileged 'own time', which can be used to experience self-control and individual structuring.

As I have argued previously, both earlier research and my own interviews suggest that the experience of one's time as belonging to others is quite prevalent particularly among young women (Leccardi and Rampazi, 1993) and women travellers (see Chapter 2), indicating that taking time to travel may carry slightly different meanings depending on the gender of the traveller. I have suggested that, in this respect, the journey as an arena for emancipation and self-control may carry a stronger symbolic value for some women travellers than for some men.

Remaining with the notion of time and the idea that long-term travel is experienced as a 'time out' from oppressive structures offers more information concerning individual empowerment and control once we focus on the journey as a 'time frame'.

What is it, within the journey, that makes the traveller feel 'free' and powerful and what does time have to do with it?

Some conclusions can be drawn from what I have argued in Chapter 2. First of all, the discarding of watches and clocks, and the choice by many to travel on 'open tickets' leaving room for last minute decisions does much more than symbolise an attempt to rid oneself of home suppression by authorities and routines. It also marks the beginning of something new, a timespace in which the traveller feels 'free' to do her thing. Sociologically speaking, however, freedom in this context is a matter of control and a way to charge travel practice with a strong symbolism of choice, action and self-determination. Travellers are of course regulated by their tickets, transport timetables and everyday routines and restrictions upon action at the destinations, but these matters are seldom experienced as the control of others but rather as opportunities to practice individual skill and self-control. Through the successful handling of external forces a sense of powerfulness can be gained.

Second, power is also gained through the experience of being able to experiment with other time constructs, relieved of externally induced oppression. Travelling involves many modes, including peaceful rests at beaches described in terms of time standing still as well as intense hiking, biking or moving about – often described as a time that moves very, very fast, indeed filling a year of travelling with a lifetime of experiences, as some travellers have suggested. An increased association with, and reflexivity in relation to, other ways to experience time than through the ticking of the clock or the inescapable and irreversible order of the calendar does, I suggest, also increase the experience of self-control and of being in a formable and identifiable timespace. While this individual empowerment is gained through playing with and constructing 'own time', additional power is gained through constructing the time of the other. Social construction of 'other' time, suggests Adam (1995:29), involves a mythology based upon a constructed opposition between modern western time and the time belonging to people, who are believed to be situated outside modernity. While modern western time, which certainly is the time the travellers identify with, is viewed as 'historical, linear, irreversible, changing, quantitative, clock and calendar based and decontextualised', the time of the 'others' is ideally constructed as 'traditional, cyclical, reversible, stable, qualitative, task/event-based, nature-based and embedded'. Adam suggests that the constructive 'westerners' ought to pay more attention to the fact that different experiences of time exist basically all over the world regardless of whether it is 'first' or 'third' worlds, east or west, north or south. This means that people in Europe experience circular time, biological time, punctuated, task-based time and many other time modes in addition to being oppressed by abstract clock time, and that the time of the 'other' is indeed influenced by a variety of time modes including the abstraction following upon the invention and extensive use of the clock (see also Mbiti, 1969). Adam's awareness is not apparent among the travellers or the tourism media in this project, whose stories often thrive on notions of an ahistorical 'other', people believed to live in 'our past', in a peripheral pocket of timelessness. Visiting and experiencing such secluded pockets of time seems to have the purpose, at least partly, to make visible the difference and uniqueness of the trav-

eller's identity. Narratives of this kind, stressing the uniqueness and individuality of the traveller through mirroring the self against the primitive and timeless otherness, have been common in this project. Stories constructed around encounters with 'the primitive', with people described as living in the 'stone age', or as remnants of our own history, work particularly well in the build-up of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984) taking place at guesthouses, in beach areas, in travel books, films and magazines. This links, without a doubt, time construction to individual empowerment.

Third, the priority given to secluded beach areas, to peripheral and rough travelling, to local and slow-moving transport, as well as the devaluation of technically advanced ways to reach a destination, is too obvious to disregard from a time perspective. The very circumstances that make this type of travelling possible, namely money to buy time and the control over time exercised through catching a plane from Europe to Asia, are also, quite often, the very qualities that are devalued among the travellers. Travelling on foot, by motorbike, on local buses transporting people on rural low-standard roads and by other relatively slow moving, cheap and poorly equipped vehicles are preferred by many experienced travellers before air-conditioned buses with tinted windows or speeding airplanes when it comes to travelling locally. The cherishing of such means of transportation is, I believe, a sign of a need or wish to experience a 'being in the world', a sense of positioning oneself in an understandable and identifiable whole, realised through feelings of having a clear insight into and control over concrete matters in the nearby environment. Sunsets at a 'paradise beach' or bouncing around on the roof or rusty seat of a local bus are common goods in stories constructing successful travelling but also signs of a yearning for recontextualisation. In addition to being signs of a search for authenticity (see Andersson-Cederholm, 1999; Cohen, 1979, 1988; MacCannell, 1976/1989, 1992; Meethan, 2001; Wang, 1999) this can be understood as a reaction against what Giddens (1991:244) refers to as a separation of time and space. This consists of a 'disentangling of separated dimensions of 'empty' time and 'empty' space, making possible the articulation of disembedded social relations across indefinite spans of time/space (see also Adam, 1990, 1995; Davies, 1990; Mbiti, 1969). In other words, social relations are no longer dependent on presence in a particular timespace but can, by means of rapid transportation, through printing and not the least the development of information technology, transcend both geographical borders and time restrictions. While this circumstance has been a major requirement for the development of a post-traditional capitalism as well as globalisation it has also placed upon individuals a sort of mental 'homelessness'. Under such circumstances they see themselves as responsible for finding the right (life) path in a world more and more characterised by a pluralisation of social life-worlds, of distant relations, abstract expert systems and a myriad of claims rather than truths (see Berger, Berger and Kellner, 1973). Viewed from this perspective, travelling 'slow-pace and bouncy' makes sense in that it gives the traveller an experience of control over everything that is relevant at that particular time and space. The most cherished moments in this type of travelling are very often characterised by a re-embedding of time in space, where time becomes linked to space through the (slow) character of transport, road and movement. The Internet, used

for communication during travel, will most likely pose a challenge to the view of travel as an arena for time control as it uses abstracted, or almost instant, time to pass messages back and forth, decreasing the experienced distance, both in time and space between the uniqueness of the traveller and the familiarity of friends and family.

Above, I have presented a number of perspectives on 'taking time' and 'making time' and how these seem to charge the individual with control, power and a sense of fulfilment. Time is, however, not the only important component in this struggle for empowerment.

### **Going home: constructing a space for self**

Feelings of control over space are immanent to the experience of 'being in the world' through having insight into concrete matters in one's nearest surroundings. Following the above reasoning concerning the quality of lives in contemporary post-industrial north-western Europe existence is by many experienced as a web of complex social relations, processes, materials, buildings and individual, unknown, life trajectories. In addition, as Berger, Berger and Kellner (1973:79) so convincingly describe, a distinguishing quality of 'modern' life is the lack of an 'overarching canopy of symbols for the meaningful integration of society'. In other words, for most people there is no longer a God, or any other authority, which can provide a unifying answer to questions concerning meanings of either collectives or individuals. The explanatory and authoritative systems of today, including science, are many and contradictory leading to confusion rather than consolidation, leaving individuals abandoned and forced to construct their own systems of explanatory meaning. The subsequent individual metaphysical loss of 'home' engenders a nostalgia 'for a condition of "being at home" in society, with oneself and, ultimately, in the universe' (Berger, Berger and Kellner, 1973:82).

A slightly different, yet related, perspective on this phenomenon is presented by Meyrowitz (1985:308) who suggests that '[o]ur world may suddenly seem senseless to many people because, for the first time in modern history, it is relatively placeless'. His focus is on the role of the media and particularly television in the profound separation between physical place and social place. In a media and print-oriented society the social situations, roles and relations are not necessarily linked to a specific setting but can take place outside the boundaries of the physical here and now. Printed matter, radio, television (and not least the Internet) have greatly influenced the abstraction of social relations and their independence from spatial contexts. In such a society '[w]herever one is now – at home, at work, or in the car – one may be in touch and tuned-in' (Meyrowitz, 1985:308).

This is helpful in understanding not only why space plays such an important role in travelling but indeed why travelling, at all, works so well for individual self-expression. If the metaphysical 'being at home' is not to be found in the 'geographic home' the option is to go looking for it elsewhere. Travelling abroad as the only available method to go home is actually not as far-fetched perspective as it sounds. In addition,

as I will discuss below, the places travellers visit seem specifically appropriate for the acquisition and/or refuelling of individual meaningfulness and 'placeness' as opposed to 'placelessness'. They *seem* to offer easily understandable relations and opportunities to experience individual empowerment in addition to control, and opportunities to take in the whole situation.

The experiencing of travel spaces as controllable and predictable places is, it should first of all be noted, the outcome of constructions and travel expectations. The spatial, in a human geographic sense, is much more complicated than its visual appearance. It is, rather, a time-space, going through a constant reshaping through social interactions and relations that reach far beyond the limitations of physical geography. Thus, when travellers experience control and recontextualisation they may nevertheless be looking out over a web of social relations, hierarchies, power struggles or memories that are fixed neither in time nor in space. As Massey (1994:5) claims:

The identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple. And the particularity of any place is, in these terms, constructed not by placing boundaries around it and defining its identity through counter-position to the other which lies beyond, but precisely (in part) through the specificity of the mix of links and interconnections *to* that 'beyond'. Places viewed this way are open and porous.

Massey's reasoning is indeed applicable to all the areas a traveller encounters, be they bustling market places or tranquil beach areas. Nevertheless, these spaces are constructed as 'enclosed' and 'eternal' and as such they become important to individual empowerment. There are many different qualities to the places emphasised by travellers and looking at them with power in mind one finds that they provide quite interesting examples of how (the construction of) place and action together can provide appropriate stages for individual mastery and empowerment.

One common backpacker scene or stage<sup>70</sup> is that of bustling marketplaces, train and bus stations where the traveller is often forced to deal in spontaneous interaction with vendors, ticket salesmen, bus drivers and other service people. While being just another place of everyday life handled with routine by many local residents, travellers often describe it as a chaotic space, needing skill and experience to be handled properly. Often these descriptions are presented as some kind of win-or-lose situation involving money as one traveller, presented in Chapter 5, illustrates with clarity. Arriving at Pokhara, Nepal, this traveller started dealing with a 'tout' (the common way used in guidebooks and among travellers to address those residents trying to attract travellers to specific guesthouses, tours, shops or the like) and found that his self-esteem grew through turning the residential man down, while making his 'own' choice of going to the lakeside rather than the dam. This is not only a question of how money is used as a mediator in power struggles but also how space is incorporated in the dealings. The possibility often offered in travelling, to go one way or another, conveys choices and opportunities for action as well as for grading, assessing and judging the people at the destination. Experiencing self-esteem in control, in having 'done something myself' as this traveller stated, is undoubtedly a case of individual empowerment. This perspective is fuelled by descriptions in travel media presenting, in the

best of cases, locals either as servants or 'exotic others' (see Bhattacharyya, 1997) and in the worst of cases openly portraying them as unreliable and greedy, deserving to be outsmarted by an experienced traveller. The opposite portrayal of a 'local' has the same effect. In claiming that a particular guesthouse owner is reliable the unspoken message is that the others are not. All in all media are vital to this type of play with place and power and in the backpacker context Lonely Planet is of utmost importance as it is the most popular guidebook among travellers. Containing detailed information not only on where you can expect to be met by 'touts' but also how you should respond to them in addition to displaying very biased information concerning the different areas, the guesthouses and other businesses, Lonely Planet works as a control tower. In addition to carrying out surveillance it provides travellers with the tools to experience mastery and control.

Individual power is also experienced through another popular stage or scene, namely the timespace of trekking. Travellers go trekking with, or without, guides among so-called 'ethnic groups' in many countries of destination, up mountainsides and/or along nature trails. Again individual mastery becomes central to success. With the exception of occasional meetings with 'hill tribes' or 'villagers' or 'indigenous groups' (these are terms often used in guidebooks), this time the challenge presents itself mostly as geographical obstacles or limits to one's own physical conditions which the traveller needs to master successfully in order to transform action into a powerful identity story.

Rural, off-the-beaten-track travelling is another travellers' scene or stage, which seems to offer a combination of the two scenes above. Constructed as a move away from other tourists, into places, and indeed homes, of local residents, this type of travelling appears to provide challenges of both a social and geographical nature as argued above. Periods of off-the-beaten-track travelling offer the traveller an opportunity to be in charge of the situation, of others and of self. The 'others' are 'mastered' through what is considered in backpacker discourses to be proper behaviour (which can undoubtedly be both polite and respectful). This can lead to successful, more or less long-term stays and visits with 'locals', to cheap or even free guidance through 'untouched' territories and to establishing friendship relations with 'locals' which work as status symbols in comparison to less valued backpacker practices. The hospitality of the 'host' measures the success. There are many stories concerning the greed of local entrepreneurs in tourist discourses adding further merits to a free or close to free stay with the 'locals'. The traveller staying for free has conquered this greed, by either having turned a greedy 'local' into a hospitable one, or by managing to find a local 'unspoilt' by other tourists, thus being experienced as genuinely honest.<sup>71</sup> The control of self, also granted through these practices, is emphasised, not the least, by the construction of risk in relation to this mode of travelling. The lack of other tourists, which is, needless to say, what makes a place off the beaten track, adds to the image of a type of rather demanding travelling requiring skill and preparedness to deal with novelty and the unknown. There is always the chance that things might get harsh and difficult, and if they do, face can be saved through experienced handling (Goffman, 1967).

