The spread of the Chain of Light movement was not confined to Germany. To the dismay of right-wing extremists and their sympathizers, this German response to antiforeigner hatred was adopted in Austria, among other places.\(^1\) Shortly after the Lichterketten in Munich and Hamburg, a “Sea of Light” (Lichtermeer) demonstration was organized in Vienna to fight xenophobia, which was becoming more alarming in Austria.\(^2\) The organizers made use of symbols and examples from the German Chain of Light movements to call for public support, which led to a turnout of more

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2. The immediate occasion was a proposed referendum by the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) to limit immigration and the rights of immigrants.
than 200,000 participants with candles or torches filling the Heldenplatz in Vienna on 23 January 1993.³

Nor was it the case that the German examples of turning served only as passive inspirational models. As a matter of fact, a proactive approach to “helping others repent” could already be seen in the 1960s, and then grew from individual to institutional initiatives, from one limited effort to a diversity of forms in the next decades, which continues in the present. At the same time, infrequent but clear encouragement for Germans to take up this hard-won duty from the side of the victims could also be heard from time to time.

In 1966, when Aktion Sühnezeichen was still in its infancy (see P5), Lothar Kreyssig, its founder, invited his Austrian counterparts to participate in “joint-atonement”: “In Poland, where fear and fright still prevail over any of our notions, the meaning of begging for forgiveness would not be perceived clearly enough . . . , it would therefore be more meaningful and effective if we went there together with the Austrians.”⁴ Volunteers from Austria were ready to take part; however, participation in such AFS projects was met with opposition and hostility from the broader public as well as within Austrian Christian communities.⁵

Similarly in 1967, when an initial willingness on the part of Austrian volunteers to join an ASF operation in Czechoslovakia was hampered by the spirit of self-victimization, ASF leaders again emphasized that Austrian turning was necessary. Responding to his Austrian counterparts’ reasoning that they would rather not go to Czechoslovakia because of recent border incidents in which “Austrian sovereignty was . . . grossly disrespected,”⁶ and because

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⁵. Legerer, Tatort, 418.
⁶. Though unspecified in the quoted part of the letter, the border incidents in question could be the shootings on 27 Aug. 1967: Czechoslovak soldiers were alleged to have shot at individuals who had already crossed the Czech-Austrian border into Austrian territory. See “Der Schießbefehl an der Ost-West-Grenze,” Der Standard, 24 Apr. 2002.
of their “strong conviction that the ministry of reconciliation has to proceed from [the attitude] . . . that the same rights will be recognized in one another,” which “must . . . be demanded from both sides,” Franz von Hammerstein, the soon-to-be secretary-general of the western branch of ASF, spelled out in no uncertain terms the necessary turning—precisely in this attitude—to his Austrian neighbors:

Your reasoning also does not convince us, for with this attitude we could hardly have gone to a single Communist country. . . . There have also been similar incidents along the German-Czech border. But in Sühnezichen it was always our Christian conviction that we continue to do further work humbly, even when we are cursed or humiliated. We want exactly to encounter hate with our humble, human service.8

This more-than-frank admonishment from the side of the widely recognized and—at least in this case—the self-confessed guilt bearer of the Nazi atrocities could very well be interpreted as impropriety on the part of the perpetrator, who supposedly had “no right to teach others.” Indeed, there were signs of its poor reception: neither did the planned “joint atonement” take place, nor is there a record of further correspondence after this.9

It was not until one young Austrian, who had participated in an ASF service in Auschwitz in the early 1980s, considered himself “German,”10 and had lobbied for years for the Austrian government to make a public confession of Austrian guilt in National Socialism, that an ASF-like organization was finally founded in 1992—the Austrian Holocaust Memorial Service, locally referred to as the Gedenkdienst (Memorial Service). Its founder, Andreas Maislinger, though in no way in unanimous agreement with his German counterparts,11 found in ASF the vision for the Austrian response that he was looking for. When he first wrote to the Austrian

