NEXUS INSTITUTE

Nexus Symposium 2020

You Tell Us Stories. Why?

The Legacy of 20th-Century Catastrophes

Saturday 2 May | 1.30 PM — 5.30 PM

DeLaMar Theater, Amsterdam

Marian Turski — Jacqueline Murekatete
Anne Applebaum — David Harland — Avishai Margalit
Freddy Mutanguha — David Rieff — Géraldine Schwarz — Leon Wieseltier

Programme Nexus Symposium

Saturday 2 May 2020
DeLaMar Theater, Amsterdam

1.30 PM	Welcome Rob Riemen
1.35 PM	The story of Marian Turski *The Shoah: What Did I as a Victim Know About My Fate?*
2.30 PM	The story of Jacqueline Murekatete *My Experiences with and Lessons from the Rwandan Genocide*
3.15 PM	Intermission
3.45 PM	Panel discussion 'The Legacy of 20th-Century Catastrophes' with Anne Applebaum, David Harland, Avishai Margalit, Freddy Mutanguha, David Rieff and Géraldine Schwarz, moderated by Leon Wieseltier
5.30 PM	Reception and book signing by speakers

To attend the Nexus Symposium please register at www.nexus-institute.com.

The programme may be subject to change. For the latest information on the symposium and speakers and for terms and conditions, please see our website. The symposium will be held in English.

With special thanks to our GUARDIAN ANGELS: Pepijn Blom — Liesbeth Cremers — Arnold Croiset van Uchelen — Karl Guha — Tex Gunning — Victor Halberstadt — Dolf & Liesbeth Huijgers — Erik van der Kooij — Van der Linden Fonds — Onno Ruding — Philip Smits & Angelique Dolle — Jasper van Veghel & Miranda Keeler — and the Guardian Angels who prefer to remain anonymous.

Nexus Symposium 2020

You Tell Us Stories. Why?

The Legacy of 20th-Century Catastrophes

I

A second world war is raging all around, but in the midst of all its violence, René Char, a member of the French resistance, keeps writing poems and observations. A year after the end of the war he publishes his notes under the title *Feuillets d'Hypnos*, adding the explanation that for him, continuing to think and write is also an act of resistance; resistance in the spirit of humanism, against fear, tensions and atrocities.

In one of his notes, Char observes that we no longer know what to do with our own past, our own history: '*Notre héritage n'est précédé d'aucun testament*' — 'Our heritage is left to us without any testament.' The past provides us with an inheritance without any indication of what it is worth, what it means, what we should and can do with it.

A decade before, Walter Benjamin made a similar observation in a brief essay: 'Erfahrung und Armut'. He argues that experience is always transmitted to us through the stories of the generations that came before us, and then asks himself: 'Where has it all gone? Who still meets people who really know how to tell a story? […] Experience has fallen in value, amid a generation which from 1914 to 1918 had to experience some of the most monstrous events in the history of the world.' This is hardly surprising, according to Benjamin: these experiences cannot be shared, exactly because they are so unimaginable. The result is a poverty of experience, and a much greater poverty that follows from it, 'for what is the value of all our culture if it is divorced from experience?' But worse than this poverty as such, Benjamin writes, is the fact that the remnant of experience is now being used as fertile soil for all kinds of irrational world views which have bewitched humanity as if with black magic. This is why he welcomes the 'new barbarism', by which he means: creative minds who rid themselves from the burden of the past, liberate themselves from all these experiences, to be able to face the new world optimistically, poor but free and unencumbered by the stipulations of any testament.

However, the choice to leave the past in the past also has a dark side. Cicero's well known dictum *historia magistra vitae est*, from his book *De Oratore*, which praises history as the storyteller offering us a guiding light for the dark future that awaits us, has lost its meaning. History will no longer be able to be a guide to life.

I discovered that a consciously cultivated absence of memory also has political consequences during a discussion I attended on 21 March 2014, during the Brussels Forum organized by the German Marshall Fund. Every spring this think tank, based in Washington D.C., organizes a conference in the capital of the EU, attended by the political and business elites of the EU and the US. That Friday morning in March six years ago, a panel discussion took place between Toomas Ilves, the president of Estonia, Federica Mogherini, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy in the government of the social democrat Matteo Renzi, and the American Robert Zoellick, former Deputy Secretary of State under George W. Bush and former President of the World Bank, who was at that time working for the American investment bank Goldman Sachs.

