

Draft: Equivocation in the face of black reaction

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In the aftermath of the murder of 12 journalists and cartoonists at Charlie Hebdo(CH), there was a strange ambivalence on the part of some to the attack¹. Of course all condemned it, but some said, in so many words that it was the journal's fault for publishing offensive cartoons about Mohamed. The journal was accused of islamophobia and racism².

It's hostility to Islam goes without question. It was similarly hostile to Catholicism. But whilst anti-catholic hostility is accepted as legitimate, against Islam it is labelled phobia : irrational fear. When each day brings worse horrors by armed Islamists, over 2000 murdered by Boko Haram two days after the Paris attack, fear of Islamists is not an irrational phobia.

Critics of CH say that sarcasm should parody the powerful, not mock the powerless.

The last tweet from CH before the attack mocked the Islamic State's Caliph. This was not mocking the powerless. Ian Bell in the Sunday Herald admitted that the main reason the English language press has not reprinted the controversial cartoons is fear. It took great courage for CH to mock a Caliph who executes his critics.

One may object that muslims *in France* are a predominantly poor and powerless minority. But muslim's qua muslims, should be powerless in a secular state, just as catholics qua catholics should be powerless, and their poverty can not be removed by an policy that addresses them as religous group. It can only be eliminated by radical economic change which eliminates unemployment and class inequality.

We should not forget that great religions arise as ideological machines of empire: Catholicism for the Western Roman Empire (*in hoc signo vinces*), Orthodoxy: the Byzantine Empire. Cromwell justified the establishment of the Church of England on the basis that 'England was an Empire'; Mohamed's ideology was the mobilising ideology used by Abassid, Ottoman and Mughal empires. These religions were inextricably linked to the state and to power. They were never private beliefs. They were social compulsions. They had land, buildings and full time employees to keep them going. You have to look at the rise and fall of states to understand them.

¹ <http://www.leninology.co.uk/2015/01/pseudo-explanations-for-massacre.html> and from a very different political perspective <http://vineyardsaker.blogspot.co.uk/2015/01/i-am-not-charlie.html>

² The allegation of racism is well refuted here <http://www.quora.com/What-was-the-context-of-Charlie-Hebdos-cartoon-depicting-Boko-Haram-sex-slaves-as-welfare-queens?ref=fb>.

Tab. 1: Comparison of incomes of selected countries

Oil Monarchies		
Country	\$ Oil revenue per head	\$ GDP per head
Kuwait	29949	52197
Qatar	40943	93714
Saudi Arabia	8939	25962
UAE	9736	43049
Europe		
France		42500
Poland		13648
Spain		29863
Asia		
India		1499
China		6807
Pakistan		1275
Turkey		10972

The rise of modern armed Islam has a geo-political context: the economic rise of the Gulf oil monarchies and Turkey. Rich Gulf kingdoms, the most politically retrograde states on Earth, are well able to fund religious institutions promulgating conservative brands of religion. Religion can then be utilised to motivate fighters serving their interests: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya, Syria.

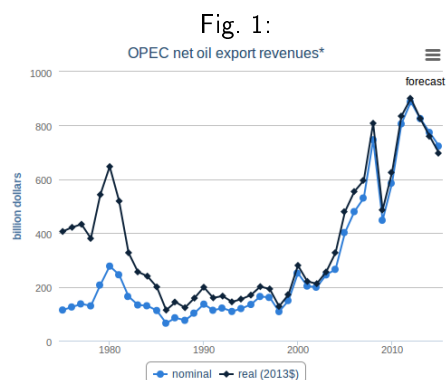
Western governments pose as defenders of secular democracy but worked hand in glove with these tyrannies in Afghanistan in the 80s, in two Gulf wars, in Libya and then in Syria. That the US and UK public debts have depended on inflows of Gulf funds perhaps explains the hypocrisy. Western troops have been used to destroy not the most backward Islamic states, but the modern secular Arab states.

Now we have the rise of neo-Ottoman ideology in Turkey, a reversion to the use of religion to justify expansion, aid given by Turkey to IS being an open secret.

Belatedly the US and France started to act against IS but they are still unwilling to help Assad. He heads only remaining secular government able to oppose the IS. As Assad predicted, Islamist terrorists who the French were arming in Syria eventually returned to Europe with results we begin to see. Meanwhile, oil revenues, and the circulation finance of capital derived from it, still bind London, Paris and New York to the Gulf.

It is worth understanding the economic forces behind this. There is a standard trope by the Islamists that the West is pillaging the natural resources of Arabia during the war on terror after 2001.

