

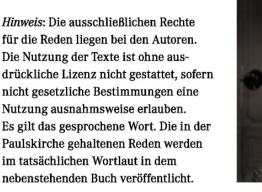
Aleida und Jan Assmann

Peace Prize of the German Book Trade 2018 Conferment Speeches

FRIEDENSPREIS DES DEUTSCHEN BUCHHANDELS PEACE PRIZE OF THE GERMAN BOOK TRADE 2018

Aleida und Jan Assmann

Ansprachen aus Anlass der Verleihung Conferment Speeches



Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels 2018 *Aleida und Jan Assmann* Ansprachen aus Anlass der Verleihung

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Statement of the Jury

"The German Publishers and Booksellers Association awards the 2018 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade to

Aleida and Jan Assmann

In doing so, the association and its members have chosen to honour two exceptional scholars who have inspired and complemented each other's work for decades.

As a scholar of literary and cultural studies, Aleida Assmann has displayed an unfaltering commitment to investigating the virulent and perennial themes of historical amnesia and memory culture. In view of the growing political instrumentalisation of these themes in recent German history, her scientifically grounded studies continue to provide much needed enlightenment on a broad range of issues relating to the cultural memory of nations. Time and again, her work has illustrated that an open and honest handling of the past is an essential precondition for peaceful coexistence.

As an Egyptologist and a scholar of cultural studies, Jan Assmann has launched international debates on fundamental questions relating to the cultural and religious conflicts of our time. His extensive scientific work has examined the relationship between religion and violence, the genesis of intolerance and the claim to absolute truth, all of which have made an indispensible contribution to our understanding of the willingness and capacity for peace held by religions in today's global society.

The exhilarating and mutually enhancing unity created by the two voices of Aleida and Jan Assmann has generated a body of work that is of tremendous importance for contemporary debates and, above all, for sustainable peace and understanding among the peoples of the world."

Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels

Der Vorsteher

Frankfurt am Main in der Paulskirche am 14. Oktober 2018

Heinrich Riethmüller

President of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association

Greeting

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Almost 70 years ago, on 10 December 1948, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For the first time in human history, countries from all continents agreed on a document that granted individual rights to every human being regardless of their nationality or ethnicity.

The Declaration of Human Rights can also be read as a reaction and response to the terrible experiences of the Second World War, and in particular to the atrocities committed in the name of the German people. Many, if not all, of the rights contained in the declaration – every one of which is selfexplanatory for us today – had been severely disregarded in that era, and some of them continue to be ignored to this day in many parts of the world.

Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The past, present and future come together in this declaration of human rights. Indeed, if the peoples and nations of this world do not strive to regularly remind themselves of their past with the goal of learning both positive and negative form it, then it becomes increasingly likely that future generations will repeat the same mistakes. A culture of remembrance that manifests itself in a collective memory is of fundamental importance for the peaceful coexistence of humankind.

The annual Peace Prize of the German Book Trade is one special component of this enlightened culture of remembrance. All of our award recipients, from Max Tau to the two individuals we are honouring today, Aleida and Jan Assmann, have shown us how important it is that we engage in the act of remembering and keeping history alive.

This culture of remembrance, however, comes in for criticism time and again. And it is true that if this culture is merely backward-looking, that is, if it loses itself in a posture of overly dramatic pauses of reflection, then the only thing it serves is to reflexively ritualise the act of remembering the past, without generating any connection to the present; in taking this approach, it runs the risk of becoming vulnerable to attack and losing the very impact it ought to achieve. A truly effective culture of remembrance always includes a reflection on our potential common future, thus helping to warn the living against engaging in a repetition of history.

Article 18: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Memories and the act of remembering gain a special urgency and persuasive power when they are conveyed to us by actual witnesses to historical events. In this context, the acceptance speech given in the Church of St. Paul by Saul Friedländer, recipient of the 2007 Peace Prize, is among the most unforgettable. Friedländer responded to criticisms aimed at the ritualisation of memory with the following: "When we listen to these cries [of the victims], we are not engaging in some ritualised or institutionalised remembrance. [...] Instead, these individual voices shake us to our core due to their innocence and by virtue of the unawareness of the victims, who knew nothing of their fate. [...] To this day, however, we are moved above all by the voices of those who faced imminent extermination, precisely because of their utter helplessness, their innocence and the solitude of their despair".

In 1999, the great historian and Peace Price recipient Fritz Stern warned in his acceptance speech in

the Church of St. Paul: "It is only right that there are reminders against forgetting. And it must be noted that these voices do not seek to place blame on today's generation, but instead they ask us to take responsibility, to broaden our knowledge about the mistakes and crimes of the past. We can learn from the past, we can come to understand that the path of history is open, that it is shaped by people. The belief in historical inevitability is a dangerous misconception. It can only lead to passivity".

Article 21: Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

Silence and passivity, fatalism and indifference are the real enemies of democracy. Indeed, democracy can only exist – can only thrive – when people actively participate, when we get involved and have the courage to express our own opinions while also respecting those of others. The award recipients of the Peace Prize have always been and will continue to be individuals who admonish us to keep history ever-present and take every opportunity to learn from it.

And yet, learning from the past means more than just gaining knowledge and understanding; it also involves taking action. In an era such as our own, which is again being shaped by racism, anti-Semitism and populism, the virtues of solidarity, compassion and participation are anything but oldfashioned, nor are they the attributes of do-gooders or so-called *Gutmenschen*. Instead, they are the very approaches that make up civil society; they work against a growing trend towards selfcenteredness that prompts many people to want to withdraw from the world.

Especially those of us who meet here every year to gain intellectual momentum for our own worldviews, we must once again articulate and express ourselves more vigorously than before. Kofi Annan, the former secretary general of the United Nations who passed away recently, was right when he said: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is the silence of the majority".

