

Sanctities, Blasphemies and the (Jewish) Nation: Commemorative Inscriptions at a National Memorial Site in Israel

CHAIM NOY

SAPIR COLLEGE

chaimnoy@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In this article I rematerialize discourse that is articulated in the shape of commemorative visitor book entries, in a national-military commemoration site in Jerusalem, Israel. The materiality and communicative affordances of the commemorative visitor book, the physical environment in which it is situated and which grants it meaning, and the modes of interaction and inscription that it affords are examined. Located in a densely symbolic national commemoration site, the impressively looking book does not merely capture visitors' reflections. Instead, it serves as a device that allows participation in a collective-national rite. While seemingly designated as a visitor book, the discursive device functions performatively as a portal or interface between visitors, on the one side, and the (Jewish) nation and the dead and living soldiers, on the other side.

Keywords: Discourse, commemoration, collective identity, Jewish identity, writing

Practices of writing have immensely diverse social, material and ideological environments. Recent inquiries into sites and practices of writing show how the meaning of texts is performatively accomplished in relation to and by dint of enmeshment in their respective environments (Blommaert 2004; Harris 2000; Noy 2008a). Due to their material qualities, the meanings of texts transcend representation; instead, texts perform in and through the practices, the materialities and the spatialities of their

production.

In this article I examine texts that are part of a sacred environment—texts that adhere to, challenge and sometimes straightforwardly desecrate the sanctification of national commemoration. I trace texts, or, defined more broadly, inscriptions, which were produced on an ideological surface in the shape of a visitor book in a national commemoration site in Jerusalem, Israel. I argue that within the densely symbolic space of this visitor book, these texts—visitors' entries—evince the powerful dialectics between sanctities and blasphemies, which, though widespread, are infrequently noticed. Hence the examination of the visitor book—defined as a stage, and of the entries therein—defined as (inscribed) performances, sheds light on the how sanctity and solemnity are pursued and violated.

In what follows I will first briefly outline the theoretical background on the linkage between sanctity on the one hand, and nationalism on the other, which is grounded in Robert Bellah's influential notion of "civil religion" (Bellah 1967). Then I will describe the ways in which the Ammunition Hill institution constructs sacred places of national commemoration, and the ritual practices through which places and surfaces are used or occupied by visitors.

According to Bellah (1975, 3), civil religion is "[t]he religious dimension that exists in the life of every nation through which it interprets its historic experiences in the light of its transcendental reality." As he famously argued with regards to the United States, civil religion comprises the "genuine apprehension of universal and transcendent religious reality as seen in or, one could almost say, as revealed through the experience of the American people" (1967, 12). Bellah's concept has been influential because it sheds critical light on Republican nationalism by showing that nations borrow an abundance of symbols and rituals from religion, which they use to mobilize citizens in ways that are uncannily similar to those used by the powerful institution which they aim to replace—namely the church.

While the concept of civil religion originated in observations of national rituals and memorials in the United States, it has been fruitfully applied to many other countries and societies. With regard to Israeli national culture, Liebman and Don-Yehiya's (1983) seminal work revealed the unique synergy between traditional Jewish symbolism and the State of Israel's ideological symbolic apparatus that aims to unite and mobilize its Jewish citizens. In their comprehensive review, they observe (1983, 30) that "Zionist-Socialism was a religious surrogate," and that "[t]he major symbols of Zionist-Socialism, its myths and ceremonies, were laden with

traditional motifs and representations.”

Nowhere in Israeli culture is this fusion more evident and more powerful than in the consecration of national sacrifice and in the celebration of militarism. Numerous rituals, ceremonies, commemoration days, and memorial sites celebrate the Zionist fusion of militarism and nationalism through the use of symbols and practices of consecration. During the last two decades, a sizable body of research has explored these assorted sites, rituals and events. From the national days of commemoration and independence to commemorative road signs, and from archeological sites that have become cornerstones in the national(ist) ethos to children’s songs and ceremonies, this body of research documents Israeli society’s “profound engagement” with commemoration (Weiss 1997, 98), which amounts to “a national cult of memorializing the dead” (Aronoff 1993, 54; also Almog 1992; Azaryahu 1996; Handelman and Shamgar-Handelman 1997; Zerubavel 1995).