The panel was meant to discuss what changes should be made to the European Union, one hundred years after the First World War, and what political choices should be made. However, from the start, the discussion was focused on the annexation of the Crimea by Russia a few weeks earlier, and the war between Ukraine and Russia that ensued.

Federica Mogherini explained how she, forty years old, as a member of the generation of young Europeans who got to know a large part of Europe thanks to the EU Erasmus study programme, came to believe in establishing a united Europe ('we need more EU') and in the strength of the soft power that made the current EU possible. This also strengthened her belief that sanctions would be an appropriate response to Putin's foreign policy and would lead Putin to see the light of reason.

Her fellow European Toomas Ilves was not convinced. At sixty years of age, he was exactly a generation older, and he mockingly paraphrased the famous statement by Robert Kagan that 'Americans are from Mars, Europeans from Venus', saying: 'Europeans are from *Pluto* — in the sense of plutocracy. The only thing the EU cares about is its economic interests. The sanctions are a farce and Putin won't lose a night's sleep over it. Just like in the thirties of the previous century, the EU is abandoning smaller countries to their fate, because they do not serve its economic interests.'

The American Robert Zoellick, also sixty years old, was even sharper in his criticism: 'You people of the Erasmus generation have been damn lucky! You have never experienced a serious security threat! Your idea that everybody will come together as a community is, I am sorry to say, a political fantasy.'

Mogherini responded indignantly: 'We, never experienced a threat? I'm sorry, but where did you get that idea? My generation experienced 9/11! That is our point of reference for what can happen and how we should react to it.'

Zoellick, the American Republican, answered curtly: 'With all due respect, but 9/11 happened in America, not in Europe. I was in New York that day, where were you? History teaches us that when it comes to defending your values, soft power alone won't get you very far. That's why we need political realism. The US and EU will not attack Russia, but what if the government of Ukraine wants to defend itself against this nineteenth-century politics of aggression and the Ukrainians fight back to regain their own territory, the Crimea, and they ask the EU to support them by providing weapons — will you, like Tom Ilves just said, do nothing, just like in the 1930s?'

The Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs, who would go on to be named High Representative for the EU's foreign policy a year later, was unsure how to respond, mumbled something about 'the necessity of discussing it within NATO' and was grateful when the moderator cut the discussion short by saying they had run out of time and there were many other topics to be discussed.

When I was listening to this exchange, I was reminded of a famous statement by the writer Harry Mulisch, whose entire oeuvre of novels and essays was written in the shadow cast by the Second World War. Like Hannah Arendt, he was present at the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, and he reported on it in his characteristic style in his book *Criminal Case 40/61*. In 1973 he published *De toekomst van gisteren* ('Yesterday's Future'), in which, amongst other things, he discusses his meeting with Albert Speer, elected by Hitler to design an architecture for the Nazi's Third Reich. In the introduction to that book, Mulisch writes: 'It is my strong belief that the Second World War will remain a point of reference until the end of times — in any case, we should hope so. If it isn't so, nothing but a third world war will be the cause of it.'

What the fierce debate between the two generations showed was that for the forty-year-old Italian politician (and for her generation?), the Second World War was indeed no longer a point of reference; that the past is dead and we should not let it guide us. If there is a testament, it remains unread or has been declared null and void. Instead of responding to new developments and events based on a reflex determined by the past, it is better to be liberated from this burden and to find a new orientation as to what is right and wrong, what is wise and what is foolish.

Now, in 2020, when we are lucky enough to celebrate 75 years of liberty and we still do not see the menace of a third world war descending upon us, the question whether Federica Mogherini, as a representative of the Erasmus generation, might not be right is justified. But if that is true, why do we need all these stories about a war long past? Why keep remembering, instead of facing the future unburdened and full of confidence?