11. See, for example, his criticism of ASF’s relations with the Communists in Poland. Quoted in Legerer, *Tatort*, 422.
federal president Rudolf Kirchschläger in 1978, after submitting his application to ASF, he lamented the Austrians’ relative inactivity in terms of reconciliation attempts and pressed for more initiatives for “understanding” and “atonement.” For Maislinger, Austrian victimhood was simply a myth, for during World War II “Austrians were actually there leading the way, when the ‘inferiors’ were being rooted out in the concentration- and extermination-camps of the Nazis.” Through Maislinger’s single-minded persistence, and helped in part by concentration camp survivors like Hermann Langbein, Gedenkdienst was at last a reality. “Modelled after Ak- tion Sühnezeichen in content,” it was recognized by the Austrian federal government as legitimate civil service and an alternative to compulsory military service.

On the intergovernmental level, the German effort to “help others repent” is perhaps most conspicuously represented by its continual promotion of anti-Holocaust denial legislation across the European Union—to the chagrin of some former Allied countries like the United Kingdom, who feared that freedom of expression was at stake. Though the result fell short of their intentions, the German EU presidency of 2007 did successfully get other EU members to agree to the “Council Framework Decision on Combating Racism and Xenophobia,” which renders “publicly condoning,

12. Quoted in Legerer, Tatort, 423. Kirchschläger retorted that “a young Austrian has nothing to atone for in Auschwitz” (425).
15. Yet, as Legerer has rightly pointed out, the difference between ASF and Gedenkdienst is still substantial. Whereas the former was the inspiration for the latter, the “theological superstructure” of ASF was not adopted—at least expressly—by its Austrian offshoot, which maintains a largely secular outlook (Tatort, 457). The central ASF concept of “atonement,” which Maislinger had clearly sought to transpose to the Austrian context, was also watered down to “social or humanitarian” effort in the wording of the Austrian legislation (432). That is, the presumption of guilt, which makes ASF unique among peace-promoting NGOs, including other Christian ones (see P14), is replaced with the innocence of benignity.
denying or grossly trivialising . . . crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes as defined in the Statute of the International Criminal Court . . . [and] crimes defined by the Tribunal of Nuremberg” “punishable in all EU Member States.” In effect, though still subject to national variations in its implementation, the denial of the Holocaust is now a punishable crime not only in German-speaking countries, where the law is strictly interpreted, but across the European Union.

Sometimes, the opportunity for help in turning can come in surprising ways. Already in the early 1950s, German and French historians and history teachers had resumed their work on “turning” in their very own craft of history writing and teaching: the turning away from mutual prejudices, what the early pioneers in the interregnum years called “the de-poisoning of school textbooks” (die Entgiftung der Lehrbücher). In the 1970s, German and Polish historians followed suit. These and other “joint textbook commissions” stemming from the Georg-Eckert-Institut (GEI) in Braunschweig, Germany, have now become models for nations still suffering from mutual hostilities and prejudices, including Japan and Korea, and Israel and Palestine. Just as in the case of ASF, a proactive approach—often in the form of platforms and workshops for collaboration on history writing and historical reflection—is also manifest in this area of helping others in their turning.


In all these endeavors, it is remarkable that the German contribution is not just to be a “nice” host who listens (and helps finance such efforts), but also to be a challenging, if not—to paraphrase Metz—a dangerous presence. At a 2008 conference in Braunschweig organized for East Asian participants, the Japanese guests stated that many in Japan were of the opinion that “Germany has gone too far in its ‘coming to terms with the past,’ ” whereas guests from China were dumbfounded as to why their own historiography and history pedagogy should come under scrutiny if not attack by the German participants. The “moral example” that strikes not only the opponent but the club wielder himself is dangerous indeed.