Look at Figure 1, it shows the oil revenues of OPEC, see how sharply they have risen since 2001. This is not a picture of a group of countries that are



Tab. 2: Differential oil production costs and profits assuming price of \$60 per barrel. Source <http://snbchf.com/global-macro/shale-oil-oil-sands/>

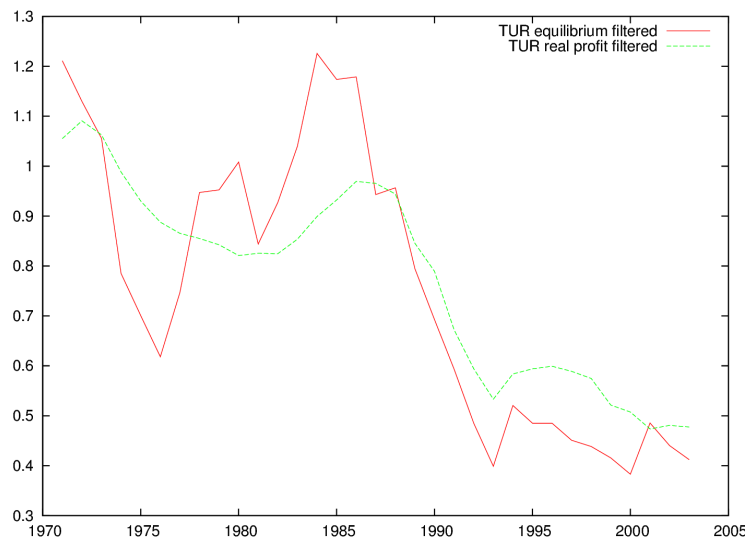
	Lifting Costs	Transport Costs	Profit
Saudi Arabia Onshore	3	2	55
Middle East ex Saudi Onshore	14	4	42
Russia Onshore	18	12	30
Other former USSR Onshore	21	12	27
Venezuela/Mexico Onshore	32	4	14
Norway/UK Northsea	50	2	8
United States Deep-water	57	2	1
Brazil Ethanol	66	5	-11
Brazil Offshore	80	2	-22
United States Shale	73	12	-25

being pillaged, it is a group of countries whose revenues grew an astonishing 4 times over that period!

We see who really benefited economically from the war on terror. The disruption of the Iraqi oil industry first by sanctions and then by war, then sanctions against Iran at a time of rapid growth in demand from China and India produced huge gains for the monarchies. As Table 1 shows the oil monarchies are now significantly richer per head than European countries and far far ahead of the rest of Asia. Where does their money come from?

They are wealthy because oil always sells at a price well above its value. The value of a commodity is determined the average amount of labour that required to produce it. But oil does not sell at its value, it sells instead at its marginal cost of production, which is typically much higher than its average cost. Thus the owners of any but the worst oil fields are able to earn a super profit or *differential rent* set by how much lower their costs are than the marginal cost(see Table). In recent years the price of oil has hit over \$100 a barrel which allowed high cost marginal producers like US shale oil or various offshore fields to become viable. In the last few months the Saudi's have started over-producing to force

Fig. 2: Falling rate of profit in Turkey: the general law of capitalist development.



down the price, bankrupt the marginal producers, and re-establish their relative monopoly.

Where does this profit come from?

Does it come from exploiting the oil workers in Saudi-Arabia?

No, that would only account for a tiny fraction of the profit.

Because the product is being sold above its value, the super profit going to the low cost producers comes from redistributed surplus value. Ultimately it is industrial workers in Asia and Europe and the Americas whose labour produces the value that turns out as ground oil revenue in Arabia.

The situation of Turkey is different. The ruling classes of Turkey can not rely on ground rents. Instead they rely on exploiting their own working classes. As such they are affected by the general law of development of mature capitalist countries, the rate of profit falls as the capital to labour ratio rises. In major capitalist economies, the onset of this process drives the bourgeoisie towards imperialist expansion as an attempt to offset the declining rate of profit. This process gives rise to new ideologies on the part of the bourgeois state. It is no

longer content with the secular modernism established by Attaturk, an ideology that was appropriate for a capitalist state that was in its early developmental stage. Once the stage of mature capitalism arrives, the ruling class rumages through the ideological toolbox of reaction to come up with an ideology that can justify expansion. In the case of Turkey, which until 100 years ago was still a great, albeit pre-capitalist, imperial power, this takes the form of a return to the ideology of the old empire.