II

In 1953, the German philosopher and anti-Nazi Karl Jaspers published his brilliant study *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*. In this work, Jaspers shows that in the years between 800 and 200 BCE, something happened that was unprecedented and that is crucial for an accurate understanding of the history of our civilizations. In China, Confucius and Laozi propagated their teachings, in India the Buddha and the Upanishads enlightened their students, in Persia Zarathustra was preaching, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Amos were prophesizing in the Middle East, Parmenides, Heraclites, Socrates and Plato were philosophizing in Greece. Independent from one another, separated by time, space and language, and with all their differences, all these spiritual leaders placed human *dignity* at the centre of their teachings, and thus declared the *unity* of humanity as spiritual beings. Jaspers called this period the *Achsenzeit*, the axial age, the axis around which world history turns and which would continue to determine the development of humanity — up until the twentieth century.

This century, the century that forms our heritage, could be called the age of catastrophes. The mother of all catastrophes is the Great War of 1914–1918, which coincided with the first genocide, that on the Armenians between 1915 and 1917. It was followed by the Italian war against Ethiopia and the Spanish Civil War with the bombing of Guernica. In the Second World War, an estimated 65 million people found their deaths and the Jewish people were destroyed on an industrial scale and with technical perfection. Stalinist Russia could only exist through terror and the Gulag. Four million Ukrainians perished in the murder-through-famine orchestrated by Stalin. Nuclear bombs destroyed the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in a single flash. With the slogan that 'revolution is not a dinner party', Mao unleashed a merciless terror and an unprecedented number of seventy million Chinese people died in the course of his revolutions. There were wars in Korea and in Vietnam. In Pol Pot's Killing Fields in Cambodia, two million lost their lives. In the final decade of the twentieth century there were 'ethnic cleansings'; in Rwanda, one million people were slaughtered like pigs in less than a hundred days. Not one of these catastrophes helped to prevent the subsequent ones, despite the constant intoning of 'never again'…

This is the age of catastrophes, defined by what Churchill called 'the crime for which there are no words' — a belated echo of what the Austrian polemicist Karl Kraus wrote when Hitler gained power in Germany in 1933: 'Das Wort entschlief, als jene Welt erwachte' — and what we nevertheless try to express in that single word: *genocide*. It is a cold, barren word for the unimaginable, for that for which there are no words.

'It happened, and therefore it can happen again, always and everywhere.' This is what Primo Levi knew in the depth of his soul and that is why he had to survive, had to testify, had to tell this story. In 1947 he wrote his first book:

Se questo è un uomo (*If This Is a Man*), about his experience in the inferno on earth — Auschwitz. As a prologue to his story he wrote a short text which reads like a psalm, an injunction to know and never forget:

You who live safe
In your warm houses,
You who find, returning in the evening,
Hot food and friendly faces:
Consider if this is a man
Who works in the mud
Who does not know peace
Who fights for a scrap of bread
Who dies because of a yes or a no.
Consider if this is a woman,
Without hair and without name
With no more strength to remember,
Her eyes empty and her womb cold
Like a frog in winter.
Meditate that this came about:
I commend these words to you.
Carve them in your hearts
At home, in the street,
Going to bed, rising:
Repeat them to your children,
Or may your house fall apart,
May illness impede you,
May your children turn their faces from you.

Levi continued to testify, to tell stories, and so did Elie Wiesel, Robert Antelme, Jean Améry. The *Diary* of Anne Frank and *Life? or Theatre?* by Charlotte Solomon were published; Solzhenitsyn, Herling and Shalamov recounted their experiences in the Gulag; reprint upon reprint was published of the books by Robert Graves, George Duhamel and Stefan Hertmans with testimonies about the First World War; we saw the documentary *Shoah* by Claude Lanzmann, *Schindler's List* by Steven Spielberg, *A Hidden Life* by Terrence Malick, *Apocalypse Now* by Francis Ford Copolla, *The Killing Fields* by Roland Joffé, *Hotel Rwanda* by Terry George and *1917* by Sam Mendes. We have the report by Jean Hatzfeld and the testimony of Clemantine Wamariya about the genocide in Rwanda and what it means to be forced to become a refugee. And the list goes on. Museums were established, like Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C., POLIN in Warsaw and the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre, commemorations and memorial days were organized, conferences, more conferences, studies and many more studies…

