

# RECONCILIATION STUDIES @UNI BONN

## NEWSLETTER

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## BONN CENTER FOR RECONCILIATION STUDIES

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Reconciliation Research at the University of Bonn is transdisciplinary and innovative. At the Center for Reconciliation Studies researchers from various disciplines in the humanities and text sciences work together to develop an empirically based concept of "reconciliation" and a theory to explain reconciliation processes.

We try to understand one of the most important questions of our time: What is "reconciliation"? How are the terms 'reconciliation' and "peace" used in different cultural and historical contexts, when and why? What are the limits of 'reconciliation'?

Learn more about our recent projects, events and lectures in this newsletter!

# NEWS

## **New partners, cooperations and friends!**

This summer semester promises exciting opportunities—new courses, inspiring projects, and events that bring our community together.

We are especially thrilled to announce a series of upcoming events, including a new cooperation with the Netzwerk Friedenskooperative, one of our newest partners at the Center, introduced through Prof. Dr. Rosario Figari Layus.

Together, we aim to create spaces for meaningful exchange and civic engagement on issues of peace and reconciliation.

We look forward to engaging discussions, shared ideas, and memorable moments both inside and outside the classroom.

Here's to a vibrant and successful summer semester!

Warm regards,  
Rosario Figari Layus,  
Esther Gardei  
Felix Koopmann

# NEWS

## A Look Back at an Inspiring Colloquium!

On May 14, 2025, as part of *Dies Academicus*, the public colloquium of the Bonn Center for Reconciliation Research took place at the University of Bonn – and it was a great success!

With around 50 interested participants, the event not only provided insights into current research projects but also sparked a moving interdisciplinary exchange: about the past and future of the Bonn Center for Reconciliation Research. From historical reconciliation projects in Latin America to today's safe spaces for exiled activists – the topics were diverse, relevant, and deeply touching!

A big thank-you to all our speakers:

- ◆ Jun.-Prof. Dr. Rosario Figari-Layus & Prof. Dr. Hans-Georg Soeffner
- ◆ Prof. Dr. Michael Schulz
- ◆ Dr. des Esther Gardei
- ◆ Jr. Prof. Dr. Figari-Layus
- ◆ Vice-Rector Prof. Dr. Birgit Münch

Your dedication and perspectives made this morning truly special!

We are already looking forward to future events – because dialogue about reconciliation is more important than ever. 



# Weitere Impressionen vom Dies Academicus



# Upcoming Events/ Veranstaltungen

## Frieden in unserer Stadt entdecken

Frieden in unserer Stadt entdecken! Der Friedensweg Bonn

Weiβt du, wer Klara Marie Faßbinder war? Warum zahlreiche Weltstars in den 1980er Jahren im Hofgarten demonstrierten? Was die Universität Bonn mit Frieden am Hut hat? Und welcher Platz nach einer Friedensnobelpreisträgerin benannt ist? Auf dem „Friedensweg Bonn“ gibt es zahlreiche Orte des Friedens und große historische Persönlichkeiten zu entdecken, die sich für Frieden und Menschenrechte engagierten. Wir starten in Beuel und laufen von dort unter fachkundiger Führung von Station zu Station Richtung Innenstadt.

Eine Anmeldung per Mail an [info@friedenskooperative.de](mailto:info@friedenskooperative.de) ist notwendig.

Termin: Mittwoch, 02.07., um 12 Uhr (Dauer etwa anderthalb bis zwei Stunden)

Treffpunkt: Hiroshima-Mahnmal am Rheinufer in Beuel, Rheinauenstraße

Veranstalter: Netzwerk Friedenskooperative, Frauennetzwerk für Frieden e.V., Bonner Zentrum für Versöhnungsforschung



In Kooperation mit Dr. des. Esther Gardei (Geschäftsführerin des Versöhnungsforschungszentrums) und Jr. Prof. Jan Rüggemeier findet in diesem Semester erstmals ein triologisches, interkulturells und interreligiöses Seminar mit Studierenden aus Palästina, Israel und den USA statt. Für Rückfragen zum Projekt steht Ihnen Esther Gardei zur Verfügung. Das Format wird exklusiv für Studierende durchgeführt.

