Book Reviews

Ada Aharoni and Vijay Kumar Roy, eds. *IFLAC Anti-War and Peace Anthology.* USA: Amazon Kindle, 2018 (PB & e-book). pp. 311. Price US$ 4.11. ISBN: 978-1980971948; ASIN: B07CRJSFQ6.

Reviewed by
Toni Matthias Mey*

The *IFLAC Anti-War* and *Peace Anthology* is an exceptional collection of articles and creative works, with the aim to unite writers, poets and artists to use the power of literature and culture for peacemaking. This anthology is based on articles, short stories and poems from writers of 25 different countries around the world, embracing the fact that culture can be a global tool to eliminate the hate towards 'the others' and to make us see the shared human common ground.

This project was organized and edited by Prof. Ada Aharoni from Israel and Dr. Vijay Kumar Roy from India as part of IFLAC, the International Forum for Literature and Culture of Peace. IFLAC is a global network of people armed with pens and determined to overcome violence and war.

The roots of IFLAC go back to a small group of courageous Arab and Jewish women in Haifa, Israel, who were determined to use the power of words to fight the concept of war. In 1974, one year after the Yom Kippur War, they founded “The Bridge”, which was the first organization in Israel that dared to gather Jewish and Arab women for peace in the Middle East. As husbands, sons and male friends, as well as peacemakers from abroad, asked to join the women of ‘The Bridge’, the organization was renamed IFLAC. Today IFLAC includes a network with branches in many countries all over the word, uniting people determined to end war, before war ends humanity.

The head of IFLAC is Professor Ada Aharoni, who was born in Cairo and lives today in Haifa. She is a writer, poet and professor of Sociology, in the field of “Conflict Resolution and Peace Research”. So far, she has published 34 books that have won her international acclaim and many prizes. Her books have been translated into many languages.

In her Introduction, Ada Aharoni powerfully illustrates the success and effect the *Anti-Terror and Peace: IFLAC Anthology* (2016) had. In one of her examples, she quotes a student of the University of Cairo who thanked her saying: “I was a man of

* *Mr. Mey holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science from the Philipps University of Marburg, Germany. He is studying in the Masters' program in Peace Studies and International Politics at the Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen, Germany. He is a researcher of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict. Address: International School, University of Haifa, 199 Abba Khoushy Avenue, Haifa -3498838, Israel.*

war and terror, and I convinced many of my friends to come with me to Syria to help the Daesh terrorists to build the Islamic State. However, after reading your enlightening and convincing *Anti-Terror and Peace*: *IFLAC Anthology* (2016) and your tragic true stories and moving peace poems – I gradually became a man of peace." (p. 12). After he and his friends read Aharoni's Introduction to the *Anthology*, they understood that the propaganda of the so called "ISIS - The Islamic State," was wrong and that a World Islamic Caliphate was impossible, as none of the Muslim countries supported it. The book played an important role in saving the lives of those youths and saved the world from a gang of additional possible terrorists. What a successful story which illustrates perfectly the power of words and the difference peace literature and education can make.

In his Preface, Dr. Vijay Kumar Roy convincingly argues that the belief system makes the difference between war and peace. Many people follow a religion to have a moral anchor, but religion does not necessarily lead to peace: "There are many terrorist organizations whose followers offer prayers and kill innocent people using the name of God! They preach to people according to their own belief system that is venomous" (19). Likewise, Vijay Kumar Roy says that, the business orientated globalization does not lead to peace as long as it does not succeed in creating positive social values, which are fundamental for peace. Vijay Kumar Roy shows that belief systems start wars but can also be the foundation of peace. This *IFLAC Anthology* displays the hideous face of the logic of violence and shows how bridges of peace can be built.

Prof. Ada Aharoni addresses in her interesting article "Hamas must Change its Charter of Destruction," a core obstacle for peace in the Palestine-Israel Conflict. She argues that for a prosperous Palestine, Hamas has to abolish its hateful Charter and create a peaceful new one, which recognizes the existence of the Israeli state. Since until now it says already in the preamble of the Hamas Charter: "Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it".

Where does this hate come from? Ada Aharoni answers: "There are many misconceptions that have created deep wounds in the hearts of the Palestinians" (51). Aharoni explains that Israel was established, because the Israeli side accepted the UN Partition Plan of 1947. However, many Palestinians until today think that Israel is an illegal state although the majority of the UN voted for its creation.

