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**Murdering the Wretched of the Earth**

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By Chris Hedges

Radical Islam is the last refuge of the Muslim poor. The mandated five prayers a day give the only real structure to the lives of impoverished believers. The careful rituals of washing before prayers in the mosque, the strict moral code, along with the understanding that life has an ultimate purpose and meaning, keep hundreds of millions of destitute Muslims from despair. The fundamentalist ideology that rises from oppression is rigid and unforgiving. It radically splits the world into black and white, good and evil, apostates and believers. It is bigoted and cruel to women, Jews, Christians and secularists, along with gays and lesbians. But at the same time it offers to those on the very bottom of society a final refuge and hope. The massacres of hundreds of believers in the streets of Cairo signal not only an assault against a religious ideology, not only a return to the brutal police state of Hosni Mubarak, but the start of a holy war that will turn Egypt and other poor regions of the globe into a caldron of blood and suffering.

The only way to break the hold of radical Islam is to give its followers a stake in the wider economy, the possibility of a life where the future is not dominated by grinding poverty, repression and hopelessness. If you live in the sprawling slums of Cairo or the refugee camps in Gaza or the concrete hovels in New Delhi, every avenue of escape is closed. You cannot get an education. You cannot get a job. You do not have the resources to marry. You cannot challenge the domination of the economy by the oligarchs and the generals. The only way left for you to affirm yourself is to become a martyr, or *shahid*. Then you will get what you cannot get in life—a brief moment of fame and glory. And while what will take place in Egypt will be defined as a religious war, and the acts of violence by the insurgents who will rise from the bloodied squares of Cairo will be defined as terrorism, the engine for this chaos is not religion but the collapsing economy of a world where the wretched of the earth are to be subjugated and starved or shot. The lines of battle are being drawn in Egypt and across the globe. Adli Mansour, the titular president appointed by the military dictator of Egypt, Gen. Abdul-Fattah el-Sisi, has imposed a military-led government, a curfew and a state of emergency. They will not be lifted soon.

The lifeblood of radical movements is martyrdom. The Egyptian military has provided an ample supply. The faces and the names of the sanctified dead will be used by enraged clerics to call for holy vengeance. And as violence grows and the lists of martyrs expand, a war will be ignited that will tear Egypt apart. Police, Coptic Christians, secularists, Westerners, businesses, banks, the tourism industry and the military will become targets. Those radical Islamists who were persuaded by the Muslim Brotherhood that electoral politics could work and brought into the system will go back underground, and many of the rank and file of the Muslim Brotherhood will join them. Crude bombs will be set off. Random attacks and assassinations by gunmen will puncture daily life in Egypt as they did in the 1990s when I was in Cairo for The New York Times, although this time the attacks will be wider and more fierce, far harder to control or ultimately crush.

What is happening in Egypt is a precursor to a wider global war between the world’s elites and the world’s poor, a war caused by diminishing resources, chronic unemployment and underemployment, overpopulation, declining crop yields caused by climate change, and rising food prices. Thirty-three percent of Egypt’s 80 million people are 14 or younger, and millions live under or just above the poverty line, which the World Bank sets at a daily income of $2 in that nation. The poor in Egypt spend more than half their income on food—often food that has little nutritional value. An estimated 13.7 million Egyptians, or 17 percent of the population, suffered from food insecurity in 2011, compared with 14 percent in 2009, according to a report by the U.N. World Food Program and the Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS). Malnutrition is endemic among poor children, with 31 percent under 5 years old stunted in growth. Illiteracy runs at more than 70 percent.

In “Les Misérables” Victor Hugo described war with the poor as one between the “egoists” and the “outcasts.” The egoists, Hugo wrote, had “the bemusement of prosperity, which blunts the sense, the fear of suffering which is some cases goes so far as to hate all sufferers, and unshakable complacency, the ego so inflated that is stifles the soul.” The outcasts, who were ignored until their persecution and deprivation morphed into violence, had “greed and envy, resentment at the happiness of others, the turmoil of the human element in search of personal fulfillment, hearts filled with fog, misery, needs, and fatalism, and simple, impure ignorance.”

The belief systems the oppressed embrace can be intolerant, but these belief systems are a response to the injustice, state violence and cruelty inflicted on them by the global elites. Our enemy is not radical Islam. It is global capitalism. It is a world where the wretched of the earth are forced to bow before the dictates of the marketplace, where children go hungry as global corporate elites siphon away the world’s wealth and natural resources and where our troops and U.S.-backed militaries carry out massacres on city streets. Egypt offers a window into the coming dystopia. The wars of survival will mark the final stage of human habitation of the planet. And if you want to know what they will look like, visit any city morgue in Cairo.



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