Ada Aharoni. *The Woman in White: An Extraordinary Life*. USA: Amazon, 2017. Paperback and Kindle. pp. 245. Price. US$ 12.45. ASIN: 1973930692.

Reviewed by
Judith Bara*

This work by Egyptian-born author Ada Aharoni, is one of the latest in her long and distinguished career as a University Teacher, Author, Poet and Activist. It relates and conceptualizes the remarkable story of the Jewish Hospital in Alexandria, and A WOMAN OF PEACE, its Head Nurse, Sister Thea Wolf, a German Jewish Nurse who came to work in Egypt before the outbreak of World War II and thus survived the unspeakable horrors of the Nazi Holocaust. However, it is much more than this, for it also shows that it is possible for Jew and Moslem, and Arab and European, to co-operate in what the most important project is known to us as human beings – the saving of life, especially under duress. As such, the book has a resonance for today's tumultuous world where peace is so difficult to bring about, especially in the context of the terror attacks on innocent travelers whether in New York, London, Paris, or the horrendous suicide bombings in the Sinai and other places.

This excellent book combines biography, *reportage* and literature. There are three important factors that have helped to make this a very special work. Firstly, from an early age Thea Wolf kept meticulous records and notes relating to her experiences and she endeavoured to find out what had happened to the many people she helped to save from Nazi Europe, through the Hospital in Alexandria. These notes proved invaluable to writer Ada Aharoni, who in turn became personally enmeshed in this project and was instrumental in discovering the fate of some of those in whose rescue Thea Wolf had participated. Secondly, the fact that the author herself was born in Egypt and spent her early, formative years there that provided a deeper understanding of the nature of that society. This is also a huge benefit to her parallel peace research project - showing how it is possible for Jews and Arabs to co-operate, even under difficult circumstances. Thirdly, the rapport that obviously developed between Ada Aharoni and Thea Wolf was such that each could bring out the each other's strengths and this enriched the work tremendously.

As a child, Thea overcame privations brought about by Germany's defeat in the First World War, and then fought prejudice from her community in terms of training as a nurse. When she had the chance to serve at the Jewish Community Hospital in Alexandria, her family was aghast, but once again her strength of character prevailed and she left, never to return to her family home. The Nazis exterminated her whole family, of seventy-two people, apart from three distant relatives.

The Hospital although primarily established for the benefit of the flourishing Jewish Community of Alexandria, never refused a patient it could help, irrespective of their

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background. It had a beautiful motto: *"Don't tell me who you are - tell me where it hurts."* Egyptian Muslims were treated and employed at the hospital and their friends and relatives were treated there on equal terms. When Jews fleeing Europe began arriving in Egypt, many Egyptian officials, who had the good experience of the hospital in Alexandria, came to enlist the help of Sister Thea and her colleagues. From 1937, in conjunction with sympathetic locals and kind-hearted officials, three groups were formed: in Cairo, Alexandria and Port Said, in order to try and help people fleeing from Europe. In most cases, the authorities were persuaded by Thea, to allow them to disembark and stay in Egypt.

A number of similar daring, brave and risky ventures were engineered by Thea Wolf and her colleagues, with the help of compassionate Egyptian officials, which led to the survival of many people. Not least among these was her own temporary evacuation on the eve of the Battle of El Alamein. There was no question that the local people involved in these escapes participated genuinely for humanitarian reasons. Differences of politics, religion and culture were set aside. This surely is a lesson that could serve as an example for today, in terms of bringing together Moslems, Jews and Christians.

Thea Wolf remained in Alexandria until 1947, when she decided to move to Palestine. This decision was based on her idea of 'owing it' to those who had died in the Holocaust to establish a safe haven for survivors and for future Jewish generations. Accordingly, Thea left Egypt and in April 1947 started work as a nurse in a government hospital in Tiberias. After the United Nations voted for the partition of Palestine, she was urged to return to Egypt for her own 'safety' by Arab friends - even by the Egyptian embassy in Jerusalem - as it was inevitable that war would break out after the British left Palestine in May 1948. In the event it was not the Jews of Palestine who were forced into exile, but unfortunately, the Jews of Egypt, many of whom were expelled from Egypt after the establishment of the State of Israel.

Thea eventually settled in Jerusalem and engaged in voluntary work to bring about peace. She lived to see the beginnings of peace between Israel and her beloved Egypt, and the Signing of the Peace Treaty by President Sadat and Menachem Begin, and she prayed that this would be taken to its ultimate conclusion - Israel living normally and in peace alongside all her neighbors in the region, including the Palestinians. Regrettably this process has suffered several setbacks, but Thea's example shows us that we should never give up hope or cease working towards this aim. Let us ensure that like Thea, our lives are not lived in vain in this regard.

Thea Wolf (born in 1907) passed away on the 14th of April, 2005, in Frankfurt on Maine, at the hospital where she studied to become a nurse.

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