[**Teaching Holocaust**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1738454/teaching-holocaust)

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SO, the Holocaust is to be taught in school in the UAE. Why not? After all, ignoring the calamities of the blood-drenched post-Balfour Declaration era, Jews and Arabs have throughout history lived in peace and harmony. The conquests of the seventh century had found the Arabs ruling an empire that extended from where I am writing these lines to the Iberian Peninsula. What happened to the Jews in this empire spread over three continents?

Here is what the late Israeli foreign minister and scholar Abba Eban says in his book My People: “Under Moslem rule, world Jewry entered into a new period of physical and intellectual expansion. […] The Jews not only retained their ancestral creed but gained new strength in the land of Moslem conquest.” Arab governments, he adds, “freely enlisted the services of Jews in their administrations, and depended heavily on their expert advice in matters of finance and international diplomacy”. Besides, they gave the Jewish community something it couldn’t even think of in Europe. and I quote Eban: “freedom of religion, freedom of settlement, freedom of occupation, and freedom of movement”.

The cultural brilliance of Muslim Spain was a common Arab-Jewish glory at a time when European Jews, as history records, were treated by European Christians as less than dirt. In contrast, the generosity the Muslims showed towards the Jews wasn’t confined to the Arabs. With the conquest of Constantinople, the Ottomans opened their doors to Jews, who, according to Eban, entered a “Golden Age”. The Jews owned printing presses, helped the Ottomans with building artillery and occupied key positions in the administration, eg, Joseph Hamon of Granada was personal physician to Sultan Selim I.

When the Reconquista began, the Spanish Jews too were slaughtered. The one who took notice of this barbarism was Ottoman Sultan Bayazit (1481-1512), who offered them refuge. Today’s Bulgarian Jews are descendants of the persecuted Jews given asylum by the Ottomans.

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Also to seek refuge in their thousands were those Jews who just had to row their boats to cross the Straits of Gibraltar and live in peace in Morocco. Today, Israelis of Moroccan descent are a major component of Israel’s population. Contrast this with the fact that French Jews were given nationality in the 19th century, and a Jew couldn’t move to a new house without first informing the police. Shockingly, when the first Zionist congress met in Basle, Switzerland, in 1897, the delegates found it difficult to find a venue, and the meeting took place in a dance hall.

Given this history, there is no doubt Arab students in the UAE will raise their heads in pride when they will compare their forefathers’ magnanimity with the unabashed persecution of the Jewish people — haunted, tortured and slaughtered in Europe more than a millennium before Adolf Hitler was born.

Will Israel reciprocate the UAE gesture and let its student read about Al Nakba? The Palestinian word for ‘catastrophe’, Al Nakba means the mass slaughter of the Palestinian people and their flight from that part of Palestine which in the wake of the British withdrawal was proclaimed Israel. Those who fled their ancestral homes numbered 750,000 and would never see their homes again. The Zionists seized not only their moveable and immovable property, even the wealth belonging to those Palestinians who didn’t flee Israel but had gone to safer places within the Jewish zone was confiscated.

Al Nakba inclu­ded the charnel house that village Deir Yassin became. On April 9, 1948, as Howard M. Sachar says in A History of Israel: “More than 200 Arab men, women and children were slain; their bodies afterwards mutilated and thrown into a well.”

All this would pale into significance when Ariel Sharon, the ‘Butcher of Beirut’, carried out in Sabra-Shatila a deed of villainy that would put to shame Hitler’s most fanatic followers. If, therefore, UAE students are to read about the horror that was the Holocaust, will Israel reciprocate the gesture and teach Israeli students about Al Nakba and what happened later in Sabra-Shatila and the massacres at the Palestinian refugee camps at Qana twice?

I have quoted Robert Fisk on Sabra-Shatila so many times on these pages that a further quote would be a waste of valuable space. But one remark by an Israeli official on the shock Fisk suffered after seeing the piles of mutilated bodies deserves to be reproduced. The Israeli said; “It is a war; in a war these things happen. … it is just a bunch of Arabs. Why are you taking it so hard?”

Will Israel let its students know this gory chapter of Palestinian history besides the relentless genocide now going on in Gaza? Perhaps Israel knows there is no need for reciprocity because Arab potentates in their present Vichy France spirit wouldn’t ask for it.

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