Article 19: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

A new edition of a work by Aleida Assmann was recently published under the title Menschenrechte und Menschenpflichten (tr; Human rights and human duties). In that short book, she describes what she calls the "human duties" that form a kind of social agreement and generate the basic foundation of cultures. In this sense, these duties represent a necessary complement to human rights. And it only follows that if we make these human duties - all of which are deeply anchored in us - the basis our actions, they can help us overcome the current divisions of our society and master the challenges associated with immigration and migration. And we must do so with empathy and respect, that is, with those virtues that are practiced in almost all cultures and give us the foundation for our peaceful coexistence.

It is my hope that we return to this insight time and again, that we keep in mind those voices from the past, and that we continue to pursue an honest and vigorous examination and confrontation with our history.

Article 27: Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

Today's award recipients are pioneers in laying the groundwork for a smart and enlightened culture of remembrance. Their work and their research provide a blueprint of how a modern society can learn from its past so as to be able to live in freedom and peace. And for us – that is, for booksellers, bookshops and publishers in Germany – conveying these values is our own very special human duty.

On behalf of the Börsenverein, I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to Aleida and Jan Assmann on receiving the 2018 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade.

Peter Feldmann

Lord Mayor of the City of Frankfurt am Main

Greeting

On behalf of the City of Frankfurt am Main, I would like to welcome you all to the Church of St. Paul, the cradle of German democracy. I use these words intentionally, because not only are the Church of St. Paul and the Peace Prize a perfect match, they also form part of a very unique Frankfurt tradition.

The decision to award the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade to Jan and Aleida Assmann also makes for a perfect match. It is a decision in favour of objectivity, knowledge, science and clear thinking. Above all, however, it is a clear decision against the inclination to forget or repress history.

Giving Jan and Aleida Assmann the Peace Prize is also a perfect match for Frankfurt. Our city is a major centre of knowledge and science; it is the home of the Frankfurt School and many other forms of in-depth scientific and historical research. Frankfurt is also a city that draws its strength from a deep awareness of its own history. People from 177 nations live together peacefully, and over 200 languages are spoken here. In fact, roughly 50% of Frankfurt's citizens have an international background; in younger generations, that number rises to 70-80%. In this sense, Frankfurt is most definitely a hard act to follow, first and foremost because it is a peaceful city, but more importantly because its diversity is absolutely normal for everyone who lives here. This is why there's no better place - no better city - in which to award the Peace Prize than Frankfurt.

Frankfurt is a city that makes no claim to martyrs or heroes. Indeed, we are a city that has always understood the advantages of opening our doors to supposed adversaries before any conflict occurs. The administrators of this city – my predecessors from way back when – were always obliged to invite people in, because Frankfurt is and will always be a city of trade. Today, for that matter, Frankfurt is also a city of prosperity and harmony (Eintracht).

The awarding of the Peace Prize is a perfect match for Frankfurt's Church of St. Paul because this site is a monument to the history of German democracy and a great space of ideas, debate and dialogue. The scholarly research done by this year's two award recipients teaches us that we can look to the past to gain ideas and inspiration for our present and our future; however, in order for this to be effective, the most important task is for us to gain full clarity about our past. This is the only way we can preserve the foundations of social peace while also realising our ideals, dreams and wishes.

With this in mind, the Church of St. Paul is the best place to ask the following question: What has become of the dreams and ideals of the individuals who gathered here in 1848 and created the foundation upon which the members of the 1968generation stood so firmly a century later? What happened to those women who shouted down from the galleries at the male members of parliament long before women's suffrage? It is time to become more aware of our history and to fill sites such as the Church of St. Paul with new and diverse life. It is time that the Church of St. Paul becomes not just the site of highly esteemed and dignified award presentations, such as the one we are celebrating today, but also the site of dialogue across all segments of the population.

Frankfurt has always been most successful when it didn't close itself off but instead opened its doors and invited everyone in to participate – both in the future of the city and that of the entire region. Indeed, German democracy is a genuine Frankfurt offspring, that is, it is the direct result of the history of our city. It did not come about merely by chance or via the exchange of goods, ideas and sometimes also ideals; instead, democracy emerged as a result of people debating with one another vociferously. Today, democracy is experiencing setbacks worldwide, while its enemies are gaining in volume, power and influence. In Germany, it's not just dimwitted neo-Nazis who are spouting xenophobic slurs; it is also publishers, authors, professor and even bankers. It is our task to counter this movement. In our home town of Frankfurt, we have plenty of space for everyone, we are open to the world and we are tolerant; however, we do not have space nor do we have any tolerance or understanding for any form of xenophobia, discrimination, racism or anything that demeans ourselves and our fellow human beings.

Every year on the occasion of the Peace Prize, our city of democracy, knowledge and science sends out a strong signal to the rest of the world. And this year's award recipients could not correspond more perfectly to the spirit of our city, in that they continue to work tirelessly in favour of objectivity, science and clear thinking and against the forgetting or repression of history. On behalf of the city of Frankfurt am Main, I would like to once again express my warmest congratulations to you, Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann, on receiving the 2018 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade.

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Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht

»Precarious Thinking. Jan Assmann, Aleida Assmann and the World of a German Generation«

Laudation on Aleida and Jan Assmann

It fills me with a tremendous sense of gratitude to be standing here in October 2018 in the Church of St. Paul for the purpose of celebrating Jan and Aleida Assmann and their "zweistimmiges Lebenswerk" - their "lifetime achievement in two voices", as the Board of Trustees of the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade so fittingly and eloquently phrased it. However, it also fills me with a sense of precarious uncertainty. I use the word "precarious" here in the specifically temporal sense of the word to mean that there is no set guideline from the past and no vision of the future that can help me formulate my words in the next (exactly) twenty-one minutes in such a way as to render them the way they should be. In turn, this subjective awareness of a highly precarious situation also draws attention to a number of objectively precarious horizons in our present day.

For example, the Church of St. Paul itself was the starting point of a precarious tradition of democracy in Germany, especially since the talk of the "end of history" served to unsettle us as we look back at what transpired. We live in an era of dwindling certainty regarding the conditions of peace stipulated by the Enlightenment and especially by Immanuel Kant, but also regarding those hopeful new interpretations that emerged after 1945 and again after 1989. Today, it is only with a degree of scepticism that we can permit the humanities - that realm of the mind to which Aleida and Jan Assmann have contributed so many vital insights for more than fifty years - to even contemplate their own future. And, ultimately, given this backdrop, is it even possible for me to live up to the standards set by the Peace Prize, namely those of objectivity and precision, when my task involves speaking *in front of* and *in praise of* two of my best friends?