While Bellah’s concept has been especially productive in stimulating research of hegemonic and institutional (“top down”) practices, plenty of room remains for examining the actual ways in which people experience, embody and participate in the rituals, how they perform practices of national sanctity and consecration, and also—where relevant—how they experience and perform practices of protest and desecration.

Ethnography of inscribed commemoration

Inaugurated in 1975, the Ammunition Hill complex honors the Israeli soldiers who died in the Ammunition Hill battle and in the other battles on the Jerusalem front during the 1967 War, and celebrates the “liberation” of East Jerusalem and the “unification” of the city. The complex comprises several spaces and structures, including an outdoor area where monuments and national and military symbols are scattered between the original trenches and bunkers where the fighting took place, and an indoor museum.

Wholly devoted to commemoration, the Ammunition Hill museum is constructed as a typical “national-militaristic shrine”—an ideological and physical embodiment of Israel’s “cult of the dead” (Weiss 1997, 91). The museum building is half underground, dimly lit, and built of local (“Jerusalemite”) stone—thus recalling the actual trenches outside, and creating an atmosphere of somber remembrance. The inner spaces feature many images and representations of the campaign over Jerusalem, steeping visitors in a reverent atmosphere created by a perfusion of symbols and icons. The display consists mainly of discursive devices

and artifacts serving commemorative aims, such as the Golden Wall of Commemoration, engraved with the names of those who fell in the battle for Jerusalem; an album-like device with pages of steel presenting information about the fallen soldiers; and soldiers' letters, personal and war journals, signatures, and the like.

My ethnography at the museum took place mainly during the summer and autumn of 2006, and included observations and interviews which were conducted over a period of four weeks. Demographically, the visitors I observed were either (local) Jewish Israelis sightseeing in Jerusalem or (ultra-)orthodox Jewish tourists-pilgrims, mostly from North America, visiting the "holy sites." Many of these tourists-pilgrims were on organized tours to Israel arranged by the Jewish Agency—e.g., as part of the Birthright (*Taglit*) Project—or by similar organizations promoting Zionism.

The focus of the research was the site's impressive visitor book, in which visitors put down their comments and impressions. The dataset examined for this study comprises two volumes of the visitor book. These particular volumes were chosen because they were the latest to be completed, and because they are typical of the Ammunition Hill visitor books in all respects: each contains 100 pages, took between one to two years to fill (the first volume was used between May 2003 and June 2005, while the second was used between June 2005 and July 2006), and each includes over 1,000 entries. Given the considerable number of entries, the books can be assumed to provide a representative sample of visitors' acts of inscription at a symbolic site. The majority of the entries are in Hebrew (50%) and English (45%), while a small number are in French, Spanish, Russian and other languages.

The entries were examined in light of the book's function, as a communicative medium that facilitates inscribed performances. In analyzing the entries, I avoided employing rigid procedures of content/discourse/text analyses, and preferred a contextual reading that applies the sensitivities of (critical) discourse analysis and multimodality studies (Fairclough 1995; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001, respectively). These sensitivities allow a semiotics wherein inscriptions correspond with, but at the same time are also part of, the material settings or ecology within which they are performed.

Institutional construction: The visitor book as a sacred Jewish stage

The Ammunition Hill commemorative visitor book serves as a *sacred stage* that invites inscribed performances of participation in the Zionist ethno-

national civil religion. In line with the performative view (Noy 2008b), I argue that the book functions as a stage insofar as it is construed by its users as a consecrated Jewish medium. In other words, the semiotics of performance on the one hand, and of Jewish symbolism of national commemoration on the other, are brought to the fore as the notions of “sacred” and of “stage” become mutually informing.