Another major misconception Aharoni points out, is that many Palestinians "feel they are the only ones who are the victims of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, and the only ones who have been uprooted. This of course is completely wrong, as in every war both sides suffer" (51). While it is well known, that as a result of the 1948 war around 700,000 Palestinians left the country, it is widely ignored, that almost a million Jews were banished or fled from Arab Countries after the establishment of the Israeli State, in 1948. Today, there are almost no Jews left in most of the Arab Countries.

Ada Aharoni knows what she is talking about, because in addition to her having researched this subject in depth as a sociologist, she herself was born and grew up in the Jewish Community in Cairo. In 1949 she and her family were forced to leave Egypt, in what she calls in her books: The Second Exodus of the Jews from Egypt,

and everything they had was confiscated by the Egyptian government. She impressively states: "In Egypt for instance, there were 100,000 Jews living there in 1948, and today there are only 6 very old Jewish widows left in the whole of Egypt!"

In February 2019, a year after the publishing the *IFLAC Anthology*, Egypt's President El Assisi said that if there would be a resurgence of the vibrant Jewish community in Egypt, the Egyptian government would build synagogues and other related services (Jerusalem Post, 25.02.2019).

In the meantime, Egypt is renovating the existing synagogues which are attracting many tourists from abroad.

This supports Ada Aharoni's message in the *Anthology*, that hopefully: "Hamas will realize the Palestinians have so much more to gain by making peace with Israel, like Egypt and Jordan, and they will annihilate their Charter, instead of trying for the fifth time to destroy Israel" (52).

Yossin Beilin has contributed a well-argued article called "Israel Faces a New Decision as New Population Figures Emerge" to the *IFLAC Anthology*, which is dedicated to the Two-State Solution, as an answer to the question of a possible Palestinian majority in Israel. Beilin has served in various positions in the Knesset and the Israeli government, including Minister for Justice and Religious Affairs. He was involved in several Agreements like the initiating of the Oslo process, the Beilin-Abu Mazen agreement, the Geneva Peace Initiative and the project Birthright that makes it possible for Jewish youths to visit Israel.

According to Beilin, the puzzle is, how to deal with the fact that: "the number of Jews and Arabs living under Israeli control in the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean [have] reached parity at 6.5 million for each side" (43). The question Beilin brings up goes down to the root of the Zionist project. "Over the years, the Zionist left kept warning about the prospect of a Jewish minority in Israel controlling a Palestinian majority, with only a small number of them enjoying full civil rights" (43). Beilin gives a strong argument in favor of a Two-State solution. He argues that, denying a Palestinian State means to question the democratic character of the State of Israel. In other words, if the leading right in Israel stresses the Jewish character of Israel, without recognizing the necessity of a Palestinian State, it undermines the democratic system. Today usually Palestinians choose to have the Israeli citizenship in order to have the privileges that come with it: Health insurance, pension insurance, higher salaries etc. Therefore, Israel has an interest in a stable, prosperous Palestinian state, that could preserve the majority of Jews in Israel, as well as its democracy.

Beilin convincingly argues in favor of a Two-State Solution, showing that it is not only a violent conflict with suffering on both sides, but it would be a win-win situation for the two parties. This article stands for IFLAC's approach to find smart political solutions, rather than stiff inefficient military action, that can't achieve a solid and full peace.

The *IFLAC Anthology* also includes an interesting article by Prof. Johan Galtung, the well-known founder of Peace Studies, and the first Peace and Conflict Studies

Institute in Oslo, Norway. His approach of the three dimensions of violence: the physical, structural and cultural dimension, is widely adopted amongst academics and beyond: The physical violence is for instance the violence of War and Terror, the structural violence is for example the violence of exploitation by capitalism and the hierarchic structures of authority and the cultural violence is the legitimation of violence through ideology. The last dimension is very important for IFLAC, since it highlights the importance of creating a peace culture ideology to counteract the culture of violence ideology, and with the aim of building a world system without structural or physical violence.

In his article, Galtung presents the Transcend Method, which "uses dialogues with all parties to identify their goals, testing their legitimacy and visions of a new social reality meeting legitimate goals" (53). Johan Galtung's approach should be considered more often in Conflict Resolution and by Governments all over the world. It is never just the political leaders that can build peace, the civic societies on both sides are responsible to claim peace. This is the goal of IFLAC and this *Anthology* is a part of its peace education for a peaceful global society.

