

## Impaired Spiritual Health and Social Cohesion: Explaining the Effects of Kharg Oil Terminal Bureaucracy on the Life of the Natives

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### Abstract

**Background and Objectives:** Crude oil is the most important exported product and a major pillar of national economic development. The majority of Iran's crude oil exports are shipped from the Kharg oil terminal, which has required the establishment of massive oil facilities and related bureaucratic institutions on Kharg Island. Nonetheless, regardless of its economic benefits for the country, it is necessary to study the effects of this terminal on the life of island residents from different dimensions. Therefore, the present study aimed to assess the cultural and social consequences of bureaucratic activities of this company from the experts' perspective.

**Methods:** In this qualitative research, the needed data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The participants included knowledgeable people with the most accurate and useful information about the subject of the research. Their views were obtained, and the data were analyzed using the qualitative content analysis method.

**Results:** The initial codes were extracted from the data, and after refining and classifying them, 24 concepts were identified which finally fell into five categories. Accordingly, the reduced spiritual health and disintegration of social cohesion among the native residents of Kharg were identified as the major cultural and social consequence of the facilities and oil terminal of Kharg Island.

**Conclusion:** As evidenced by the obtained results, it can be concluded that the merely economic and technological outlook on development and modernity is insufficient. Disregard for the cultural and social dimensions of modernity leaves adverse traces on people's lives. Therefore, it is indispensable that these dimensions be taken into account in a comprehensive and balanced way to avoid the risks of such measures.

**Keywords:** Bureaucracy, Kharg, Oil, Qualitative Content Analysis, Social Cohesion, Spiritual Health.

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### Introduction

Oil as a strategic commodity has been inextricably linked to our country's economic development in the last hundred years; moreover, it has affected other aspects of development as well. The First and Second Pahlavi Governments relied on oil revenues to plan for transformation and development in society within the dominant single-product economy at that time (1) (2). In so doing, oil replaced the resources from other

economic activities, such as agriculture and native industries. The substantial oil revenues enabled the government to achieve its objectives without the support of the nation (3). In this regard, the relative industrial development in 1953-1978 was largely due to the dominant role of government backed by oil revenues (3).

Oil, along with natural gas, replaced coal and bring about fundamental changes to people's

lives across the globe (4). The economic impact of oil, as well as its political and social effects, still persists in our country. Kharg Island, located at a distance of 32 km from Genaveh port and 70 km from Bushehr, was considered a suitable place for an oil export terminal due to its unique climatic characteristics. The construction of this terminal changed the traditional economic structure of the island which was based on agriculture and fishing. In addition, it affected its population composition, environmental situation, and many aspects of people's life.

Oil facilities and their powerful technocrats controlled life on the island since the oil industry was the lifeblood of the country's economy, and its maintenance, management, and development required a complicated bureaucracy. Therefore, the new people who came to the region to manage the oil terminal disturbed the balance of power and structures; consequently, two unequal life structure confronted each other in the region.

The establishment of massive oil facilities in the region was supposedly a sign of development and modernity. Nonetheless, it did not have a tangible impact on the economic well-being of the native people; moreover, it exerted serious adverse effects due to the imposition of class distinction, as well as economic and social inequalities between the two groups. The privileged group had a tendency toward snobbery in their clothing, hospitality, food, and many customs. On the other hand, the disadvantaged group tolerated the suppressed anger caused by deprivation. This class conflict has led to adverse social and cultural consequences for human life and relationships.

In light of the aforementioned issues, the present study aims to identify the social and cultural consequences of bureaucracy resulting from the presence of the oil terminal in Kharg Island.

## Methods

This qualitative study was conducted using the content analysis method. The needed data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The participants were selected via

purposive sampling and according to the knowledge and experiences of individuals in the field of study to obtain the maximum information, as well as diverse views and attitudes related to their work and educational experiences. In the current study, 25 experts were interviewed, including a range of department employees, oil company managers, city officials, private sector activists, as well as academic experts and seminary scholars.

