

Contested Land, Contested Memory: Israel's Jews and Arabs and the Ghosts of Catastrophe

By Jo Roberts. Dundurn, 2013. 302 pages. \$24.99/paperback; \$11.99/eBook.

Reviewed by Max L. Carter

Looking back on reviews I have written for *Friends Journal* on books about Palestine/Israel, I notice that I often refer to a statement by Israeli politician Naomi Chazan: “The tragedy of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is that there are two narratives of the situation which are both true—but don’t meet.” Jo Roberts’s book *Contested Land, Contested Memory* gives depth and texture to that statement, adding historical detail to the conflicting narratives.

A trained anthropologist, lawyer, and former managing editor of the New York *Catholic Worker*, Roberts trains each of these lenses on the complex history which forges the memories of Jews and Palestinian Arabs—and which tragically makes the current situation as close to intractable as even a Quaker might admit. As I finished reading the book, Israel’s 2014 Operation Protective Edge had already pushed the death toll in Gaza over 1,000, with neither Israel nor Hamas showing any signs of backing down. The insights of the book as to why such carnage could be justified by both sides were on stark display.

Roberts presents two “catastrophes” that have shaped the collective memory of Jews and Palestinian Arabs: the *Shoah* (the Hebrew word for catastrophe, translated in English as Holocaust) and the *Nakba* (Arabic for catastrophe and the name given by Palestinians to the events that led to the creation of the modern state of Israel). Both experiences lead to a self-identity as a victim—and to the responses that victims often display, emotions too numerous to mention here!

Each chapter explores a different aspect of the memory each side has of events that precede the momentous year of 1948 and which flow from it. Even having spent considerable time in the region and having read more than I care to admit about Palestine/Israel, I found fascinating details revealed in Roberts’s careful journalism. Especially interesting are her personal interviews with major figures in the new historiography emerging from Israel itself, historians such as Benny Morris and Ilan

Pappé. These reveal many of the myth-busting details that are sadly lacking in the “script” that too often plays out about Palestine/Israel in the popular media and Western consciousness, myths such as the “land without a people for the people without a land” and the “voluntary” abandonment of their homes by Palestinians in 1948.

As both Israel and Hamas appeared to be acting irrationally in the Gaza crisis, Roberts’s insights helped make more sense of this catastrophe: Israel’s collective memory as a people facing annihilation lends itself to using all means at its disposal to assure “never again,” and Palestinians’ collective memory as a people who also face annihilation lends itself to resisting a continuing Nakba by all means possible.

Roberts’s conclusion is that “Ultimately, the deepest healing of the wounds of this seemingly intractable conflict will come . . . through a re-imagining of the body politic, a reworking of collective memory, for both Jewish Israelis and Palestinians.” Unfortunately, at present it appears that Landrum Bolling’s oft-cited assessment is as true as Naomi Chazan’s: “Neither side is willing to give up its hope for a better past.”

But I have not read a better book than Roberts’s *Contested Land, Contested Memory* for understanding the competing memories of that past.

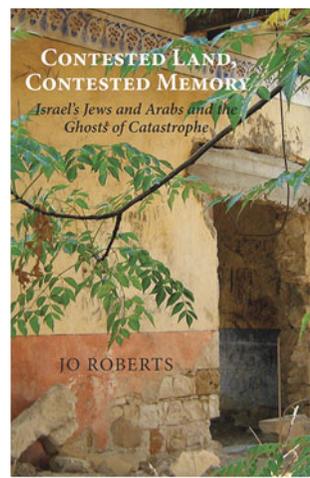
Max L. Carter is the director of Friends Center and campus ministry coordinator at Guilford College, where he also directs the Quaker Studies program. He taught in the Ramallah Friends Schools as his alternative service as a Vietnam War-era conscientious objector and returns annually to the Middle East leading work/study groups in RFS and Israeli and Palestinian peace communities. A graduate of the Earlham School of Religion and the PhD program at Temple University in American religious history, Max is a recorded Friends minister in North Carolina Yearly Meeting (FUM).

99 Tactics of Successful Tax Resistance Campaigns

By David M. Gross. Picket Line Press, 2014. 312 pages. \$18.50/paperback; \$7.99/eBook.

Reviewed by Tom Head

David Gross has put together a helpful compendium of tax resistance tactics. It is a work that I found stimulating and rewarding to read. I came to this book with two distinctly different parts of myself



in tension with each other.

On the one hand, I am a pacifist. I was honorably discharged from the U.S. Army as a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War. Ever since that life-changing experience, I have grappled with the question

of *paying* for war. It was one thing to remove my body from conflict, but that was only a first, small step in a lifelong commitment to peacemaking. The call to act in good conscience keeps working within me. Paying for war is clearly a form of participation in the military, and so I continue to seek ways to move away from war.

On the other hand, I am an economist. As such, I appreciate and understand that a strong society depends upon a willingness to attend to the needs we cannot meet through individual action alone. I have been dismayed at the unhealthy attitudes toward the public sector that have been so prevalent in recent years in this country. In many ways we are shirking and denigrating legitimate and desirable support of the public sector. I ask students to read Jeffrey D. Sachs’s most recent book, *The Price of Civilization*, the title of which is taken from a statement by Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.: “I like to pay taxes. With them I buy civilization.”

And so as I read Gross’s book, I find myself in this tension: I *do* like to pay taxes. A free, virtuous, and flourishing society depends upon a measure of cooperative public activity, and we should support that. And yet I *do not* like to pay taxes that actually undermine a free and just society, those that fuel the destruction of civilization. Sorting out which is which is an important dialogue. This book only indirectly treats that larger moral question, but what it does do very well is catalog methods for removing the support of injustice and destruction. How and when to use these tactics will depend very much on our deeper individual and collective discernment, but I found that even this catalog of action stimulates and informs the larger search for truth.

Gross speaks to all forms of tax resistance. He studies tax resistance around the world and throughout history. His primary topics are war and militarism,