The second part of the *Anthology* is enriched by short stories. Ruth Fogelman wrote two of these enthralling short stories, which depict intercultural encounters. She is a poet and writer, who since 1979 lived in the Old City of Jerusalem. In the first one called "On the Seam", she describes in a beautiful way the life of a neighborhood, supposedly in Jerusalem, describing how she meets three people in a corner groceries store. She talks to them in three different languages: Arabic, English and Hebrew.

As I live in Haifa, where Hebrew, Arabic, English and Russian are widely present on the streets, I fully relate to this story. I am convinced that it is important to tell stories about intercultural communities living in peace and harmony together.

In the second one "What if …?" Ruth Fogelman describes the encounter between a crying Jewish boy on the street and an Arab adolescent who comes by with his wooden cart. Ahmed tries to help the boy and sits with him for a while, when he leaves he asks himself: "What if I had been born to his parents, and he to mine …" (65).

This reminds me of the peace poet Wilfred Owen, who wrote during World War I: "Why should I kill this young German? If I had met him in a Bar I would have invited him to a Beer!". These kinds of questions, automatically question war and violence. How can we hurt someone that could have been us? We should not! Due to this fact, it is important to reflect: "What if I was on the other side?", a question which helps to overcome the dehumanization of violence and helps to build mutual understanding and recognition.

The third part of the *Anthology* is a collection of various peace poems and paintings. Ada Aharoni proves with her poems that she is not only a great researcher in the field of Conflict Resolution, but also a smart and powerful poet and artist. Her Poem "A Bridge of Peace" begins with two strong quotes one from the *Bible* and one from the *Koran*: "They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid." (*The Bible*, Micha, 4.4) and "He who walks with peace, walks with him" (*The Koran*, Sura 48). With these quotes Ada Aharoni shows

that both religions encourage people to live peacefully together. In her own words Ada Aharoni addresses her Arab counterpart: "My Arab sister, let us build a wonder bridge from your fig tree and vine to mine" (67). As until today war is led by men, Aharoni addresses the women to end war and to support the culture of peace. She stresses that nobody wants to do harm to the other: "I do not want to be your oppressor, you do not want to be my oppressor, or your jailer, or my jailer" (67). And Aharoni concludes "So, my Arab sister, let us build a sturdy bridge of tolerant jasmine understanding" (68). This beautiful poem is a master piece full of symbolic language, referring to the common roots of the Jewish and the Muslim religions, including the Middle Eastern nature and addressing the gender aspect of peace. This truly shows how to use words to lead people in conflict to a prosperous peaceful future.

Another particular thoughtful poem is written by Varda Breger, who lives in Tel Aviv, Israel. It deals with ecological and social issues, including peace promotion in her paintings and poems. In her poem: "Wandering Birds," she looks at the wandering birds and contrasts their peaceful freedom to the civilization of the world today:

> From north to south and back,
> season after season
> millions of miles
> no fuel
> noflag
> noreligion and
> no borders.
> Caressing the planet
> feathers of fraternity (Varda Breger 147).

Varda Breger illustrates in a talented way, how we humans have created fuels, flags, religion, and borders, but they do not help us to create a peaceful society. The way I read the poem, I am convinced that since we created all these categories we can change them for the good of the planet and the good of the people. This is certainly a powerful message that needs to be shared.

The *Anthology* does not only include powerful words but also beautiful paintings that spread the message of peace. Like the "Doves for Peace" painted by Gian Piero Act is from Italy (122), in which one can see three white doves, one of them with an olive twig in its beak, flying towards a bright light, flying towards peace. Ada Aharoni shows that she masters this genre as well, with a beautiful painting called "Dancing the Tango of Life" (129), depicting vibrant feelings with bright gay colours.

To conclude, the *IFLAC-Anti-War and Peace Anthology* is a marvelous collection of articles, true stories, poems and art pieces united by the will to overcome violence and war and to build a peaceful global village. I hope that this message will be taught across the globe in kindergartens, schools, colleges and universities to strengthen the culture of peace. The *IFLAC Anthology* shows that it is possible to build bridges of peace and that Peace Culture and Literature are powerful weapons to overcome violence and create peace.

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