All three above mentioned scenes are similar in that they provide opportunities for empowerment through achievement. Achievement, as demonstrated by individual performance and accomplishment of tasks in order to visualise the individual, undoubtedly belongs to a contemporary northern European existence. Mere being is seldom enough to earn respect and a place within the community. One has to be working, to create things, to reproduce oneself. Since Marx's (1867/1967) conviction that individual alienation is avoided through the process of objectification manifested in the 'production of objects' such as food, clothes, and shelters (Ritzer, 1992:54) and Weber's (1934/2001) acknowledgement of the 'protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism', sociology has been quite concerned with this connection between modernity and rationality, achievement and 'making'. Noteworthy, are the strong links suggested between these qualities and masculinity. Felski (1995) has presented a thorough critique of both earlier and recent social science research and theory arguing that it has been blind both to women's alternative reality and to their presence and competence in arenas thought to be masculine. By ignoring women as 'makers' and 'producers', they are robbed of their positions as subjects in the creation of historical processes. As this research project has shown, female travellers are, without a doubt, just as active, 'risk-taking' and competent as men, and thereby provide an example of Felski's argument with regard to women's presence in the shaping of history (also of travel in this case). They too, just as men, use space to empower their identities. Nevertheless, this usage may take on different forms and create different meanings depending on sex and gender expectations. Some restrictions seem to apply to women's movements in rooms of travel. For instance, some areas are more or less inaccessible to women travellers, such as bars, cafés or houses of worship in cultures quite exclusively dominated by male hegemonies forbidding women to enter certain public places. Guidebooks for women are written sometimes explicitly advising women to move extra carefully, on account of their 'natural vulnerability'. Further, as Bhattacharyya (1997) points out, much more moralised guidance is put on women travellers (and gay and disabled travellers) than on male travellers by guidebooks. All in all, this discourse of female vulnerability may, regardless of actual risks, cause more caution and reflexivity in relation to space movement among women travellers than among men. Similarly, the interpretations of travel movements may vary depending on gender. An act, having been conducted and valued by the traveller herself as a power statement, may be interpreted as an anomaly and as a norm offence by an audience still influenced by discourses equating mobility and individual achievement with masculinity.

Hedonism, the counter-image of modern rationality, is however not far away if we continue our search for space-related empowerment. Many interviewees suggest that their travel can be viewed as a polarisation between times of work and times of rest. Working time is experienced in the individual achievements at places intense with action and events, discussed above. Rest time, or 'holidays within the holiday' as one traveller described it, is linked to inactivity found in spaces often characterised by sun-drenched, palm-fringed beach areas where travellers rent 'bungalows' for long or short periods. Cohen (1982), in comparing beach-travellers with trekking travellers

in Thailand, finds that these two holiday modes differ quite dramatically in the social interaction between travellers and residents. While interaction is expected and cherished in off-the-beaten-track, or trekking areas, beach areas are best left 'pristine' and 'deserted'. Interaction between travellers and permanent residents in beach areas may even cause conflict as portrayed by Pettersson-Löfkvist (1997) who addresses the conflicts arising at particular beaches on the island of Zanzibar following the tourists' desire to use the beach for sunbathing and swimming while the residents want it for growing seaweed.

In interviews, in travel magazines, and not the least in the now famous film *The Beach* based on Garland's (1996) book with the same name, the beach is constructed as a place for travellers to take 'time out'. In this place the traveller can rest in solitude by being away from the intensity of the spontaneous interaction with permanent residents found in some of the other spaces or enjoy mingling with other travellers. In this context, the place for the permanent residents becomes increasingly one in the service quarters, expected, as he or she is, to prepare food, rent out motorbikes, or maintain the area. There are exceptions of course but my own fieldwork into beach areas in Thailand suggested few deviations from the norm. Travellers occupied the beach-fronts and the restaurant and guesthouse sitting areas, while local residents were found fixing food, transport and other services backstage in the setting. Seldom did I see interaction between travellers and residents apart from dealings over the counters and apart from a few exceptions where a couple of travelling women had become residents, working in the restaurant business.

In Chapter 2 I spoke of the beach as a 'mending area', a place of routine and mastery, where experiences from intense travelling in areas considered as 'unstructured' and 'challenging' could be integrated and fitted neatly into the life-stories of individual travellers. Beach space and time offers a void between actions so it is perhaps not surprising that beach life is sometimes referred to as being in a 'time standing still' situation (see for instance Edwardson in Res, 1998). This is a tranquil place where travel stories can be told to other travellers, where diaries and letters can be written and pictures of the paradise beach taken, which gives the journey meaning. Of particular importance to the construction of the beach area as a ground for individual empowerment is, quite contrary to the spaces described above where chaos lurked, its simplicity and predictability. The beach is the area where few demands appear to infringe upon the travellers' day-to-day existence. An overseeable beach-front, palm-trees giving shade to resting bodies, simple bamboo huts and a restaurant or two with a small number of staff all add to a sense of control and being in place and time. Even the music played at the restaurant in the evening is foreseeable given the peculiar ease with which backpacker preferences and trends travel side by side with the backpackers along the global tracks. Rhythm, as displayed by the sunsets, the waves rolling onto the beach and the wind disturbing the palm leaves, add to the feelings of control and familiarity. Beach space is home space: a place where one feels safe and in charge of the situation.<sup>72</sup> Beach space is also, perhaps, one of the travel spaces that will suffer most from popularity loss, if the Internet, television and mobile phones continue their penetration into the backpacker culture.

What all four scenes discussed above exhibit, however, is the fixed and demarcated place, the home which 'homeless' and 'placeless' people feel they have lost (Berger, Berger and Kellner, 1973; Meyrowitz, 1985). In off-the-beaten-track travelling, in trekking, at marketplaces and beachfronts the travellers, if they have accepted the norms of backpacking, are to a larger extent than at home cut off from distant social relations. Being is a foreseeable, controllable here and now, demanding, if anything, concrete individual action.

There is one more issue relating to place, which cannot be overlooked when discussing travel space and power. In previous chapters I have from time to time returned to travelling backpacker style as an investment in symbolic capital (see also Bourdieu, 1984; Desforges, 1998, 2000; Munt, 1994). Space, as the places one chooses while travelling, is of utmost importance in the power struggle and the attempts by the *avant-garde* to stay ahead. As explained in earlier chapters the places of travelling are intrinsically entwined in a hierarchical web of power positions rendering more symbolic capital to certain places than to others. Off-the-beaten-track places generally render most capital. In this web, continents are positioned against continents, countries against countries and regions against regions. Continents such as Africa or South America are more prestigious places to visit than North America or Australia. Some countries seem to be reserved for the experienced travellers, such as Micronesia, The Solomon Islands or Papua New Guinea. Other countries, such as India or Thailand, need to be broken down more, into regions where a visit to Goa or Kerala in India is far less prestigious in the backpacker hierarchy than a visit to Tamil Nadu or Andhra Pradesh, and a visit to Ko Chang in Thailand's Trat province renders more capital than one to Ko Samui. There is more to these places than their geographic position. Their importance is related to the social relations they provide. The amount of other tourists, the 'character' of the residential ethnic groups and the social and economic status of residential living are conditions which decide what position each place shall take in the backpacker logic. Assuming that you handle your visits with skill and experience, it is possible to move up the backpacker status ladder by using places as elevators. This phenomenon is undoubtedly at the core of individual empowerment through travelling. Having coped with the (often mythologised) nature of life in highly prestigious places increases the chances of becoming, in the eyes of 'self' as well as of an audience, a 'true adventurer', someone who can master existence even at the outskirts of everyday life.

## Constructing adventures 'where the action is'

By using the concepts of time and space I have, hitherto, presented a perspective on how these work as contexts for individual empowerment. Adding together these different uses of time and space for individual empowerment, an image appears of a quite particular timespace, seemingly pregnant with adventurous action.

Adventures grow in timespaces 'where the action is'. I here refer to Goffman's (1967) term action, which is more than a meaningful expression or a practice. Goffman's action is an embraced and sought out act of chance and risk-taking. It requires that a time and place is experienced as out of the ordinary, offering opportunity for an action associated with fatefulness, opportunities and the calculation of possible gains and losses (see also Kjølørød, 2003). Action, as 'activities which are consequential, problematic, and undertaken for what is felt to be their own sake' (Goffman, 1967:185), goes beyond the ordinary, given and collectively normal. Goffman's action is strongly linked to the matter of choice and, very importantly, to mastery. In order to build a strong character, an adventurer has to be skilful and cool in the act, otherwise action will turn into a personality failure – or anxiety.

Where the action is, is not a timespace experienced as being outside culture but takes place right at its borders – where the act of skilful transcendence of normality, without losing face, makes a person visible. Central to its existence is not the actual location or the actual act but the value ascribed to it. Following Bourdieu (1986, 1991) I want to relate this phenomenon to a 'production of belief'. Belief, as that which is necessary to make symbolic value effective and long-lasting, needs, needless to say, to be collective. One person's belief attached to a specific act will not make much difference, but many believers will provide the world with audiences, practitioners, consumers and so forth. It is belief rather than fact that shows us where the action is and what it is. The adventurers would not be much more than, perhaps, lost, dirty and lonely, had there not been a belief system making them into heroes. It is belief that assigns proper action at places 'where the action is' its characteristics. Being there is believed to be at the cultural borderline. It is a timespace offering conspicuous qualities to its believers, thus generating a strong character, or as Goffman (1967:270) says, '[t]hese naked little spasms of the self occur at the end of the world, but there at the end is action and character'. Acting 'where the action is' is to become visible to one's self and to an audience. It is to construct an interesting personality, which others believe in. It is to be seen and concretised (compare Asplund, 1987a). As Goffman notes, it is through contrasting with 'difference' that this visualisation occurs. Thus, being where the action is, must be understood and interpreted against its 'other', namely 'where the action is not'. It is there the urge to cross the borders is born. Goffman (1967:268) states:

Looking for where the action is, one arrives at a romantic division of the world. On one side are the safe and silent places, the home, the well-regulated role in business, industry, and the professions; on the other are all those activities that generate expression, requiring the individual to lay himself on the line and place himself in jeopardy during a passing moment. It is from this contrast that we fashion nearly all our commercial fantasies. It is from this contrast that delinquents, criminals, hustlers, and sportsmen draw their self-respect.

Being 'where the action is not' seems to be 'a drag' to many people according to contemporary western ideals. One must work, eat and be skilled at using the codes of 'normality'. Routine and repetition master life in the construction of 'where the action is not', as do copying and imitation. Under such circumstances the individual, absorbed

into the normality of the masses, loses contour and character, or a 'meaningful home' to return to the reasoning of Berger, Berger and Kellner (1973) as well as Meyrowitz (1985), presented earlier. However, activities at the borders protecting 'normality' will make a person visible again. This is 'where the action is' and this is where one finds the most concrete expressions of individuality and individual control.

Conditions that are required for making a timespace 'where the action is' are not specific to travelling. Goffman speaks of crime, gambling, of slot-machines in shopping arcades and of sporting events as examples of 'where the action is'. I have found the phrase quite useful in understanding the qualities considered to be high status and adventurous in backpacker travelling.

Below I will call attention to the particular qualities needed for a trip around the world to become an arena for 'action' and to qualify as adventurous, but first it is necessary to again call attention to the constructed nature of scenes for action. Many acts considered to be faithful action are really just acts, no more no less. Yet there is something 'extra' making them chancy, risky and profitable beyond the given moment. Bourdieu (1986, 1991) would have called it 'symbolic energy', or even 'magic'. Just as the sacramental wafer somehow converts from bread to flesh by people *believing* in its symbolic value, so bus-tickets, bungalows or bushwalks can be equally loaded with transformative magic, as long as one believes.

## Magicians and believers in (travel) action

Magic, in the sense Bourdieu (1986, 1991) uses it, is a metaphor to describe how crude acts, crude materials, symbols and brand names get a value beyond the sign. The magic we normally see on stage juggles with reality as when a rabbit is picked out of a hat which was previously empty, or when a woman seemingly being cut in two remains intact. It creates an illusion of something that in reality is something else.

The same characteristics apply to the magic metaphor, which refers to transformation processes within a social context. The value in a work of art, for instance, or a fashion dress does not come from visual representation or design, but as Bourdieu shows, from the magic supplied by linkage to a specific artist or a label. In this context Bourdieu (1986:122) also speaks of 'symbolic trans-substantiation' and 'social alchemy', 'which, without changing anything of the physical nature of the product, radically modifies its social quality' (my translation). When I speak of magic, I speak of a formula which somehow creates a social surplus, a symbolic value attached to a given object, image, act, place or event that transforms the crude material into something more than it physically is.