And at the same time, something strange is happening. For even if the Third World War has not happened (yet) and, thanks to writers, artists and historians, so many stories are still being handed down, and even if (so we would like to believe) we are all convinced that we have learned the lessons of the past and that everyone is familiar with the instructions of the testament of the twentieth century — despite all this there is a remarkable and growing discrepancy between the national self-image of our various countries and their political realities, and there is a yawning gap between the lessons of history as we have had to learn them over the years on the one hand, and the rewriting of history that is currently taking place on the other.

Regarding self-image and reality. Americans who consider the politics of President Trump to be extremely nationalistic, xenophobic, racist and in complete contradiction to the ideals of the founders of their nation, keep saying: 'This is not America. This is not what we, Americans, stand for!' But if that is true, why is Trump president and why does he have a good chance of being re-elected as president in November 2020, thanks to the loyal support of the Republican Party and tens of millions of Americans?

In Germany, the governing class offers a similar response when it comes to the message of the continuously growing political party Alternative für Deutschland and the Identitäre Bewegung with which it is associated, which unmistakeably resonates with sounds that could also be heard in the previous century in the world of rising fascism. The reaction of the German political and intellectual elite: 'This isn't us! This isn't Germany. We have overcome our pitch-black past and learned the lessons of history like no other country has!' Again, if that is the case, how is it possible that this extreme-right party and movement can count on the support of almost twenty percent of the electorate, and has thus undeniably become a political force to be reckoned with?

The question is: what does it mean if we refuse to acknowledge the developments that are taking place, because we apparently have an unmoveable faith that 'history cannot repeat itself' because 'the lessons of history have been taken to heart' and 'people are not so foolish'? But isn't this exactly what we are seeing, history repeating itself? For what could the Germans have known when they turned out in numbers to vote for Hitler's party and so helped him and his cronies to gain power in a democratic way? Could the Jews have known what would be their fate when they were shipped off, like cattle, to distant camps? Is evil so hard to recognize, or is it that we would rather look away?

Regarding lessons from history and rewriting the past. In countries like the Netherlands, Poland, Hungary, Russia, Italy and the United Kingdom, either the testament of the twentieth century has floated down Lethe into the domain of oblivion — for after all, we live in the 21st century, 9/11 is the experience that shaped us, we are facing new challenges, we have new

insights, new science and technology that can help us solve problems — or the latest lesson from history is that history must be rewritten, because until now, we have learned the wrong lessons from it. Historical truth supposedly is no more than an interpretation. That is why in the latest, rewritten history, we are taught that genocide is evil (of course!), but that does not mean that refugees are welcome, because we cannot solve the problems of the entire world. That immigrants are welcome (of course!), but they should be exactly like us, and we'll call this 'integration' and not the new nationalism. We are in favour of democracy (of course!), but it needn't be liberal democracy with an independent judiciary. We like freedom (of course!), but only when it is *our* freedom. And even if we think the wars in Syria and Yemen, the terrorism of Boko Haram in Nigeria and Chad, the terror of ISIS in their self-proclaimed caliphate and in the Sahel, and the genocide on the Rohingya in Myanmar is terrible (of course!) it is far away, we have no economic interests there, so what are we supposed to do about it? And (of course!) there should absolutely *not* be a united Europe; history teaches that one's own nation comes first. And if we, who represent the voice of the people, finally gain power, you can trust us (of course!) not to plunge this continent, sleepwalking, into another catastrophic crisis…

III

Now, 75 years after the end of the Second World War, when we in the Netherlands on 4 May solemnly commemorate the dead, and then on 5 May exuberantly celebrate Liberation Day, when we will listen once more to stories as a testament to the catastrophe that occurred, it is wise, for the sake of our own future, to ask ourselves: *You tell us stories. Why?*