Interkulturelles & interreligiöses Seminar

## Middle Meets – Dialog statt Distanz

zum Israelisch-Palästinensischen Konflikt

Wie gelingt echter Dialog zwischen Menschen, die auf unterschiedlichen Seiten eines Jahrzehntelangen Konflikts stehen?

In „Middle Meets“ treffen Bonner Studierende auf Kommiliton:innen aus Israel, Palästina und den USA, um sich auszutauschen und gemeinsam nach Antworten zu suchen.

 Auftakt mit Prof. Dr. Elitzur Bar-Asher Siegal (Hebrew University):

**30. April**

 Zoom-Dialoge mit jüdischen & palästinensischen Studierenden:

**28. Mai, 3. Juni, 10. Juni**

Blockseminartermine in Bonn: **9. Mai, 16. Mai, 6. Juni**

(mit Dr. Esther Gardei Institut für Politische Wissenschaft und Soziologie)



# EVENTS

## Conference-Format: Quo vadis Middle East?

Immediately after the outbreak of the war between Hamas and Israel, we were able to bring together important actors from the region in Bonn for a free exchange of views. At the conference "Quo vadis Middle East?", scientists, civil society actors, representatives of business and political decision-makers from the Palestinian territories, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Germany discussed possible paths to a peaceful future. When the project started, it was the first and so far only conference of its kind, financed by the Ministry of State for Culture and will be continued in 2025.

Read more about the project [here](#).



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# EVENTS

## Conference-Format: Quo vadis Middle East?

Please watch one Aftermovie of the new conference format here: <https://www.ici-institute.de/projekte>



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# Joint Lecture Series/ Summer 2025

THE MEMBERS OF THE BONN CENTER FOR RECONCILIATION RESEARCH OFFER COURSES IN THIS RESEARCH AREA. IN THE NEWSLETTER, WE PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT TWO EXEMPLARY COURSES. YOU FIND ALL INFOS [HERE](#).

## RECONCILIATION – THEORIES AND PRACTICES FROM AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE

JUN-PROFESSOR FIGARI-LAYÚS

PROF. DR. MICHAEL SCHULZ

ESTHER GARDEI

In recent decades, there has been a growing trend, both in academia and in the policymaking of international organisations worldwide, to analyse and incorporate policies and initiatives to promote reconciliation processes following periods of mass violence. As many studies have shown, extreme and systematic violence and repression by authoritarian regimes leads to the breakdown of social structures - social and economic institutions and networks of family and intimate relationships that form the basis of a functioning community. Mass violence has a strong relational impact, resulting in social fragmentation and the breakdown of social ties, as well as increased social feelings of mistrust, fear and indifference to the suffering of others. It is in these transitional and post-conflict contexts that dealing with the legacy of violence is recognised as crucial to building sustainable, inclusive, democratic and peaceful societies. However here some questions arise: How can societies rebuild social ties after mass violence, and negotiate a peaceful coexistence and future together? How can the structural factors of the past that led to violence be transformed in order to guarantee the non-recurrence of violence?

In order to address these issues and the various challenges to the concept and practice of reconciliation, the course offers theoretical insights as well as relevant case studies that illustrate the conceptual and practical dilemmas of rebuilding social ties after mass violence.. For this the course is divided into three main blocks.

It is not difficult to see that the concept of reconciliation has its roots in Judaism (יום כיפור Yom Kippur = Day of Atonement) and Christianity, so that in a first block of the seminar the transfer of the concept of reconciliation from the religious sphere via the philosophical (G.W.F. Hegel) to the social and political sphere can be traced. It is striking that it was only in the 20th century that the concept of reconciliation began to play a significant role in the post-conflict phases and processes. Finally, equivalents of reconciliation have to be found in other non-Western cultures, for example in Asia. In Korean, "reconciliation" is called 和解, hwahae. These characters combine several meanings: 和 means "harmony" and is composed of 禾 for "ripe grain" and 口 for "mouth": harmony is achieved when someone receives the staple food, that is, when one receives what is needed to live. 解 means "to untie": that is, the condition that disturbs harmony must be untied. Consequently, the fair distribution of goods is at the center of attention. What does this mean for the Western understanding of reconciliation, which focuses on guilt and reparation? The aim of this first part of the seminar is to reflect on a transcultural understanding of the concept of reconciliation.