This unique condition is accomplished through a number of contextualizing framing cues (Gumperz 1982), by which the sacred function and the national-performative function are joined, materially and symbolically. First, while visitor books are typically located near the exit of the site, where they allow visitors to summarize their experience and relate their overall impression, at the Ammunition Hill Museum the book is located in one of the site’s innermost spaces, right outside the hall holding the Golden Wall of Commemoration and the eternal flame, where a solemn recorded voice of a male narrator continuously recites the names of the fallen soldiers along with their military affiliations and ranks, and praises the beauty and innocence of their youth. This unique location, inside the museum’s commemorative “holy of holies,” endows the book with the semiotic status of a sacred device that is an organic part of the museum’s authentic commemorative exhibit. Conceptually, the book’s unique location is the complete opposite of the typical location of visitor books, because it invites acts of ideological and emotional participation in a national rite, rather than retrospective reflections on a completed visit.

The book’s framing as a sacred stage is further augmented by the structure on which it rests. The book is installed on a large and impressive structure, consisting of two columns of black steel, each of them about one meter thick (Figure 1). The shorter column functions as a pedestal on which the book is placed, and beside it is another pillar some four meters tall. The book itself rests on a platform of thick wood, giving the structure a particularly respectable appearance. The entire structure rests on a base that is slightly elevated from the floor, so that those wishing to read or write in the book must step up and enter a specially designated—elevated—zone. Moreover, the book is the central exhibit in the hall where it is located.

The book and hall in which it is located: Solemn national spaces

The special construction on which the book rests, and its location within the museum, cue the book’s sacred function. That is, they suggest that the book is not a mere bureaucratic document meant to record basic information about visitors (such as their names, the dates of visit, etc.) or even



Figure 1. Solemn national spaces.

to elicit their impressions regarding the site. Instead, it is a venerated medium that invites the visitors to engage in ritualistic acts that are part of their embodied participation in national commemoration.

Note that, because the book is located in a special public space inside the museum, the visitors' entries *themselves* become elements of the site's commemorative (Jewish) display. Here is a transformative function, whereby

visitor book, stressing the tripartite bond between Zionism, Judaism and militarism.

The framing cues described above suggest that the book can be conceptualized as a sacred public medium—or “stage”—which serves to embody Zionist ethno-national ideology. First, due to the symbolic and material ways in which the book is framed (i.e., its potentialities), and also due to the identity of the visitor populations that access it (i.e., its usage; recall that only Jews visit the site), the pages of the visitor book are ethno-national spaces that are exclusively *Jewish*. Moreover, the materiality of the book and the interactional possibilities it offers evoke traditional Jewish practices: the impressive pedestal on which the book rests, which requires the visitors to stand while reading or writing in it, the material of its leaves, which clearly echoes the material of the Jewish *sepher torah* (Torah book), and the fact that the installation is slightly elevated above the floor—all these are symbolic, evoking the Jewish ritual of reading from the Torah at the synagogue, called *ascending* to the Torah (*aliyah la-torah*). These qualities all offer a physical setting in which Jewish practices of writing and reading can be observed and performed (Boyarin 1993).

Sacred text(ure)s: Logos and inscriptions on parchment

Finally, it should be noted that the visitor book and many of the other displays at the museum are *literacy-related objects*, expressing and demanding acts of writing and reading. This fact is not coincidental, and suggests that the site holds a particular *textualist ideology*. The visitor book is such a central device at the site because it embodies this ideology, and as such, not only absorbs meaning (in the form of visitors’ entries) but also projects meaning: its presence in situ says something about the site and its literacy-related orientation.

