The book contains a number of thoughtful and well-written essays based on the contributions to a conference organized at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat Gan, Israel, in December 1999 as a reaction to the Walser-Bubis debate. The book title and subtitle seem to suggest a discussion of Holocaust remembrance (exclusively) in Germany as enacted by Germans and reacted to by Jews. This assignment of roles not only does not adequately reflect the actual ideas developed in the contributions, but also puts “the Germans” (again–and this time, I believe, incorrectly so) in an active role and “the Jews” in a passive one of merely responding to German actions. Furthermore, in speaking of “German strategies” and “Jewish responses,” the editor dichotomizes German and Jewish ways of commemorating the Holocaust. Such a simplification of the complex interaction among the various commemorative discourses in the three countries the book focuses on–Germany, the United States, and Israel–may be understandable (if regrettable) in a book title, since titles need to be short and thus often tend to simplify. However, it is neither necessary nor helpful for an understanding of these highly complex discourses, and hence the fact that it is furthered by subdividing the articles into two sections titled “Fifty Years of Debating in Germany” and “Jewish Perspectives,” as well as through elaboration and emphasis in the introduction, is disappointing. In addition, the thus-established dichotomy creates the problem of placing those contributions which could fit into either of the two discourses/book sections, as well as those that fit into neither. The latter problem applies to Dan Diner’s contribution for “integrating the Holocaust into the narratives of the century,” which the editor includes in the first section of the book, while the former condition pertains to Michael Brenner’s article on “the changing role of the Holocaust in the German-Jewish voice,” which the editor puts in the second section with Israeli and American, i.e. non-German, “Jewish perceptions.” This editorial decision disregards the important and complex role of German Jewry in collective negotiations of approaches to Holocaust commemorations in Germany, de facto excluding the German-Jewish voice from (the book section on) “fifty years of debating in Germany.”

The first section starts with Jeffrey Herf’s article, entitled “The Holocaust and the Competition of Memories in Germany, 1945-1999” which, summarizing ideas from his book Divided Memory, provides a useful overview of Holocaust memory and commemoration in the FRG and the GDR. He limits his discussion thematically to the political discourses and temporally to the eras of Adenauer and Ulbricht. As is well known, despite recourse to the discourses of totalitarianism and anti-fascism in the FRG and the GDR respectively, this period was characterized in both countries by a marginalization of and silence on the Holocaust and a focus on German suffering. In the second contribution, Gilad Margalit points out a further similarity in the commemorative discourses of the FRG and the GDR, namely the “attempt to equate the German suffering to the fate of the Jewish victims of Nazism” (p. 31) and to balance both catastrophes in a way that they would cancel each other out, thus making redundant any reason for German guilt or responsibility. While the article is well written and the argument convincing, in an unfortunate phrasing Margalit speaks in his title of “a united German memory” and thus evokes associations and expectations of a discussion of commemorative strategies of united Germany, i.e., of a time period not discussed in the article. The phrasing is also slightly misleading in that while one can certainly speak of similarities in or
shared aspects of the commemorative discourses of East and West Germany, these discourses nevertheless do not comprise any sort of united entity.

Extending the time period analyzed by about a decade until (the German showing of the Holocaust TV series in) early 1979, Y. Michal Bodemann discusses “the Holocaust in Germany before its mass commemoration,” confirming the well-established notion that a brief period of discussion of the Third Reich (characterized by writers such as Kogon and Jaspers) occurred immediately after the war and was followed by an era of silence or “negative memory … where only the contours of the Shoah are made visible, while the destruction itself remains occluded” (p. 44), an attitude which most famously found expression in the popularity of the diary of Anne Frank. This silence encompassed all discourses and, despite the creation of some important memory artifacts in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Weiss’s “Die Ermittlung,” or events such as the Eichmann and Auschwitz trials, it did not change at its core. Such a break was only achieved when the “memory epidemic” began in Germany with the Holocaust TV series.