Since the sampling was purposive, this study did not have a predetermined fixed sample size, rather sample size determination was left to the researcher's discretion over the adequacy of the data, which continued until data saturation. The semi-structured interview was the data collection instrument in the current study. In this regard, the interviewees were asked some guiding and open-ended questions. The interviews began with the main research question and continued according to the interviewee's responses to collect relevant data about different dimensions of the subject. The interviews lasted within 30-80 min.

The majority of participants were interviewed in their workplace at their convenient time. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants, while the interviewee's responses were accurately transcribed in a few cases who withheld consent. The qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the data; moreover, it was attempted to discover the meanings, priorities, and attitudes of the participants through linguistic analysis. To this end, after the full transcription of the interviews, the resulting texts were fully studied. Thereafter, different parts of the text, including words, sentences, and paragraphs, were assigned the initial codes in this stage.

The obtained codes were refined after examining the similarities and differences, which resulted in the extraction of 24 concepts. In the next stage, similar concepts were put together, and categories emerged from the analysis of the relationships, as well as their aggregation and combination. These categories formed the main themes of the research which coherently explicated the findings as a whole. In the current study, apart from the interviewees' opinions, their emotional states

were also taken into account. It was attempted to summarize their perceived experiences presented in the interviews in form of concepts in an effort to help the audience infer and interpret the implied meanings in participants' responses to the greatest extent possible.

The researchers were assured of the validity or acceptability of the data through various means, such as constant examination of data and control of the interviews, and their analysis under the auspices of consultants and supervisors. In order to check the reliability and consistency, in addition to the supervisors and consultants, the opinions of one political science professor and one management professor were also used.

**Ethical considerations**

The present research was conducted with the approval of the Ethics Committee of the Islamic Azad University, Shahreza Branch. In order to ensure ethical considerations, the participants were provided with necessary explanations about the research to encourage their cooperation and willingness. Furthermore, they were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Moreover, privacy was fully observed in the interviews, and all respondents were asked for permission to record their

interviews.

**Result**

The study participants consisted of 22 subjects, out of whom 6 (24%) cases were female, and 19 (76%) subjects were male. In terms of education level, 11 (44%) cases had a bachelor's degree, 13 (52%) subjects had a master's degree, and 1 (4%) participant had a seminary education. The majority of the interviewees (44%) were in the age range of 40- 50 years, 24% of cases were below 40 years of age, and 32% fell within the age range of more than 50 years.

Participants included people with managerial experience in government offices, membership in the city council, or responsibilities in different departments of the oil company. After coding and classifying the resulting concepts, the findings of the interviews were classified into 5 categories and 24 concepts. The derived categories included approaches, economic outputs, social outputs, cultural outputs, and consequences which are presented in Table 1.

In summary, based on participants' point of view, the dominant approaches adopted by the oil company in the Kharg region were as follows: monopoly and extravagance,

Table 1. Scales and sub-classes of study findings

Categories	Subcategorize
Approaches	Monopoly and extravagance
	Influencing the parliamentary and city council elections
	Influencing the appointments of local managers
	Affecting the decisions of provincial and national officials
	Controlling and directing local media and news
	Concentration of different facilities
	Non-use of native labor and human resources
Economic outputs	Cost-benefit decision-making
	Disregard for the rights and interests of the majority of society
	Justification of the negative consequences of oil exports, such as environmental degradation
	Destruction of the traditional economy based on agriculture and fishing
Social outputs	Ignorance of public health ( diseases inflicted by oil terminal)
	A detrimental role in the growth of civic institutions in the region
	Fostering inequality and escalating social conflicts
	Inequality in access to welfare and communication facilities
	Residents' distrust in the managers of the oil company
	Disappointment and despair among the young
Cultural outputs	Promotion of emigration to the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf
	Disrupting the cultural integrity of the region
	Decreased participation in social activities and religious ceremonies
	Promoting the values which challenge the traditional value system
Outcomes	Unequal distribution of educational facilities between the oil company and native residents
	Decreased spiritual health
	Disintegration of social cohesion

influencing the parliamentary and city council elections, influencing the appointments of local managers, affecting the decisions of provincial and national officials, controlling and directing local media and news, the concentration of different facilities, non-use of native labor and human resources, and cost-benefit decision-making. They added that all these issues have led to economic, social, and cultural outcomes.

