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BOOK REVIEW

Thank You for Dying for Our Country: Commemorative Texts and Performances in Jerusalem

By Chaim Noy. Oxford University Press (<https://global.oup.com/>) 2015, xix + 274 pp. (figures, references, index), Price £25.99. ISBN: 978 0 199 398980.

What do tourists do in tourist spaces? They leave traces. Some may say that the main trace of tourists' activities is their carbon footprint. For others, it may be the contribution to the local economy, or it may be the millions of photographs of tourists shared through social media. For Chaim Noy, it is the linguistic inscriptions left behind by museum-goers in the visitor book at Ammunition Hill National Memorial Site in Jerusalem.

Ammunition Hill is located at the site of a battle between Israel and Jordan during the Six-Day War. The battle was won by the Israeli forces, with a loss of thirty-seven soldiers and twice as many Jordanians. Nearly 1,000 Israelis and up to 15,000 Arabs were killed during the entire war. Originating as a site commemorating the Israeli victims of the war, Ammunition Hill has established itself as one of the spaces of nation-building with a strong Zionist ethos, alongside other heritage sites in Jerusalem—the Western Wall and Yad Vashem. The approximately 200,000 Ammunition Hill visitors are almost exclusively Jewish: school tours, individuals and groups visiting Jerusalem from other parts of Israel and abroad, and local residents, predominantly ultra-Orthodox Jewish families.

Ammunition Hill is a site where different authenticities are produced through the choice of the site itself (the place of the actual battle with its remaining military installations) and a wide range of physical and discursive artefacts, including armory, a sculptural installation featuring the names of the 182 fallen Israeli soldiers, maps, paintings, photographs and original or photographically reproduced handwritten notes, signatures, letters, and signs. This cursive landscape establishes a specific linguistic ideology that authenticates, individualizes, and humanizes the site through the associations of handwriting with spontaneity, immediacy, and literacy. Recontextualizing these apparently banal textual artefacts as museum exhibits, encased, enlarged and enshrined, turns them into secular relics indexing the hands of the military personnel that wrote them as well as that operated the guns used in the War. The cultured acts of handwriting mitigate the inhuman acts of killing. They are at once holy and heroic.

Apart from gazing, reading, listening to tour guides, touching (e.g. the remaining bunkers and trenches), and walking about the site, the handwriting exhibited in the museum prefigures another mode of consumption of Ammunition Hill by its visitors—their own writing in the museum's visitor book. Although not unique to this site and dating back to the emergence of visitor books at the aristocratic, European collecting institutions and museums in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the invitation for the visitors to inscribe their names and reflections in the museum's visitor book creates a coherence in the way the museum is experienced as a site of consumption and production of the ethno-national narrative of remembrance and unity.

Unlike most other visitor books, the one at Ammunition Hill is not positioned near the exit, in the liminal space between the museum and the outside world, where the written comments are acts of self-reflexive commentary about one's museum experience before stepping back into one's mundane routine. In contrast, the Ammunition Hill visitor book, monumental in size, binding, ornamentation, materiality, and display is to be found at the inner sanctum of the museum, a cavernous space displaying three large flags—of the Israeli State, the Israeli Army, and the city of Jerusalem—with a looped recording of a male voice reading solemnly the names, nicknames, parents' names and ranks of the soldiers who died on the Jerusalem Front. A brief text affixed to the book's stand invites visitors to write down their impressions in "a concise and respectful manner" (p. 49). This call for visitor self-reflexivity and literacy is not, then, simply, part of a leave-taking ritual, a typical museum going activity usually lumped together with, perhaps, buying a souvenir, having a cup of coffee, or making a dash for the bathroom. Rather, the visitor book's affordances of emplacement, size and materiality turn it into a "*ritualistic and participatory interface*" eliciting not reflections but "wholehearted gestures of participation" (p. 53; original emphasis), blending the ethno-nationalism of modernity with the traditionalism and sanctity associated with other holy books (the Torah).