Magic is totally dependent upon collective belief. Bourdieu (1986:166) suggests that magic is 'nothing other than the power which has been granted certain people to mobilise the symbolic energy produced when the whole field functions, that is the *belief* in the game and its stakes, which the game itself produces' (my translation and

italics). Thus, it takes a common belief to make the crude act, the places, objects and signs of the journey appear to be something more than they are. In church, to return to the example in the section above, it is the magic of religion, the faith and belief in the words of a god and the bible that transform the wafer and give it a social surplus.

Tourists have their wafers too, their brand names and signs, which, supported by systems of beliefs, induce the transformation process from crudity to symbolism. 'Just as the brand name raises or even virtually constitutes the price of a perfume, so does the name of a trip's destination determine its price', claims Enzensberger (1958/1996:134) in an instructive – and critical – account of the history of tourism. However, there are more than destinations and prices involved in the 'symbolic trans-substantiation' of long-term travelling. Analysing backpacking one must think of a symbolic value rather than a price-tag attached to different destinations (brand names), since 'roughing it' on a tight budget is considered much more valuable than spending a night in a luxury hotel, regardless of how distant the hotel may be from tourist centres. Similarly, there are other components than destinations which provide a high symbolic value. Catching a train or a bus, failing in communication, having dinner with a family you do not know very well, fighting annoying mosquitoes or watching the sun settle below the horizon are activities which can be conducted almost anywhere in the world and are often carried out without much consideration. Yet, during prestigious and adventurous travel they move beyond themselves, being accredited a symbolic value much grander than their physical and visual nature. Often in adventurous travelling, the symbolic value attached seems peculiarly contradictory to the crude act. Seemingly bad encounters are transformed into good ones and vice versa. For instance, books are written filled with travel 'horror' stories about illnesses, robberies and other dangers encountered (a comprehensive example is Fraser's book *Bad Trips*, published in 1991). Dangerous bus-rides on Himalayan mountain roads become highly cherished stories in e-mails, on post-cards and in articles. On the other hand, paying extra to spend a night in a room with nice, clean sheets and air-conditioning, is a practice to be ashamed of, as it gives the adventurous character an air of non-authenticity. Evidently, the acts go through a process of 'trans-substantiation', which modifies their social quality. I will in the following focus on one of the major forms of magic in travelling permeating expectations, acts and stories of backpacking. Such magic, I will argue, stems from, as much as it constructs, power. This power, like most, relies on the faith of its advocates, that is the people who *believe* in the symbolic value supplied by the magic.

Self-evident in ascribing magic qualities to crude travel acts are the travellers themselves, who actively construct (adventurous) tales of travel. Yet, to be able to charge an act with magic they must have learnt to believe in its formulae. This is where the media so obviously enter the scene of magic construction. *Lonely Planet* guidebooks, *Rough Guides*, and travel magazines such as *Vagabond*, *Escape* or *Wanderlust*, dominate this sector, but there are other less discussed media products, which influence travellers just as they do non-travellers. Daily newspapers carry travel sections as well as different news stories from around the world. These should not be neglected as creators of travel meaning. Television relates travel-stories as well as supplying an audi-

ence with images of what it is like in other areas of the world. With very few exceptions the sources, in addition to interpreters and broadcasters of the information, are representatives of powerful people/groups/nations (see Mathiesen, 1989). The conclusion which can be drawn, as was argued in Chapter 5, is that the media are central in supplying the travellers with the belief needed to make a good story out of a crude travel act. Nevertheless, Chapter 5 also shows that the media producers and the travellers are often one and the same. Thus, travellers and travel journalists, almost exclusively defining themselves as 'westerners', construct stories for other travellers and journalists to be used, in future travels, as frames for understanding people described as 'non-westerners'. Very seldom are these stories filtered through the knowledge of the people living at tourism locations. Although these people are more knowledgeable than most about the tourism site and situation, and are affected most by it, they are generally only used as requisite in a preset story-telling. This is true not only of travel journalism but of journalism in general. Far too often the media are the megaphones for the powerful (Mathiesen, 1989).

Equally important to remember when understanding travel as acts with magic qualities, is that successful magic is possible only on one condition – a certain type of ignorance or unawareness. When speaking about magic, Bourdieu (1986:166) argues 'the question is (...) not what specific qualities distinguish the magician, nor the specific qualities distinguishing the magical operations and performances; rather, what it counts for is the foundations for collective belief, or rather the foundations for collective misunderstanding, collectively produced and collectively preserved, which is the foundation for the power the magician acquires' (my translation). Thus, magic is the silent (or silenced) foundation upon which collective belief, or misunderstanding, rests. Like in the magic show on stage, that which makes the trick work must remain untold or else the power exertion of the powerful is exposed and the show is off. The magic which supplies symbolic energy to crude acts is sometimes performed at a rather subtle level. This means that not all control and power in travelling is exerted on a conscious level but as an effect of practices performed for a variety of other reasons.

There are, not surprisingly, many magic formulas involved in making a good performance out of travel. However, to understand long-term travelling, as well as most other forms of tourism, I feel that one of these formulas which I have found rather significant to understand the symbolic value of travel (off the beaten track in particular), has been overlooked both in popular debates and in tourism research. The magic making travel so powerful as an arena for identity formation and, thus, empowerment, which I want to explore through the rest of this chapter, is 'primitivism'.

## The magic of primitivism

Modernity has spawned a monster: the hope or the expectation that everything can be pure; the expectation that if everything were pure it would be better than it actually is; and we have concealed the reality that what is better for some is almost certainly worse for others; that what is better, simpler, purer, for a few rests precariously and uncertainly upon the work and, very often, the pain and misery of others. (Law, 1994:6-7, cited in Bauman, 1995:140)

Just as religious beliefs imbue wafers with a symbolic surplus, primitivism fills the journey with much of its symbolic energy. In much research the quest for authenticity is stressed (Andersson-Cederholm, 1999; Cohen, 1979, 1988; MacCannell, 1976/1989, 1992; Meethan, 2001; Wang, 1999). Tourism, it is argued, can be understood as a reaction against a society which one experiences as controlled, constructed, fake and complex and an expression of a search for personal 'freedom', for more 'genuine', 'real' and 'predictable' contexts and social relations. While some of the earlier work on authenticity has been influenced by an objective view of authenticity as something that is actually out there to be discovered, much of the later work on tourism and authenticity acknowledges it as a social construction, which carries different meanings to different people. My view on authenticity, as presented in previous chapters, is that it fits as a 'gathering concept' encompassing all that people feel is not contrived, faked or refined. This urge to find those qualities/objects/experiences that appear to be 'real' and 'genuine' is above all a reaction against a society, which one feels is abstract and undependable and where accessibility to what goes on behind the scenes and on 'floors of production' is very limited. A discourse of authenticity is, however, not only applicable in travelling to countries regarded as foreign, remote and different. It informs trips to summer houses, farming areas or natural forests at home in addition to an endless number of every-day activities, performed to 'recontextualise', to reunite time and space and the individual with the context (for example the use of drugs, see Lalander, 2003). What makes authenticity in travelling specific to travelling is the co-presence of another discursive component, namely primitivism. I could as easily have said exoticism, but I feel that exoticism, as authenticity, fails to account for the implicit power manifestations built into discourses of travel. Exoticism directs the attention towards 'difference' and 'otherness', and honours the 'pristine', the 'paradise beaches' and 'untouched forests' (and people) which all fit very well among the favoured qualities of successful backpacking. However, primitivism accounts also for the power structures which make 'tourism' possible, not only in a physical sense but as a legitimate practice and a 'state of mind' which few seem to question. Statements and media texts analysed throughout this project suggest that in order to understand how backpacking can be such a self-evident and favourable practice, issues of power must be incorporated in the analysis. This power becomes visible if we for instance toy with the idea that the essentialist texts presented by Lonely Planet to describe groups of people in Nepal (referred to in Chapter 5) or the mocking of Thai taxi-drivers and their English skills in Vagabond (referred to in the Introduction) were instead describing groups of people living in England, the

United States or Sweden. These texts would most likely have been questioned and even indictable had they been mocking or generalising people in their own nation in the same way. Primitivism, as I will define it below, manages to account for biases and mythologies – the magic – making it possible to use confrontations with otherness as a springboard for an accentuation of the ‘western’ self.

Needless to say, however, and before developing this line of thought further, primitivism does not account for all there is to say in relation to backpacking. Far from all actions taken or all narratives told in backpacker contexts are manifestations of a primitivist discourse and not all backpackers appear to be ‘primitivists’. There are always exceptions, complexities and/or other discourses to focus on. Yet, primitivism is persistent enough in the empirical material to deserve particular attention and above all it captures, to a significant extent, the structures of thought, belief and power, which legitimise some people being seen as successful travellers while others are expected to remain in Bhattacharyya’s (1997) words, ‘tourees’, or objects in the tourism industry.

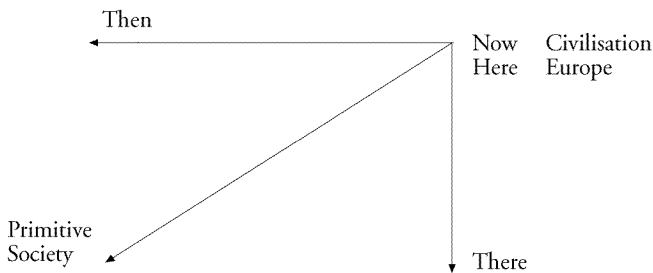
Given the sometimes violent outbursts consequential to primitivist ideas of yesterday where people were killed during colonial efforts to convert and/or civilise the (noble) ‘savages’ it is perhaps not surprising to encounter doubt when claiming primitivism to also be one of the more prevalent discourses of contemporary travelling. There is hardly ever violence in the backpacker tracks or letters written to the kings and queens of Europe proclaiming that yet another country, another people, have been conquered with armed forces. Indeed, the values supplying tourism with its popularity have become ‘neutralised’, domesticated and taken for granted. Yet, the magic of primitivism fuels many of the travel acts and makes them into desirable objects to use in successful travel stories. This contemporary primitivism is taken for granted and less outspoken than the earlier form but it is constructed around the same, or very similar qualities. Thus, while being broadly concerned with authenticity, tourism also needs ‘difference’, ‘otherness’ and the experience of time as linear to survive as a meaningful system, in the service of both healing and power. Primitivism, a discursive child of colonialism and early geographical mapping, claims Jordan (1995:282), is a ‘turning away from modernity – from the horrors and alienation of modern industrial technocratic, capitalist society... It is an embracing of the other – of the manifestly superior ways of the ‘primitives’, who are defined as living in another time and another space – for the purpose of improving the conditions of life under modernity’. As he suggests, *notions of time* are central in this construction of an other and so are *notions of space*. He continues:

In the modern West, time and space have become the property – literally – of capitalist logic and capitalist social relations. Our time is linear, precisely divisible, quantifiable. Thus we say, “Time is money!” However, there is salvation: outside of modernity, the primitivists tell us, there are Others who live in a temporal world governed by ‘natural rhythms’ and ‘unchanging traditions’ – a pristine world that is effectively ‘timeless’.

Consequently, primitivism is an engagement with that which is thought to be another time. Indeed, to make it effective, it relies on continuous reconstruction of the

time of 'others' as ahistorical, non-modern and pre-developmental. The 'old', 'petrified' times of 'others' can then be used by primitivists to experience well-being in the present and to invest in symbolic capital for the future. Notions of space serve the same purpose. In order for space to be appealing in a primitive sort of way it has to be different from the home space of the primitivist. Different symptoms of the 'malaise' of modernity, such as machines, plastic, or other signs of technology and human mastery over nature, are rendered inauthentic and polluting. This is how magical primitivism manages to convert poverty (of others) into symbolic capital (of the primitivist's self).

In addition to space having to be used in a particular way by residents, it should appear different too. The primitive beach is exotic, pristine, paradise-like and fringed by palm trees. It cannot be mistaken for a beachfront in Sweden or Northern Germany. The primitive jungle lacks wheel-chair access, public toilets and the kind of plants which remind the visitor of home. Primitivist notions of primitive time and space have one thing in common. They both belong to pre-development, to the past, to a space lost by modern man and woman. The relationship between contemporary Europe and the world of the primitive can be visualised with the following figure (idea borrowed from Fabian, 1983:27):



Difference is crucial to the model (and to the primitivist). The more different a place and a time is experienced to be, from the viewpoint of here and now, the more primitive the object appears. There is a complex and interdependent relationship between experiencing difference and the construction of identity (Bauman, 1991; Melucci, 1996, Torgovnic, 1997). The 'other' as a counter-image, a 'that-which-is-not-me', is called upon, by ambivalent cultures, to get the ordering right, framing one's own identity and normality by positioning it against that which is different. At the heart of this preoccupation with otherness lies also, paradoxically, the fascination for and interest in qualities of life experienced as hidden qualities of the self, believed to remain solid and intact among people of otherness. Thus, it is among the different others that alienated 'westerners' expect to find the repressed traits of the individual and cultural self. Primitivism is truly as much a case of association through distance as a case of distancing through association.

While a sense of identity is needed in order to be preoccupied, at all, with that which is not my/our identity, with difference, it is not certain that the meaning of difference is always the same, to everyone or at every time. This will be discussed later

in the chapter, in relation to the change from collective to individual primitivisms, but it is also important to note here, that the qualities ascribed to difference can play important roles on different levels of identity creation. The horrors or ideals of the 'other' may at one time serve to visualise one's personal identity, but at another also one's 'sub-cultural' identity, one's national identity, one's religious identity and in the case of travelling, not least one's 'western' identity.

