Historical narratives are a constructed form of knowledge, often put into the service of collective identity formation. Authors of historical narratives are social actors and are situated in particular cultural and political contexts that inform the narrative construction process. As such, even the most self-aware historian or textbook writer is incapable of wholly neutralizing the prevailing values, ideologies, conventions, and memories of the past that may impinge upon the objectivity of an authored text. Although historical narratives are grounded in fact, rigorous investigation and accumulation of evidence does not ensure subjectivities are muted in narratives. Facts are inert until appropriated and subsumed into a narrative. Once they are selected, facts are interpreted and imbued with meaning that is not inherently possessed. That is, because of the constructed nature of historical narratives there is no singular version of the past that holds a monopoly on truth. Instead, because history is entangled with collective identity, narratives tend to depict truth as perceived from the vantage point of a particular group. The past thus is represented in a manner conducive to nurturing group cohesion. Yet, in order to do so, historians must present the past in a manner that evokes a sense of pride in belonging. This often means that narratives minimize certain historical blemishes that may be detrimental to a positive self-image. This becomes particularly problematic in the context of conflict between communities. Narratives may reinforce a sense of group superiority over an adversary and incubate a sense of seemingly intractable enmity. In this respect, historical study may offer less of an intellectually edifying experience than an opportunity to demonize an enemy under the pretense of scholarly pursuit. It is this phenomenon of the misuse of historical study that the Israeli and Palestinian authors of Side by Side: Parallel Histories of Israel-Palestine sought to redress through the publication of their textbook that is inclusive of Israeli and Palestinian historical narratives.

Under the supervision of Israeli and Palestinian historians, teachers from each respective community collaborated in writing Side by Side under the auspices of the Peace Research Institute in the Middle East. The joint venture was initiated in 2002 and culminated in 2009 with the publication of a Hebrew-Arabic textbook and followed shortly thereafter with the publication of the English version in 2012. Side by Side was designed as an alternative to the textbooks ubiquitous in Israeli and Palestinian schools that, according to the editors of the English edition, reinforce salient misrepresentations that further promote a sense of alienation from the other community. In their introduction, the editors — Sami Adwan, Dan Bar-On, and Eyal Naveh — explain, “In intractable conflicts, each side creates a monolithic identity by constructing it in opposition to the ‘other.’” Historical facts are recruited to support the narratives associated with the monolithic constructions” (p. xiii). It is this understanding that historical narratives are constructed, history textbooks serve as an instrument of socialization, and representations of other communities can foment antagonism rather than repair relations that compelled the scholars and teachers to set aside antipathy and work as partners for producing new knowledge that challenges the status quo of conflict, mistrust, and dehumanization of the other.
Side by Side reflects the concerted effort to recast history as a medium that gives voice to silenced communities and acknowledges those who have been defined as a threatening force jeopardizing national security. In doing so, the textbook is an attempt to affirm the identity of Israeli and Palestinian populations by allowing either community to define itself rather than have an identity imposed upon them by outsiders whose existential concerns and interests may preclude the emergence of a nuanced and accurate characterization. The editors elaborate:

Using this book, the habitual stance of simply ignoring one another’s historical narrative gives way to a process of developing mutual respect and understanding of each side’s ‘logic,’ as a necessary (if not sufficient) step toward developing a better relationship with the ‘other’ and between the two peoples. (p. x)

This is accomplished by juxtaposing an Israeli narrative with a Palestinian narrative in the same textbook. By presenting both versions of the past, the authors intentionally provide students with the opportunity to explore their community’s version of the past while also having access to another interpretation of the same events as filtered through the lens of another community intimately related to this history.

The authors did not present a single narrative that merges Israeli and Palestinian narratives into a unified account. They justify this decision when writing, “We decided to initiate a process that would allow both peoples- especially the younger generation- to move beyond the one-dimensional identification with their own narrative and become equipped to acknowledge, understand, and respect (without having to accept) the narrative of the other” (p. x). Instead of producing a new narrative that integrates elements of Israeli and Palestinian versions, the authors of Side by Side accomplish something less profoundly consciousness altering but also necessary. They provide symmetry between either version of the past without either community’s voice eclipsing or negating that of the other. This inclusive framework allows readers to compare the two versions, identify divergent interpretations, and recognize the marked dissimilarities that continue to produce a fault between the two communities, arresting attempts at mutual recognition of the pain and adversity endured by both Israelis and Palestinians. This textbook represents the first increment in a prolonged process of normalization of relations that will entail questioning deeply entrenched beliefs and making concessions for the sake of resolving conflict and humanizing the other.