There are obvious reasons for literacy to receive prominence in this museum. First, language, and specifically Hebrew, can, more than any other element, evoke traditional Jewish motifs and representations (Liebman and Don-Yihya 1983). Second, handwritten documents are an effective means of evoking *authenticity*. In tourism in general, handmade products have acquired a special value because they index their creators, and handwritten products are no exception. Notice that in Sabra (native Israeli) culture, where informal and un-institutionalized modes of communication, such as handwriting, are highly valued as “authentic,” this quality enjoys a particular cultural accent (Katriel 1986; Noy 2007). Third, literacy in general, and specifically in association with Jewish symbolism, serves to construct an image of the *moral Israeli*. After all, the Ammunition

Hill site commemorates a battle, an instance of institutionalized brutality and violence. The emphasis on literacy serves to portray the warriors as literate and educated: they were “men of the sword,” but also “men of the pen” (savage but noble, etc.). Fourth and finally, from the perspective of national identity, literacy brings to mind Anderson’s (1983) work, which demonstrates the effects of print on the emergence of imagined communities of nationhood spanning large distances.¹

Inscribed performances: Sanctities and blasphemies

The fact that the spaces of the museum, as well as those provided by the visitor book itself, are institutionally cued to elicit reverence and solemnity does not necessarily mean that the visitors—i.e., the users/consumers and producers of the book—indeed understand these cues or comply with the ideological agenda they promote. To begin, only a third of the visitors who enter the hall approach the book, and only about 10% of these choose to inscribe it. In other words, most visitors do not respond to the invitation and simply decline the opportunity offered by the book. These findings are not surprising considering the observations, which indicate that, like all museum goers, many of the visitors to the Ammunition Hill site are in a hurry, tired, bored, preoccupied with social interactions or disinterested for some other reason. While these visitors do not leave signs in the book, their acts are nonetheless meaningful in this context in that they present a *notion of mundaneness* amidst national sanctity.

That said, the book nevertheless overflows with inscribed acts of consecration in the form of commemorative entries displaying characteristics of religious language (Keane 1997). The sense of profusion is deliberate, and results from the book’s large size, coupled with the enduring nature of the inscriptions. This gives the book a cumulative quality: new entries are constantly being added to older ones.

Example 1 is typical of the *normative entries* in the book, i.e., entries that employ the sacred register of national commemoration with the aim of accomplishing a commemorative performance. The example preserves the layout of the original entry, which was written in Hebrew.

Example 1:

“In their death they commanded us to live”
Thanks to the courageous [soldiers] who fell on
Ammunition Hill, we and our children can

1. Note that in the case of the Ammunition Hill visitor book, the spread is temporal rather than geographical: the book binds together the contributions of different people who arrive at the *same place at different times*.

stand here now in unified
 Jerusalem.
 Holy are these men.
 The Shiffman Family
 Hadera
 19.10.05

This is a typical confirmative entry, which reproduces the ideological agenda of Israel's national militaristic heritage: it repeats the transcendent tenets of the Zionist ethno-national civil religion in its commemorative message—namely in the causal connection between past and present (and future: “our children”)—as well as in its justification of the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem (and more broadly, of the entire West Bank). In this and other entries, the (mythic) past is characterized by sacrificial death, which enables life in the present to flourish. Hence the gratitude of the living—expressed through remembrance and commemoration—to those who fell.

This entry complies with the agenda of the site not only in terms of its aims, but in terms of the rhetoric it employs. This inscribed performance reflects that its author(s) have understood and internalized the sacred register of commemoration: this is conveyed lexically, i.e., through the choice of words such as “holy,” and by echoing (citing or paraphrasing) the discourse of commemoration presented at the site itself. Note that entry's opening sentence is a direct quote (specifically marked as such using quotation marks), which re-voices an idiom. Other entries make use of familiar ethno-national(ist) idioms and icons, e.g., expressions such as “may their memory be a blessing,” “next year in Jerusalem,” “Jerusalem of gold,” “for the glory of the State of Israel,” and icons such as the Star of David and the Menorah (the Jewish candelabrum). This web of re-evocations reminds us that for performance to be effective or performative, some aspect of repetition of authority must be exercised (Butler 1993; Noy 2007). The use of idioms and icons, which constitute “canonic language,” by individual visitors is also an essential aspect of religious expression and experience (Stromberg 1993).

