

The effect of petro-globalization on non-western cultures assignment

[Sociology](#)



These two events, separated by over five decades, represent a kind of yin and yang of globalization, extreme examples of the risks and benefits of our ever-shrinking economic world. The nation of Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932 (History of Saudi Arabia, n. D.) when the warlord Bin Saudi united the kingdoms of Haze and Naked after some 30-odd years of fighting. That same year oil was discovered in Bahrain, touching off a wave of petroleum exploration on the Arabian Peninsula. The Saudi strike in 1938 quickly led to more, and it soon became clear that Saudi Arabia was sitting on top of the largest crude oil reserves in the world.

The importance of this would soon be underscored in World War 2, as industrial nations' mechanized military might came to rely more and more on petroleum-based fuels. This reliance would only grow and expand during the postwar years, eventually leading to the petroleum-based world economy of today. On the face of it, the nation of Saudi Arabia benefited tremendously from these developments. Almost overnight, a dusty backwater (at least to Western eyes) was transformed into a modern economic powerhouse.

Arabs had long been a tribal people, often nomadic, living a hardscrabble existence on an unyielding land. An ancient culture that had developed in a land of limited resources suddenly found itself living in a land of plenty. Moreover, a people who had previously had little nesters, some practically throwing money at them, others eager to help them spend it. The results ?? both good and bad ?? should not have been hard to predict. Saudi Arabia's newfound wealth and importance guaranteed them entry to the elite halls of world economic power.

It has also made them a natural regional hegemony, and they often act as the spokesman for all Arab peoples in world affairs (much to the annoyance of other Arab nations). Economic development has unquestionably raised the standard of living for all Saudi, but most of the wealth has been split unevenly. The bulk of it remains in the hands of the Saudi Royal Family, descendants of Bin Saudi, and their assorted hangers-on (by some estimates there are as many as 25,000 royal princes). There is a monarchy in the truest, almost medieval sense of the word: there is no democracy, no constitution, no guarantee of human rights.

Indeed, the medieval comparison is apt. Government and religion are intertwined, as the Saudi monarchy has long been given legitimacy by its alliance with the Hanbali, conservative sect of Sunni Islam that dominates Saudi society. There is no freedom of religion in Saudi Arabia; indeed for a foreigner to even discuss other religions with Saudi could be grounds for expulsion. Women have no rights, they cannot vote, drive, or even leave the house without a man's permission. Homosexuality is punishable by death. Public executions remain the norm, broadcast to reach a larger audience.

Medieval social policy meets 21st century technology. For Saudi Arabia globalization brought power and prestige on the world stage and economic development at home, but it did little to change the underlying social order. Political and economic power remains in the hands of a small elite, while the majority of the population has no say. Daily life is strictly regulated by an institutional religious authority. Much of the nation's wealth has been

squandered, while few plans have been made for the day when the oil runs out. By some estimates that day could come in as few as fifteen years.

The I-Jaw people benefited less than the Saudi from the discovery of oil on their lands. Called "The Thinking People," the I-Jaw inhabit the tropical rain forest in the east of Colombia, near the Venezuelan border. The I-Jaw long lived a traditional, largely hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Says environmental writer Ion Vidal, "They have lived in the foothills and cloudbursts of the Andes in northeast Colombia since, they believe, the world began, and had only limited contact with the outside world until 40 years ago" (Corroborative, 2010).

One indirect result of that contact has been a dramatic decline in the I-Jaw population: At the beginning of the twentieth century there were believed to be as many as 20,000 I-Jaw in eight clans; today only 7,500 remain in three clans, comprising a mere 822 families (Cultures of the World, n. D.). The I-Jaw call their homeland Kale-Aka, meaning "The Heart of the World." It lies near the headwaters of the mighty Amazon River, in a region of cloud forest, so named for the layer of low-lying cloud that perpetually hangs just above the dense canopy.

It is a moist region characterized by towering tree trunks and hanging mosses, almost primeval in its beauty. It is also the location of some 1.5 billion barrels of crude oil, if the petroleum industry estimates are to be believed (Rainforest's Action Network, 2001). 1.5 billion barrels of oil is no small thing. At \$100 a barrel (its average over \$111 a barrel in 2012), that represents over \$150 billion, a considerable amount of money.

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Unsurprisingly, this potential goldmine has consisting of the aforementioned Occidental Petroleum in partnership with Royal Dutch Shell (and the Venezuelan government itself).

Shell soon pulled out, but Occidental (Ox) remained involved for many years, and today new commercial tersest continue to try to drill for oil on I-Jaw land. For perspective: 1. 5 billion barrels of oil could feed US consumption for about two and a half months (Musicals, 2013). The I-Jaw believe that oil is the lifeblood of the land, and that drilling for it is literally bleeding the land dry (Cultures of the World, n. D.). They did not take the assault on their homeland lying down. They used nonviolent tactics, such as sit-ins, to block work at drill sites. They published articles educating people about their culture and their struggle.

In 1997 the leader of the Traditional I-Jaw Authority, Bertie Karakul, declared that his people “ would rather die, protecting everything that we hold sacred, than lose everything that makes us Awe” (Isolation and Koenig, 2004). The threat of a traditional peoples’ mass suicide made international headlines and drew attention to the I-Jaw cause. They staged successful protests at Fidelity Investments, the American firm that at the time was the largest shareholder in Occidental Petroleum, eventually forcing Fidelity to divest itself of the largest portion of its Ox portfolio. The I-Jaw also took their fight to the courts.

The struggle was not always useful. At various times the Colombian government has taken a hard line against Laws protesters, sometimes shooting at them, sometimes physically displacing them. Several I-Jaw have

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died and many more disappeared, although no charges have ever been brought (Corroborative, 2010). The ongoing political, legal, and public relations struggles finally drove Ox out of the area in 2002 (VEHEMENT. Org, n. D.), but for the I-Jaw the fight was not over. Although initial drilling yielded unpromising results, the petroleum industry remains convinced that there are valuable reserves to be had entreat I-Jaw land.

Today the South American petroleum companies Copter and Repose AS, drawn by the lure of ever-increasing oil prices, have renewed the fight to drill in the Heart of the World. For both the Saudi and the I-Jaw, globalization meant relatively “ primitive” culture’s rapid exposure to a new, more technologically advanced, more cosmopolitan culture seeking to exploit their resources. The Saudi ?? more numerous, more developed, less isolated ?? were better positioned to benefit from this exposure than the I-Jaw, but both cultures have been transformed by it. E Saudi invited technological modernity and an affluent, almost decadent postmodern consumer lifestyle, but hewed to a rigid, regressive social system very much at odds with expectations of freedom and self-determination in the West. The Laws resisted modernity, at least in the form of drilling rigs on their ancestral land. But they too were forced to embrace the technological, turning to partners in the nonprofit and MONGO world to help them cannily use modern media to aid them in their fight. That fight came to dominate and define their existence right up to the present day.