

Episode 41: Trauma Legacies in the Middle East II

Guest: Dr. Sami Awad - Holy Land Trust

Hosts: Alexandria & Yusuf

Bio: Dr. Sami Awad was born in the US and grew up in Bethlehem in a Palestinian Christian family and is the nephew of Mubarak Awad, a pioneer of Palestinian nonviolent resistance. His father comes from a refugee family that lost their home in Jerusalem in 1948 and his mother comes from Gaza. He studied Political Science at the University of Kansas and International Relations at the American University in Washington D.C., focusing on peace and conflict resolution. He later earned a Doctorate in Divinity from the Chicago Theological Seminary. After returning to Palestine, Dr. Awad founded Holy Land Trust, a community-based organization in Bethlehem that works for justice and peace through empowerment, training, and trauma healing. Over the years, he has become a leading voice on the psychological and intergenerational wounds of conflict, highlighting the spiritual and emotional resources needed to break cycles of violence. In a widely read interview with *DIE ZEIT* after October 7th, he was described as a “Palestinian Gandhi.”

In this Episode: In the second part of our special series on Trauma Legacies in the Middle East, Yusuf and Alexandria are joined by Dr. Sami Awad for a profound conversation on trauma from a Palestinian perspective. Dr. Awad traces his personal journey into peace work, shaped by his family’s history - including the example of his grandmother, who, even after losing her husband and all their property in 1948, taught that revenge had no place in the struggle for freedom and justice. The discussion explores how trauma continues to shape Palestinian identity, collective memory, and politics: the Nakba as a living, intergenerational wound; the devastation of Gaza and the impact of October 7; and the difficulty of pursuing healing while new trauma is inflicted in real time. Dr. Awad emphasizes that historical trauma can be addressed even during ongoing conflict, while new trauma caused by immediate events can only be confronted once the violence has subsided. He underscores that healing is guided by principles of truth, empathy, accountability, and dignity - practices that transform suffering into awareness, connection, and constructive action. From this foundation, he defines a path of „sacred activism“ rooted in transformative justice - a framework that connects personal and collective healing with concrete social change, showing that true peace requires all involved communities to actively confront trauma, restore dignity, and break cycles of fear and violence.

Links:

Dr. Sami Awad: <https://sami-awad.com/about-2/> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Holy Land Trust: <https://holylandtrust.org/> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Nonviolence International: <https://www.nonviolenceinternational.net/team> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Please also check out our other episodes to explore multiple perspectives.

Dedication:

We dedicate this Podcast to all victims and survivors of October 7, the hostages and their families, to all innocent civilians killed and injured in Gaza and their grieving families and friends. To our dear guests Udi Goren, Khalil Sayegh, Sima and Mai who shared their losses so powerfully with us. To their families: Tal's wife Ella Haimi, their children Nir, Einav, Udi and Lotan, who never got the chance to meet his father. To Khalil Sayegh's mother and siblings, to Mai's and Sima's family, to her mother Bushra.

To the blessed memory of: Tal Haimi, Lara Sayegh, Jeries Sayegh, Mahmoud, Danny Darlington and Haim Perry.

Disclaimer:

In each episode of this podcast, the invited guests speak on their own behalf. They share their experiences, assessments, and expert perspectives. These contributions are central to the multiperspectivity of the project but do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial team or producers.

Legal & Historical Anchor Episodes:

This podcast may include controversial legal terms of specific technical significance. Their legal applicability requires a thorough expert contextualization; for this, we refer to our legal chapter. All relevant terms of international law, its institutions, current controversies, and the state of jurisprudence are explained in the anchor episode with Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. Claus Kreß LL.M. (Cambridge) (Episode 36). He is co-author of the Rome Statute, Special Advisor to the International Criminal Court, and Judge at the International Court of Justice in the parallel Gambia vs. Myanmar genocide case.

Historical matters are discussed from multiple perspectives in this podcast. Please check the cross-references in the shownotes of the respective episodes for details. All historically contested issues are addressed in the history anchor episode with Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Gudrun Krämer (Episode 21), author of the comprehensive work *A History of Palestine: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Founding of the State of Israel* (Princeton 2008), a standard reference in the field. For her scholarly achievements as a historian, she was awarded the *Preis des Historischen Kollegs* in 2025, the highest distinction in her discipline in Germany.