Another rhetorical device which serves to mark the entry as ritualistic and sacred is that of *addressing the dead soldiers directly*. Entries that open or close with expressions such as “[T]hank you for dying for the Land of Israel” are prevalent in the visitor book (cf. Noy 2008a, 187). In all of these cases, inscribing entries facilitates the assumption of a particular “inhabitable speaking role,” or in this case inscribing role, which accomplishes sanctification (Keane 1997, 58).

Though confirmative entries constitute the majority of inscriptions in the visitor books, there are also clear instances of violation and desecration. Statistically, the latter type of entries constitute less than 4% of the entries in the books examined for this study, yet these entries are salient because they *express criticism in situ* rather than admiration and affirmation, or, to use the terms of civil religion, they are performances of blasphemy rather than sanctity. Moreover, they stand out because salience on this particular stage depends not only on sheer quantity, but also on the entries' visibility (or iconicity). The next illustration (Example 2, Figure 3) is a Hebrew text that occupies an entire page of the visitor book page (space that usually holds 6-10 entries), a fact which obviously gives it visual power.

Example 2:

Bsd [acronym for 'with God's help']
 Boo [for] Sharon
 who made life bitter
 for the *Haredim* [ultra-orthodox Jews]
 and [one] need to blow up his
 belly with a needle.
 From Ben Ezra

Boo [for] Sharon

The name Sharon refers to then Israeli prime-minister, Ariel Sharon (the entry was written around May, 2005). Publicly expressing a desire to stick a needle into his belly and to blow him up is a symbolic expression of radical disdain not only for Ariel Sharon himself, but also for the Zionist ideals of (militaristic) nationalism, with which he is strongly associated. Recall that like many Israeli prime-ministers, Sharon was a decorated general. Hence an attack on Sharon carries considerable symbolic meaning. As typical of these "blasphemous" entries, the inscriber explicitly indicates the motivation for his inscription—in this case anger at Sharon on behalf of ultra-orthodox Jewish groups. What is interesting is the fact that the stage provided by this ethno-national commemorative book was found appropriate for inscribing this entry. In this symbolic context, the entry is not simply an instance of hate graffiti that could have been inscribed anywhere, but a situated performance that recognizes what the site stands for, and aims to "stick a needle" and deflate the Zionist ethos and narrative that it recites.

All the entries of this type, expressing various degrees of violation, were written by anti-Zionist ultra-orthodox visitors. This is explained, to some degree, by the urban location of Ammunition Hill, which is adjacent

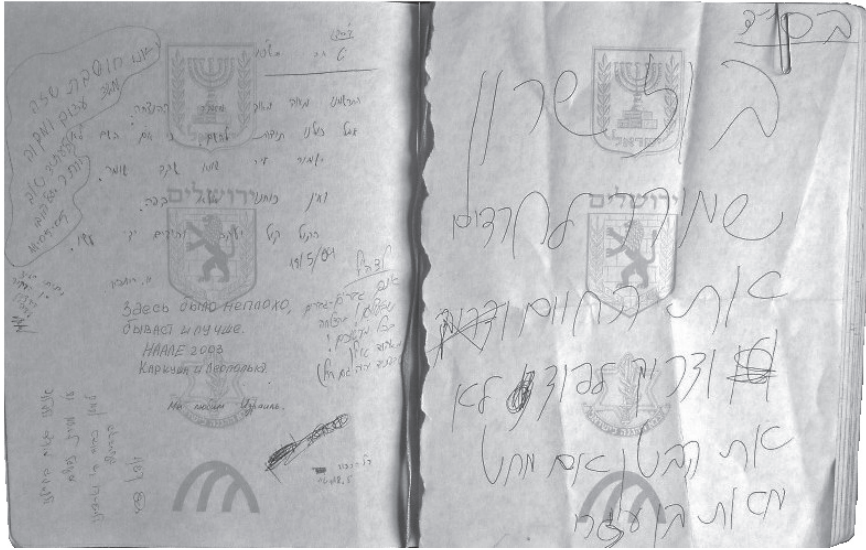


Figure 3. Violations: Boo [for] Sharon.

to ultra-orthodox neighborhoods (e.g., Ramat Eshkol).