Both the Israeli and Palestinian narratives in Side by Side begin with the Balfour Declaration and continue through the 1990s, culminating with the failure to procure a peace agreement at Camp David when negotiations between Clinton, Barak, and Arafat reached an impasse. Both narratives found in the textbook consist of nine chapters that ostensibly introduce similar topics and episodes although varying greatly in content. For instance, the Israeli textbook devotes much of the first chapter to the condition of European Jews during the 19th and early 20th centuries in order to contextualize England’s formal recognition of Jewish rights to establish a homeland by issuing the Balfour Declaration. The chapter is rich in descriptions of the deteriorating status of Jews as racially charged antisemitism undermined attempts at full integration into European society. The Israeli text attributes the advent of Zionism to the precariousness of Jewish life in Europe coupled with the ancient desire to return to the Land of Israel. In framing the Balfour Declaration in such a manner, the Israeli narrative introduces recurring tropes of victimhood and the desire to end the Jewish diaspora. In contradistinction, the Palestinian narrative frames the Balfour Declaration in the context of World War One, European imperialism, and its apparent contradiction to similar promises for self-determination made to Arab leaders. Unlike the Israeli text which presents the Balfour Declaration as a the long awaited recognition that Jews deserved a homeland, the Palestinian text depicts it as an act of European hubris since England promised land that was still part of the Ottoman Empire. In the Palestinian narrative, the Balfour Declaration was
Osborn, D.

the first of numerous acts of imperialism that would result in territorial loss, displacement of people from their ancestral home, and national and political uncertainty. 

*Side by Side* is replete with interpretations of historical events that expose the tendency for communities to construct knowledge of the past in a manner that aligns with national memory. The side by side approach to presenting Israeli and Palestinian narratives subtly illuminates the national biases that permeate historical accounts and interfere with historical knowledge from ascertaining a singular, objective, and universal truth. The titles of the chapters from the Israeli and Palestinian narratives provide a glimpse into this reality. In the Israeli narrative, chapter four is entitled “The War of Independence and the Founding of the State of Israel” whereas the Palestinian equivalent is entitled “Al-Nakbah [The Catastrophe], 1948.” Similarly, chapter five in the Israeli text appears as “The State of Israel: The First Decades, 1950s and 1960s” whereas the Palestinian text presents “Years of Homelessness and Despair: The 1950 and 1960s.” As these chapter titles attest, at certain junctures, the Israeli narrative is triumphant while the Palestinian narrative is steeped in despair. At other moments, the Israeli narrative speaks to fault lines within the Israeli-Jewish population while the Palestinian narrative underscores a sense of collective resolve and unity. Yet even with the conspicuous disagreements in interpretation of the past and characterization of the other, neither account is neutral or more valid. Because this textbook represents a joint endeavor, both narratives are replete with similar factual backing. Even still, these facts are employed for nationalistic purposes and as such the tenor of either narrative differs considerably depending on the national identity of the authors.

While the chapter names provide insight into the national subjectivities that inform historical interpretation, there is one particularly salient commonality expressed within both narratives. The undercurrent within both narratives that is consistently manifest is the sense of victimhood felt by Israelis and Palestinians. Because the authors endeavored to humanize the other as a step towards reconciliation, the presentation of victimhood as a shared reality rather than something one group inflicted upon the other is important. The Israeli narrative recounts antisemitism in Europe, the trauma of the Holocaust, and the ongoing sense of insecurity resultant from rocket attacks and suicide bombings. The Palestinian narrative describes a sense of subjugation under British imperialism and suffering under Israeli occupation. Because both narratives cohabit within the same textbook, neither group is cast as solely a victim or a victimizer. Instead, reading the narratives in tandem, it becomes evident that both communities have suffered hardship and abuse while also inflicting such pain on their perceived enemy. By presenting both narratives in the same textbook, neither Israelis nor Palestinians are presented as immune from criticism or unworthy of sympathy. Both appear as victims and victimizers.

