

Editorial Foreword

MARTYRS AND MEMORIALS It is hard to imagine nation-states without war memorials. A nation is alive and well—or so it would seem—if its members are willing to die for it and to commemorate such deaths. Yet which deaths count as sacrificial, and how do states remember, or strategically forget, those who died in the name of national imaginings the state does not fully control or endorse? If the nation-state is everywhere a site of internal power struggles and identities in opposition, which martyrs become heroes and which become enemies? When a nation's martyrs cannot be recognized by the state that rules them, how are their deaths preserved in national memory, at what political cost, and on what moral authority?

Tamir Sorek explores these questions in Israel, a nation-state in which Arab citizens, still widely considered “internal enemies,” confront tremendous obstacles to the building of memorials that mark the killing and massacre of Palestinians in Israeli-Arab wars and intercommunal violence. Because they are citizens of the state, but not Jewish nationals, Palestinians must deal with the offense their history gives to other Israelis, who attempt in myriad ways to suppress the public commemoration of Palestinian martyrs, even as memorials to Jewish war dead fill the Israeli landscape. Sorek describes the caution and contradictions that pervade attempts to build Palestinian memorials, explaining why some efforts succeed and others fail.

Lara Deeb contends with martyrdom and memorialization among Hizbullah supporters in Lebanon. Hizbullah martyrs are fully Lebanese, yet their movement does not stand for the Lebanese nation as a whole, and their acts of commemoration are undertaken without government support or official state endorsement. Deeb describes exhibitions and historic sites at which Hizbullah has commemorated its dead, making their deaths part of larger narratives of Lebanese, Arab, and Muslim liberation. The acts of martyrdom Hizbullah memorializes belong to recent memory, to “the just-lived past,” and attempts to render them historical are urgent and hotly contested, not only by Lebanese, but by Israelis as well, who intervene in these historicizing projects by destroying sites of commemoration (like the Khiam detention center), creating new shrines and martyrs to Hizbullah's cause.

CONTESTING COMMODITIES As material things worth having, commodities are inseparable from the social worlds they create and the immaterial desires they express. Commodities are often called “goods,” and they can go bad. Great effort, political and moral, is given to making sure commodities

are what they claim to be, are worth what we pay for them, and that people do not derive unfair advantage from selling or controlling them. In the cases explored here, the value of commodities is a function of the degree to which their qualities, as products and as public goods, are contested by consumers and regulated by the state.

Susanne Freidberg charts the history of industrial cold storage in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a new technology that changed the market for eggs and, ultimately, transformed the physical nature of egg-producing hens. Refrigeration made it possible to sell eggs long after peak laying seasons were over, yet the public had to be convinced that cold storage could preserve “freshness,” a quality whose very meaning was altered by artificial cold. Consumers also worried that the market for eggs and other frozen or chilled goods was inherently deceptive because it encouraged the hoarding and cornering of a food item that once appeared seasonally. These concerns and government attempts to regulate egg markets, Freidberg argues, led eventually to the development of chickens that could lay eggs year round, thus rendering obsolete earlier concerns about “freshness” and how best to guarantee it in the new conditions made possible by cold storage.

Brenda Chalfin deals with a much larger, more expensive commodity: the automobile. As modern and as manufactured as the supermarket egg, cars are yet another powerful example of how commodities are contested by their own consumers and literally recreated through government regulation. Chalfin situates her study of cars in Ghana, and more specifically in the customs offices where imported cars are inventoried, tested, certified, and reproduced by functionaries of the Ghanaian state. The state interest in cars is revealed not only through customs procedures, but also through its treatment of cars as a sumptuary good, one that can be distributed to clients and withheld from opponents. Cars, Chalfin argues, are objects ideally suited for use in neoliberal policies of transparency and anti-corruption campaigns, and they play a central role in electoral politics, where signs of good (or bad) government are now visible in the relationship between cars and power.

DIVINE AGENTS The gods are a mystery, and fathoming their will is a task secular scholars long ago conceded to “the believers.” The line between divine and human agency is hard to draw in the world of belief; the two domains blend into each other, as people worship gods and gods intervene in history, often through the medium of people or things people create. This interactive process is broadly intelligible to believer and infidel alike, yet infidel scholars are at a serious disadvantage in capturing an agentive dialogue that, in keeping with method, is routinely portrayed as imaginary. What kind of agency do gods have; how is human agency created through contact with divine agency; what does it mean to treat divine agency as a force that is real in its historical

consequences? Creative answers to these questions require new understandings of what hegemony, and agency, can mean.