Lastly, Figure 3 clearly shows that the page on which the inscription is written was at some point roughly torn out of the book and crumpled up. The story behind this is that the book once contained several large hate inscriptions of this kind, directed at Zionism and Ariel Sharon. The others were covered by the curator with white correction fluid (an intervention that is performed by the staff very rarely), while this inscription was left as it was. However, at some point, one of the site's maintenance employees became so upset with it that he tore the page out, thus adding his own act of desecration to the violating inscription itself. He was then made to return the page to its original place in the book (which is how I found it in the archive).

If this and similar entries constitute anti-Zionist violations of the sacred ethos of national commemoration, then Example 3 (Figure 3 above) expresses what can be perhaps termed as the Neo-Zionist (counter-)narrative (see Ram 2007). This example is typical of a cluster of entries that were written around the time of Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip (in August 2005). These entries perform the act of condemning the Zionist narrative that is celebrated via commemoration at the site.

Example 3:

With the completion of the deportation of the Jews from *Gush Katif* a museum needs to be built

a memorial
 in memory of a territory
 that was torn apart, destroyed and annihilated
 at the hands of evil and cursed people
 with no heart and no pity

The most interesting point about this entry is the fact that the violation it performs is reflexive: it is performed and directed at sites of commemoration. Its message of condemnation focuses not on the government's withdrawal plan, but on the sites and apparatuses—museums, memorials and rituals—through which national commemoration and sanctity are expressed and performed. The (anonymous) inscriber suggests that additional or even alternative sites and rituals should be constructed to commemorate the “destruction” of *Gush Katif* (the Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip). By doing so, the inscriber is not challenging the notion of sanctity associated with sites of commemoration, but rather protesting and suggesting that at present national (Zionist) commemoration has taken an erroneous path. Entries of this type, both in the visitor book and outside the Ammunition Hill complex (in the form of graffiti, bumper stickers and the like), de-legitimize the association between Judaism—as practiced by some—and the Zionist Movement.

Note that the Hebrew term translated here as “memorial” (*yad va-shem*) is particularly charged because it is the name of the official National Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Site in Jerusalem. The entry thus evokes the claims of *Gush Katif* settlers who drew a comparison between their situation and that of the Jews in the Holocaust.

The final example (Figure 4) presents an act of desecration grounded in a rather different ideological conflict, which concerns the politics of ethnicity in (Jewish) Israeli society and specifically within the Israeli army. The entry was produced sometime around January, 2006.

Example 4:

Golani Respect!!
 [image of a tree]
 Death to all the paratroopers!! [image of a crossed out snake]
 [image of footsteps]
 I was here...

Anti-commemoration: Ethnic desecration

Golani, an infantry brigade whose emblem is a (green) tree, and the Paratrooper Brigade, whose emblem is a (red) snake, have a long history of mutual rivalry. The entry may be understood as a reflection of