Difference, as a fundamental principle for primitivism, must be created and recreated in language, images and texts. The qualities ascribed to the others say more about the constructor than about otherness. Steiner (1995) has appropriately suggested that in so far as there are said to be transcultural similarities found among non-western people they are the product of ethnographic fictions and not of ethnographic traits. It is, in Steiner's (1995:208) words, a 'bricolage' of images summed together from elements borrowed from various places and times. This is literally how the primitive was constructed initially. Artists, painters and illustrators who had never left their home towns worked together with writers in science, news media and literature, to illustrate stories about the life among non-Europeans. To make up for the lack of personal experience they borrowed material from previous (borrowed) images used to describe a variety of places and people. As Steiner argues (1995:208) 'this kind of ethnological bricolage often produced some rather unexpected combinations'. 19th century Africans appeared together with Hook figures<sup>73</sup> from the Sepik River in Papua New Guinea. The very same map was used to illustrate different geographical spaces. 'At the expense of ethnographic accuracy', continues Steiner, 'the illustrator created a pastiche of primitive symbols – a mixed metaphor, as it were, alluding to the universality of idolatry and paganism in the non-European world'. The images constructed were seldom questioned, as few had travelled to obtain a counter-image and the people that were portrayed presented no threat to the power of the European printers.

This art of bricolage has undoubtedly continued into present-day travelling. Notions of the primitive, waiting to be encountered during tourist activities, is even today a combination of stereotyped images taken from a variety of places and times and added together into a universal ahistorical primitive, a reasoning I touched upon in Chapter 2. It seems, according to interviews, films, television shows and travel journalism, to be possible to encounter the same 'Jones-of-otherness' everywhere in the world. People in South America, in Africa, in South East Asia are often described as childlike, (sexually) free, lazy, cute, relaxed, friendly, naive and unaware of the rest of the world.<sup>74</sup>

The constructed nature of the primitive makes him hard to situate geographically. He can be anywhere or nowhere in sight. Such is the nature of magic – it resists easy categorisation and positioning. Australia, for instance, is not known as a primitive country, yet it is home to some of the most cherished 'people' for primitivists. India on the other hand attracts travellers as a 'truly' primitive country, yet, as admitted by travellers, caters for some of the most advanced technological centres in the world. Primitivism is a construction process built on and around qualities other than national borders. It relies instead on a construction based on visual qualities, on matters

as simple as skin and hair colour, on standard of living, on choice of clothing and on poverty and seclusion in general. Further fuel to the discourses are presented by the media, such as *Lonely Planet* guidebooks (see Chapter 5) which keep certain groups of people in separate sections attributing to them a number of essential traits. It is the right mixture of qualities which makes the symbolic bricolage needed to convert an 'ordinary Thai' into an exotic other (see also Chapter 2). In Bhattacharyya's (1997:383) words it will turn middlemen (service-people) into tourees (exotic primitives worth a visit).

It is important to keep in mind that primitivism, despite the stereotypical images it creates, serves rather complex and contradictory purposes. Torgovnic (1997), for instance, demonstrates how primitivism is deeply embedded in aspects of both lacking and loathing. While always being a preoccupation with 'otherness', and with a sense of being-in-the-world thought to be passed and foreign to the 'westerner', it can express itself either as a longing for what is lost, or as a fear of certain hidden aspects of the self, thought to be naive, immature, spontaneous and chaotic. The former leads this text into a discussion concerned with primitivism (and travel) as an act of civilisation critique while the latter relates to matters of travel as civilised critique. In each case I will try to show how the specific qualities ascribed to the 'other' are linked to other much broader categories of meaning related to being in contemporary Europe (and its cultural cousins).

## Primitivism as a critique of civilisation

*Mutant Message Down Under* (...) is a unique and touching story arriving in due time. It is not too late to save our world from devastation if we realise and respect that all that is living – both plants, animals and humans – belong to the same magnificent wholeness. All live in mutual dependency. If we listen to this message our lives can become as meaningful as the lives of the Real People. (Morgan, 1995, my translation)

This citation, found on the cover of the Swedish edition of Morgan's popular book *Mutant Message Down Under*, speaks for a whole genre of literature, journalism and film preoccupied with a 'truer' and 'righter' sense of being, thought to be found in other time-spaces than that of contemporary post-industrial Europe or the United States. The 'real people' Morgan refers to are a group of people often stereotyped under the term Australian aborigines (a term heavily burdened by the 'racialising' and 'essentialising' tendencies found in much construction of 'otherness' in tourism discourse – see for instance Bhattacharyya, 1997). They are portrayed as keepers of a knowledge, which 'our' time and place are said to have lost. They are true, authentic and pure as opposed to the people of an inauthentic, fragmented and alienated western civilisation.

Undoubtedly earlier forms of primitivism – which can be traced back at least as far as the colonial quests of early 15th century sea journeys, and a little later to the birth of anthropology – contained a streak of idealisation of the 'primitive' in addition to a general disdain for its lack of development (see Flores Morador, 2001). Nev-

ertheless, it was much later, in the early 1900's that the belief in a 'purer' life among the 'primitives' settled more concretely in mainstream European societies. Images of the 'noble savage' moved from museums into art-galleries and fashionable homes of 'modern' Europe (Torgovnic, 1997). Simultaneously anthropological and ethnographic research entered bookstores and bookshelves in the homes of 'ordinary' people. This happened, not surprisingly, while Europe and its cultural cousins such as the United States were adapting to and coping with all aspects of modern industrial development, some of which would create a sense of loss and deprivation. Non-hierarchical relationships, relationships tied in time and space, control of nearby surroundings, self-evident answers to obvious questions, unity and meaningfulness within the collective were all experiences and conditions becoming scarce. Being, for many in modern Europe, became a matter of paid labour, of identity construction and abstract social relationships ranging over time and space (Asplund, 1987a; Bauman, 1995; Giddens, 1990, 1991; Simmel, 1911/1971 among others). These qualities, deemed a slow but sure death in 'our' time and space, were, instead, ascribed to communities of 'otherness'.

Encounters with 'otherness' have thereby come to be seen as a healing experience for people scarred or hurt by an unfriendly civilisation development. It offers (constructed) people, places and time-zones thought to hold those qualities which the 'development' and modernity has left behind, or to use Marx's (1867/1967) terms, which the Juggernaut has crushed in its implacable march forward. Travellers at the turn of the millennium still hope to gain qualities they feel are lost or at least are very scarce in their home environments. The notion, so often expressed in interviews and journalistic texts, of going back in time, to a time standing still and to a people of no change (and no hope), is an expression of such an idealising primitivism (see also Jordan, 1995). The home-societies' focus on accomplishments, 'doing' as opposed to 'being', hectic lifestyles, schedules, punctuality, clocks and development are all under the magnifying glass in such statements. Consequently, the (often essentialist) qualities ascribed to the people at a destination – such as social, spontaneous, lazy, relaxed and childlike – are the very qualities the tourist wants to achieve during the journey, as these inner qualities are experienced as repressed at home. The poverty of the same people, the living in leaf-huts, on earth floors and the dependence upon what the household produces can similarly be interpreted as a critique of materialism and ownership – which some of the travellers have expressed openly.

However, it is not only the specificity in the lives of the others that is meaningful and symbolic here. Rather, this specificity serves as a travellers' stage, offering the requisite 'control', 'time and space reembedding' and 'foreseeable social relations' so scarce in contemporary post-industrial Europe. When travellers speak of strong emotional and bodily sensations in relation to time standing still (Chapter 2), of growing self-esteem after facing – and conquering – risks (Chapter 3 and 4), they are harvesting their travel rewards. Primitivism therefore not only supplies believers with objects of interest but also with subjective individual experiences thought to heal an alienated individual. The stereotype character ascribed to the primitive life of the 'other' is magically transcendental as it moves from otherness to 'self'. By this I mean that the

meaning of poverty alters profoundly once it is transferred from the primitive to the primitivist. The poverty of the other becomes a symbol of an enriched 'western' self. In this instance, the marriage between primitivism and authenticity is obvious. When the life of the primitive other spills over to the civilised traveller it is converted into a traveller's authenticity.

Having said that, in order to retain the opportunity to escape from civilisation a remaining difference needs to be held intact. Stories need to be (re)created to cater for those in need of experiencing all the 'goodies' of non-civilisation. These stories travel through travellers' tales, in conversations, in books, in magazines, in newspapers, radio and television. These work like sprinklers of discursive messages, often so powerful that people at the destination are not interpreted as the complex individuals they are but as simple, stereotyped constructs – and almost always as the 'other'. Most importantly, the very qualities ascribed to people of otherness, in order to be able to use their homelands as spaces for civilisation escape, are often the very same qualities that the 'western' discourses feed on to place the 'other' in an inferior position, as people of no history and no time (see also Flores Morador, 2001). Paradoxically the critique of civilisation is also part and parcel of a 'civilised' critique. Primitivism as civilised critique can really not be separated from primitivism as a critique of civilisation. Only for the sake of clarity in arguments have I separated the two under different headings.

### **Primitivism as civilised critique**

First of all, in using the term 'civilised critique' I have not adopted a view of the destination countries as uncivilised or somehow marginalised or set aside from the developments, changes and historical processes influencing all societies in a world of globalised economic and social interactions. Modernity, to the extent that the term actually manages to encompass an objective reality, takes place outside Europe and the United States too. People all over the world experience the effects of time and space disembedding, complex and abstract social relations and other complexities. Similarly, people all over the world find areas of time and space re-embedding, of dwelling and being here and now (see Adam, 1990, 1995; Davies, 1990). Instead, the term civilised critique tries to frame the mythologies or discourses used in the construction of an inferior otherness.

While most people are preoccupied with the 'primitive' as a desirable object, its function as a healing discourse cannot be fulfilled without placing the 'other' in an inferior position. This 'racist' character built into primitivism belongs to the more unconscious dimensions of the western 'gaze' (Jordan, 1995) and is an expression of an evolutionist notion. Just as the characters attributed to the 'other' are held as desirable in discourses of primitivism, they are characterised as traits, which 'we', the 'western' travellers, have left behind us on the road through development and to progress. As I argued in Chapter 2 and above, this theory of (modern and social) evolution and linear thinking is still most prominent in contemporary post-industrial

Europe and its cultural cousins, for instance the United States and Australia, (although it most certainly exists in most parts of the world). While a number of theorists have suggested that the time of linear, sequential, thinking is soon to be a thing of the past due to the effects of, among other things, information technological development on a global scale (see for instance Bauman, 2000) I have seen little evidence of a decline in evolutionary thought in this research project. Rather, both media and travellers often refer to the 'others' at destination as people having stayed behind in time and development. Some testimonies place them in the 'stone age', others in a permanent state of 'childhood' where 'locals' are described as 'playful', 'childlike' or 'cute'. Yet others link permanent residents to (a pre-civilised) space by referring to them as 'jungle-people' or 'bush-people', who on some occasions do not 'understand any better' (see Chapter 2/Elsrud, 1998). Either way, as stone-age people, children or jungle people they are constructed as a collective who have not yet developed fully, as retarded in 'our' history of development.

The same traveller or travel article can change from a celebration of the simple life of the 'locals' to mocking their ability to think, speak or be rational. While there are certainly exceptions among interviewees as well as media texts, the message remains that the 'other' of highly prestigious tourism 'still' have not managed to progress and deserve friendly and patronising advice from 'westerners'. In addition, judgements are passed with ease and naturalness. Like Bhattacharyya (1997), I have found *Lonely Planet* guidebooks, used by so many long-term travellers, to be compelling examples of this self-confidence. People of otherness are written in and out of the history of backpacking according to their usefulness as exotic – and primitive – others or as service-people (Chapter 5). While people at travel destinations are often admired at a conscious and explicit level, the 'unconscious' message, the pattern of information and the self-confident 'construction' of places and people, frequently tell a story of disrespect for people at the destination.

Arguably, the media, including television, magazines and other literary and journalistic productions, have a central role in the continuous primitivist trend and construction of a stereotyped other. In line with Fürsich and Kavoori (2001) I have found the products of travel journalists to be particularly stereotyping. Travellers in person often have a more negotiating approach to other places and people although they too often present rather stereotypical images of a 'lesser' world and 'otherness'. If the travellers are believers in the magic of primitivism, the media are most certainly supplying them with most of their magic formulas needed to supply the symbolic energy. I have argued, in Chapter 5, for a number of reasons as to why travel media seem to take the lead in mythology production. Media stereotyping of 'otherness' may partly be due to the restrictions placed upon media presentations, due to pure form matters, such as restricted spaces for text and image presentations and a lack of continuity between different presentations, in time as well as space. The image of the 'other' must inevitably become simplified and fragmented. However, this does not explain why it is acceptable to portray the 'other' as belonging to a 'lesser' world, or in mocking and ironic ways. This type of media mythology is, I have suggested, a consequence of profit seeking, of creating a message that will please both readers/

viewers and owners. Under such circumstances it is safest to print the expected – namely that of the primitive other, which is a familiar story. It is safe too, as the travel media, as opposed to many other types of media, do not risk being faced with critique from their objects. While the whole world is actually changing it seems the media to a large extent – and its users to a fairly large extent – continue to petrify and dichotomise stereotypes through the magic formulas embedded in an old colonial discourse. While such practice remains a case of power exertion through ‘writing the other’, I suggest the purposes it serves have altered.