These two friends of mine were born at the very beginning and at the very end of a particular German generation, our generation, a generation to whom history granted the lead weight of a paradoxical obligation. Anyone born in 1938 (such as Jan Assmann) could in no way have participated in the crimes committed in the name of the German nation; and anyone born in 1947 (such as Aleida Assmann) was still within reach of a call from the past obliging them to take on responsibility for crimes that were not part of their own lives or their own remembrance (Andenken). This call was an appeal to work against the communicative silence and, worse still, the outright denial of the perpetrators. And, indeed, nobody has sought more consistently and imaginatively to think through (andenken) against this paradox than Aleida and Jan. In doing so, they appear to have - perhaps without knowing it - given the word Andenken a new meaning.¹ This new meaning took the stasis of the remembered past and transformed it into the energy of intellectual thinking. It may seem improbable that the very good and very German poet Friedrich Hölderlin understood the title of his poem Andenken (Remembrance) in this sense, yet we can nevertheless see very clearly how for him, too, the remembrance of the gardens of Bordeaux led him

¹ Translator's note: The German noun *Andenken* can be used to refer to a memory, a souvenir, a remembrance, etc. The verb *andenken* describes the act of remembering, contemplating or thinking about something. In this essay, Hans Ulrich Gombrecht uses both the noun and the verb in a number of different ways, placing particular emphasis on a new interpretation of *an-denken* as a form of what has been translated here as a "thinking through".

to a *thinking through* – an *An-Denken* – of the promises and perils of his future.

Instead of reviewing the process with which today's award recipients broadened the depth of focus now enjoyed by the word "memory" (Erin*nerung*), as no doubt many of you might expect me to do, I would like to instead - both with and for you - bring to mind a series of precarious situations, with which and against which my two friends sought to *think through*. Their thinking resulted in a number of suggestions for the construction of new worlds in their nation; suggestions for frameworks of individual and collective existence that were infinite and could never become rigid frameworks in which a life lived with that horrifying past was made bearable, so that we could then, finally, move beyond the initial trauma of our generation and begin to consider the problems associated with other, different futures.

Without paying mind to any sort of chronological order or even the assumption of a logic of development, I will first concentrate on the concept of time as a central object in the thinking of the two Assmanns, so as to, after that - in a manner that is perhaps too phenomenological, even for a German audience - speak of their life in the space of dissipating national borders. However, my words of praise for this prize-winning couple would be lacking a centre if I did not mention the family of Jan and Aleida Assmann and their love - in a time when especially love and family have lost much of their self-explanatory nature. The same applies to the concept of peace which, in the almost seventy years since the inception of the Frankfurt Peace Prize, has unfortunately not become a merely decorative theme, but instead remains a very firm benchmark for the relevance of the prize-winners. Of course - and I would like to conclude this section with this thought - this criterion must appear, especially for people working in the humanities, at least initially as a somewhat excessive expectation.

As for the unique configuration of historical time for our generation, it was Aleida Assmann, in particular, who never shied away - indeed, one could also say she never hesitated - from using the evolving space of the public sphere to engage in controversial debates. And she did so with a depth of expertise that could only have been gained in the humanities and also with the sound judgement of passion. I am quite familiar with the power of her thinking and her words, because we find ourselves on opposing sides in one of those disputes, namely, to put it in elementary terms, Aleida on the side of understanding and myself on the side of condemnation. It was revealed that my academic mentor in Constance - whom I credit with launching a passable university career but also, above all, to whom I attribute the deep conviction that no path through the humanities should be considered complete without a detour through philosophy - was a member of the Waffen SS for six years and unable, even up to his death, to bring himself to willingly speak about that time in his life.

Until that moment, there had never been a single controversy between Aleida and myself. But then I made the decision to engage in a damnatio memoriae - a reaction to which I am committed to this day. Aleida, on the other hand, and I quote, opened herself up to the "historical contexts" of an important achievement in thought, one that came to an end in Constance and one "that complicates the clear image we desire". In other words, behind my damnatio memoriae, she revealed "a need for decontamination, a desire to discredit a work in toto so as to remove a name from the annals of the humanities. But this is not an easy task, seeing as when we - metaphorically, of course - remove that steel beam, a larger building collapses. And in such cases, we would have to also destroy and dispose of entire paradigms of literary theory (...)".

It was uncompromising words like these that helped me to achieve – at first against my own resistance – a sober evaluation of my own motivation and the consequences thereof. They led to a conversation between Aleida and me that continues to this day and from which I, at least, have profited considerably.

Like Aleida Assmann, so, too, is Jan Assmann a master of contouring his own intellectual positions. However, his temperament is such that it precludes him from seeking out the stage of polemic and political debate. For this reason - and not simply because he has clung fast to the culture of Ancient Egypt as the centre of his thinking to this day allow me to quote Jan Assmann as an Egyptologist, in this case from his essay on "Todesbilder and Totenriten im Alten Ägypten" (tr: Images of death and funeral rites in Ancient Egypt) from the year 2000, still one of my favourite texts after more than 50 years of reading in the humanities: "[M]an, who has fallen outside the order of nature [...] through a superabundance of knowledge, [has to] create an artificial world in which he can live - and that is culture. Culture arises from knowledge of death and mortality. Culture represents the attempt to create a space and a time in which man can think his way out of the [finite] horizon and of his life and [trace the lines] of his action, experience and plans [...]."² These words, which sound in all lucidity like the résumé of an already existing thesis drawn from the history of philosophy, were actually a breathtaking provocation by the author Jan Assmann. No one had ever posited the thesis that culture emerges out of man's knowledge of his own death. In contrast to the sharp awareness of difference found in the conception of a narrow present in the "historical worldview" of Western culture, we learn that the Egyptians, in response to the trauma of human finitude, created a present that extended without beginning or end into the past and into the future: into the past as an obligation handed down by the state to maintain the presence of a tradition of moral life through memory; and into the future with the hope of surviving individual death by integrating the individual into the cycles of nature by means of particular funeral rites.

