

“Tell Me, Mother, What does Peace Look Like?”

In Memory of the German Peace Activist in the Israel-Palestine Conflict Ellen Rohlfs

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*When I read in “Global Research” of 17 August 2022 (“Haaretz” 11 August 2022) the article by **Gideon Levy** “[When Roger Waters Cried. “Has any Israeli Shed Tears for a Boy from Gaza?”](#)” (1), I remembered the German peace activist **Ellen Rohlfs** (1927-2020), with whom I had a lively exchange in the mid-1990s.*

*Today – in heartfelt remembrance of this exemplary woman – I will quote from her book alone: “**Tell Me, Mother, what does peace look like?**”*

Sag, Mutter, wie sieht Frieden aus? Dura Verlag Tossens 1993,

Thoughtful and question-worthy reflections on the Israel-Palestine conflict with a foreword by Uri Avnery”. (2)

Book cover, foreword, dedication

The book cover with the word “**peace**” written in large letters in several languages already conveys the content of the book: it is about peace, understanding and reconciliation between the two peoples – the Israelis and the Palestinians.

In “a kind of preface”, the Israeli journalist, writer, politician and peace activist **Uri Avnery** writes:

“As an Israeli, I do not want to be measured by different moral standards than any other people. Zionism for me means the desire to live as a normal people in a normal state.”

(...).

“What impresses me most about this book is that it has understanding for both sides of this tragic conflict. That is what matters. It is my deepest conviction that you don’t have to be against Israel if you sympathise with the Palestinians – and that you don’t have to be against the Palestinians if you love Israel. The opposite is true: One can and must be for Israel, for the Palestinians, for humanity and for peace. Ellen Rohlfs is.” (3)

Following the preface, four quotes as dedications:

“Motto: ‘Israel must live – must others die?’ (poster at a Peace Now demonstration)”

“‘A man who is a man cannot be silent about what is happening.’ Erich Fried (from ‘Hear Israel!’)”

“‘He who is silent agrees!’ (from the Talmud and from the appeal of Israeli peace groups to the friends of Israel see Appendix II)”

“‘Who is a hero? He who makes friends of enemies.’ Avot d’Rabbi Nathan” (4)



Introduction by Ellen Rohlfs

“Even though this volume contains the question of a child: ‘Tell me, mother, what does peace look like?’ this question is a much more serious and grave one than the ‘significant questions’ of the ‘little prince’ (St. Exupéry) to the adult world. The child’s question is so serious because – of course, the child is not aware of it – it has not only local but, for certain reasons, global significance.

Since the beginning of this century, responsible politicians worldwide, ministers of state and foreign ministers, Jewish and non-Jewish, American and European, the UN and the World Security Council, renowned personalities, Middle East experts, economic managers, historians, theologians, peace researchers and many others have been dealing with the question of how peace could be created in the Middle East, what peace should look like in this small country where two peoples have had to live together for about 100 years.

(...).

And there can also only be peace between the two peoples if 'the Israelis treat the Palestinians like human beings', as a Jew recently expressed to us. This is what I plead for, this is what I complain for, this is what I cry out for – and I wait impatiently for peace in this land, for peace between the two peoples, between the Israelis and the Palestinians. ...should we have come a little closer to peace today – after 13 September 1993? Am I knocking down open doors in the meantime? I would be really happy." (5)

“Tell me, mother, what does peace look like?”

Towards the end of the book, Rohlfs describes how peace could also look in Israel and Palestine:

“Children paint their world. They paint it as they experience it, as they see it, and in the middle of it their little, big selves. They paint their desires, their dreams...Among the dreams and desires of the children of Palestine is the longing not to have to be in fear all the time: to play without fear and to learn without fear, to move in the streets without fear, and to romp among the olive trees without fear, and to roam among the rocks of their own land without fear, without finding the objects that arouse curiosity exploding in their hands.

What is normal and taken for granted for other children, to stay fearlessly within their own four walls with siblings, parents and grandparents – and usually the rooms are very small – also to sleep fearlessly – has not been taken for granted for Palestinian children for a long time. Nightly disturbances by ruthless Israeli soldiers looking for a supposedly hidden terrorist are commonplace.

Children also don't want to be locked up in their own homes for days and weeks at a time like in a prison because of curfew – they hardly have any toys. Sitting in front of the TV all day – who can stand that unscathed? Boredom and scuffles among the siblings are therefore part of everyday life – also beatings from the parents; because they are just as irritable and less patient; they also live in constant fear. One of the many children is always screaming. The tension is almost unbearable.

Sleeping and eating disorders are now normal, even bed-wetting...No one is surprised about it any more. The doctors have resigned – what else can they do? A number of children even only see their mother when they visit her in prison, and not even here are they allowed to be held by her. Why is mother actually in prison? Didn't she just defend herself against the brutal soldiers? Didn't she just stand in front of her brother so that 'they' wouldn't take him away? Mother is not a criminal after all.

And again and again the children stand at an open grave, the big, brave brother is laid in it or a little sibling who choked on the tear gas. The mother cries, the father cries – but the child does not understand what is going on...Is this life? And once the children get calm, they paint and ask one of the thousand questions: 'Tell me, mother, what does peace look like, I want to paint it.' They don't know what peace is – they have never experienced peace.

(...).

But I have a simple but moving drawing of a Palestinian child of about nine years old.

His parents seem still and despite everything to be building on reconciliation – and not on hatred. I describe the drawing:

Two children are facing each other. One wears a cap on his head, the other a black and white scarf, the keffiyeh, and to make it very clear, above the one with the cap is the Israeli flag with the Star of David, and above the other child the Palestinian flag with the four colours. The children are holding hands. They are flanked, however, by all kinds of weapons, tanks, aeroplanes and guns – but these are heavily crossed out. They want to live without threatening, deadly weapons. They no longer want to be afraid of each other. They want to live with each other and not against each other. They want to play together, celebrate together and be happy together.

This is what peace would look like in Israel and Palestine. From an unusual mixture of experienced daily fear, naivety, wishes and hope, the children's drawing of peace and reconciliation emerged." (6)

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He is a regular contributor to Global Research.

Notes

(1) <https://www.globalresearch.ca/when-roger-waters-cried/5790446/>

(2) Rohlfs, Ellen (1993). Say, mother, what does peace look like? Thoughtful and question-worthy reflections on the Israel-Palestine conflict. With a foreword by Uri Avnery. Tossens

(3) op. cit., p. 10

(4) op. cit., p. 11

(5) op. cit., p. 12 ff.

(6) op. cit., p. 178 ff.

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