### **Primitivism serving the individual**

*I beg your Highnesses to hold me in your protection; and I remain, praying our Lord God for your Highnesses' lives and the increase of much greater States.*<sup>75</sup>

(Columbus, 1494)

A reading of colonial literature, of writings on early science, mapping and travelling, makes it rather obvious that framing and defining ‘the primitive’ was done in the service of some common good – a nation, a king and/or a christian god (see Flores Morador, 2001). Although some of the writers undeniably made a name for themselves, colonial primitivism supplied material and evidence to discourses on supreme European nations, monarchies and religions. Primitive others were ‘encountered’, defined and reshaped through killing or ‘civilising’, in the name of a christianity and science that were white, European and masculine. It is by no means surprising that feminine attributes, believed to be inferior, were ascribed to both mapped land and people, regardless of gender, as a degradation of the encountered was necessary to justify the violent practice of geographical mapping and colonisation (see Rose, 1993).<sup>76</sup>

The primitivism of yesteryear, expressed to empower a masculine collective, has since undergone some changes. Although it is possible to find stereotyping messages in contemporary travel stories that are very similar to those presented in 15th century early scientific writing (see Flores Morador, 2001) their purposes appear to have altered. Like the same piece of music being used over time (and space) and for different purposes in relation to social movements (Eyerman and Jamison, 1998), it seems that the ‘song of primitivism’ can be played repeatedly but for a variety of audiences experiencing a variety of sensations. It seems that the primitivism of today works less in favour of the collective and more to boost the individual.

Before addressing this matter further I would like to stress that there still are, undoubtedly, strong connections to be made between the construction of a primitive other and construction of a collective. While I initially in this research project tried to avoid the concept ‘western’, I found the task impossible since ‘western’ is indeed a construction which is very much alive both in social theory and in the minds of trav-

ellers. Rather than placing the term where it belongs – in a burial place for worn-out linguistic mind deceivers – I have found it appropriate on recurring occasions. A ‘western’ identity, as a constructed pole in an equally constructed binary division of the world, is still at stake in travelling. Although people from all over the world travel as tourists, to a greater or lesser extent given their economic conditions and interests (see Alneng, 2002, forthcoming), and although no biological or geographical border exists between the west and elsewhere, reality is still being altered. While few travellers seem to take much notice of different nationalities or refer to a common European identity, and, with the odd exceptions, even openly suggest that there are no differences among travellers, the construction of a ‘western’ collective has survived the years of historical change. Statements suggesting that the traveller was the ‘only’ one there or the ‘first’ one there, or ‘all by myself’ (Chapter 2 and 3) may be naive and innocent expressions of a highly valued exclusivity, of feelings of being – and being special – but at the same time they are loaded with binary thinking, with ranking and exclusion. In this case they serve a common western collective and help to form a western identity. While the decline of the importance ascribed to nations is an expected sign of contemporary globalising tendencies, the strong emphasis on ‘westernness’ indicates that a need to polarise and order remains intact.

In addition to fuelling a construction of a western identity, primitivist ideas in travelling are central to the construction of individual identities. With her faith in primitivism a traveller separates herself not only from the others of ‘otherness’ but also from the ‘other’ of her own ‘cultural group’. This is what happens when primitivism marries individualism. Undoubtedly, individualism and a search for self-identity is one of the major expressions of contemporary life in the countries most travellers count as home, following from, as I have earlier argued, the disembedding of time and space and of social relations (see for example Bauman, 1991, 1995; Giddens, 1991; Melucci, 1996; Simmel, 1911/1971). Primitivism creates, accentuates and recycles the difference in the ‘other’, making it appropriate in a traveller’s search for arenas of individual self-expression. Being ‘alone’ among the ‘other’ and living like the ‘other’ instead of like ‘us’ is, in addition to being a rapprochement, experienced as an effective form of visualising the self. I have found expressions of, and a search for, individualism of major importance to most travellers, and travel writers. The discourse of primitivism accounts for the effectiveness of individual self-expression. This is also where the tragedy of individualism can be viewed in all its clarity. As Simmel (1911/1971) has noted, individualism becomes a form as soon as many individuals have made it their religion. Economic growth and democratic tendencies in tourism have made it possible for more and more people to travel. Simultaneously the tributes to independent travelling have become mass-spread due to the obvious success of travel magazines, literature and other media, including the Internet. Primitivism is thereby practiced by larger and larger numbers of independence-stating travellers, naturally leading to congregations of travellers in places expected to be ‘primitive’ and ‘untouched’. The institutionalisation of independent travelling is indeed a worry to many travellers, but not much in this project has pointed towards a

decline in the search for the primitive and for the individualism thought to remunerate the faithful.

Thus, primitivism becomes manifested on a day-to-day basis, not only through the acts of individuals but also as an investment for the individuals. There is undoubtedly a positive connection between *amount of primitivism* and *amount of symbolic capital* for the individual and this brings the story back to 'where the action is' and to adventurism. The more primitive a space or a people are portrayed, and the more primitive the travel conditions of the individual traveller are, the more likely it is that the traveller will succeed in creating an adventurous, experienced and highly esteemed identity. Primitivism has thereby become a case of symbolic ordering not only between a pre-designed 'us' and an 'other' but also between individuals seemingly belonging to the same community. By appropriating primitive objects, through reading, writing, eating and courting the 'other', one can invest in an adventurous identity. Primitive objects being, as they are constructed, rather unpredictable, chaotic and different, constitute perfect settings for 'where the action is'. Nevertheless an adventurer never becomes 'primitive'. Inoculated as they are, by the choice to come and go at their own speed, and by being in charge of the construction process, adventurers seeking 'primitive hosts' instead become those who managed the life of the 'primitive'. Undeniably long-term travelling in what is termed 'poor', 'third world' and 'peripheral areas' of the world, is a very obvious case of individual manifestation of primitivism, of staging, performing and re-writing a powerful structure of thought.

However, the matter is much more complex than I have sketched hitherto. A perfect performance while travelling may not be successful upon home-coming. Or it may not even be seen as such among fellow travellers. There is certainly an uneasy relationship between womanhood, adventurism and primitivism (see also Chapter 4).

### *Masculine individualised primitivism*

The magical effect of primitivism when it comes to performing adventure acts and stories is sometimes less linked to the nature of the setting and more to the nature of the actor. The focus hitherto, based on what the travellers are influenced by, has indicated that all modes, all aspects of travelling can be used and constructed in the same way by all travellers. This is not the case. The magic just does not work for some the way it does for others as I have tried to show in Chapter 4. Not all action is appreciated. This can be due to bad handling, for instance through being too aggressive, too timorous or wrongly informed during the manifestation of primitivist ideas. It can, however, also be due to circumstances completely beyond one's own control such as the accreditation of different normality frames. The normality on offer by society is not the same for everyone. For instance, what is seen as normal for the men is not normal for the women and vice versa. This is undoubtedly also the case in backpacking, and particularly when it comes to adventure construction.

Interviewed women have found their action being ridiculed or ignored upon homecoming. Some of them told of resistance from friends and family when they de-

cided to travel, often on the grounds of the fact that they were women. One of them felt her brother, who had made a similar journey earlier, had encountered no such resistance from friends and family. None of the interviewed men had encountered problems, apart from one who left a child (and ex-wife) behind. Desforges (2000) also mentions the possibility that women may have a harder time using their journey as symbolic capital in situations at home, consequently feeling they have to avoid talking about the journey in order not to scare potential partners or employers. In addition, articles and books are still written portraying travelling women as oddities, particularly brave or exceptions to the rules (see Chapter 4 in addition to Bond, 1995, 1996; Davidson, 1980/1998; Jansz and Davies, 1995; Zepatos, 1996). It seems as if it is harder to get the magic of primitivism to work for them. In order to understand why, one needs to look at the contradictive discourses in operation in relation to adventurous backpacking.

First of all, and as noted above, the ideas of primitivism were initially intrinsic to a christian, white, European, masculine world-view. Both men and women at the destination were ascribed feminine characteristics – and particularly weaknesses – in addition to the land being a ‘she-land’, a ‘virgin’ soil with a hot ‘interior’ waiting to be ‘penetrated’ (see for example Blunt and Rose, 1994; Mills, 1991; Rose, 1993). Another link between (a constructed) femininity and primitivism is presented by Felski (1995), who in her presentation of gendered assumptions within social theory finds that for instance Simmel, Lacan and Freud have all placed women in an ahistorical time and space, a ‘wholeness’ outside the complexities of culture. The traits ascribed to women are identical to those ascribed to primitive people.

The linkage remains in contemporary travelling. The most popular photographic image in travel press seems to be that of the passive woman (see Bhattacharyya, 1997) and at least Swedish travel magazines still use terms such as ‘virginity’ and ‘penetration’ in describing encounters with areas ‘unexplored’ by previous tourists. The heritage remains, although it may not be manifested in a conscious act but is displayed more as an unconscious adherence to a taken-for-granted norm. Yet, as a powerful discourse it is real in its consequences. Permanent residents continue to be portrayed as passive and female giving the image of a feminine, lazy and non-progressive life in a distant primitive country. Further, it causes identification problems for travelling women, normally being the ‘other’ in relation to the dominant discourses of home. Not only must travelling women find a way to position themselves in relation to a story based upon masculine exploitation of a female destination, they must also come to terms with the fact that their acts, as the ‘other’ encountering other ‘others’, may be interpreted very differently by an audience than if they had been men (see Chapter 4).

Adding to these difficulties of positioning and interpreting women travellers is the adventure discourse, being the ‘twin of primitivism’ in travelling. Women, seeking adventure through encounters with what the travel culture describes as ‘the primitive’, usually also experience that this traditional and stubborn discourse is reserved for men. Some light can be shed on this problem by looking at some theorising of the past. Berger (1962:41) cited in Goffman (1967:267) writes:

Consider the strain on our moral vocabulary if it were asked to produce heroic myths of accountants, computer programmers, and personnel executives. We prefer cowboys, detectives, bull fighters, and sports-car racers, because these types embody the virtues which our moral vocabulary is equipped to celebrate: individual achievement, exploits, and prowess<sup>77</sup>.

Backpacking, as has been obvious through this research project, is more often than not categorised as a heroic practice rather than as a dwelling on the boring existence of clerks, accountants and subway commuters at home. Its celebration of primitive encounters and adventure stories places it in the categories mentioned by Berger above, as an individual achievement (of initiative, movement and accomplishment), an exploitation (of places and the exotic other) carried out with prowess (in mastering uncertainty and risks with coolness). Thus, it can be a successful route to the type of heroism Berger mentions. However, it takes more than an individual achievement in general to become a hero. Millions of individuals achieve great things every day: giving birth, keeping their families alive on little means, conquering illnesses, resisting oppression from partners, superiors at work or unjust governments and discourses. But their acts, regardless of the amount of bravery and strength displayed, are considered neither as achievements, nor as individual expressions. Thus, they are hardly ever acknowledged as particularly heroic.

Noteworthy, but not surprising, is the strong connection in theory, as well as in everyday life, between the heroic life and the male character. In the citation above the author portrays a clear awareness of the link between (the mythology of) heroism and stereotype masculine characters such as cowboys and bull fighters, but explains this by connecting these types to the 'virtues' our culture is 'equipped to celebrate' – individual achievement, exploits and bravery. However, we need to remember that what is considered individual achievement is a construction too. Why do cowboys and bullfighters embody individual achievement while a nurse, or a doctor, saving a person's life while risking contamination do not? Is fighting one's own or others' illnesses or feeding a poor family not an individual achievement or an act of bravery? Rather than claiming that our culture(s) celebrate(s) individual achievement (exploit and bravery), as Berger does in the citation above, it should be claimed that our culture(s) celebrate(s) those individual achievements that are (believed to be) practiced by men. Clearly, masculinity is one of the magic formulas of bullfighting just as it is of certain types of travelling, such as adventurous backpacking.

One way to understand this 'natural' connection between masculinity and (brave) individual achievement is found in the matter of choice. Often, but not always, what is seen as individual achievement, exploitive and brave, rests upon a foundation of 'free choice'. The idea of a free choice is, claims for instance Simmel (1911/1971), one of the conditions for individualism. When a person is able to step outside the structure (society, an institution or a discursive frame), view it from the margins or the outside and indeed experience that she has done so, she also becomes self-reflexive, an object of her own imagination and thoughts. Choices and free time are qualities women, in reality and in the past, have had less of, making the connection between masculinity and individual achievement self-evident and taken for granted.<sup>78</sup> One chooses to chase bulls, but not to chase bargains when stocking up on food, to

start wars but not to fend off its bombs and rapists, to climb mountains but not to deliver babies. Heroism, more often than not, thrives on stories about the heroes' choice even in circumstances brought about by an outer force, as when men are said to step aside to let women and children climb into life-boats first while the ship is slowly sinking.