Still, if you've read the works of Jan Assmann, you know that he never stops with historical reconstructions. His sentence dedicated to the Egyptian pyramids, according to which "the message of these stones is one massive protest against death and surely the most grandiose attempt to overcome death that humankind has ever attempted", succeeds at almost silently – and Jan, indeed, often writes very quietly – lending that present, which is infinite on both sides, the status of an existential yearning today. In our own age, this status gives our imagination the gift of an alternative to our historical worldview – and perhaps even the vision of a new, ecological temporality of conservation.

The political potential of such thoughts reveals itself, quite surprisingly, when we bring to mind the spatial conditions in which it emerged in the lives of Jan and Aleida Assmann. Both gained insights while on excavations in Egypt. Jan's thesis on the dialectical origins – in the Hegelian sense – of Jewish theology from out of an Egyptianpolytheistic pre-history was met with such an intense resonance in Israel that he very quickly became an honorary doctor at Hebrew University. And I must say, dear Jan, that I envy you very much for that accomplishment!

Aleida became a specialist in the ambivalence associated with memorial sites in Israel, that is, the Jewish-Palestinian-Islamic ambivalence, and I believe this was the result of her early experiences in Egypt. Among the stops on her career path as a scholar of English-language studies was a high school year in San José, California, where she became the first piccolo flutist to play in the school's marching band. And here I must mention that both Assmanns have kept faith, even in difficult times, with our American universities. Jan and Aleida also became Europeans *avant la lettre institutionnelle* via England and France, in particular. They were both born in northern Germany, and instead of

² Taken here from *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* by Jan Assmann. Translated from the German by David Lorton, Cornell University Press, Cornell. 2005, pp. 6-7.

"settling down" in one place, they found the axis of their lives running between Heidelberg and Constance. This came to pass, of course, because being the true cosmopolitans they are, all they ever find anywhere is a constant flow of ambivalences and precarious situations, that is to say, nowhere do they find the peace of final certainty.

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This lifetime achievement would not have been imaginable without the family and without the love between Aleida and Jan Assmann. This became clear to me for the first time at a series of colloquia held in today's Dubrovnik in Croatia, where we three went from being colleagues to becoming friends. Aleida and Jan travelled to the gathering with their five children, all of whom have such wonderful names - Vincent, David, Marlene, Valerie and Corinna. At no time did the family capitulate to the logistical difficulties of such an undertaking. On the contrary, the children were present almost every day during the two-week colloquium at most of our discussions, some of which lasted twelve hours. The concentrated liveliness with which the children read picture books, played in the aisles and drew caricatures of conference participants - which also led to some precarious situations - impressed us all just as much as the thirst for knowledge and the attentive attention displayed by Aleida and Jan, who would pass a pencil back and forth like a relay baton while taking notes in their beautiful (and similar) penmanship.

What I am recounting here is more than a *petit* genre of childrearing rendered golden by the retrospective view of advancing years. Instead, it reflects much more a well-meaning envy with regard to the success of their *thinking through* (*An-Denken*) against the idea of having to make the ghastly choice between a life *either* as intellectuals *or* as a family. For Jan and Aleida, the two cannot be separated. I admire first and foremost your love for one another, and I mean this word in its fullest sense. You have never let your passion for one another deteriorate into a routine partnership, a division of labour or even a mere synthesis. I believe that you love each other out of the experience of the tremendous difference between the two of you, and this experience of difference has allowed you to keep the passion alive and well – a passion that continues to provide you with two-fold energy for your intellectual achievements to this day. Although this kind of joy cannot and should not become a "prescription for young families", it most definitely continues to have an impact as a form of encouragement and as a thing of beauty.

In other words, one can say with confidence that Jan and Aleida Assmann deserve a Peace Prize, because they have proven that family and love remain an organon of coexistence in understanding, affection and passion, even under new circumstances. However, I find such words a bit too sweeping and serene, and this prompts me to want to think further, that is, to think through (An- and *Weiter-Denken*). If we find ourselves responding to the fragility of today's peace more with fear than with mere concern, then it would behave us - with a view to Kant's Perpetual Peace - to try to determine, with as much precision as possible, which conditions of peace have, in fact, become fragile. No doubt, this applies, first, to the positive limitation "of world citizenship to conditions of universal hospitality" (Kant's third definitive article), and, second, to the demand that "no state shall by force interfere with the constitution or government of another state" (Kant's fifth preliminary article). Today, the drastic extent to which so many states especially in North America and in continental Europe - avail themselves of the right conceded even by Kant to refuse hospitality to strangers is ever-present and the subject of daily debate. And, at the same time, a tone of moral superiority - not least in Germany - has spread, an approach with which one seeks to interfere in the "constitution and government of another state", for example, by imposing one's own form of the separation of powers and political interaction on other political systems with a level of self-satisfaction that disregards

all shame associated with German history between 1933 and 1945.

Can an expert in English literature and an Egyptologist actually generate more openness with regard to migration issues? Can they have a tangible impact on the struggle for peace? And can they do so in a manner that is effective beyond their role as the protagonists of a Sunday speech? I believe they can. Aleida Assmann has devoted herself to fostering the willingness for greater hospitality, particularly in the societies of Eastern Europe and the socalled "Middle East". She has done so, above all, by arguing in favour of clear and critical appraisals of each respective history and in favour of a turn towards the idiosyncrasies found in the cultures of the respective other (and often also of the respective excluded person). Jan Assmann's thesis - one that he has been refining for over two decades focuses on revealing an affinity between the claim to absolute validity made by theological monotheisms, on the one hand, and political totalitarianisms, on the other - a theory that has served from the very beginning as a warning sign for European intellectuals against the perils of moral arrogance.