The second part of the seminar (led by Esther Gardei) focuses on Israel/Palestine and the war in the middle east. Students will read works by liberal authors who - in the midst of war - reflect on proposed solutions, such as the two-state solution and its future or the idea of a binational state based on human rights. The tension between particularism and universalism from a Jewish perspective will also be discussed. The following authors are on the program: Eva Illouz, Moshe Zimmermann, Natan Sznaider, Omri Boehm, Hannah Arendt. We will also reflect visions of practical initiatives committed to dialogue and understanding (Mothers for Peace, Standing Together, and others). We ask and discuss: How do these initiatives fit into the discourse outlined above? Which strategy is "utopian" and which is realistic? Esther Gardei will also bring in her network of practitioners in the field of reconciliation and dialogue or peace work in the context of the Middle East conflict. We may conduct interviews and/or invite guests, for example from Women Wage Peace Germany or the Jewish-Muslim educational organization Maimonides. How has the war changed the work of these institutions, which were already working for dialogue, peace and understanding before October 7, 2023?

The third block of the course (led by Rosario Figari Layus) focuses on the different practices, understandings and challenges of reconciliation processes in multiple contexts of violence and from a variety of perspectives. In peace and conflict studies, reconciliation usually refer to transformative processes of dealing with conflictual and fractured relationships (Hamber and Kelly 2004). However, these concepts are multifaceted and can have different meanings and political, social and legal implications in different contexts (Hermann 2004). For example, while in countries such as South Africa or Rwanda the concept of reconciliation may have been associated with nation-building projects, the non-violent coexistence of victims and perpetrators within communities, as an instrumentalist or pragmatic way of living together, or even with development and poverty reduction (Zorbas 2004), in several Latin American countries, such as Argentina, the term has been used as a synonym for impunity and has been used primarily to justify a public stance of 'forgive and forget' about past crimes (Roht-Arriaza 2004). This explains the deeply contested nature of the concept in several settings. The analysis of reconciliation processes in different contexts of violence means examining them from different perspectives (top-down and bottom-up approaches), different actors and groups (gender and intersectional perspectives), and including an analysis of the different factors that can contribute to or hinder the rebuilding and recovery of societies in post-conflict contexts.

To address these debates and challenges, the course will provide an introduction to the concepts, debates and tensions of reconciliation processes in conflict transformation settings. Throughout the course, theoretical framings as well as concrete case studies will be discussed to illustrate how reconciliation processes are conceptualized and take place in practice in order to promote more inclusive and democratic societies. The combination of theoretical approaches with the analysis of concrete case studies will enable students to acquire key skills and knowledge in understanding reconciliation processes and conflict transformation dynamics.

