Ada Aharoni. *From the Nile to the Jordan*. 2nd Enlarged Edition. Haifa, 2017 (PB & e-book). pp. 335. Price US$14.25. ISBN-13: 978-1535165983.

Reviewed by
Toni Matthias Mey*

The historical novel *From the Nile to the Jordan* is an enthralling story about the "Second Exodus" of Jews from Egypt to Israel. This so far little-noticed aspect of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, could spread new light on the events of 1948, make the suffering of both sides public and bring the middle east one step closer to peace. Before 1948 there was a prospering community with 100,000 Jews in Egypt, today there are only few Jewish widows left.

This book combines the well-researched historical facts based on Aharoni's research on the topic, as a professor of Sociology, with her personal perspective as a witness who had to leave Egypt as a young woman. This approach makes the book an eye-opener for an important chapter of Jewish history, that is widely unknown. Aharoni goes beyond the past, aiming at using the story of the "Second Exodus" as a tool for reconciliation, convinced that if Israel and Egypt can make peace, peace between Israel and Palestine is possible too.

Ada Aharoni is a writer, poet and professor, in the field of "Conflict Resolution and Peace Research," who was born in Cairo, Egypt, and lives today in Haifa, Israel. So far, she published 34 books, that have won her international acclaim and many prizes. Growing up in the 1940's in Cairo, speaking French as her mother tongue and going to an English School, the young Ada was integrated in the Jewish community. She was deeply inspired by the poetry of the British Peace Poet, Wilfred Owen and she decided that her vocation would be like his, a poet and writer for eliminating the concept and practice of war from our planet.

The novel begins in 1946 in Cairo, when the eighteen years old protagonist ‘Inbar’, meets the slightly older handsome Raoul. Inbar is part of the Oriental Sephardi Jews, and is over all blessed with a happy childhood. Raoul is an Ashkenazi Jew, who barely survived the holocaust. He only survived, because his father protected him with his strong belief in hope, even when the Nazis already started to execute the lined-up Jews. Ada Aharoni contrasts the collective stories of the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi Jews: “Europe is still licking her wounds and here nothing is touched, all is affluence and sparkle as if the Second World War did not take place at all” (p. 22). In spite of the protests of Inbar's grandmother Nona Zina: “God forbid that you should marry an Ashkenazi!” (25), the young lovers meet each other and have deep discussions. Raoul's

* *Mr. Mey holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science from the Philipps University of Marburg, Germany. He is studying 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.*

disillusioned world view reflects his heavy experiences: "All your liberal 'fraternity, equality, and liberty' principles they're all rubbish! During the Holocaust, all these were laid aside like a flimsy curtain and you see the real human stage" (28).

However, Aharoni describes how Jews were a recognized part of the diverse Egyptian society, for example when Inbar and Raoul go the Cairo Opera House: "In addition to the Egyptians and Jews in the audience, there were representatives from several other ethnic groups: Lebanese, Syrian, Copt, Armenian, Greek and Italian. Most of these were likewise chatting in French, but each group displayed a colorful diversity of characteristics which was obvious in their dress, pronunciation, expression, gesture, smile and laughter" (63).

Equally important, Aharoni's story can serve as a role model for girls and young women: She describes Inbar as a brave girl that faces harassment but questions the patriarchal society in both the Arab Egyptian and the Jewish Egyptian circles and fights to have the same rights as her brother. She clearly stands up against her father, Judge Mosseri, when she wants to go to a summer camp: "I can't read to you tonight be… because you won't allow me to go to the camp with the rest of my friends" (40) and despite her father's anger, she succeeds to accomplish her goal.

As a third dimension, Aharoni includes the class difference and describes the thoughts of Inbar, when she observes, how the children in a poor neighborhood in Cairo play, a boy loses his life in an accident, and nobody seems to care. As Raoul observes "People die all around you even in normal conditions with no war on or anything and nobody cares" (88).

In a very strong middle part of the book, Aharoni manages to weave in the history of the Egyptian Jews, by letting Inbar deliver a fascinating lecture in her Jewish youth group. "Egyptian Jewry dates from the time of the prophet Jeremiah; after the destruction of the First Temple, when Jeremiah and his followers arrived in Egypt and settled here. Since then, there has always been a Jewish community in Egypt …." (120). Thus, the reader understands the full tragedy of the uprooting of this ancient, prosperous and highly cultured Jewish community.

The Jews in Egypt, in general, were not allowed to obtain an Egyptian citizenship, but they were treated with respect as "guests of honor", however, the situation drastically changes: "With the establishment of the State of Israel on May 15 … the Jews are now considered enemies in the eyes of Egyptian authorities" (171). Through the eyes of Inbar, Aharoni shows, how Jewish life was more and more threatened: "As we know, not only Zionist youths have been seized and sent to Huckstep in Heliopolis, and El Tor in the Sinai Desert, and various other concentration and deportation camps, but also several rabbis and leaders of the community. Some have been tortured when they refused to chant: 'Jews are the dogs of the Arabs'" (172). One by one Inbar's friends escaped to Israel or elsewhere. Her grandmother, refuses to be exiled and ends her life together with crashing her fine elegant china, when she throws herself from her staircase. Another very touching moment is, when Inbar's family finally leaves the country and the father tries to access his savings in the Swiss Bank in Marseilles, but the bank account has been sequestered by the Egyptian government. He has his first heart attack then and later dies from a second heart attack.

Raoul is cruelly attacked in a pogrom in the streets of Cairo, and exiled. As soon as Inbar gets to Israel she starts searching for him. After five long years of searching, she finally finds Raoul in Jerusalem, after she thought she had lost him forever: "'Only five years?' Inbar asked in wonder. 'It seems more like five thousand years!'" (239) Aharoni uses the meeting of the young couple to symbolize the renaissance of a people from the East and from the West, reunited in the land of Israel.

At the end, Ada Aharoni sends a message of hope, describing the spirit of the creation of the Israeli state. Inbar gives lectures about the "Second Exodus" at the University of Pennsylvania, years after her escape from Egypt. She includes the perspectives of young Palestinian Students, that have difficulties to hear that Jews were uprooted from the Arabic world, when they had always heard that Jews are the oppressors of the Palestinians. She explains the one million-dollar question how the Palestinian - Israel Conflict can be ended: "The difference between the Jewish refugees and the Palestinian refugees is that Israel is ready to absorb all the refugees who want to settle in Israel. However, the Palestinians do not have a state of their own […] which could absorb the Palestinian refugees wishing to flock to it. […] The solution to the Arab Israeli conflict is the establishment of a Palestinian State as soon as possible."

This is a powerful story, that can make Palestinians motivate to increase efforts towards peace, by showing them that a big part of the Israeli society are Jews that escaped from Arabic countries. However, unlike the Jews from Arab countries, the Palestinian refugees have until today no state they can return to. The responsibility to work towards peace lies also in the hands of the Israeli government, that should stop talking about annexing the West Bank and rather respect international law and stop the building of settlements that makes a two-state solution unlikely. When thinking about how this story can proliferate the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians, it is important to recognize that both sides have suffered and that both need to work toward reconciliation to create a peaceful future.

The famous Israeli novelist, essayist and playwriter A.B. Yehoshua said about the Ada Aharoni's story: "I didn't even know that there was a Second Exodus of the Jews from Egypt in my own times! Ada Aharoni has described this astonishing historical period in a superb and most convincing way." A.B. Yehoshua.

I highly recommend reading this sublime historical novel that reconstructs the essence of this vanished Jewish Community in Egypt, and shows how this uprooting can promote reconciliation and peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

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