And yet, the humanists among us, in particular, should not succumb to any illusions, even here on this celebratory morning. We cannot demand that politicians pay us any attention and express interest or confidence in our experiences or even our judgement. Indeed, we humanists will never attain the level of respect for learning in the fields of history and the arts that was cultivated, for example, by Wilhelminian society in the era of Theodor Mommsen, who was honoured with the Nobel Prize for Literature - only the second one ever awarded at the time - for his work as a historian of the Roman Empire. The dimensions of respect which Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann have reclaimed - as a result of their noble erudition, their patience and especially their passion for our generation of humanist scholars in Germany - are indeed much more precarious, despite all the differentiation relating to the diversity of their talents. By means of

the sober clarity of her thinking and her language, Aleida has succeeded in regaining a right that was perhaps squandered in an age of all too pretentious theories, namely the right to be heard and taken seriously. In contrast, if we make our way along the ongoing reception of Jan Assmann's work, what we find is his persistent delight in the surprising and often counter-intuitive ideas he finds – especially in the pre-ancient worlds – and which he renders as concrete counter-images to that which seems immutable and always already existing. I like to describe this gift of his as "risky thinking", and I admire it just as much as I admire Aleida's friendly earnestness. Indeed, I adore my two friends equally and particularly in their contrast.

I would like to conclude by arguing that no higher or more demanding claim with regard to thought and peace could have been achieved by the humanist scholars of our German generation. The fact that they are humanist scholars, however, also means that the time for remembering Aleida's and Jan's achievements will indeed most likely be shortlived, shorter than that of many athletes, artists, actors or politicians. It is almost impossible to suppress this thought - one we should probably reveal to our younger colleagues - beyond the age of seventy. Nor is it likely that any member of our generation, not even Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann, will win the Nobel Prize in Literature or the Nobel Peace Prize in the foreseeable future. Although, who knows!

For this reason, we should hold fast and as long as possible to the present moment on this celebratory morning in Frankfurt, so that we may thank Jan and Aleida with pure joy for their "lifetime achievement in two voices", which gifts us a very welcome dose of encouragement for the humanities and for peace. We should hold fast to this happiness before our precarious everyday lives return on Monday asking us to *think through and against* them.

Aleida and Jan Assmann

»That which is true is that which connects us to one another!«

Acceptance Speech

The news that we had been chosen to receive the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade came as an overwhelming surprise to us. We have followed the ceremony for many years and seen it provide a podium and an audience to so many extraordinary voices. We never dreamed that we would be invited to make the leap from audience to podium. This is why we are all the more grateful to the Board of Trustees of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association for this great honour and the recognition it brings to our joint work. We see this prize as a letter offering us honorary citizenship in the *Res publica litteraria*, a homeland that knows no national borders.

Res publica litteraria

This homeland was founded on the cusp of the age of the printing press by poets, humanists, publishers and booksellers. These are the figures who mediated between old and new languages, thereby laying the foundation of European diversity. In doing so, they fashioned the library as their realm of communication and set into motion a true *Geister-Gespräch* – a dialogue of exalted spirits – that developed across centuries and national borders.

In 1950, the newly launched tradition of the Peace Prize brought this dialogue of exalted spirits – upheld to this day by writers, publishers, booksellers and readers – back into the public sphere. Indeed, we should never forget that the term *Res publica litteraria* contains the word "public". Although books open up "thinking spaces" for the spirit and libraries are vast archives of information containing a universe of fantasy and imagination, does this automatically mean that they, too, generate a public sphere? The halls of the book fair here in Frankfurt create a vast labyrinth that opens up ever new paths and an infinite number of meeting points. In contrast, the public sphere is born of something else; it is created when we focus our attention in the same direction, when we concentrate on our common interests, presence and participation. Whereas reading scatters and isolates, the public sphere pulls us together and addresses each and every one of us. In this sense, the Church of St. Paul is the necessary supplement to the Frankfurt Book Fair.

By virtue of hosting the Peace Prize, the Church of St. Paul - this historic site of German democracy has become a site of dialogue and exchange across time and over generations. By gathering here today, we enter into this space of resonance. And it is here that we would like to speak of some of our predecessors - with particular preference, of course, for those who appeared here in pairs. For us, the first such pair is Karl Jaspers and Hannah Arendt, who stood on this very spot 60 years ago and likewise took up the notion of the Res publica litteraria. In her speech honouring the recipient Jaspers, Arendt argued that her mentor - whom she referred to as an "incorruptible philosopher and dissident" while no doubt isolated and on his own during the Third Reich, was never alone, because he had a spiritual home in "the realm of humanitas, which everyone can come to out of their own origins".

Truth and the public sphere

The "public", as we all know, is the opposite of the "private". "Public", however, can also mean the opposite of a repressive silence – one that must be broken time and again, as we saw most recently with regard to the handling of victims of sexual violence. Jaspers, too, saw the public sphere as a battlefield upon which truth must do constant battle with untruth. He considered untruth to be "the true evil destroying every peace." And, for Jaspers, untruth had many guises: "from concealment to blind indifference, from lies to inner mendacity,

from foolishness to a rigid truth fanaticism, from the untruthfulness of the individual condition to the untruthfulness of the public condition."

Since Jasper's day, the universe of communication has become infinitely more abundant and flexible, with many more voices joining in; however, it has also become much more difficult and – above all – more dangerous to navigate.

When we speak of the "public" here, we must also speak of "media", that is, we must distinguish between the organs of the public sphere, such as newspapers, television and radio, on the one hand, and their technical infrastructures, on the other. Indeed, each individual technological base creates the public realm in a different way. Whereas the printing age and analogue photography were still calibrated to serve values such as truth, evidence and verifiability, in the digital age, the door has been left wide open to data manipulation. For example, while it has long since been possible to manipulate images at will, IT engineers in Germany and the US are now working on a very disturbing AI faceswapping technology that will enable anyone to create fake photorealistic videos, thus making it look like a person is speaking words they never spoke. In April of this year, a Google engineer presented a video he had made while still a student showing Barack Obama uttering a number of things he never said, all deceptively real and matched perfectly to his facial expressions. In other words, we will soon, quite literally, be able to put words into anyone's mouth without being able to judge definitively where an expression or an opinion originated. And yet, we not only have to deal with ever-increasing levels of obfuscation thanks to fake news and the latest technologies; we've also had to confront more traditional forms of deceptive behavior, for example, in the auto industry with regard to the manipulation of emission levels. Only now, as this type of obfuscation grows more prevalent, is it becoming clear to us how desperately we rely on particular achievements - such as truth, credibility and accountability - for our peaceful coexistence.