Hence, as is to be expected, such outspokenness is often the object of attack itself, not the least within intra-German dialogues. In his acceptance speech for the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 1998, German writer Martin Walser lamented the use of Auschwitz as a “moral club”: “It does not befit Auschwitz to become a threat-routine, an all-season tool for intimidation or moral club (Moralkeule) or just an exercise of duty.” Though hidden in language that was somewhat elusive, a central thread in Walser’s speech could still be identified: the critique of the critics. Three times the speechmaker repeated himself: “Whatever one says to another, he should at least say exactly the same to himself.” With this he assailed the critics of Germany and of the Germans: “When a thinker criticizes the ‘full extent of the moral-political trivialization (Verharmlosung)” of the government, of the state apparatus and of

Institute in the Middle East, Learning Each Other’s Historical Narrative: Palestinians and Israelis, preliminary draft of the English translation (Beit Jallah: PRIME, 2003).


24. In the context of the speech, this trivialization was applied previously to Auschwitz—Walser recounted in the selfsame speech that he himself had been accused of this—and to right-wing terror.
the leadership of the parties, then the impression is inevitable that his conscience is purer than that of the morally-politically trivialized.” Just before this he said: “Could it be that the [critic-]intellectual . . . had for a second succumbed to the illusion that—since they have worked again in the gruesome ministry of remembrance (Erinnerungsdiest)—they were a little bit expiated, that for a moment they were even closer to the victims than to the perpetrators?” Thus in highly veiled language, the age-old rejection of the repentant sinners’ outspokenness was repeated: the critic should refrain from criticizing others because of his less-than-immaculate self (see R7). As a self-professed “soul who thirsts for freedom,” Walser chose to “look away” (Wegschauen) and “think away” (Wegdenken): “Instead of being thankful for the incessant presentation of our shame, I begin to look away.” “When the condemned thinks that the judgment is unjust, he is free. That is the freedom of conscience that I have in mind.”

Walser’s speech sparked a series of heated debates that accompanied those concerning the Berlin memorial for the murdered Jews of Europe, which Walser referred to as “a soccer-field-size nightmare in the center of the capital.” Chief among the debate participants was Ignatz Bubis, then president of ZdJ, who retorted that although he fully agreed with Walser that the concept “Auschwitz” should in no way become a routine of threats or intimidation tool or just a compulsory exercise, he did consider it right that Auschwitz should be used for moral purposes. “When Walser sees a ‘moral club’ in it, he is perhaps right, for one can, should, and must learn morals from ‘Auschwitz,’ though he need not look upon it as a club.” Bubis further asserted that it should not be the duty of the Jewish community alone to take up this moral role, but the wider German society. “It is the society that is demanded here, and

26. Ibid., 12.
27. Ibid., 14.
28. Ibid., 13.
it cannot be that the fight against racism and antisemitism as well as hostility against strangers is left to the Jews, whereas a part of the society feels rather annoyed by it.”

Reading Walser and Bubis together, one can already discern the subtle but significant changes in the use of “moral club”: whereas the original nomenclator used it derogatorily, seemingly with the intention to inhibit its use, because it was allegedly employed by some to “injure” others, himself included, his critic upheld it—the moral part of it—and encouraged Jews and Germans alike to use it to speak out.

This encouragement to speak out was uttered not only by Bubis, but also by representatives from other Jewish communities. Avraham Burg, former speaker of the Knesset, whose father had fled Nazi Germany, proposed in his controversial book *Defeating Hitler* that Germans and Jews should become partners in the moral fight against violations of human dignity: “I propose a walk together, for both Jews and Germans, for the children of victims and perpetrators. I propose that we go there together, wherever human beings are sacrificed at the altar of cruelty, and to raise our voice and say: ‘Never again, no one, not only Jews. Never again the murder and extermination of human beings.’ That is the universal lesson from the tragic relationship between Jews and Germany that we want to derive from ‘our Holocaust.’”