Because these individual achievements are constructed as masculine, often much more so than they in fact are in real life, females embracing them strike us as odd, unusual and as a deviation from the codes of gender (Mills, 1991). This actually excludes women in general from the (adventure or hero) discourses more than it does from an adventurous reality and contributes to a remaining notion that women are per definition different from men. Evidently, what is constructed becomes true in its effects (see Barker and Galasiński, 2001; Jenkins, 1997). Accordingly, women, even in large numbers, can enter into a field described as masculine without their presence being noted or acknowledged, other than as deviant behaviour. Travelling women still have trouble being seen as individuals. While indeed travelling in a fashion similar to any other (male) individual, their acts, in being interpreted as female and deemed 'better' or 'worse' than normal (male) travelling by the media and in the spoken travel discourse, female efforts become sexualised instead of individualised. The individual act becomes, instead, a sign of gender peculiarities. Inevitably, the trouble in making an interpretation of the acts of travelling women that is not contradictive, not only falls upon an audience but also the adventurous woman. What stance is she supposed to take in experiencing the incompatibility of characteristics ascribed to her gender and the discourses of adventure travelling? I have presented four responses to this clash between discourses in Chapter 4 – tomboy narratives, emancipative narratives, non-adventurous narratives and ironic narratives – but these are as much ideal types as they fail to encompass many varied responses and complexities. Mills (1991) has done much to increase an awareness of the complexities in women travel writing of the 19th and 20th century. She successfully shows how women are forced to balance between different discourses, but also how they often negotiate between actual acts and the meanings ascribed to them depending on their gender. She shows, additionally, how women, while in some ways being allowed by their discursive 'scripts' to interact closer with 'otherness', in other ways take part in the reproduction of discourses on a superior 'western' people and way of life. Her reasoning applies to this research project too in that there has been no possible way to describe a 'female' way of travelling. There appear no unambiguous images of what a woman traveller is. She remains, like male travellers, an individual, relating in different ways to the different discourses available. It is, indeed, the discourses, the value-ridden structures of thought – and not the summing up of individuals – that answer our sociological curiosity concerning commonalities, tendencies and 'trends' and help us to structure our stories.

Denying women their individuality, as well as their presence in arenas constructed as masculine has some serious and universal consequences, in that women are being robbed of their share of historical relevance as anything other than objects and male belongings. Often being ignored, but as a collective invading the fields of fashion and

consumption, the much more highly esteemed public arenas of the market, business, politics, and indeed travel are left to the men (see Felski, 1995). This is a problem of a rather complex nature, not only facing women but also other groups in society excluded from more powerful arenas. The construction of ethnicity – and the placing of some groups of individuals, but not others, in this category – is important for the continuous repression of immigrants in, for instance, Europe as well as of ‘others’ at tourist destinations (see, for instance, Eade and Allen, 1999; Jenkins, 1997). Likewise class, as a rather dull tool in framing people according to cultural, economic and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984), affects the way in which acts of individuals are stereotyped and controlled. For best results in any research project, an awareness of and an interest in the interdependence of all three construction-sites – gender, age and class – is needed (de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari, 2002). While claiming, for instance, that women are accessing the travel room in large numbers it should be remembered, and addressed, that the practice is still predominantly middle class and ‘white’. The signs are obvious. Some guesthouses in the Khao San Road area in Bangkok carried signs saying ‘no blacks or Thais’ allowed upstairs or in the rooms, and not many of the whites at least seemed to object, as the guesthouses were often full. Many women and men in Sweden, England or the United States will never leave their home countries, as they will never be able to save enough money – or find the necessary motivation – to be able to buy a ticket. These aspects of long-term travelling deserve more attention than given in this research project but at least these shortcomings have been declared in Chapter 1.

Nevertheless, denying women their individuality and their place as actors (rather than objects) in historical development, including the performance of travel, has, as Felski (1995) convincingly displays, consequences on a general and universal level. Being excluded from historical processes also means being excluded from being given credit as well as responsibility for the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ within human development. Denying women credit and responsibility is one of the conditions that contributes to a continuation of referring to them as the weaker sex.

## Further outlooks: globalisation on old scripts

There are many levels to account for in any qualitative research project. Contradictions are found as often and as surely as answers, tendencies and indications that unite. In this chapter I have pursued at least three tasks, one being to link previous chapters in an overlapping discussion, another to do this by taking a rather critical standpoint in relation to the topic, and a third to also – while pointing out the links – visualise the contradictions and complexities. Through approaching the previous chapters, the interviews and the travel texts from a point of view of power exertion the complexities are hard to overlook. This is equally true when asking if gender matters to the outcome. In the end a complex web of similarities and contradictions ap-

pear, making a neat and tidy conclusion all the more impossible. Instead I find that this research has left me to account for the complexities rather providing any simple, straightforward interpretations.

Yet, when turning the perspective away from individual responses to the structures, there are some overlapping and compelling patterns that have survived all the way through the critical (re)examinations of a full research process. One rather paradoxical and intriguing interpretation of the backpacker phenomenon comes from its relation to globalisation. Almost as a matter of course an increased voluntary (and indeed involuntary) travelling is described in books, in academic course descriptions and in travel media as an expression of an increasing globalisation. The development of new and advanced machinery and technology – for instance high-speed transport devices, fibre-optic cables, electronic terminals, credit cards – have had a compressing effect on both time and space. Their mass-production has made it possible for larger and larger numbers of quite affluent groups of people to become tourists. These tourists are, simultaneously and additionally, consumers of the globalised media industry supplying images on a global scale and on a regular basis. It is often argued that globalisation carries with it the seeds of increased understanding, of more interaction between different cultures around the globe, of an increase in shared values and of a global instead of national concern among the people of the world. Travellers appear to be spearheads in this development in that they transcend former borders, establish new links between ‘selves’ and ‘others’, seldom seem to pay much notice to the nationalities of other travellers and so forth. Undoubtedly too, in backpacking, there are signs of a longing for less rigid structures and of a questioning of the previously taken for granted values. Styles, experiences, music, artefacts are supplied to be consumed on a global marketplace allowing for cultural specifics to become ‘multicultural’, ‘mixed’ and ‘stirred’ into new global constructions. The situation facilitates a sharing of experiences between different communities and individuals around the globe, which could lead to increased understanding and notions of a ‘world-citizenship’. Undoubtedly, the ‘life-world’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1966/1991; Schutz, 1970), has both widened and deepened, as Jenkins (1997) points out. From the perspective of identity construction as a reflexive project there are all the more options to choose from in the ongoing process of (re)building a coherent yet developing sense of self. Backpacking is in this case just another arena of global consumption where abundant lifestyles, ‘ethnic’ particulars, musical tastes and other identity components seem to be available on a much larger scale than previously, waiting to be chosen by individuals on identity quests.

However, in line with Jenkins (1997), I feel that the most drastic change is of a quantitative rather than qualitative nature. The notions, values and expectations now carried around by European travellers on a global arena seem to still belong to what is sometimes referred to as ‘modernity’ – a timespace where the imaginations of ‘hermetically bounded groups’ are still being constructed. The magic of primitivism still works as the discourses investigated in this project have shown quite convincingly. Thus, a promising situation of increased global social intercourse is opposed by counterproductive forces. Rather than dissolving borders and questioning differences

and stereotypes, the magic of primitivism (re)makes them, often making travelling appear repressive rather than regressive, conservative rather than revolutionary.

While some qualities inherent to globalisation tend to shrink both time and distance, possibly even give rise to notions of a geographical and historical death (Bauman, 1998; Fukuyama, 1992; O'Brien, 1992) long-term adventurous travelling appears, from the perspective presented above, as its adverse reaction. Bauman (1998) writes that there was a time when the contradictions between inside and outside, here and there, close and far away indicated what was familiar, safe and controllable. The order of life was moulded around notions of near and far away, and within closely coherent communities. These were the times before the controllable and concrete relations in *gemeinschaft* had been substituted, at least to some extent, by uncontrollable and abstract relations in a modern *gesellschaft* (Asplund, 1991; Tönnies, 1887/1979). These also appear to be the contemporary times of backpacking, particularly informing the magic of primitivism, which is so central to off-the-beaten track and adventurous travelling. Individual backpacking – adventurous style – is constructed around qualities that oppose notions resulting from globalisation. Backpacking, adventurous style, offers time and space recontextualisation. Its preference for slow-moving transportation, long stays, eating and living with the 'locals', for strenuous effort, hard work and direct and visible results is perhaps even a direct reaction to the uncertainty, risk-consciousness and grandeur of globalisation. So it happens that a phenomenon acted out in an oppositional manner on the individual level, counteracts itself and feeds into that which it opposes on a structural level.

Obviously one needs to differentiate between structural globalisation tendencies and the notions belonging to 'globalism'. By this I mean that it is not self-evident that an increase in travelling and in global intercourse leads to an increased belief in a 'world society'. The question of whether a sense of a real world society exists can, claims Beck (2000:10), only be answered through being 'empirically turned into the question of how, and to what extent, people and cultures around the world relate to one another in their differences, and to what extent this self-perception of world society is relevant to how they behave'. While there is no doubt that long-term travelling is a practice that can render both strength, emancipation and 'meaningfulness' to its practitioners, it appears in this research project that the unanticipated structural consequences both continue to be constructed upon and to construct rather uneven structural conditions. The survival of the magic of primitivism (and of 'authenticism' and 'exoticism'), almost as old as overseas travel itself, allows only hierarchical arrangements. The primitives are okay, if they remain in time and place.<sup>79</sup> They must accept being constructed over and over again as inferior curiosities in order to suit and feed into a 'western' discourse of strong identity construction as something most successfully practiced outside or along the margins of one's own society.

Just as this contradictory relationship between the purpose of individual action and the structural outcome becomes logical and understandable through the magic of primitivism, the channels for the teaching of magic formulas become evident in reading travel media. Again it seems that it is, above all, the quantity that has changed. Swedish *Vagabond* seems to have increased its places of interest (as well as

its potential readers) and *Lonely Planet Publications* claim to reach every corner of the world with their 650 guidebooks, some of them published in 14 different languages.<sup>80</sup> Yet, most of their contents are produced by 'western' travellers/writers/discourses turning the information into a body of mythology where the 'west' defines the 'rest'.

Idealistically there might be a potential in the new techniques inherent in globalisation. The media, which in this research project have appeared as the main carriers of much of the magic formulas of travelling, could undoubtedly draw from the opportunities presented by information technology and all opportunities for social interaction over time and space. With such an intimate relationship as they have with their readers, informing tourists on the when, where, how and who of backpacking, they could have the potential to actually influence the construction processes in travelling. They could, given the technology on offer, make the perspective of the 'others' available to travellers on a much larger scale, supplying not only an increase in quantity but also a change in the quality of the information. There are no physical or technological restrictions to stop them from setting up offices in distant places and/or recruiting writers locally who can supply the travel media market with alternative descriptions of life at tourist destinations.

However, when reflecting upon structural circumstances other than those of a physical and technological nature, such developments seem far-fetched. The discourses of travel, where we also find the persistent belief in travel and tourism as an opportunity to encounter a primitive existence, prevent an incorporation of alternative descriptions. To strip travel narratives of their primitivism would be to rock the very foundation of backpacking (and other forms of tourism) itself. Dichotomies of 'modern/primitive, work/leisure, ordinary/extra-ordinary, us/them, guests/hosts, west/rest, home/elsewhere, now/elsewhen' (Alneng, 2002:137), are vital in making tourism from 'west to the rest' into a popular pastime and a base for favourable identity construction. Travel descriptions such as the *Lonely Planet* guidebooks, *Vagabond*, *Wanderlust* and *Escape* supply the travel market with the constructions, the narratives, needed to sustain the belief in a true otherness at tourism destinations. If they did not they would risk undermining the very (tourism) market they need to make a living. Fortunately for the media (and other agents within the tourism industry), they have a large and willing horde of idealistic 'employees' working for them – the travellers. Enzensberger (1958/1996:134) suggests:

The last stage of the tourist endeavour is the return, which turns the tourists themselves into the attraction. It is not enough to experience what ideology has sold as the pristine far away – one also has to publicize it. Those who stayed at home demand that the adventures be recounted. (...) Today's tourists (...) only proclaim what everybody already knows. Their report serves to bolster not only the image of the tourist but also that of the organizers of the trip to whom they had entrusted themselves. Tourism is that industry whose production is identical to its advertisement: its consumers are at the same time its employees.

Enzensberger above may be speaking of charter tourists, but the circular and mediated mythology process he suggests, is evident in the backpacker context too. Back-

packers are both readers and writers of travel texts, listeners and narrators of travel stories. Like tourists before them, they have learnt what to look for, and how to convert travel experiences to stories-on-demand upon homecoming. In such a way they become ambassadors of the very societies they often claim to have 'escaped' through their long-term journey and of the primitivist notions that are needed in order to make travelling into a powerful identity statement.

If dominant discourses within travelling portrayed the 'other' as a 'self', as that which is similar to a travelling 'us', and if people in travel destinations – in India, Thailand, Nepal and elsewhere – were described as 'stressed', 'modern', 'future-oriented' fellow beings in a complex world, potentially some of the urge to take time and make journeys would be lost. This is something deserving more attention, not only from the producers of travel and tourism guides, but also from researchers who take tourism for granted. It may be one of the largest industries in the world and it may potentially bring prosperity and better financial and social circumstances to places and people, but, nevertheless, it rests upon unequal access to the global supply of time, space and capital. And it gets its legitimacy through an ongoing construction process where (the notion of) 'the west' defines the 'rest'.