The entries in the Ammunition Hill visitor book are acts of collective commemoration both in that they are often co-produced by groups (families, soldiers, pupils) and inscribed with the consideration of the earlier ones. New entries are added with attention to older ones resulting at times in relatively neat columns creating aesthetic gestalts of two page-spreads typical of the genre. Their additive effect is not that of a new narrative but "a *narrative effect*. . . of national commemoration and nostalgia, with a linear and continuous temporal connection established between the present time of visiting, reading, and signing (the visit's here-and-now) and the selected events of the past" (p. 64; original emphasis).

Not all of the Ammunition Hill visitors engage with or read the visitor book, and only 10% of those who do enter their own inscriptions. Nonetheless, we get a sense that those who do are representative of all the visitors, mostly Israeli Jews (with an apparent overrepresentation of younger ones—school groups and soldiers brought over to the museum as part of their national education curriculum—and ultra-Orthodox families), Diasporic Jews (mostly from the USA), and a smattering of visitors from other places, judging by a small number of languages other than Hebrew and English represented in the book. Through their signatures and places of residence, the inscribers note their trajectories, converging on the site in a map-like fashion with Jerusalem at its ideological centre as a unifying node for all Jews; a discursive accomplishment defying the contested nature of the city.

The entries in the visitor book take a number of formats: from signatures of solo visitors, to those signing off a single entry as a group (e.g. families); from telegraphic, graffiti-like inscriptions (e.g., *Bitton was here!!!*), to more elaborate "articulations of commemoration" (e.g., *Thank you for dying for our country*, followed by expression of thanks by the inscriber to be able to live freely), to other, sometimes much longer expressions of gratitude to the dead soldiers, museum curators, or God. The inscriptions give voice to the visitors in co-articulating commemoration, although at times this is done anonymously. Taken together, they give rise to a collective, ethno-national "we" voice, with only a few contesting inscriptions challenging the militaristic and secular stance of the museum with a "theological non-Zionist challenge" demanding due recognition and praise for God or "those men whose lives are dedicated to prayer and the study of the Torah" (p. 111). Another group of contesting, "hyper-Zionist ethnonational" voices call for ever-tougher political and militaristic measures as they perceive Israel to be under continued threat from its enemies. The latter stance does not so much challenge the museum's narrative of commemoration as it calls for the toughening of its ethno-national mission. Some entries are light-hearted but not disrespectful; many involve drawings and ornaments. The multimodal inscriptions animate the book in a complex web of spatial production, ideological stance-taking, performances of individual, group, gendered, and intergenerational identities.

Noy does a fine job developing earlier, relatively limited research on visitor books and tourist inscriptions. In his very detailed ethnography spanning several years (2006–2012), he gives a compelling testimony of the role of language, and discourse more broadly, as a multimodal resource crucial for staging, co-constructing and consuming tourist destinations. His analyses and interdisciplinary theorizing of the Ammunition Hill visitor book, its inscriptions, and the acts of individual and collective inscription making are compelling and rich in detail. His fascination with the object of his study is palpable throughout and provides a near-immersive experience to the reader who

has never visited the site. However, this level of detail is one of the book's few and minor shortfalls as, at times, it reads like raw notes from Noy's ethnographic notebook (e.g. numerous descriptions of groups of visitors approaching the visitor book and negotiating how and what to write in it, or not). On occasion, the reader is confronted with somewhat conflicting accounts of the visitor book, for example as an exhibit in its own right (p. 53) and a counter claim stating that "the visitor book is not offered as an exhibit nor is it made to be perceived as such" (p. 199). Towards the end of the book, there is a self-reflexive chapter devoted to Noy's own experience of doing ethnography in the museum that I would have preferred to see in a more condensed form earlier on in the book, for example, when some ethical issues of the research are addressed. These quibbles aside, Noy's study is highly recommended to everyone who wants to understand the centrality of the performative nature of language (writing) at the nexus of tourism, ideology, and identity.

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