*Side by Side* was authored by individuals intimately familiar with conflict brought on by unresolved political realities. As the authors attest, in this context, it is imperative that history education be a mechanism through which to challenge interpretations that are divisive and perpetuate antagonism. Yet, even outside this context, *Side by Side* is an important educational instrument. Unlike the majority of textbooks that present a singular account of the past, *Side by Side* confounds this widely accepted practice. In doing so, the book intentionally does not negate or displace potential counter-narratives. Instead, as illustrated in the chapters devoted to the 1947-1949 war, Israeli liberation and Palestinian loss may typify either narrative but both cohabitate within the textbook. In this way, the national character of each narrative is preserved without either party being silenced or absent. This allows for national memory to not only be expressed but, also, to appear as limited, contingent, and prone to subjectivities that can be questioned and countered. The textbook implicitly subverts the tendency for school-based history knowledge to present a single narrative that is ostensibly normative and without complement.

For social studies educators in the United States, *Side by Side* is valuable as a concrete example of how historical narratives are constructed rather than irrefutable truth. Reading two juxtaposed narratives provides insight into the nature of history as a discipline. History is neither
value-free nor its meaning innate. Instead, it is fashioned. For social studies teachers, appreciating this reality is indispensable and *Side by Side* is an accessible example of this critical perspective. 

*Side by Side* is also of value as a classroom resource. In recent years, there has been a considerable amount of emphasis on incorporating primary source documents into social studies education. Exposing students to primary source documents is a means to familiarize students with the historian’s craft and the processes of historical thinking. Students are often asked to analyze and compare documents, establish their veracity, and integrate them into a narrative. Primary sources are thus a vehicle for facilitating students’ ability to construct an historical account by relying on the sort of fodder used by practicing historians. *Side by Side* presents the corollary to introducing students to an array of primary source materials. *Side by Side* serves as a model for how students can be asked to deconstruct a narrative. By providing students with contending narratives of the past, students may have the opportunity to better appreciate how facts are not inert but rather can be subsumed into a narrative and, in the process, constituted with new meaning. Such an exercise calls upon students in social studies classrooms to unpack knowledge and come to terms with the subtle subjectivities that are not overt but still shape the narrative. By exposing students to numerous contending versions of the same events, teachers may allow students to actively critique information rather than passively receive it. This sort of learning experience may nurture students’ development of a critical consciousness whereby they discriminatingly consume historical knowledge. This entails actively reading a text to understand how it functions rather than simply reading to acquire information.

*Side by Side* is also a timely resource for teaching students about the Middle East in a manner that affords the inhabitants of the Middle East the agency to speak for themselves as authorities on their region, its past, and its cultures and conflicts. In the twenty-first century, students are living in an increasingly interconnected world. With the advent of digital technology and wireless forms of communication, the Middle East is neither remote nor is its history and contemporary reality discrete from the lives of Americans. Such a reality requires students to have some degree of early and meaningful exposure to the history, culture, and society of the diverse array of inhabitants found in this part of the world. *Side by Side* not only satisfies the demand for students to learn about the Middle East, but it does so by presenting students with a source of information authored by members of two Middle Eastern communities. This may provide students with exposure to voices and perspectives that are often excluded in American social studies classrooms.

*Side by Side* provides a glimpse into the nature of historical knowledge and its role in identity formation. The novel approach taken by the authors to house two narratives in one textbook disrupts the conventional presentation of the past in social studies classrooms. There is value in exposing students to two narratives about the same historical subject albeit written from two dissimilar vantage points. This textbook is illustrative of the limitations of a single narrative in social studies classrooms. It is also an opportunity to confront and recognize the legitimate memories harbored by diverse communities. For teachers in the United States, *Side by Side* is a resource worthy of incorporating into the classroom as an instrument to provoke students to better understand knowledge, its social construction, and the implications of history for perceiving social reality.

About the Reviewer

Daniel Osborn is a doctoral student studying History and Social Science Education at Boston University. His research looks at the representation of non-Western peoples in social studies classrooms. He can be reached at djosborn@bu.edu.