Wei-ping Lin lays out the complex procedures by which Chinese villagers in Taiwan create god icons, objects that might be described as statues or figurines, but which are in effect the meeting ground of god-like and human agencies. Lin explains how the icons are produced and why gods “need” icons to sustain their relationships with people and places. Not only do gods inhabit icons, they also speak to and through villagers, and Lin investigates the means by which gods, icons, and spirit mediums share their powers and mutually inflect the agencies and effects they can have in common. This careful analysis enables Lin to reconceptualize several dominant approaches to Chinese god icons.

Sean Hanretta takes on issues of agency, human and spiritual, both as a set of claims about how humans act in society and as a set of analytical problems created and best resolved by particular forms of historical writing. Recounting the growth of a West African Sufi order founded in the 1920s by Yacouba Sylla, Hanretta produces four accounts that “explain” the agency of women, who became Yacoubists in large numbers even though the movement was, in many respects, patriarchal in its organization and teachings. Each account, including one that is “less humanist” and more alert to spiritual agents, has its strengths and weaknesses, but all are removed from the experiences of agency they purport to explain. The sense of agency at stake in these accounts, Hanretta argues, is better treated as a problem of writing and rhetoric than as a problem of social theory.

JEWES IN TRANSITION The nineteenth century saw radical changes in the identities and social positions occupied by Jews. For much of the twentieth century, political Zionism and the emergence of American Jewry as a successful, pan-ethnic constituency have served as backdrops for study of these nineteenth-century changes. The result has been an understanding of recent Jewish history that is heavy on cultural and political themes but lighter on economic and religious ones. This trend harmonizes nicely with the transformation of Jewish communities from economic specialists and religious minorities to a nation (with its own state) composed of “ethnic groups” (which might live in Israel or elsewhere). The anachronisms and elisions that often accompany this transition are becoming obvious to scholars, as are the intellectual gains to be made from approaching nineteenth-century Jews with different assumptions in mind.

Eli Lederhendler offers a critical reassessment of the late-nineteenth-century immigration of Russian and other east European Jews to North America, giving explanatory weight to economic and political changes typically overlooked by historians who are invested in the working class and entrepreneurial identities American Jews developed after arriving in the United States. Lederhendler argues that Jews in Russia were not disproportionately

working class, nor were they middle-class entrepreneurs. Instead, they were undergoing a pervasive downward transition toward a caste-like status of impoverished artisans and petty merchants. Effectively cut out of the middle and industrial working classes, millions of Russian Jews adapted by leaving. Lederhender analyzes this radical displacement and explains how and why the factors motivating Jewish migration to the United States are remembered differently today.

Abigail Green focuses on the development, in the mid-nineteenth century, of a global Jewish public that defined itself and its interests in explicitly religious terms. This religious sphere resembled international Catholic and Protestant movements, in which bodies of believers were being steadily transformed into bodies of opinion. These publics had their unifying causes, their media, their heroes and villains, and they were variously opposed to, or strategically aligned with, each other. Green suggests that a new kind of Jewish modernity was worked out in these religious publics before secular variants of Zionism developed; indeed, these new, international modernities functioned as preconditions for a secular Zionism that could unite Jews in and beyond Europe. That Jewish publics evolved in tandem with Catholic and Protestant publics, Green argues, has implications that are overlooked when historians privilege the secular contexts in which Zionism (and other variants of nationalism) emerged.

CSSH DISCUSSION The fusion of history, anthropology, and critical social theory has produced distinctive genres of historiography. **Anupama Rao** explores recent experiments in the new history by juxtaposing four books in which “archival mediation” is central to history writing as performance. Doing history, for these authors, entails the creative use of “texts, objects, and bodies” that have been removed from one sociopolitical context and exist now, for the historian and often for the subjects of history as well, in pieces that must be carefully reconstituted, always with an acute awareness of political intention and sensitivity to the conditions that make certain forms of evidence available for use. The creations that result, Rao suggests, have the potential to transform “our understanding the perceptual field that is history.”