And this Jewish encouragement for Germans to speak out includes also perhaps the most inconceivable direction: German critique of Israeli policy. Alfred Grosser, who was already an active “turner” in the early postwar years (see P1 and P3), explicitly demanded that postwar Germans should resist the silencing effect of the “Auschwitz club” and diligently criticize Israel:

A young German, who has nothing to do with the German past—except the responsibility to make sure that something like that should never happen again—such a German must intervene wherever fundamental

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30. Ibid., 108.

rights are infringed. . . . In this point I stand behind Martin Walser’s critique of the Auschwitz club.32

The idea that the duty of the repentant to speak out exists precisely because—rather than in spite—of his guilt in the past has perhaps found clearest expression in Lev Kopelev. A Russian-Jewish writer, Kopelev joined the Red Army during World War II and saw the atrocities committed by Soviet soldiers against Germans in East Prussia.33 In his book Aufbewahren für alle Zeit (To Be Preserved Forever), first published in Russian in 1975 and then in German a year later, he bore witness to these wrongdoings and his own guilt and fate in these. He called it an “attempt at a confession (Beichte).”34 In an opinion piece in Die Zeit, which had serialized parts of his book, Kopelev explained to his German readers why he was doing what he was doing:

I began to write down the memories, because I recognized my guilt. But I know that regret does not repair (wiedergutmacht) my guilt, nor does it free me from the responsibility for all that the Party had done, to which I belonged. . . . My guilt remains inextricably bound with me. . . . Only if I resolutely and unreservedly judge myself can I further live. . . . And only determined and unreserved self-condemnation gives one the right, even the duty, to speak against those who try to deny, to trivialize (verharmlosen), or to justify the same kind of evil acts.35

Kopelev’s daring acts of speaking out found immediate resonance in Germany. Heinrich Böll wrote the afterword for Kopelev’s book, and cited Kopelev’s confession as proof of a long-begun

and ongoing process of “rethinking” (Umdenkprozeß), and of the “inner transformation” (innere Umwandlung) in the Soviet Union. Yet, just like those who had quoted Victor Gollancz before him (see P3), Böll cautioned German readers not to commit the error of self-victimization when faced with the turning of the other, to “exploit” it while neglecting the “entire context” of German guilt and Soviet guilt. In this sense, one might agree with Böll when he called Kopelev “dangerous,” because a genuine turning act is always simultaneously challenging and tempting.

Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, another German writer and a great “turner” in her own right (see P4), saw in Kopelev—who was admittedly with the Russian troops when they marched into Dönhoff’s native homeland of East Prussia, from which she had to flee in 1945—an exemplary “change” (Verwandlung) “from a scrupulous faithful Communist to at first an angry, then disappointed, but finally a fearless man of great wisdom,” that is, someone who has much to teach others. Dönhoff’s praise for this “turned turner” was unreserved: “I marvel at Lev over and over again. I’m amazed most of all by the freedom that he possesses. Perhaps one might better say the freedom that he begets, that he has summoned out of nothing.”

Hence in Kopelev, as appreciated and “promoted” by Dönhoff and others, one finds an example of calling others to repent that is not simultaneously “looking away” from one’s national or personal shame, as manifested by Walser. Rather, looking into one’s own guilt, as argued and shown by Kopelev, is the prerequisite to helping others turn. Confession, according to this paradigm, precedes and demands such a duty. The freedom to call for repentance comes from one’s own repentance.

Yet, one might want to object, Isn’t this in principle what Walser was saying all along, “Whatever one says to another, he should at

37. Ibid., 599 (emphasis in the original).
38. Ibid., 602–3.
40. Ibid.
least say exactly the same to himself”? Had not Karl Jaspers also said something similar in his *Schuldfrage*, namely, that fellow Germans should stop assigning guilt to others (including other Germans) instead of themselves? And weren’t Kopelev and Dönhoff mutually contradictory—one speaking of his “inextricable guilt,” and the other of his “marvelous freedom”?

These are indeed complex expressions that do not lend themselves to oversimplified explication. We must therefore turn to the next chapter in which we’ll see how, in the postwar period, certain logical “disagreements” actually turned victims and perpetrators/bystanders toward each other (and thus were “repentant disagreements”), whereas some “agreements” did the opposite.