In her brief comment, Inge Marszolek provides an elaboration on Bodemann’s commemoration-as-theater metaphor. She suggests that “the play on stage is a dynamic process” (p. 56), created in the interaction between actors and spectators and influenced by their respective individual memories and personalities. She thus develops the metaphor in a way that stresses the differences between commemorative acts and (at least “traditional”) theater performances, de-concretizing and abstracting it, thus making it more applicable to commemorative acts.

Chris Lorenz focuses on a specific aspect of the German discourse on the Third Reich, namely “the role of German historians in recent public debates on Nazi history.” In his clearly structured and well-written article, he proposes and argues three theses with respect to the discourse on the Third Reich and the Holocaust created by German historians. First “the Holocaust has been referred to rather than researched” (p. 59) and is present primarily in its absence from the discourse. Due to its traumatic quality it has been repressed and split off. While the repression “has never been complete … it has been the dominant characteristic of the German historical debate from 1945 onward” (p. 59). Second, while “the repression of the Holocaust in German history has always been present, at the same time it has gone through a substantial process of change” (pp. 59-60) primarily due to the passage of time and the succession of generations. Lorenz suggests the following periodization: 1945-1965, almost total repression; 1965-1990, partial repression; and after 1990 “a more or less open attitude.” His third thesis—which Margalit has also identified as a characteristic of German public debates—states that “the Holocaust has, below the surface, been linked to the “German catastrophe,” meaning the loss of independent statehood and the loss of unified nationhood for Germans after 1945” (p. 60). Lorenz supports this thesis through a review of several debates among German professional historians (most of which also reached a wider, public audience): the Historikerstreit; the debate about the role of German historians in Nazi Germany; the debate about the exhibition on the crimes of the Wehrmacht; and the Goldhagen debate.

In the next article, Dan Diner makes an interesting suggestion for “integrating the Holocaust into the narrative of the century” despite its inherent irreconcilability with the century’s core narratives. Thought-provoking and well argued, Diner’s essay suggests two potential narrative frameworks within which one could try to understand the European twentieth century. “The first is based on rather traditional modes of historical understanding and relies heavily on notions of conflict rooted in political, diplomatic, and military action, i.e., modalities of institutionalized power” (p. 97). “The other quite different axis of interpretation—the axis of value judgments and ideological strife— … focuses on motivations and concepts that run beneath and across entities of states, nations, and peoples, while transcending them. Such motivations and concepts involve a completely different category of loyalties—the loyalty to social class, political values, and ideology. Their creed is generally universal, although divergent in content and orientation, entailing an infusion of philosophy into politics” (pp. 97-98). Diner convincingly argues for integrating the Holocaust into the second narrative. The argument involves incorporating the Holocaust into the larger pattern of the National Socialist racial warfare and genocidal practices of which the Holocaust constitutes the ultimate core. Due to their “common provenience in Enlightenment values, an ideological wellspring Nazism sought to repudiate” (p. 101), the “antagonisms between Western democracy and Soviet communism” waned away (p. 100). Thus “the more appropriate distinction between the ultimate adversaries of World War II is the fundamental incompatibility between racist Nazi Weltanschauung, rooted in specious biological assumptions, ... and a societal understanding of human history.... Indeed, biology versus history is the pivotal antinomy distinguishing the adver-
saries in World War II” (p. 101). However, “such an understanding,” Diner writes, “is an a posteriori judgment in retrospect, introduced from the angle of philosophy of history in an attempt to incorporate the Holocaust into a coherent narrative” (p. 101).