# Specials

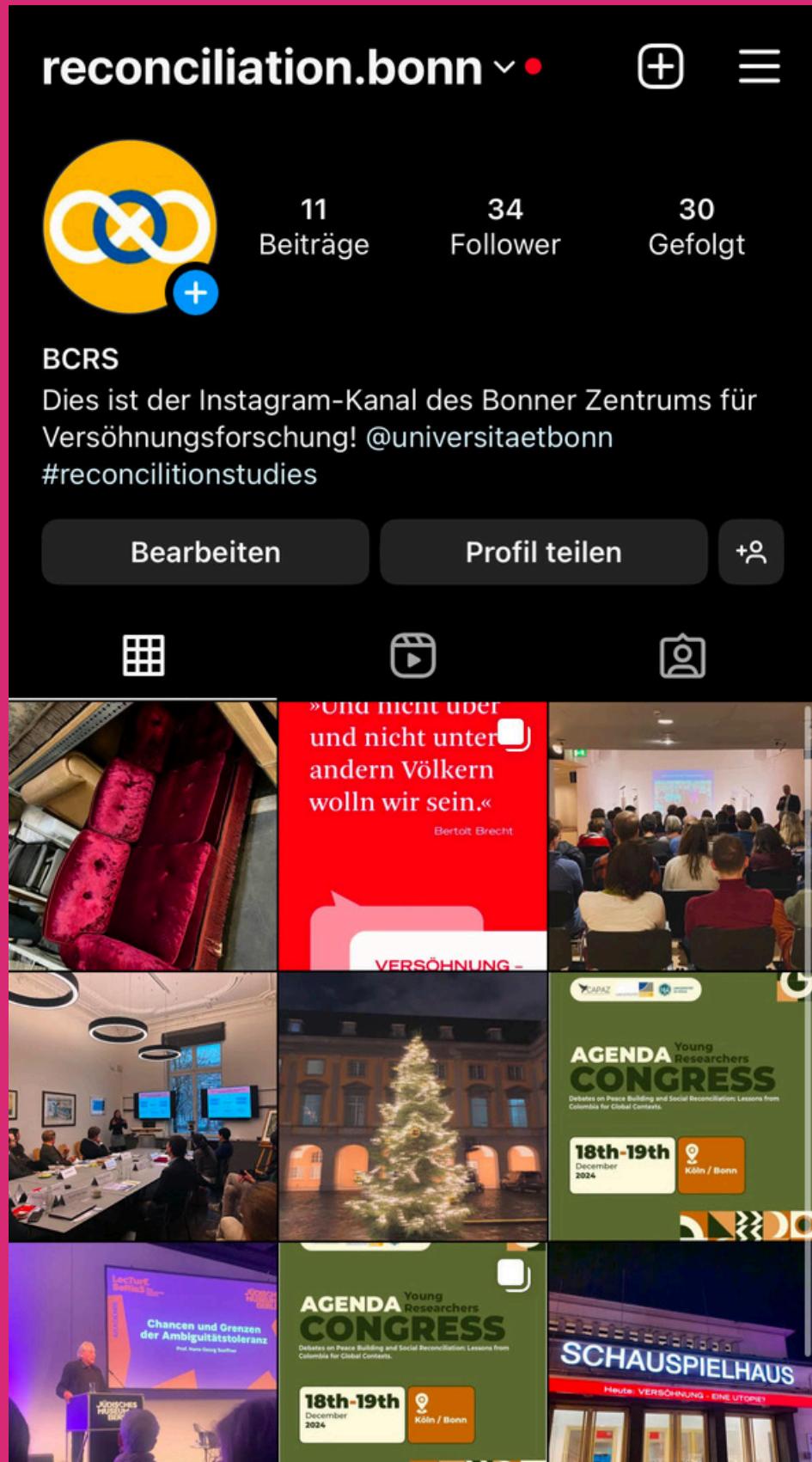
## **Rosario Figari-Layus raises Gerda Henkel funds for project on activists in exile**

Together with Prof. Dr. Paul Gready from the University of York, Assistant Prof. Dr. Rosario Figari-Layus has acquired a two-year project in the Gerda Henkel Foundation's "Forced Migration" program. Together with two postdoctoral researchers, they will work on the project "Activists in Exile in an Era of Mass Displacement: Universities as Sites of Protection and Supporters of Agency for Activists from Russia and Myanmar."

The rise of populist and authoritarian governments across the globe has led to a dramatic increase in a particular form of forced migration, the flight of human rights defenders (HRDs – used here interchangeably with the term activists) into exile. Crackdowns on civil society in general, and HRDs in particular, are becoming commonplace. Relevant support infrastructures, such as the refugee legal framework and temporary relocation programs, provide responses that are fragmented, partial and ultimately inadequate. The result is that activists in exile risk being demobilized, while domestic civil society is decimated. This matters because these activists, and their organizations, are the foundation not only of resistance to repressive rule now but also of more democratic societies in the future.

The project will explore the role of universities in providing formal and informal support to HRDs in exile, with a particular focus on exiled Russian activists at Charles University, Czech Republic, and exiled activists from Myanmar hosted by Mahidol University and partner universities in Thailand.

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**Impressum**

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