



Israeli police clashed with mourners as they carried the casket of slain Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh during her funeral in east Jerusalem on May 13, 2022.
● MAYA LEVIN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Washington State University professor of history R. Charles Weller:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights hasn't done much good for the Islamic world

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EXCLUSIVE



R. Charles Weller is associate professor of history at Washington State University, and author of 'Reason, Revelation and Law in Islamic and Western Theory and History', published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2021.

Your words reminded me of a scholar who once said some of the geniuses — in terms of scientific discoveries — in Europe at the time of the industrial revolution were not the products of any specific culture or something like that. And if, as in a historical thought experiment, you take them away, even though it is hardly possible, those scientific discoveries could have as easily happened elsewhere.

Well, it might, but then again, it might not because the situation in those other societies requires different needs. They have different demands. They have a whole different cultural, religious, political, and social economic context.

So, for instance, why did China need to industrialize? China had a massive population. They had all of the labor power that could mass produce.

They didn't need machines to do it. So, these are the kinds of things that you have to think through.

The Chinese civilization doesn't need an industrial revolution in the European sense for many decades or even centuries until it was forced upon them by military superiority and the threat of dominance and political and economic takeover. They may have never needed an industrial revolution, industrialization, and modernization if they had not been threatened militarily.

The case of a Syrian Muslim family being denied Swiss citizenship just because their teenage boy refused to shake hands with a female teacher was especially interesting to me. Let's put aside for a moment the Sharia law and Swiss culture, or the 'West' and the 'Islamic'. Doesn't the problem boil right down to freedom vs. unfreedom of the colonized in the Imperial metropolitan?

Yes, I agree with you. Although I would also say that there are some dynamics here of the authority figure within the Swiss context: the teacher demanding obedience from the students. So, there are pride and these kinds of issues regarding who's supposed to be in charge.

That ties into freedom. What kind of freedom do you have? Does the authority figure have the freedom to demand and to require certain things of their subjects, so to speak, as it were? So, there are more dynamics than just freedom involved.

But let's say that this was a white Swiss boy, of the same age as the Syrian boy, who refused to shake hands with the female teacher. If we took those two different scenarios, what would it yield? What would the Swiss authorities have done?

The question of whether there has ever been a case where a white Swiss boy or a girl has refused to shake hands with one of their teachers at any point would be a historical question. It would involve in-

vestigation and checking into the past. Who knows there may be reports in the records, and that would become evidence. In these kinds of things, it's a fair question. But we don't have the evidence right now.

So, we can just theorize about what might have happened. Certainly, their citizenship would never have been taken away and called into question. Never. Do you know what I'm saying? It never would have been a question of citizenship. It would have been a question of a rebellious young child or, who knows, an autistic child or anything else. Whatever the case, it never would have been a question of revoking their citizenship because they don't conform to Swiss culture. That never would have come on the table.

I liked your question because it made me think about another case. In 2017, when Donald Trump came into office, he issued his executive order about immigration to the United States. He named seven Islamic countries that were banned from immigration into the United States. If you look at the specific reasons that they gave within the executive order, he names things like the "mistreatment of women". He said these societies mistreat their women, do not grant religious tolerance, and are religiously intolerant.

He names this list of different cultural civilizational values and practices that he

says are not compatible with the United States' values and practices. So, immediately it can be said that domestic violence is a major problem in the United States itself. There's a massive problem of domestic violence amongst white as well as black Americans, Asian Americans, etc. Moreover, the mistreatment of women is a major problem within American society. There is also plenty of religious intolerance in people who do not accept people of other religious faiths, condemn them, speak against them, etc.

Here again, there's no question of citizenship about these people, right? No one ever thinks, "Oh well, let's take their citizenship away because they don't hold and practice these essential values."

I loved your questions. They made me think from these different angles. As I said in my book, this really didn't even need to be the massive issue that it was, and it wouldn't have been a massive issue that it was if it wasn't for a post-9/11 War on Terror issue.

It reminds me of a post on Twitter. When you hear the news that a driver came into a crowd, you would ask, "Who was the driver?", and find out that the driver was a Muslim. Okay, then the first assumption is that it was an act of terror. If it was a white man, "Okay, maybe he was wrong. Maybe he was angry. Maybe it