Is there something to be learned from history after all, or is that larger story nothing, in the end, but what Macbeth exclaims in desperation: 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'? The famous Italian-Jewish historian Arnaldo Momigliano had a grandfather, Marco Momigliano, who as chief rabbi was as learned as he was pious, and who, according to his grandson, had absolutely no interest in history, for the simple reason that meaning nor truth can be found in it. For him the Torah alone had value as a source of meaning and truth for our lives. Regarding history, this learned man's opinion did not diverge much from Macbeth's…

In any case, if we, just like the no less learned but perhaps less pious historian Arnaldo Momigliano and so many of his fellow historians, starting with the Greek founding father of history Thucydides, believe that we can in fact learn from history and from the testaments it hands down to us, *how* can we do this? How do we know what is true? And if artists create a story using their imagination, how much truth can be found in it? And, if we are honest: why do we, in the end, fail to learn the lessons from history, leading to one catastrophe being followed by the next?

In 1996, the Nexus Institute organized the first Nexus Conference with the title: *The Legacy of the Twentieth Century. Part I. The Politics of Amnesia*. At that time, we were already familiar with the rise of the 'oblivious', people who consciously choose not to know history and not to read its testaments. We no longer burn books, we simply do not read them. Why? And does it make any difference whether we keep looking back at the Second World War and the other catastrophes of the twentieth century, or whether we look ahead and refuse to remember anything before 9/11, because history will in any case never repeat itself? Is this a liberating or a worrying development? And if the latter, how can we counter it in this time of cultivated (for no longer educated) cultural illiteracy? In his *West-östlicher Divan*, Goethe warns:

Wer nicht von drey tausend Jahren
Sich weiß Rechenschaft zu geben,
Bleib im Dunkeln unerfahren
Mag von Tag zu Tage Leben.

Now three thousand years is a very long time, but how much history, how many stories should we know not to repeat the mistakes from the past? Why are we experiencing this unmistakeable return of the ghosts which we believed to belong to the past? Who is responsible for it? What does it say about the quality of our education, and the role of the media, intellectuals and politicians?

And what does it take to rewrite history? And why? Who benefits from it? Who writes history? And is it really desirable to keep remembering the disasters of times long past? Isn't the war in former Yugoslavia, for example, the result of an *excess* of memories?

Primo Levi and all these other storytellers and transmitters of stories consider it an almost sacred task, a supreme moral responsibility, to testify and to convince us. What is it in us that makes us take so little interest in their stories?

And suppose that, following Harry Mulisch' advice, we decide not to forget the Second World War (and everything that came after) in order to prevent a third one, what are the most important lessons, who should learn them and what should we do *now*?

The answer to these questions will determine whether, during the commemoration of the dead on 4 May, we will be dealing with — in the words of the Jewish-German painter Charlotte Solomon, who was murdered on 10 October 1943, only two weeks after her arrival in Auschwitz — something that can still be called *life*, or only with *theatre*.

Rob Riemen
Founder & President Nexus Institute

Speakers

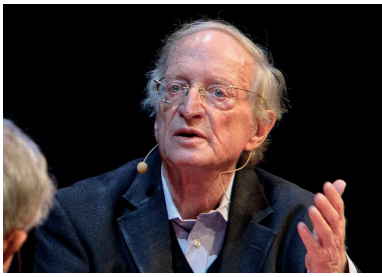
MARIAN TURSKI (Poland, 1926), a distinguished journalist and historian, is one of the last living Holocaust survivors. Having survived the Lodz ghetto and captivity in Auschwitz, he was finally liberated at Theresienstadt in 1945 after a gruelling death march from Buchenwald. Turski decided to stay in postwar communist Poland to work towards reconciliation between the various communities, mainly through his contributions as editor and journalist for the Polish weekly *Polityka*. The highly praised BBC documentary *Auschwitz, the Nazis and the 'Final Solution'*, for which he was closely consulted, was a television success around the world in 2005 and his book with heart-breaking testimonials of fellow survivors was translated as *Polish Witnesses of the Shoah* in 2007. As chairman of the Council of the Jewish Historical Institute, Turski is one of the founding fathers of the POLIN Museum of Polish Jews, which opened its doors in 2014. During the ceremony commemorating the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz in January 2020, Turski, a member of the International Auschwitz Council, gave a powerful speech in the presence of several heads of state that made headlines across the globe.