# Notes

- 1 The concepts west or western can, according to rules on language, be written with or without a capital w. My choice, to write with a lower-case w, is not simply the result of tossing a coin but consciously chosen to indicate the constructed nature of the area the word tries to encircle. While names of countries are initiated by capital letters, the 'west' is by no means a country or a group of countries, and should not be mistaken as such. However, some journals prefer the capitalised version and this is accommodated in some of the chapters in this book, being copies of their published originals.
- 2 Statements have been found either at the SVT (Swedish Public Service Television) homepage, <http://svt.se/svt/jsp/Crosslink.jsp?d=1981> (December 2, 2003) or in narratives during the actual television show.
- 3 In my work I refer to travellers as females (her, she) or in a genderless plural form (they, them). This is a matter of preference, indicating that I am aware that women travel just as much as men, that my focus on gender in this work calls for it and that the normative 'he' when referring to individuals needs to be questioned (see Cameron, 1998).
- 4 It is quite proper to use the word *themselves* when describing a reflexive pronoun in singular. Rather than being forced to choose between genders – as in using *himself* or *herself* – when referring back to 'people', 'individual', 'person' as so forth, I prefer to support those linguistic changes which move beyond this grammatical and linguistic gender division. The term *themselves* in the context I use it, is now listed in *Collins COBUILD English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (2001), which I assume accounts for its accuracy. See Cameron (1998) for a thorough account on how language can be altered to accommodate both genders.
- 5 However, a footnote has also been added to chapter 2 and chapter 3 has for the sake of consistency and readability been adjusted slightly, from American to British English, as *travelers* and *traveling* have received an additional l.

## C H A P T E R I

- 6 I am certainly not the only PhD student wrestling with the language of academia. I recommend a reading of Widerberg (1995) who recalls her dissertation writing as a period of being imprisoned in the language of somebody else. Her writing made it possible for me to put into words the unease I felt in trying, among other things, to exclude myself from the text by using third person singular when referring to myself.
- 7 Quotes without clear references are interesting matters. After months of searching for the exact references to the stated quote by Jack Kerouac I have come to the conclusion that the origins of it must remain a secret. The quote is vividly spread over the Internet but not even a number of contacted researchers into the life and achievements of Jack Kerouac are able to locate the original. A similar problem is at hand elsewhere in this book where I make references to a Kirkegaard quote in an American travel magazine. When trying to trace its origins I was finally helped by an expert on the writings of Kirkegaard who was aware of the quote's popularity but also of the fact that it did not exist in those exact words in any of Kirkegaard's texts. For my purposes, however, the contents of these quotes are more important than who said them, when and where.
- 8 For those who wish to deepen their knowledge about narrative analysis, yet find themselves lacking in time and concentration, Kohler Riessman's account of the developing and ongoing work within the field of narrative analysis is very informative and distinct.
- 9 The concepts hegemony and hegemonic suggest a perspective on cultures and discourses as dynamic and negotiating. In Connell's (1995:77) interpretation of Gramsci's (1971) arguments, hege-

mony refers to the ‘cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life. At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted’. Therefore I regard dominant discourses and practices at any given time and space not as static, but rather as the outcome of a historic and ongoing social struggle for dominance and power. Another reason for using the concept hegemony is that it allows a view of dominant discourses (at any given time) as maintained not only by those in dominance, but also by those outside the dominant group. For instance Strinati (1995:165), interpreting Gramsci, claims that ‘[d]ominant groups in society, including fundamentally but not exclusively the ruling class, maintain their dominance by securing the “spontaneous consent” of subordinate groups, including the working class, through the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups’

- 10 For an interesting and informative discussion concerning the close link between the owners, the managers and the writers in the media industry see Matheisen (1089).
- 11 This applies to broadcast media too, which have their own restrictions when it comes to how much time and contents can be fitted into a program or a show
- 12 I use the term myth when addressing stereotyping narratives produced in folklore and traditional storytelling as well as in characteristic false or simplifying stories in contemporary everyday talk. Such myths are not to be mistaken for Barthes (1972) concept mythology, which is a concept describing much grander cultural meanings and messages hidden within language and texts. Myths, however, often work as vehicles for transportation of mythologies.
- 13 The critique of an objective science is indeed a long-lasting and well established branch within social research. Kuhn (1962/1996) for instance, has offered social scientists an insight into the relativity of knowledge construction, as have earlier theorists such as for instance Dewey (1910/1997) and Mannheim (1929/1991). In so far as to induce a critical and reflexive social science they have been successful. Yet, theirs is not a perspective that specifically connects positivist and objectivist ideals to a hegemonic masculinity. Such awareness has predominately been stressed by feminist scholars, which in turn has influenced my own work and reasoning.
- 14 It should be noted that I do not see my own work as an example of postmodern reasoning and theorising. The function postmodern theory has for my work is that it, at times, supplies reasonable interpretations in relation to specific issues. I am not convinced that the world, or parts of it, has reached a state beyond modernity. I see certain postmodern theories as useful when analysing trends intrinsic to that which many researchers call modernity.
- 15 The critique of the links between science and power have been expressed by people other than feminists, such as for instance researchers, feminists or not, within a Marxist tradition. In referring to a feminist critique I am positioning my own influences.
- 16 The term ‘young adult’ draws its relevance from a cultural idealisation of youth found in societies accentuating the body, health, fitness, appearance and consumption leading to a striving for youthfulness among all ages (see Featherstone, 1994; Tveit, 2002).

## C H A P T E R 2

- 17 Eurocard advertisement in *Vagabond*, a Swedish magazine for backpackers, No. 9, 1997 (author’s translation)
- 18 Of course, not all travellers carry Eurocard. Some budget travellers may be dependent upon cards while travelling; others may find other means of getting by, such as temporary jobs. However, the issue here is not to link travellers to specific incomes or ways of payment, but to point towards mythologies produced and reproduced by different agents in relation to travelling and ‘cultural meetings’.
- 19 Riley (1988) has been influential in tourism research through her concept ‘long-term budget travelling’. It points at the importance of cutting costs and travel cheaply among many backpackers. While I initially used this concept as is evident in this chapter based on a prior publication and in the two subsequent ones, I have since these texts were published, or prepared for publication, preferred to speak of long-term travelling or long-term independent travelling. As undoubtedly travellers spend quite a lot of money during their long journeys taken as a whole, in addition to spending a lot more money than many local residents on a daily basis, I feel the term is slightly deceptive. Long-term independent travelling, which I have occasionally used instead, also implicates an emic construction in which the message is that backpackers are more ‘free’ and ‘independ-

- dent' than other tourists. While this is critically questioned and examined throughout the dissertation, I find it a less 'offensive' way to frame the group of tourists this work relates to.
- 20 The consequence of such an exploratory search for tendencies is that commonly addressed topics will possibly appear to be under-emphasised. Backpacking, or budget travelling, is a phenomenon deserving critical and thorough investigation into its character and conditions. I do not dispute claims that travelling may be regarded as a superficial act carried out by the bourgeoisie of the West. Rather, I see many signs of this in literature as well as in my own research. However, I believe that the phenomenon is complex and diversified, and so this article recognises this complexity in its analysis of travel.
  - 21 While Clifford (1992) and Riley (1988) argue that a closer analysis of women's travel may shed new light on travelling as an occupation carried out by both sexes and for many reasons, Veijola and Jokinen (1994) claim it is a male bias to regard travelling as superficial and detached from bodily experiences. Ryall (1988) claims that science – and literature – have regarded early women travellers, like Isabella Bird, as oddities to be dismissed. Swain (1995:253) argues that science has long been based on a 'womanless' recipe and then later enriched by a request to 'add women and stir'. Her main point is that a gender approach is needed in leisure studies as well as in other research areas.
  - 22 By travelling 'single' is meant that these women left their home country without a travel companion, and that this status was a result of choice rather than of circumstances. The interviewees emphasised the advantage of travelling alone as it gave them 'freedom' and 'control' of their own time and of travel destinations. However, all of them met other travellers along the road and saw this as a welcome change to solo travel. Some of the women described these constant meetings with different 'strangers' (other backpackers) as one of the goals in travelling which could only be reached through solo travel. A travel companion would interfere with the possibility of making new friends
  - 23 Again, it is important to emphasise that this article is a scanning for tendencies, and that this affects the way the women are being portrayed – possibly as if they formed a homogenous group. I am aware that their claims to be 'participants' should be placed under close scrutiny, but I have made the choice to concentrate on other issues in this text. Also, a closer focus on the women's backgrounds would possibly give the reader a better understanding of how diversified this 'group' of travellers really is and how its members are related to living conditions in Sweden. (The travellers interviewed in my research come from 'working class' backgrounds as well as from 'middle class' ones.) Most of my effort here, however, has been spent on trying to find new topics. In this phase of my research the social position of the backpacker is not central.
  - 24 When I argue that the travellers 'turn their backs on clock-time' or 'leave clock-time behind' this should not be interpreted as if clock-time no longer informs their consciousness. The journey demands that the traveller keep track of clock-time when it comes to catching a plane or a train, visiting a bank or keeping an appointment. However, for the travellers interviewed, long periods of time (both in beach areas and 'on the road') were spent without the need to consult a clock/watch. Equally important to emphasise is that an expression such as 'leaving clock-time behind' says nothing about the structures of the cultures which the traveller visits. Such cultures may certainly be structured through clock-time, among other things. I use the concepts to try to express the travellers' subjective beliefs.
  - 25 By saying that norms and values are to 'some extent' left behind I hope it becomes clear that I assume people cannot totally rid themselves of a former structure. I believe internalised norms and values to be rather persistent parts of a person's 'stock of knowledge' (on internalisation and 'stock of knowledge' see Berger and Luckmann, 1966/1991 and Schutz, 1970), that is, the subjectivity born in one culture may very well survive a transfer to another and very different culture. However, I also believe in people's ability to change, both intentionally and unintentionally, thus seeing it possible for a traveller to question and even replace old structures, when given the right circumstances.
  - 26 Adam (1990) offers a thorough investigation of different times and temporalities constituting social and biological existence, not only breaking barriers in dichotomies and ideal type simplifications but also between different social scientific disciplines. Here the most important point may be that life cannot be separated from biological and environmental life.
  - 27 Not surprisingly, travelling has sometimes been described as a restorative process involving 'regressions' into a childhood free from the obligations which are so much a part of adult life (see Curtis and Pajackzowska, 1994:203–4, 207).

- 28 However much this article attempts to suppress clock-time and to emphasise other temporal aspects, clock-time obtrudes upon the observant reader. The narrative starts in the past and moves, almost unavoidably, by way of the present towards the future, which only proves how difficult it is for researchers to free themselves from the old and ingrained notion of time linearity
- 29 Some of the travellers devised their travelling in two phases, constantly succeeding each other. These were the 'hard-working phase' and the 'holiday phase'. The hard work needed while moving around searching for treasured backpacker destinations and goals called for a rest on a semi-deserted beach where structure was regained (see Cohen, 1982). Thus, agreeing with Urry (1994b), it would be to jump to conclusions arguing that leisure time, or even travel, is non-working time.
- 30 The contradiction between clock-time and body-time has been highlighted by Adam (1995:48–51) as she compares statements from women who have given birth, aided by doctors at clinics, with those at home with no aid from medical science. She finds a striking difference in the two modes of delivery. A strong sense of unity and wholeness of body and mind, and of giving life, while having the child at home, was for the women at the clinic turned into painful difficulties in reaching the feeling of 'all-encompassing body time'. The doctors' and nurses' counting and measuring of the length of each stage and contraction, the constant questions and demands to report and count, turned 'giving life' into 'delivery' and 'wholeness' into 'parts' for the women involved. The 'body-present' must make way for clock-time abstraction.
- 31 By the expression 'right circumstances', I mean to indicate an open mind to wherever and whenever such circumstances may appear. Long-term travelling to distant cultures is most likely not the only condition that will lead to an experience of time as something that can be both produced and waited on.
- 32 This argument is in line with Curtis and Pajackowska's (1994:204) claim that travel may well be experienced as a 'reprise of childhood', as a 'flow state' of passage where temporal and spatial dimensions are experienced as integrated.
- 33 The expression 'taking time and making space' is used by Donald (1997:102) to describe symbolism in Chinese films, but is suitable for different uses here.
- 34 Both 'time going faster than ever' and 'time standing still' are however still signs of a relation to clock-time. Time can only go faster in relation to something that is considered to be moving at a 'normal' speed.

