

Episode 48: Unsettling Empathy: How to Hold Conflicting Truths at the Same Time?

Guest: Prof. Dr. Björn Krondorfer, Northern Arizona University

Hosts: Efe & Yusuf

Bio: Björn Krondorfer is the Endowed Professor of Religious Studies and Director of the Martin-Springer Institute at Northern Arizona University. He holds a Ph.D. in Comparative Religion from Temple University and studied Protestant Theology in Frankfurt and Göttingen, Germany. Krondorfer is internationally recognized for his pioneering work on post-Holocaust reconciliation, historical trauma, and dialogue among Germans, Israelis, and Palestinians. His work brings descendants of Holocaust victims and perpetrators into conversation and expands these dialogues to include Palestinian narratives. He is the author of *Unsettling Empathy: Working with Groups in Conflict* (2020), *Reconciliation in Global Context* (2018), and *The Holocaust and Masculinities* (2020). Beyond scholarship, he facilitates workshops, field encounters, and critical pedagogy that put dialogue into practice.

In this episode: Yusuf and Efe speak with Prof. Björn Krondorfer about his decades of work engaging groups affected by historical trauma and conflict, particularly descendants of Holocaust victims and perpetrators, as well as Germans, Israelis, and Palestinians. They explore key concepts including intergenerational, transgenerational, historical, and cultural trauma, and the ways these traumas shape relationships across generations. Krondorfer explains his approach of “Unsettling Empathy,” a method for engaging with conflicting truths and power dynamics while fostering dialogue that is ethically grounded and emotionally aware. The discussion also covers the challenges of addressing silenced Palestinian narratives in Germany, Germany’s responsibility toward Israel, and the triangular relationship that includes Palestinian experiences. Listeners will gain insight into how historical wounds, empathy, and self-awareness can transform dialogue, the importance of holding conflicting truths simultaneously, and practical lessons for educators, mediators, and anyone seeking to bridge deep divides.

Links:

Prof. Dr. Björn Krondorfer: <https://directory.nau.edu/person/bk349> (Last accessed on October 21, 2025)

Krondorfer, Björn. *Unsettling Empathy: Working with Groups in Conflict*. Bloomsbury, 2020. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/unsettling-empathy-9781786615817/> (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.