Michael Brenner’s discussion of “The Changing Role of the Holocaust in the German-Jewish Public Voice” in the West German debates on the Third Reich and the Holocaust opens the second section of the book. In broad strokes he reaffirms the well-known general picture of the problematic position of those Jews remaining in Germany after the Holocaust in relation to both the German public and the international Jewish public, primarily in Israel and the United States. The attitude towards Germany and the Germans of the majority of Jews in Germany after the Holocaust—who were DPs of Eastern European origin—was very much one of distance. They saw their situation, even after they had been in Germany for decades, as a temporary one and thus did not feel the need to get involved in German public life. Additionally, the Jews who remained in Germany after the Holocaust had to cope with constant accusations from Israeli and American-Jewish organizations of remaining on “blood-soaked soil” (p. 112). These factors and the minute size of the Jewish community in Germany made a German-Jewish voice virtually absent from the German public debates. “Only in the late 1980s and 1990s, when the larger German public began to discuss matters of the unpleasant German past with an openness previously unknown—beginning with the Historikerstreit and leading all the way up to the present debates about the Holocaust monument, the Goldhagen book, the Walser speech, the Wehrmacht exhibit, and the slave-labor reparations—did Jews become part of this public debate. This was also the result of a process of slight, but clear, pluralization within the Jewish communities” (p. 118). Unfortunately, however, the article ends shortly after this observation. Given its title and the fact that the German-Jewish voice was virtually non-existent before the 1980s, the article would have benefited from a discussion of the developments within as well as citations from and references to the vast variety of discourses—literature, film, essays, newspaper articles, public speeches—of the last two decades.

Shlomo Shafir examines the discursive interactions of (primarily West) German and American commemorative discourses. He discusses “the impact of actions by the organized community, as well as media events and initiatives of individuals” (p. 122) such as the Morgenthau plan; the involvement of American-Jewish organizations in the campaign for German reparations; “the first individual appeal for German soul-searching” (p. 124) by Elliot Cohen at a meeting of the Society of Christians and Jews in Berlin in 1950; the TV series “Holocaust”; and the campaign for the extension of the German statute of limitations for murder in 1965. While the review of these diverse involvements of the American-Jewish community in German political action and the construction of German collective memory is interesting, the article could have benefited from an integration of views critical of some of the work of American-Jewish associations, such as Novick’s The Holocaust in American Life or even Finkelstein’s Holocaust Industry.

Yehuda Ben-Avner’s article—which due to the death of the author shortly after the conference remained in its original format—briefly describes (from the perspective of a convinced Zionist who denies the right of existence of a Jewish Diaspora) the work of a joint Israeli-German schoolbook committee, which was initiated in 1968 and concluded its work in 1985 with a joint report. However, Ben-Avner did not observe significant changes in German or Israeli schoolbooks published after the report (although this may also be due to the fact that he did not do a thorough textbook analysis; at least he does not report on conducting one). The contribution is a purely descriptive summary—lacking all analysis, abstraction and integration into larger contexts—of the (by now most certainly outdated) views of the Israeli and German participants on various topics of Jewish history, particularly German-Jewish history and the Holocaust. The German and the Israeli representatives seem to have disagreed on almost everything, and virtually no compromises or cases of convincing the other are reported. A joint report which integrates such differing views must have been a rhetorical masterpiece, yet one wonders if the report had no pragmatic effect (if indeed that is the case) because it had to be general to the extent of saying nothing.

The last contribution is Yfaat Weiss’s interesting analysis of the “vague echoes of German discourse in Israel,” in which she very convincingly analyzes why the heated German public debates are virtually irrelevant—and thus unknown to anyone but the academic specialist—for discussions of the Third Reich and the Holocaust in Israel. In this respect the Israeli discourse seems to reflect a notion that is becoming more widely accepted, namely that it is the Germans, not the Jews, who need to come to terms with the Third Reich and the Holocaust. To this I would partially agree by saying that it is both groups who need to ponder this past, but that they do it in very different discourses, which are often not so much antagonistic as
simply unrelated. Weiss aptly illustrates this idea with analyses of an Israeli performance of Tabori’s adaptation of Sichrowsky’s *Schuldig Geboren*; a book of interviews with children of Nazis; and the Israeli and German receptions of Schlink’s *Der Vorleser*, Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, Klemperer’s diaries, the exhibition on the crimes of the Wehrmacht, and the debate over the Berlin Holocaust memorial.

All in all, the book contains a number of interesting, well-written and well-argued articles. It would have benefited from a different, less dichotomizing editorial conceptualization as well as from a detailed introduction and/or conclusion pulling the different threads from various contributions together and interweaving them—thus clarifying the discourse(s) which the book as a whole seeks to engage in and placing it into the larger context.

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