

Avraham Sela and Alon Kadish (eds), *The War of 1948: Representations of Israeli and Palestinian Memories and Narratives*, Bloomington, IN: Indian University Press, 2016; pp. vii + 232, paper, £16.99 978-0-253-02242-4

This richly textured edited collection coalesces not so much around history but on how Israelis and Palestinians have remembered, memorialised, and represented the traumatic events of the war of 1948 through media such as TV dramas, paintings, urban space, official histories, literature, and museums. The formation of Israel in its glorious war of independence against the odds was a disaster for the Palestinians who lost their land and went into exile. The contrasting histories of victors and vanquished are reflected in the Palestinians giving priority to memory over critical history – the past is simply too painful and involves too much self-criticism, and there is little accessible archival material available. While the Palestinians have memory, the Israelis have history; Palestinians have given remembrance precedence over critical history. These essays show that when you stop having memory, you have history, or put another way: when you stop having memory, you stop having history. As these essays all prove, both winners and losers in 1948 have quested for legitimacy through (re)presentation of past. The two sides have produced (p. 204) ‘mutually exclusive narratives’ that seek legitimacy for the world as it is now. History really does matter here. At first sight, Israel has managed this process more effectively in terms of writing the histories of the war, reflecting both its and the Palestinians’ memories (so giving the Palestinians their story), shaping the future, using mobilised history as psychological armour. Digging deeper in the text, critical histories within Israel by Jews have threatened the conventional story of Palestinians leaving their homes voluntarily, even if today the vast majority of Jewish Israelis still believe the official story of what happened in 1948, with the blame lying with the other side. There is a story here of ivory tower critical history versus popular history for the masses, adumbrated both in the long introduction by the editors and in the afterword by Sela and Neil Caplan. The Palestinians’ eschewal of conventional history in favour of different methodologies that reflect their lack of archival material, such as oral history, provides exciting, non-conventional ways of looking at the past, as readers of this text will discover. The studies here are skewed to the Israeli side of the debate, not in terms of numbers of essays but in how our understanding of the Palestinians’ understanding of 1948 comes through scholars who are not Palestinian, but Israelis writing about the other side of the hill. That said, the editors have done a good job of balancing the volume and they are to be congratulated for an interesting volume whose individual studies will excite the academic specialist, while the general reader will find much of value in the supporting contextual text.