

Thank You for Dying for Our Country: Commemorative Texts and Performances in Jerusalem. Chaim Noy. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. xix + 274 pp.

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In *Thank You for Dying for Our Country*, Chaim Noy examines visitor books at the Ammunition Hill National Memorial Site in East Jerusalem. The analysis that emerges is one that rests at the intersection of multiple fields; including linguistic anthropology, semiotics, tourism studies, and the study of ethnonational identity. In addition to its interdisciplinarity, the study also showcases competing textual practices, narratives, and ideologies regarding the nature of the Israeli state; all of which play out on the pages of visitor books themselves.

The book opens by situating both visitor books and Ammunition Hill within a broader discussion on the ways in which tourism is performed, the place of language in its production, and how an ethnography of texts informs our understanding of the nature of national identity. In chapter two, Noy walks the reader through Ammunition Hill, from its outer courtyards to the inner halls of the museum, presenting its physical spaces, curation, and contents. Noy argues that the site itself creates a language ideology deeply rooted in Israeli ethnonational identity and the military history of Ammunition Hill.

Chapter three shifts from the site's physical space to the visitor book and its inscriptions. The book is presented as an organic byproduct of the foundational ideologies of Ammunition Hill, serving as a centerpiece of the ideological ecology of the site (p.47). Noy suggests that through its existence and visitor's decisions to inscribe on its pages, the book acts as a commemorative canvas adding symbolic force to Ammunition Hill while contributing to the ideological recreation of the state. Chapter four introduces the visitor book entries, presenting multiple genres, all of which Noy treats as public performances that constitute proper ways of "doing commemoration" (p. 77). Noy shows that through the act of inscription, the medium of the visitor book is co-produced through collaboration between visitors and the institution itself (p. 84). One of the strengths of this analysis is that it highlights how links are created that tie these inscriptions to the ideological foundations of Ammunition Hill, but crucially extending those links beyond the site's walls to the city of Jerusalem and the State of Israel itself.

Chapter five analyzes the more elaborate entries inscribed on the pages of the visitor book. In doing so, Noy shows how they performatively re-tell the narrative of commemoration that is presented at Ammunition Hill, reflecting how visitors learn to articulate this ideological narrative through the act of inscription. This chapter also illuminates ideological conflicts that play out in the visitor books by analyzing entries that challenge the lack of theological and religious content at the site. Noy shows that visitors draw on the ideological message of Ammunition Hill, indexing their understanding of its narrative and critiquing its message in their inscriptions.

Chapter six examines the co-production of inscription, showing that the process of co-production involves learning specific forms of literacy and language socialization, all of which are cultivated through the act of inscribing. In these cases, visitors who are more "literate" in the genre of national commemoration socialize other members of society into these discursive practices. Chapter six also highlights the heterogeneity of the inscriptions present in the book, suggesting that although visitors make use of both verbal and graphic elements, as well as

multiple genres, collectively their entries represent part of a much broader performance of national commemoration.

In chapter seven, Noy analyzes the role of gender and the family in processes of commemoration. Noy shows that the site furthers particular forms of hegemonic masculinity linking Ammunition Hill with masculinities that index the militarized history of the state. The textual analysis of this chapter highlights spaces where gender is both marked and unmarked, showing a myriad of ways in which gender is performed textually (p. 145), including entries that construct an image of conflicting masculinities (e.g. Ashkenazi vs Mizrahi) that play out in the book. Families, and specifically how female family members take part in national commemoration, also represent a key area of analysis in this chapter. Family inscriptions are treated as largely unmarked, with Noy arguing that they work to actively conceal, omit, and de-mark gender.

Chapter eight moves away from the public visitor book, shifting the discussion to a non-public, VIP visitor book also housed at Ammunition Hill. These VIP inscriptions, as Noy notes, serve to reinforce the ideologically laden character of both the site, while reinforcing the “elite” status of the signatories. Noy shows this process through highlighting that while public inscriptions often index the origin of the inscriber, that private inscriptions index institutional status and affiliation, reflecting the inscriber’s awareness of their public face and institutional affiliation (p. 169). This chapter also discusses the only Arabic entry in these visitor books, inscribed by Jordanian military officers who fought at Ammunition Hill in 1967. Noy describes the Arabic entry as performing an act of reconciliation between Jordanian and Israeli soldiers (p. 184), while suggesting that these forms of reconciliation and commemoration ultimately serve to silence Palestinian claims of sovereignty.

In chapter nine, Noy steps back from analyzing these inscriptions to take a more reflexive view of the site and his positionality as an ethnographer. The chapter begins by examining the ethnographer’s presence in the site, and the role that both Noy and his equipment played in the unfolding of the project. The second component of the chapter examines Noy’s practices of collecting and processing the data, while the remainder of the chapter focuses on his embodied presence in the research, and how certain aspects of the project are concealed through the crafting of the ethnography.

In closing out his account of Ammunition Hill, Noy foregrounds again the ideological nature of the visitor book. As he describes, it is perhaps not a book per se that this ethnography presents, but an ideological platform on which ethnonational commemoration is performed. As he moves forward from the ideological nature of the medium, Noy reiterates the interventions that the ethnography makes within the range of disciplines that it engages. A performative analysis of language within the context of heritage tourism, as Noy notes, illuminates what tourists actually accomplish in these contexts. In taking this performative view of a medium like visitor books, Noy opens up a space for dialogue across disciplinary lines, situating tourists as both producers and consumers of discourse (p. 209).

In *Thank You for Dying for Our Country*, Noy meaningfully engages with a diverse range of fields and, regardless of a given reader’s theoretical orientation, this study provides a great deal of insight. One of the strongest aspects of the book is the view that it provides of the daily ways that people do and enact nationalism and national identity, adding to our understanding of the ways that national commemoration serves to ideologically reproduce and maintain the state. Noy paints a vivid picture of how individuals reinforce and maintain Israeli ethnonational

identity through their performance and inscription. All, as he says, “without a word about the Palestinians” (p. 217).

Palestinians are, unsurprisingly, absent from both Ammunition Hill and the pages of Noy’s ethnography. Although their absence does not undermine to the strength of the analysis, more direct engagement with the “politics of removal” that exist in Israel regarding Palestinians would have further strengthened the work. Both the ideological orientation of Ammunition Hill and the picture of Israeli ethnonational ideology offered by Noy is built on the removal; whether literally, figuratively, or discursively, of Palestinians. Noy’s analysis may have benefited from situating visitor book performances at Ammunition Hill within a broader scholarly discussion that has investigated the other forms of removal that have been key components of the Israeli national project. Engaging with scholars like Eyal Weizman (*Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation*, Verso, 2007), who has shown how spatial control in the West Bank facilitates the removal of Palestinians from the lives of Israeli settlers, or Daniel Monterescu (“To Buy or Not to Be: Trespassing the Gated Community”, *Public Culture*, 2009: 403-430), who has examined processes of ethnogentrification playing out in other parts of Israel, would have allowed Noy to situate these performative linguistic practices within a broader contextual frame. In doing so, it would showcase the multitude of different forms of removal that take place in the process of creating and maintaining the state, while situating visitor books, like those at Ammunition Hill, as key sites where individuals quite literally make their mark on the face of Israeli ethnonational identity.