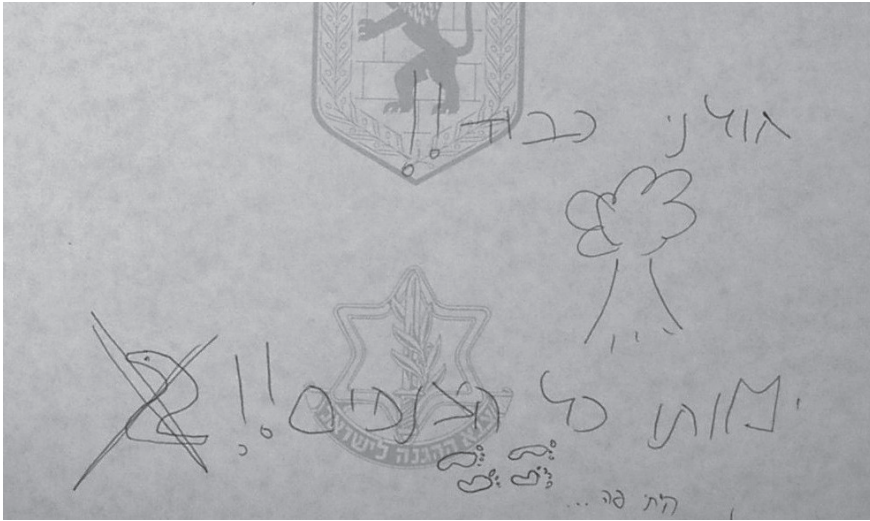


Figure 4. Desecration: Death to all the paratroopers!!

this rivalry and as a celebration of Golani's supposed superiority over the Paratroopers, conveyed in a straightforward way by wishing death on the paratroopers. The entry expresses this through both discursive and iconic means, and is thus a "hybrid entry" that makes effective use of the communicative resources made available in and by the book. This entry might have conveyed no more than intra-military rivalry were it not for the fact that the Ammunition Hill *celebrates the Paratrooper Brigade* and is associated with it. The site and the museum are full of pictures and texts describing the heroic achievements of the paratroopers, who were the first to "liberate" the Western Wall in Jerusalem's Old City. Since the entry symbolically "executes" the paratroopers, instead of honoring and commemorating them, the entry is undoubtedly directed not only at the paratroopers themselves but at the Ammunition Hill site and the (ethno-) national narrative it tells.

The entry takes on further meaning owing to the fact that Golani and the Paratroopers are associated with different social sectors of Israeli society and with different images of men and masculinity. The soldiers who joined the paratroopers traditionally belonged to the old Ashkenazi elites, and the brigade is correspondingly associated with earlier images of "kibbutznik" (Jews of European decent) Sabra (native Israeli) masculinity. The soldiers who joined Golani, on the other hand, were traditionally of Mizrahi background (Jews who emigrated from Muslim countries), and this Brigade is associated with an alternative, rougher model of masculinity.

Hence, within the context of politics, ethnicity and gender in contemporary Israeli society, an assault on the Paratroopers carries distinct ethnic overtones, and amounts to an assault on the Ashkenazi hegemony. It is directed at the local politics of commemoration, which underlie the sacred register, revealing that sacred *ethno*-national commemoration (and ethno-militarism) is a prestigious cultural resource. As Weiss (1997, 99) correctly points out, Israeli culture of commemoration purports to be a “key symbol that cuts across historical periodizations and ethnic divisions.” The entry challenges this claim. The violation performed here is not limited to symbolically executing the paratroopers instead of commemorating them, but also exposes the politics behind national commemoration and the social prestige and mobility that are bound to them.

Conclusions: Jewish entextualizations

It is no news that where norms exist, deviations and violations follow, and that where sanctities exist, blasphemies and profanities are expected. Most of the entries in the commemorative visitor books examined in this study confirm the Zionist story told at the site. They do so by repeating and (re)citing its ideological tenets and adopting its sacred register of discursive-cum-iconic commemoration. Perhaps more interesting, and definitely more intriguing, are those entries that do not confirm the national narrative, but challenge and violate the sanctity that the site endows. Paradoxically, these violations do not promote secular or liberal worldviews, aiming to dissociate the civic sphere from religious and militaristic symbolisms. Instead, they are predominantly expressions of fundamentalist Jewish ideologies, which view the conjoining of national and religious worldviews as essentially problematical. Since for these worldviews some of the state’s actions are blasphemous, the visitors who adhere with them seize the opportunity to pay the state back with the same coin.