In a true democracy, the work of thinking cannot be delegated, that is, it cannot be left up to experts, performers and demagogues. Eight years ago, in his bestselling essay Indignez-vous!, 93-year-old Stéphane Hessel let us all know that it was "a time for outrage!" Since then, that indignation has switched sides - and it has done so all over the world. While it is true that democracies gain in strength through disputes and debate, this does not mean that everything in a democracy is subject to negotiation. A democracy must have inviolable convictions and be based on a shared consensus, for example, in the form of a constitution, human rights and the separation of powers as well as in the independence of the legal system and the media. Indeed, not every dissenting voice deserves to be heard. A voice that seeks to undermine the pillars upon which the diversity of opinion is built forfeits in that moment any respect it may have had. In other words, democracy thrives not on disputes, but rather on good arguments. Loutish behaviour, verbal attacks and the increasing use of polarising symbols, such as we saw recently in Chemnitz, can only lead to a state of general confusion, which, in turn, inevitably leads to a paralysis of democracy, ultimately rendering it incapable of carrying out its important tasks.

Cultural Memory

Jaspers was one of the individuals who developed a vision of a new Europe in the wake of two catastrophic world wars. For Jaspers, this vision involved first and foremost the overcoming of European conceit towards other countries and cultures. Just one year after the end of the war, he declared: "Gone is that European arrogance which used to think in terms of 'world-history' what was in reality only occidental history". Jaspers sought to bring an end to Europe's exclusive and destructive hegemony in the world and instead integrate it into a global vision of *humanity* that "made a great leap" as a whole around 500 B.C. This is the core of his idea of the "Axial Age", a new interpretation of history that sought to place Europe on par with other advanced civilisations. In that era thousands of years ago, many cultures saw the emergence of great minds whose words and thoughts continue to shape our lives to this day. In Greece, it was poets and thinkers such as Homer and Plato; in Israel it was the prophets; in Persia, it was Zarathustra; in India, it was Buddha; and in China, it was Lao Tzu and Confucius. These figures established a *Geisterreich* - a realm of exalted spirits - in which, to use the words of Hannah Arendt, "they appear once more as speaking individuals - speaking from the realm of the dead; speakers who, because they had passed from the temporal world, were able to become eternal companions in the realm of exalted spirits."

Jaspers' agenda for peace started at a cultural level. As scholars of culture, this approach speaks to both of us. However, it also presents us with a number of challenges. Our research, too, is based on the observation that some so-called advanced civilisations used writing and other forms of transmission to create traditions that have lasted for thousands of years. This sense of contemporaneity with great thinkers, poets and founders - this connection and comprehensibility between their and our time upheld through traditions - is exactly what we refer to as "cultural memory". However, unlike Jaspers and Arendt, who presupposed the "realm of exalted spirits" as something self-evident, we focused the lens of our research on the very question of how traditions are built.

First, our thesis posits that cultural memory *is the result of ceaseless cultural work*. Here, it would suffice to recall the unbelievable efforts made by ancient Egyptian culture to maintain its recognisability across the millennia, that is, to make it possible for us to read inscriptions even after two-and-ahalf centuries and to continue to practise the formal language of art and architecture. This was no "dull perseverance," as Max Weber put it, but instead the result of intensive work on cultural memory.

Second, a cultural memory requires *dialogue and vigorous engagement* with each respective present. The texts, books and authors that are closest to us are those we reinterpret time and again – the ones

into which we are able to input our own thoughts. Those that become unfamiliar to us are doomed to disappear in an archive – from which they can nevertheless be rediscovered at a later date.

Thirdly, although Jaspers envisioned the realm of humanitas as a sphere of "limitless communication", we do not go that far. Instead, our theory is based on the acknowledgment of borders and differences in the realm of humanitas. Indeed, humanity exists in the singular, but cultures, languages and religions exist only in plurals. For this reason, we also do not speak of "knowledge" but of "memory", which is always already bound to identities, perspectives and, of course, interests. Society needs a memory just as individuals do; we need memories in order to know who we are and what to expect, and to be able to develop and orient ourselves. Seyla Benhabib, who spoke here two years ago, expressed it in the following manner: "Culture is a dialogue of multiple voices across generations, connecting the past, present and future by means of conflicting narratives."

Remaining recognisable is the task of a cultural as well as a national memory. In this sphere, however, a number of things have changed in recent years. We can no longer seamlessly draw on old fantasies of national pride and greatness. The national memory, which served as a pedestal for honour, pride and heroism for a long time, has become more complex, more inclusive and more self-critical. Still, it is not only a pedestal that makes the nation larger and more powerful, but also a mirror of selfknowledge, remorse and change. The nation is not a holy grail that needs to be protected from defilement and desecration - the key word here being "Vogelschiss".3 Instead, the nation is a union of people who are also capable of remembering shameful episodes in their history and taking re-

³ In June 2018, Alexander Gauland, co-leader of the farright Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, described the Nazi era as a brief blemish in the country's otherwise grand history, stating "Hitler and the Nazis are just a speck of bird poop [Vogelschiss] in more than 1,000 years of successful German history".

sponsibility for the monstrous crimes committed in their name.

We must keep one important difference in mind here: it is the history alone that is *shameful*, not the *liberating* memory of it, which is something we share with the victims. This is why identity does not emerge through denial, ignoring or forgetting; in fact, identity also requires the act remembering in order for it to become accountable, that is, to take on responsibility and foster a change in values and national self-image.

