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EGYPTIAN INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES

Articles

1 JULY 2019

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July 1, 2019

Dr Morsi's Demise – The Birth of a Martyr

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Dr Mohamed Morsi's Demise - Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Martyr

Abstract: This Opinion Piece analyses the death of Dr Mohamed Morsi, the former president of Egypt as a public spectacle of execution. It argues that it was not just Dr Morsi who was on trial, but the concept of the Arab Spring itself was being systematically questioned to send a blatant message, no civil democracy in Egypt will be tolerated. Revisiting Michel Foucault's theories of the end of public executions, this piece suggests that the theatricality of public punishment is still at play in the Middle East, the intentional humiliation of the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood is a clear example of that.

Why is Dr Mohamed Morsi mourned as a martyr in the Arab world? With an angry hashtag claiming "El Sisi killed the president", thousands of Arabs are expressing their grief for the first democratically elected president of Egypt Dr Mohamed Morsi who is still regarded as the only legitimate president of Egypt by millions of his supporters. Siding with The Freedom and Justice Party, Arab internauts insist that his long-predicted death is an assassination. Not only that, but even figures who are known for their criticism of the ideologies of the Muslim Brotherhood are now castigating the blatant violation of human rights which lead to Dr Morsi's death.

"The more monstrous a criminal was, the more he must be deprived of light: he must not see or be seen" writes Michel Foucault in 1975 while examining the old techniques used in prisons for punishment and executions¹. Foucault later on suggests that these techniques of humiliation are bygone and even hypothesizes that the performativity of death as a spectacle has ended. It has not. The death of Dr Morsi -the former president of Egypt- is an elongated,

¹Foucault, Michel (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*. London: Penguin Books.



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slowly paced, spectacle of death. In a leaked voice recording posted by Al Jazeera², the ousted president Morsi pleads that he has lost his sight because of the excess of light he has been exposed to after being in solitary confinement; a way of torture. Caged in a double glass cage which secludes him from the court not only chastens the first democratically elected president of Egypt, but also forces him to bear the brunt of a monstrous menacing criminal. A spectacle of humiliation and punishment.

There is nothing “natural” about Dr Morsi’s death, it is a strategized, planned and meticulously staged spectacle of punitive assassination. The slowly executed death penalty through the systematic medical negligence and physical and psychological torture is intentional. A modern day Lingchi; also known as death by a thousand cuts which was an ancient form of torture and execution used in China. The condemned who is executed by Lingchi would literally be sliced piece by piece till death. It has also been reported that opium used to be given to the condemned, not to alleviate their pain, but to prolong their suffering before they finally die. Since the military coup in 2013 which ousted Dr Morsi, till the 17th of June 2019, his rights have been repeatedly violated despite his family’s poignant pleas to pay attention to his health. He died, sliced one piece at time.

As if his death was not enough, Dr Morsi -who ,in so many ways, symbolizes the Arab Spring in his merit of being the only democratically elected president in the history of Egypt- had to be buried away from his family cemetery under heavy security and without even allowing his wife to attend the burial. The former interim president of Tunisia Moncef Marzouki expressed his utter shock by how far evil can go while discussing the improper burial of Dr Morsi, commenting on the current leader of Egypt, Sisi, Marzouki insisted that his cruelty reflects his fear of Dr Morsi as a symbol: “ He was a bomb of symbolism. That is what they fear the

² Al Jazeera Exclusive. Mohamed Morsi Accuses the Egyptian Authorities of Threatening him. Added By Al Jazeera Arabic. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJ3EQfrBm7o>

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most, symbols and icons".³ Juxtaposed with Dr Morsi's tragic fate is that of Hosni Mubarak, the former president who ignited one of the biggest revolutions in the history of the Arab world and who is today free! This juxtaposition, if anything, unveils the webbed circuits by which the militarised regime in Egypt works. It is therefore unfortunate, yet incumbent to admit that the Egyptian revolution of 2011 has been highjacked if not aborted.

Dr Morsi is just one of over 60.000 political prisoners incarcerated by Sisi's regime under inhumane conditions, all suffering from death by a thousand cuts. It is therefore urgent to re-open their cases and to start investigating their conditions to, hopefully, save those who can still be saved. After all, how is it okay for the dictator to be free and the revolutionaries to be incarcerated? The death of Dr Morsi, the long years of systematic medical negligence, the refusal of allowing him a proper burial, the prohibition of any collective prayer for his funeral in Egypt are all signs of the fragility of Sisi's regime which is still mortified of Dr Morsi's popularity. However, the very cruelty that killed a man, gave birth to a martyr whose legacy will now be engraved in the Arab collective memory. It is very unpredictable that there will be any major protests in Egypt under Sisi's rule now, yet, if we have learned anything from Arab revolutions, it is that the volcano of anger inevitably erupts.

Dr Morsi's rise to power symbolized the Muslim Brotherhood's survival of oppression and the success of Arab revolutions in toppling unwanted regimes and unwelcomed foreign intervention. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi who orchestrated the coup d'état that ousted the former president Dr Morsi is the son of the Egyptian military and is now ruling Egypt with an iron fist. Sisi's regime is now growing more and more infamous for its intolerance of the freedom of speech, which is now reaching absurdly tyrannical levels, even by Egypt's standards. A very simple example is that of the popular singer Sherine Abdel Wahab who was put on trial

³ Former Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki's Laments Mohamed Morsi. YouTube Video. Added by Aljazeera Mubasher. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VW85C0UtbLg>

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and disbarred from the guild of artists in Egypt because of a statement she made while singing for a concert in Bahrain when she jokingly said "In Egypt, those who speak are imprisoned"!

Born of the same military school that gave Egypt its former president Hosni Mubarak, Sisi's role as an heir to this military lineage and his faithfulness to its oppressive reputation makes it clear that it was not Dr Mohamed Morsi who was on a trial that lasted for six years and culminated in his indirect assassination. What was on trial is the Arab Spring itself. What was on trial is the dream of an Arab revolution that would change the dynamics of power in the Middle East. What was on trial is the aspirations of millions who wanted to break the chains of tyranny in the Arab world. Freedom was on trial, hope was assassinated, and tyranny survived yet one more time in the Arab World. That is why the Arab world is mourning, not just Dr Morsi per se, but mourning its dream of freedom.