In the visitor book of the Ammunition Hill site, these (Jewish) fundamentalist dialectics and blaspheming impulses become inscribed performances. These performances are not merely discursive opinions or expressions, but are situated “writing acts” (to paraphrase Austin’s “speech act”). Two factors account for this. First, the stage on which they are inscribed is cued as a “Jewish” stage, i.e., is designed to evoke sacred Jewish symbolism and ritual, specifically concepts related to writing and reading. This staging is pursued with the ideological aim of sustaining the Zionist “civil religion,” especially with regards to pivotal moments of sanctified commemoration, sacrifice and a sense of profound indebtedness.

The institutional staging supplies only one half of the overall semiot-

ics, the invitation/potentialities. The other half, the response/materializations, is supplied by the visitors themselves, who are the (ab)users of this stage—the actors who perform upon it. The ethnographic observations indicate that the visitors are all Jewish. Therefore, the site as a whole, and the surfaces of the visitor book, are a Jewish space in both respects: in terms of their design and in terms of their use.

The performative dialectics of sanctity versus blasphemy notably occurs on a *discursive* stage. The medium that serves here, handwriting, is not coincidental; it too marks the stage and the texts therein as embodied and authentic “Jewish” performances, and it too harks to the esteemed symbolism of the written word—and of occasions of reading and writing—in traditional Jewish ritual (Boyarin 1993). The visitor book thus emerges as a politically mobilized, cultural site of entextualization: a site where texts are publicly drafted and meaningfully performed. While processes of entextualization have generally been discussed in terms of the extractability of discourse, or how units of discourse can be (re)moved (Bauman and Briggs 1990), the framing of this commemorative visitor book establishes the opposite notion—one of *immobility*. In line with commemorative ideology and iconicity, the book indexes the stability of location and the span of duration, while the visitors themselves represent mobility and fleetingness.

Moreover, the semiotics of the visitor book as an entextualization site are also shaped by the semiotics of (heritage) tourism, which are largely concerned with issues of space, place, scale and mobility. Because the tourists’ performances are actions, the entries in the book amount to more than just “signs” or “representations.” Rather, in their material and spatial dimensions, they are actions that occupy and populate space. Thus through occupying space and marking place inscriptionally they accomplish something over and above their literary meaning. Note that like tourists elsewhere, visitors at the Ammunition Hill too are playful (Dann 1996), and some of the challenge their entries pose to the site’s gravity is established by the caricature-like/child-like entries they produce (colorful drawings and expressions such as “stick a needle,” see above).

The commemorative visitor book corresponds with other Jewish/Israeli sites and practices of entextualization—from political bumper stickers to graffiti in settlers’ houses (Bloch 2000; Kohn and Rosenberg 2009, respectively). For instance, the Western Wall (only a twenty minute walk away from the Ammunition Hill), was mentioned in interviews I conducted with both the site management and with visitors. As a matter of fact, there are a few cases of visitor book entries that are not inscribed on the book’s pages but on pieces of paper placed between its pages. This is very reminiscent

of the practice of placing notes inscribed with prayers between the stones of the Western Wall and at other holy sites.

Another example of a Jewish-Zionist site of entextualization, with which I wish to conclude, has recently occupied the local media. This example concerns racist and otherwise offensive inscriptions that were smeared on the walls of Palestinian houses in the Gaza Strip by Israeli soldiers during the 2009 Israeli invasion (Ynet and Agencies 2009).² Those inscriptions resemble the ones explored in this article in many of their features, including some thematic aspects, the frequent use of Hebrew/English code switching, and the combination of discursive and iconic resources. It can be said that both are part of a web that constitutes accumulating performances which mark, consume, occupy and (ab)use spaces.

Acknowledgment

I am deeply indebted to Ayelet Kohn, Caroline Aronis, and Hagit Migron for their many constructive comments.

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2. Notice that the newspaper article is titled "A 'souvenir' from the soldiers," alluding to both the enduring nature of the inscriptions and their authentic (and somewhat touristic) character.

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