JACQUELINE MUREKATETE (Rwanda, 1984) is an internationally recognized genocide survivor and human rights activist. Born in Rwanda, Murekatete was nine years old when she lost her parents, all six siblings and most of her extended family to the 1994 genocide. She was inspired to share her story of survival and hope for the first time in 2001 after listening to the story of the late Holocaust survivor David Gewirtzman. Since then, Jacqueline has delivered hundreds of genocide-prevention and human rights presentations at schools, NGO events and faith-based communities across the US and in Germany, Israel, Ireland, Bosnia, and Belgium. She has also addressed the UN General Assembly and regularly participates in high-level human rights conferences. Jacqueline is the founder and president of Genocide Survivors Foundation, an NGO which educates people about the crime of genocide and raises funds to support survivors.

ANNE APPLEBAUM (United States, 1964) is a staff writer for *The Atlantic* and a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian. She is also a Senior Fellow of International Affairs and Agora Fellow in Residence at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, where she co-directs LSE Arena, a program on disinformation and 21st-century propaganda. She wrote for leading publications including *The Washington Post*, *The Spectator* and *The Economist* and wrote several award-winning books on the history of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, including *Gulag. A History* (2004 Pulitzer Prize for non-fiction), *Iron Curtain. The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944-1956* (2012 Cundill Prize for Historical Literature), and *Red Famine. Stalin's War on Ukraine* (2018 Lionel Gelber Prize).

Photo: Thomas Meyer/OSTKREUZ

DAVID HARLAND (New Zealand, 1962) is Executive Director of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, a private diplomacy organisation working to prevent, mitigate, and resolve armed conflict through dialogue and mediation. Harland worked for the UN in Bosnia in the 1990s where he was charged with drafting the UN report on the fall of Srebrenica, and acted as a witness in the trials against Ratko Mladić, Radovan Karadžić, and Slobodan Milošević at the International Criminal Court. He currently serves on the United Nations High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation, was Chair of the World Economic Forum Conflict Prevention Council and was adjunct professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Harland has published widely on the issues surrounding conflict and international relations in the *New York Times* and elsewhere.



AVISHAI MARGALIT (Israël, 1939) is a philosopher who has become famous for his ideas on social and ethical issues. He has explored social constructions such as human dignity, memory as a constructive force and moral responsibility in times of conflict. His 2002 book *The Ethics of Memory* was a landmark work in the philosophy of memory, suggesting that memory is an ethical duty that can help bind communities together. Margalit wrote several other influential works, including *The Decent Society* (1998), *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies* (2004, with Ian Buruma), *On Compromise and Rotten Compromises* (2010) and *On Betrayal* (2017). He was awarded with the Spinozalens (2001), the Israel Prize in Philosophy (2010) and the Dr. Leopold-Lucas-Preis (2011). In 1978, he was one of the founders of the Peace Now movement. In 1996, Margalit was one of the speakers at the very first Nexus Conference, *The Legacy of the Twentieth Century: The Politics of Amnesia*.

FREDDY MUTANGUHA (Rwanda, 1976) is Executive Director of Aegis Trust, an influential NGO campaigning to prevent genocide around the globe. Mutanguha is a survivor of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and played a key role in developing Aegis Trust's peace education programme in the country. He is now at the forefront of taking the successful model for peace education developed in Rwanda to other countries, working in partnership with community leaders and national or regional authorities in Kenya, Nigeria, Cameroon, South Sudan and the Central African Republic. Mutanguha is a Board Member of the Centre for Justice and Reconciliation in Cambodia and Vice President of Ibuka, the umbrella organisation of genocide survivors' associations in Rwanda. In 2016, he received the Justice and Security Foundation Peace Award for his outstanding contribution to peace.