#### C H A P T E R 4

- 35 I am aware that today's use of the term adventure is 'gender neutral'. A look into its semantic and gendered origins does, however, offer an interesting point of departure for this article. Evidently other descriptions of the adventurer, as well as the adventuress, can be found in other dictionaries. Using the Wordsworth citation here is thus an opening up of a discussion about specific perspectives on the female adventurer but it should be stressed that it is also indicative of tendencies revealed through an examination of various contemporary empirical materials.
- 36 The term pathologise, as it is used here, should not be mistaken for the practice among elites, such as medical practitioners, to subordinate and control unwelcome or deviant behaviour with a clinical diagnosis. I use it in a metaphorical sense to describe the activity in a culture to transform non-conformable acts of individuals or groups into anomalies.
- 37 Turn to Meethan (2001) for a thorough investigation into tourism as consumption. Meethan also addresses how avoidance, as well as affirmation, of risk is intrinsic in different modes of tourism. While the adventurous journey requires and thrives on an element of risk, the package tour traveller hopes to eliminate as much risk as possible. Thus the consumption of risk (as action, expression or choice of destination) becomes a differentiating factor in the tourism industry. This has been noted, not the least, by Adams (2001) who acknowledges an increasing interest in so called 'danger-zone tourism' where some travellers actually seek out areas of conflict and danger.
- 38 Although Scheibe (1986) describes adventure as a predominantly masculine practice he does point towards an upcoming change, triggered by renegotiations of gender relations.
- 39 The concept was coined by Riley (1988) to describe backpackers' common interest in keeping spending to a minimum. I consider 'budget' in this context as much a 'social construction' as a reality. Managing to budget your funds through eating, sleeping and travelling 'cheaply' is an admirable skill in narratives on travel, both in travellers' testimonies and written texts. The lack of money and little spending often increases the possibility of escalating from novice to experienced, or from tourist to traveller (and to adventurer). It should be remembered though that, despite res-

- trained and moderate spending each day, many travellers are quite well off in terms of economic security if something should go seriously wrong. Credit-cards, money in the bank, supportive parents and possibly a job to return to make 'poverty' so much easier to cope with. It cannot be pointed out too many times that gaining symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984) through poverty and 'roughing it' is a prerogative of the rich.
- 40 Examples this project uses are drawn from various texts focusing on independent travelling found in for instance *Vagabond* (a Swedish magazine which has focused on backpacking but is now slowly moving up-market) and *Escape* (a US-based 'adventure' magazine) as well as from travel sections in regular daily newspapers in Sweden. Other examples, such as the advertisement discussed in this article, have been picked out from the Internet. Reading a variety of *Lonely Planet* Guidebooks has however been most important to the project.
- 41 *Lonely Planet* Guidebooks are often referred to, by travellers, as the 'bible'. *Lonely Planet* has published a large amount of guidebooks, not only to almost any country you can think of but also to suit many different forms of travel, such as 'bush-walking' or 'biking'. There are other guidebooks around but – as evidenced during my fieldwork in Thailand – *Lonely Planet* clearly outnumbers any other brand at the guesthouse breakfast tables in the morning.
- 42 As Alneng (2002, forthcoming), Fürsich and Kavoori (2001) among others have pointed out tourism patterns have changed. People all over the world are practicing tourism and it can no longer be claimed that it is a 'simple' movement from the 'west to the rest'. Yet, when looking at the structural conditions behind tourism as a recreational mobility (of free choice) it is still predominately a privilege of people in wealthier nations.
- 43 Turner has developed the concept liminality with Gennep's (1960/1977) concept 'rite-de-passage' as its foundation. Liminality is used to describe a ritual separated in time and space from everyday life entered into in order to connect with a spiritual world as well as to mark the passage from one stage in life to another. The lack of hierarchical structures is needed to disconnect from the profane whilst instead connecting with the spiritual. As a tool in tourism research the concept is of limited use following such a definition. Its semantic qualities do however make it useful also in other circumstances than the one described above which is probably why it is found on and off as a 'matter of fact' in tourism texts both in research and in travel writing. The aim is then, I believe, to stress the importance of the journey as a timespace away from home believed to have the potential for personal development of the traveller but often also the potential to lift the traveller to the next step on the social ladder.
- 44 Defining her as a postmodern tourist may at a first glance solve the problem as it would give her time and space to act in any number of apparently contradictory manners, given the shallowness of experiences believed to be encountered by the postmodern wanderer (see for instance Lash and Urry, 1994, MacCannell, 1976/1989). I believe however that using such a vague concept, framing any number of contradicting aspects of a person's experiences, leads to an inadequacy in noticing and understanding all the small and large meaning-bearing details in a person's life-story, or in the complexities in cultures for that matter.
- 45 The aesthetic appearance is an important aspect of the adventure identity. Shorts with flowers on them, feet dressed in socks and hairspray to keep the wisps of hair in place are not appropriate in this context. Tattoos, piercing, shaved head or dread-locks do however seem to fit well with the worn cotton clothes of the adventure image.
- 46 See Bond (1995, 1996), Jansz and Davies (1995) and Zepatos (1996) on examples of contemporary travel writing by adventurous women travellers.
- 47 However, the Internet may also increase the risk of a demystification of the adventure and maybe also reduce travellers' feelings of having taken *time* and *space* for their own (re)creation.
- 48 In a face to face survey carried out in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore with 1372 backpackers being interviewed Jarvis (1998) found that 47 percent of the backpackers were women. When the material was analysed for age and home region women outnumbered men on two accounts; in the younger age group, that is 18-24, which may be indicative of a future trend, and in the Scandinavian backpacker population. Although the data gathered cannot be analysed for solo versus group travellers it is a strong indication of a trend in which women in large numbers have entered and will continue to enter a previously masculine and adventurous arena.
- 49 And as always when hegemonic claims are at stake, and the advantages of the few are taken over by the many the *avant-garde* reacts by pushing onwards. As Bourdieu's *avant-garde* of art and fa-

shion moves on to new trends in order to keep the masses behind (Bourdieu, 1984), the *avant-garde* traveller heads for the periphery and the lack of other travellers there.

- 50 The interviewee herself would not agree with the term adventurous as she clearly did not like labelling and thought that she was just fulfilling a need to travel which was not romantic at all. Still, she did engage in such activities that most others in this project would regard as highly adventurous and has therefore been placed in the 'adventurous' category by me.
- 51 Egeland (1999:75) analyses a Kilroy 1997 advertisement where a big, powerfully positioned woman is portrayed together with a text telling saying 'Scream on, Big Mama, but we're on the first fright to Paris, anyway'. Such a message derives its meaning from the historically burdened notion of home being the place of femininity, while mobility is an act of masculinity.
- 52 These erect penises have since been removed. A new check at <http://www.kilroytravels.com/> in December 2001 reveals only a slightly shrunk life-time walker with his erect penis.
- 53 It seems this magazine has since moved its focus on off-the-beaten track travelling to on-the-beaten track journeys.
- 54 'Pistolo' is not an exact Swedish word, but pistol is, meaning gun. 'Pistolo' as an invented word rhyming with 'solo' is the choice of the magazine.
- 55 If this is indicative of a trend in 'extreme adventure' stories it comes close to hand to view the late 20<sup>th</sup> century increase and stretching of limits in 'adventurism' as a reaction to female trespassing. A form of masculinity under threat may need to be stressed again under more extreme circumstances.
- 56 Among the 16 men interviewed irony has not been a recurrent feature. Although it may be an indication of a gender difference it can also be the effect of coincidental circumstances or methodological failures. I by no means suggest that men cannot be ironic when referring to the adventurer in themselves or in others as well as to other practices and aspects of life.

## C H A P T E R 5

- 57 Another nationality seemingly increasing on the backpacker circuit are the Japanese. During fieldwork in Thailand in 1998 I found guesthouses that catered mainly for Japanese guests, as others catered for Israeli or Scandinavian guests. Attempts to interview Japanese backpackers were unsuccessful mainly due to language difficulties on both parts.
- 58 I do not deny the importance of word-of-mouth, letters, slide shows and postcards, to transfer meaning from one person to another and from one cultural home (in time and space) to another. Nor do I ignore the existence of discursive narratives of travel within early socialisation processes. Children have been exposed to tales of primitivism and masculine 'adventurism' as well as paradise beaches and people through teachers, schoolbooks, friends and parents. Most of these letter and postcard writers as well as the other socialisation agents are however also media consumers, making it very likely that a lot of the travel tales that circulate in a given society are to a very large extent informed by the media.
- 59 Normally the relationship between *tourism* and *travel* is portrayed the other way round. Tourism is described as a form of travel and separated from, for instance, business trips, refugee and migration movements. The term travel has come to dominate this paper as well as my other papers due to it being the term the independent travellers themselves prefer to use in their efforts to distance their own actions from other tourist types. I am aware though that *travellers* and for instance *charter tourists* are often informed by the same, or related, discourses and that it is often difficult and not even necessary to separate travel writing from tourism writing. The media analysed in this research project, such as the Swedish travel magazine and the *Lonely Planet* Guidebooks, are likely to be read by short-term charter tourists as well and do most likely have much in common with the norms and values informing any charter tour brochure.
- 60 This citation was found at <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/faq/faq.htm#basix>, April 3, 2002.
- 61 This citation was found at [http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/south\\_east\\_asia/thailand/](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/south_east_asia/thailand/), April 3, 2002.
- 62 This citation was found at <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/faq/faq.htm#basix>, April 3, 2002. On November 11, 2003 it was however located at [http://www.lonelyplanet.com/help/faq\\_lp.htm#basix](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/help/faq_lp.htm#basix).
- 63 An acquaintance recently told me about the annoying fact that she now knows right away when her backpacking daughter is doing something wrong but has no chance to do anything besides worrying. The daughter will send her an e-mail saying she will leave Manila in a few minutes to

boat-hike around a distant archipelago by herself, leaving the mother distressed for a couple of weeks unsure of what has happened to her daughter. She preferred having regular letters recalling events that had already taken place.

- 64 The text was found at <http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/magazine/writing.html>, May 1, 2002.
- 65 I am thankful to Anna Greek at University of Kalmar, who is a lecturer and PhD-student in English, for the discussions concerning this testimony, thus to the ideas and understanding it gave rise to.
- 66 This can be compared to Tonboe's (1993) reasoning on travelling and leisure as a state of mind entered, for instance, while watching leisure and nature programmes on television.
- 67 *Lonely Planet*, [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com), for instance lets users who register as new members know that improper postings can and will be removed.
- 68 Resboken.com means 'The Travel book' in English and is a Swedish web-page developed to serve travellers with a communication platform.
- 69 I have translated the citations below from Swedish to English purposely keeping the incorrectness present in the original text. The citations were found at [www.resboken.com](http://www.resboken.com), May 13, 2002.

## C H A P T E R 6

- 70 I use the term 'scene' to frame a particular area with certain qualities but also to suggest a perspective in which areas are seen as stages for specific performance. This approach is influenced by Goffman (1959) who, rather inventively, began viewing people as actors and places as 'stages' upon which we (normally) act and present ourselves according to scripts for proper behaviour.
- 71 Again, I want to point out that the perspective of the people who are residents in backpacker locations cannot be presented here, given that the purpose of the project has been to focus on the travellers' construction of the journey and the people they meet. I, by no means, see local residents as passive and apathetic receivers of accommodation-searching backpackers. I am certain they are able to think for themselves and make a choice whether to invite visitors or not and whether to charge money or not. Nor do I consider people at the destination as greedier than any of the travellers or the nations they come from.
- 72 Not surprisingly the beach area is the scene of much drug-taking. The liminal character of the beach, being set aside from the hustle and bustle of other modes of travelling, turns it into a time and space in brackets. This is a place, better than most, for releasing any hedonistic desires. While the construction of the 'paradise beach' as a place for relaxation, contemplation and other non-efficient and non-rational states of being has remained within western discourse for quite some time, the 'neutralisation' of beach areas as drug scenes is of a later date.
- 73 A Hook Figure is a wood carving specific to a particular part of Papua New Guinea.
- 74 It is important, however, to point out that the material conditions upon which an image of the primitive other is constructed have changed over time. Yesteryear's 'noble savages' – a notion ascribed to men or women in traditional clothing, living in self-subsistent households and villages and exercising animistic and other so called 'pristine' religions – have become scarce and hard to find, even for those determined to look for them. The primitivism of today often has to settle for a less 'exotic' and more secularised 'other', wearing familiar clothing and depending upon society at large. This has, however, made the construction of difference (between traveller and other) all the more important as without difference much of the symbolic values ascribed to tourist practices and narratives vanish.
- 75 Columbus's letter to the King and Queen of Spain, 1494, extracted from Medieval Sourcebook: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/columbus2.html>, June 23, 2003.
- 76 Columbus's letters to the King and Queen of Spain in 1494 (cited in the introduction) as well as his journal notes, testify to brutal slaughters as well as friendly encounters depending upon the 'nature' of the primitive. They also clearly express that these encounters are made in the name of a common national and christian good.
- 77 In Swedish, prowess is sometimes translated as 'mannamod' (manly courage) which is an indication of the close association between masculinity and bravery (see for instance Norstedts, 1993).
- 78 One should not forget however, that the taken-for-granted relationship between men and mobility (just as between women and dwelling) is greatly exaggerated. As Mills (1991) so convincingly has argued, there were plenty of women travellers and women travel writers in the past but their actions and accomplishments were ignored by their contemporaries as well as in recent travel literature research.

- 79 In fact, the often unconscious power structure within primitivism becomes visible and identifiable at the thought of tourism flowing in the reverse direction. What would the reaction be in Sweden, England, Germany or the United States if people from Asia, Africa or the Pacific started arriving in great numbers, with, relatively speaking, an enormous amount of money, asking to camp in people's back yards, photograph the children and taste some of the supper, on a more or less daily basis? Their presence would most likely not only disturb people's feelings of being able to control one's own environment. It would unveil and threaten the image of an inferior 'rest of the world'.
- 80 The claims by *Lonely Planet* have been found at <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/help/about.htm> in the summer of 2003.

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