Solidarity and integration

And yet, that which connects us - whether it be our origins, religions, convictions or projects - is often also that which separates us. Thus the following key question arises: How exclusive or inclusive is this national "we" that emerges through identity and identification? In posing this question, we move from the theme of cultural memory to the theme of social and political solidarity; and here we would like to draw upon the research done by yet another couple among our Peace Prize predecessors. Alva and Gunnar Myrdal were honoured here in 1970 - that is, in a critical phase of the Cold War - for their energetic advocacy of nuclear disarmament. In addition to the nuclear menace, however, they also saw other issues as posing a threat to world peace: for example, the lack of equal opportunity and integration, the erosion of solidarity due to racial discrimination and the exclusion of entire groups as a result of increasing economic inequality. Gunnar Myrdal even already anticipated the experience of globalisation when he argued that "[a]s a result of revolutionary technical and political changes, nation states will inevitably become more and more dependent on one another". He also emphasised "that the prevailing free-trade theories and their application will lead to a further deepening of existing inequality at the expense of poor countries".

Myrdal's argument is also more relevant today than ever before. His model at the time was the Swedish welfare state, but his utopia went even further and aimed to carry over the principle of the welfare state to the world stage in the form of a "welfare world". Still, Myrdal also had no illusions about the forces of opposition that stand ubiquitously in the way of our willingness to express solidarity on a global scale. People are very willing to show solidarity with others when those others have the same attitudes and pursue the same goals. We are all familiar with the type of solidarity that comes in the form of a nation's "collective egoism" - the model here being "America First!" In recent years, we have also come to know the transnational collective egoism of populist parties, their model being that of a "Fortress Europe". These forms of solidarity are exclusionary and aim to keep others out. Integration, on the other hand, calls for an inclusive form of solidarity that extends to people who are different from us - people with whom we nevertheless want to build a common future.

Money and greed neutralise cultural foreignness, however they, too, divide the world - into the rich and the poor. Nationalist political forces are very adept at diminishing solidarity in many areas; for example, by inciting hatred for those who are weaker or foreign. This leads to a *Milieuvergiftung*, yet another term used by Gunnar Myrdal, this time to refer to a poisoning of the social atmosphere with which he drew parallels to an Umweltvergiftung, the contamination of the physical environment. On the path to achieving a welfare world, as he envisioned it, Myrdal argued that solidarity must therefore be cultivated on all levels: as social solidarity on the level of society, as transnational solidarity on the EU level and, above all, as global solidarity in the handling of economic and natural resources so as to ensure that subsequent generations can even have a future. Today, we must add to this our solidarity with refugees - people who have had their futures destroyed by war, hardship, violence and thievery. It simply cannot be the case that we endorse a neoliberal freedom of movement with regard to capital, goods and raw materials, while migrants drown in the Mediterranean or are

left stranded at national borders and we forget the people, their fate, their suffering and their future.

The key question here is no longer whether we are going to succeed at achieving integration, but instead *how* we are going to go about achieving it. Unfortunately, at the moment, it almost appears as if this development is moving backwards. When the scope of public discourse is narrowed down to include only a few issues, this serves only to fan the flames of the debate while doing very little to assist in clarifying and handling current problems. I was speaking recently to a social worker - a woman who works with foreigners and has lived in Dresden for 15 years - and she told me in perfect German: "When I open my mouth and people hear my Russian accent, I'm suddenly a migrant again, and nothing else." Still others, many of whom have been living here three times as long, have told me that they, too, have been gripped by naked fear in recent days.

Shall we speak, for a change, about areas in which efforts are actually bearing fruit? We would like to provide three examples.

Our first example brings us to Olga, the women whom we just quoted. She belongs to a group of Russian-speaking citizens who found a home here in Germany at the end of the 1990s. This group of parents are anything but indifferent about what happens to their adopted country and its democracy, which is why they founded an association called "Phoenix." These people are the new patriots. As individuals who have undergone the process of integration themselves, they know best how integration works. And this is why they are putting their experience and commitment to work as mediators between German authorities and immigrants looking for employment. By the way, these citizens are currently working in a race with the AfD, a political party that has proven very clever and effective at using new immigrants for their own political ends.

Migrants helping migrants; this is also the principle behind the second group we would like to mention here, a project called "Back on Track – Syria." This group of Berliners works with Syrian teachers to give Syrian children a proper education. Their aim is to get these children – who were torn from their daily lives due to civil war and flight – "back on track". Using their newly developed method of "guided self-learning", they have succeeded at reaching a large number of "derailed" children.

The third association we would like to mention here is called "Helfende Hände" (Helping hands) and was founded by two Austrian couples. This group manages schooling and medical care in an underprivileged area of Kenya. With the help of donations and sponsorships, they were able to build a school that welcomes children from the poorest families. Their work in education helps save families from the misery that prompts so many Africans to flee to Europe. This year, 19 of the 33 pupils in their last year of secondary school were able to make the transition from school to university. This is five times the national average. The demand is great, and it is our hope that the school will be able to grow even further.

We mention these three initiatives in particular because it is to them that we will be donating the money we receive as part of the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. But we're not done yet.

Shared heritage?

The borders between cultures – and we would like to emphasise this one more time – are permeable. Indeed, translators and interpreters are among the oldest professions in the world, having accompanied tradesmen on their routes for as long as those routes existed. Cultures can cross borders through the import and export of books, but also by means of translations, appropriations and reinterpretations. Through this contact with other cultures, all cultures are transformed: they overlap, inspire and leave lasting changes on one another. It is not possible to bring cultures to a standstill, nor can they be confined to national borders.

Cultural memory comprises not only books and sacred texts, but also monuments, landscapes and

locations. One current example is Hebron, the largest city in West Jordan, and one occupied by Israel. One year ago, Hebron submitted an application to UNESCO requesting acknowledgment of its Old Town as a World Heritage Site. The application was granted. An acknowledgment such as this helps with the overall recognition and preservation of old buildings, while also boosting tourism marketing and national pride. However, this specific application also had a political component to it, seeing as it made only selective reference to the history of the site. The application spoke of the site's historic buildings, beginning in the late medieval Mamluk period and including the Al-Ibrahimi Mosque in the city's centre. Herod had built this gigantic structure 2,000 years ago on the Machpelah - the burial place of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. With the emergence of Islam in the 7th century, that building became a Mosque. In the 12th century, it served as a cathedral for Christian crusaders, until it became a mosque again after being retaken by Saladin.