Photo: Megan Hustad

DAVID RIEFF (United States, 1952) is a New York-based journalist and author. During the 1990s, he covered conflicts in Africa (Rwanda, Burundi, Congo, Liberia), the Balkans (Bosnia and Kosovo), and Central Asia. Rieff has written extensively about Iraq, and, more recently, about Latin America. He is the author of eight books, including *Slaughterhouse: Bosnia and the Failure of the West* and *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*. He has published numerous articles in the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Le Monde*, *El País*, *Foreign Affairs* and other publications. His book *The Reproach of Hunger: Food, Justice, and Money in the 21st Century* was published in October 2015. His experience with the historical grievances that fuel conflicts in the Balkan and elsewhere led him to conclude that peace is only possible if we let go of the past, an argument he develops in his latest book *In Praise of Forgetting: the Irony of Historical Memory* (2016).

Photo: Matthias Bothor

GÉRALDINE SCHWARZ (France, 1974) is a journalist, author, and documentary filmmaker based in Berlin. After working for ten years as a correspondent in Germany for Agence France-Presse, she now collaborates with various international media and gives lectures throughout Europe on the themes of memory, Europe, populism and democracy. She is the author of *Those Who Forget*, translated into ten languages, which won several book prizes, among them the European Book Prize. Weaving together three generations of her French-German family story, Schwarz explores Europe's postwar reckoning with fascism. In the face of the return of fascism in Europe today, she asks: how can we better learn from history today to protect our freedom and our democracies?

LEON WIESELTIER (United States, 1952) is one of America's leading public intellectuals, a distinguished critic and prolific writer. After his studies at Harvard and Oxford, he quickly became the principal literary editor for *The New Republic*. After more than thirty years at this influential journal, he left in 2014 in protest of managerial changes. In the fall of 2020, he will present the first issue of a new journal on culture and politics, *Liberties*, which seeks to inform today's cultural and political leaders, deepen the understanding of citizens, and inspire the next generation to participate in the democratic process and public service. Wieseltier, whose moving diary *Kaddish* (1998) phenomenally addresses the eternal themes of loss and faith, freedom and predestination and the significance of traditions, is a devoted Jew, who lost many members of his family in the Shoah. In 1993 he published the influential essay 'After Memory: Reflections on the Holocaust Memorial Museum'.

Guardian Angels of the Nexus Institute
— Our 100 finest —

The Nexus Institute's 25-year history has been a remarkable success story. It began in 1991 with the journal *Nexus*, which led to the founding of the Nexus Institute in 1994. The Institute soon gained international fame for its unique ability to keep the spirit of European humanism alive and for pursuing the ideal of *universitas*, which disappeared in the academic world a long time ago.

In the last 25 years, the Nexus Institute has addressed the most important questions and topics, and hundreds of acclaimed speakers from the worlds of the arts, culture, science and politics have already stepped onto the Nexus stage, including Amos Oz, Mario Vargas Llosa, Margaret Atwood, John Coetzee, Susan Sontag, Richard Rorty, Ágnes Heller, Jürgen Habermas, Patti Smith, Sonia Gandhi, Ai Weiwei, Simon Rattle, Wole Soyinka, Jeb Bush, Daniel Barenboim, George Steiner, Nuria Schoenberg Nono, Garry Kasparov, José Manuel Barroso, Azar Nafisi, Amartya Sen, Jacqueline de Romilly, Alain Finkielkraut, Bernard-Henri Lévy, Anne Applebaum, Simon Schama and many more…

In these times, when intellectual education is disregarded and extreme forms of politics are re-emerging, the existence of an independent institution which — inspired by the ideal of European humanism — nourishes intellectual culture to defend freedom and democracy is anything but self-evident. The Nexus Institute's 25-year existence is largely due to its loyal members, generous Friends and funding bodies, and to politicians in the Netherlands who recognized the Institute's importance and acted accordingly.

Unfortunately, this political support has become less and less self-evident as a result of pressure from extreme political forces. In order to make the Nexus Institute stronger in times when our work is needed more than ever and the demand for our activities is growing, we are looking for our 100 finest: a circle of Guardian Angels of the Nexus Institute. The Nexus Institute has been granted the 501(c)(3) status in the United States, allowing for donations to be tax deductible for US citizens.

Would you like to join this circle? Please contact Eveline Riemen – van der Ham, vice president of the Nexus Institute, by sending an email to ham@nexus-instituut.nl or call +31 (0)85-047 1229 for more information.

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