

***Thank you for dying for our country:  
Commemorative texts and performances in Jerusalem***  
**Chaim Noy (2015)**

**Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press**  
**ISBN: 978-0-19-939897-3. Pp. 304**

*Reviewed by Vesa Koskela*

The life and death of Israelis and Palestinians has been the stuff of stories and politics for several decades now. Pro-Israel and pro-Palestine politics have embedded themselves in the public consciousness of not just the United States, where a sizable Jewish population resides, but continental Europe as well. In his book *Thank you for dying for our country: Commemorative texts and performances in Jerusalem*, Chaim Noy approaches the visitor's book at Ammunition Hill National Commemoration Site, an Israeli military museum in Jerusalem, as a source of real-life expressions and performances of Jewish identity and Israeli military tradition.

Noy engages in a multimodal exposition of his field research into the Ammunition Hill site. As he himself notes, this is an eclectic approach that foregoes theoretical and analytical rigor for a wider perspective on the material at hand. A critical approach to the subject matter is apparent throughout, based on the work of Blommaert (2013) among others. Van Dijk's (1998, 2008) extensive critical work on discourse and identity would also be closely connected to Noy's project, had his work been cited. The absence of van Dijk's work was a small surprise in this regard, as his work on discourse and identity is both vast and influential. The book follows a simple tripartite structure. Part one is named

---

**Affiliation**

University of Turku, Finland  
email: vpkosk@utu.fi

*Signing in* which introduces the theoretical launching point and the location and topic, that is, Ammunition Hill Museum. Part two is named *Thank you for dying for our country*, a phrase taken out of the visitor book, and constitutes the bulk of the work delving into the material of visitor books located at the site. Part three is named *Signing out*, containing an overture to a VIP guest book and reflections on what the author had learned from his project.

Part one begins with a personal account by Noy on his arrival at Ammunition Hill Museum, setting the narrative style that is followed throughout most of the book. The reader is then introduced to the Ammunition Hill Museum, the focal point for this volume, through the eyes of the author. Noy's personal observations and experiences are retold in a detailed manner as he introduces some of the cultural and linguistic artifacts found in and around the museum, such as signs, letters, and personal performances by Israeli soldiers. It is the concept of performance that takes on a significant role in this book, as the relationship and interaction of tourists, school children, and soldiers with the museum and its contents are observed and analyzed. These performances extend beyond the visitor's book into the physical space and place of the museum itself. Billig's (1995) work on nationalism and Derrida's (1976, 1988) deconstructionism set the opening tones for the contemplation of how ethnonational ideology is constructed. The concept of Zionism is highlighted in particular as an important part of the museum's commemorative experience and part of a Jewish ethnonational ideology.

Part two is occupied with exploration of the museum and the visitor book found within, 'playing on Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1998) notion of "destination cultures"' (p. 45). The interactions of museum visitors and their process of writing in the visitor's book is explored in detail, enveloping not just the discursive and social aspects, but the aesthetic as well. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1998) idea of 'destination cultures' could have been tied to the chapter earlier on and expanded upon to appreciate the role it plays. As it stands, that concept is left to be embedded within the text with other methods. Goffman's frame analysis (1974) and some of his earlier work is justifiably employed on multiple occasions to explore the perspectives that visitors display on their visit to the museum. The question of ethnonational identity mentioned earlier is studied in greater detail in this section, not only through the perspective of Jewish nationalism, but gendered identity as well (Butler, 1990). More recent methods of discourse and multimodal analysis are also invoked, for example Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) take on multimodal discourse that informs the core of multimodal methodology employed herein. Their work is fundamental for the multimodal approach Noy has opted to use.

Part three brings a closure to the work by analyzing the private VIP visitor's book where important delegations and Israeli officials could write down their greetings. Noy also engages in a kind of metaethnography, reflecting on his own work by ethnographic means and the theoretical implications of his multiple methods approach. The nature of this approach is bound to reflect on the reader's own epistemological predispositions and how they evaluate each piece of data and analysis. As a whole, this work reads much like a travel or a field research journal of the author's trip through the landscape of Ammunition Hill. The personal narrative is interspersed with theoretical and methodological thoughts immediately related to the subject. These methodological applications are then brought together at the conclusion of this work, contemplating on possible theoretical developments made during the course of the author's investigations.

Noy dedicates considerable time and space to the study of the little things, such as the physical space between sentences and the interactions between family members, in between theoretical and methodological considerations. For that reason, *Thank you for dying for our country* is a personable work on an esoteric subject, bringing together multitudes of theories and approaches to language, culture, identity, and performance. From Peircean semiotics to Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) gender-oriented work on performing identity, a host of approaches are applied with varying degrees of detail and scope. This book will be of interest to readers interested in multimodality, ethnographic studies, or tourism studies, as it tells its story of Jewish identity through a critical lens in a war-torn environment. Noy himself states that the audience for this work is meant to be not only the ivory-tower academia, but includes 'curators and museum personnel, those in the heritage and the tourism industries, cultural commentators and critics, and artists' (p. xviii). The audience thus reflects the text.

## References

- Billig, M. (1995) *Banal nationalism*. London: Sage.
- Blommaert, J. (2013) Writing as a sociolinguistic object. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 17(4): 440–459. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josl.12042>
- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993) *Bodies That matter: On the discursive limits of 'sex'*. New York: Routledge.
- Derrida, J. (1976) *Of grammatology*. [Trans G. C. Spivak]. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1988) *Limited inc*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

- Goffman, E. (1974) *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (1998) *Destination cultures: Tourism, museums, and heritage*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kress, G. R. and van Leeuwen, T. (2001) *Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication*. London: Oxford University Press.
- van Dijk, T. (1998) *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. London: Sage.
- van Dijk, T. (2008) *Discourse and context: A sociocognitive approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511481499>

(Received 31<sup>st</sup> May 2016; accepted 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2016)