In other words, the architecture of the Mamluk era in the 15th century marked the *fifth* historical layer of this building's uniquely complex and multi-religious architectural history. And yet, the application for recognition as a World Heritage Site mentioned nothing of the four previous historical layers. It did not take long for sharp reactions to come in from Israel and the US. Both countries announced that they would be leaving UNESCO in protest by the end of the year. The Old City of Hebron has a Jewish, Christian and Islamic history that is equally present, sacred and vibrant in the cultural memory of the three monotheisms, because they all refer to Abraham as their founding father. But if we could just look closer, we would see that the *source* of the conflict is the very thing that could simultaneously provide us with the *solution* to the conflict; that is, if only we were able to unite these layers of history and accept them as our "common heritage". Indeed, the EU has declared 2018 to be the year of common cultural heritage. An application submitted jointly by Israel and the Palestinians could recognise the full history of the site – and thereby also be its best protection.

As a Palestinian - hyphen - Israeli World Heritage Site, the Old City of Hebron would hold the potential to shift away from being a site of violence and terror towards becoming a site of rapprochement, cooperation and peace. The German UNESCO website makes it very clear that World Heritage Sites, as a result of their visibility and value, "provide the world community with tremendous potential for generating understanding among peoples". In this case, the name of the site also strengthens our argument: "Hebron" is "Chevron" in Hebrew, which itself comes from the word "Chaver", which means "friend" and refers to Abraham as a "Friend of God". The Arabic name "Al-Khalil" also means "friend" and refers to Abraham, as well. In other words, the name Hebron means nothing other than "City of the Friend".

Unfortunately, the tangible potential for peace contained in ancient texts has continued to fall on deaf ears in the "City of the Friend" to this day. In this case, as in many others, that which separates us from one another is an exclusive claim to truth. In contrast, there is a very simple criterion that enables us to take up a perspective of peace, and we found it, once again, in Karl Jaspers:

"That which is true is that which connects us to one another!"



- 1950 Max Tau Adolf Grimme
- 1951 Albert Schweitzer Theodor Heuss
- 1952 Romano Guardini Ernst Reuter
- 1953 Martin Buber Albrecht Goes
- 1954 Carl J. Burckhardt Theodor Heuss
- 1955 Hermann Hesse Richard Benz
- 1956 Reinhold Schneider Werner Bergengruen
- 1957 Thornton Wilder Carl J. Burckhardt
- 1958 Karl Jaspers Hannah Arendt
- 1959 Theodor Heuss Benno Reifenberg
- 1960 Victor Gollancz Heinrich Lübke
- 1961 Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan Ernst Benz
- 1962 Paul Tillich Otto Dibelius
- 1963 Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker Georg Picht
- 1964 Gabriel Marcel Carlo Schmid
- 1965 Nelly Sachs Werner Weber
- 1966 Augustin Kardinal Bea und W. A. Visser 't Hooft Paul Mikat
- 1967 Ernst Bloch Werner Maihofer
- 1968 Léopold Sédar Senghor François Bondy
- 1969 Alexander Mitscherlich Heinz Kohut
- 1970 Alva und Gunnar Myrdal Karl Kaiser
- 1971 Marion Gräfin Dönhoff Alfred Grosser
- 1972 Janusz Korczak (posthum) Hartmut von Hentig
- 1973 The Club of Rome Nello Celio
- 1974 Frère Roger, Prior von Taizé (keine Laudatio)
- 1975 Alfred Grosser Paul Frank
- 1976 Max Frisch Hartmut von Hentig
- 1977 Leszek Kołakowski Gesine Schwan
- 1978 Astrid Lindgren Hans-Christian Kirsch, Gerold U. Becker
- 1979 Yehudi Menuhin Pierre Bertaux
- 1980 Ernesto Cardenal Johann Baptist Metz
- 1981 Lew Kopelew Marion Gräfin Dönhoff
- 1982 George F. Kennan Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker
- 1983 Manès Sperber Siegfried Lenz
- 1984 Octavio Paz Richard von Weizsäcker
- 1985 Teddy Kollek Manfred Rommel
- 1986 Władysław Bartoszewski Hans Maier

- 1987 Hans Jonas Robert Spaemann
- 1988 Siegfried Lenz Yohanan Meroz
- 1989 Václav Havel André Glucksmann
- 1990 Karl Dedecius Heinrich Olschowsky
- 1991 György Konrád Jorge Semprún
- 1992 Amos Oz Siegfried Lenz
- 1993 Friedrich Schorlemmer Richard von Weizsäcker
- 1994 Jorge Semprún Wolf Lepenies
- 1995 Annemarie Schimmel Roman Herzog
- 1996 Mario Vargas Llosa Jorge Semprún
- 1997 Yaşar Kemal Günter Grass
- 1998 Martin Walser Frank Schirrmacher
- 1999 Fritz Stern Bronislaw Geremek
- 2000 Assia Djebar Barbara Frischmuth
- 2001 Jürgen Habermas Jan Philipp Reemtsma
- 2002 Chinua Achebe Theodor Berchem
- 2003 Susan Sontag Ivan Nagel
- 2004 Péter Esterházy Michael Naumann
- 2005 Orhan Pamuk Joachim Sartorius
- 2006 Wolf Lepenies Andrei Pleşu
- 2007 Saul Friedländer Wolfgang Frühwald
- 2008 Anselm Kiefer Werner Spies
- 2009 Claudio Magris Karl Schlögel
- 2010 David Grossman Joachim Gauck
- 2011 Boualem Sansal Peter von Matt
- 2012 Liao Yiwu Felicitas von Lovenberg
- 2013 Swetlana Alexijewitsch Karl Schlögel
- 2014 Jaron Lanier Martin Schulz
- 2015 Navid Kermani Norbert Miller
- 2016 Carolin Emcke Seyla Benhabib
- 2017 Margaret Atwood Eva Menasse
- 2018 Aleida und Jan Assmann Hans U. Gumbrecht