These outputs, which are the primary results of applying the aforementioned approaches, eventually produce secondary outcomes. They are presented in the aforementioned table as consequences covering such issues as a decrease in spiritual health and the impairment of social cohesion. Interviewees believed that the Kharg oil terminal was much more than an economic enterprise and technical facilities active in the field of oil and its exports. In fact, it performs a vital and crucial role in numerous social and political relations in the region.

This influence, which is due to the many possibilities available to that group, has been exerted through various means, such as influencing the council and parliamentary election process, as well as the press and media. In this regard, it has a significant potential to influence the decisions of political officials and members of parliament. The participants also indicated that the oil company tends to monopolize and prioritize their relatives' interests over those of the majority of people and the public interest. This inclination has harmed the social and cultural values of society.

Based on participants' point of view, the dominant approaches adopted by the oil company in the Kharg region were as follows: monopoly and extravagance, influencing the parliamentary and city council elections, influencing the appointments of local managers, affecting the decisions of provincial and national officials, controlling and directing local media and news, the concentration of different facilities, non-use of native labor and human resources, and cost-benefit decision-making. They added that all these issues have led to economic, social, and cultural outcomes.

The right to participate in the council elections is subject to the length of residence (at least one year). Nonetheless, as stated by some participants, the managers of the oil company deploy the satellite employees who live elsewhere and practically take over the city council. It results in the election of a mayor who acts in line with the company's policies and disregards the demands of the people. They also pointed out that although the island's residents are limited in inter-island transportation due to the absence of road transport, the oil companies have scheduled charter flights to Tehran every day; therefore, the company's managers have easy access to the top officials of the country.

Moreover, the parliamentary members and other officials need to use the facilities of the oil company to visit the island. Consequently, they can easily convey the policies and programs that sometimes only serve their own special interests. Regarding the role of the media, one of the participants said: "Even radio and television are not allowed to broadcast the news of the Kharg Island". Furthermore, the provincial press and news sites have to follow their policies since they need the help of some oil company managers to cover some of their expenses.

This process in the performance of the oil company has led to various outputs in the economic, social, and cultural dimensions. In the economic sector, the oil exports justify such negative issues as the destruction of the traditional economy based on agriculture and fishing, the disregard for the rights and interests of the majority of society, and environmental destruction. One participant stated "Traditional fishing spots, as well as the wheat and grain farms, were allocated to oil facilities. Seawater is contaminated by the disposal of ballast water and oil spills.

Such events have an adverse effect on the health of people and residents of the region. A participant stated: "Oil export wharves emit all kinds of harmful gases in the air, which has caused various diseases among the residents; moreover, the oil company refuses to help patients with specific diseases". They believed that the industrialization of the region and the

presence of the oil industry was imposed on the native people. It did not bring the island residence the desired development and benefits; moreover, it negatively affected their traditional living structures.

The social outcomes of this process include the deterrent role of the oil company in the growth of civil institutions, pessimism, and the residents' distrust in the managers of the oil company. Based on participants' responses, the concept of "corporate" and "non-corporate" in this island, like all oil-producing areas where the oil company has special authority and position, has a special meaning that is repeated in the historical mentality of the people, residents, and employees of the oil company.

The term "corporate" refers not only to the apparent concept but also the development and prosperity, and "non-corporate" signifies deprivation and backwardness. Children grow up with the surface meaning of this concept and its inner significance and internalize it. According to them, other classes of the society, especially the youth, are driven to despair since they cannot convey their demands. Consequently, we are witnessing a tendency toward emigration to the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf. Nonetheless, this inclination is not compatible with peoples' commitment to their country, especially in the border areas.

The aforementioned events have also challenged the cultural situation of the country, as well as the cultural, moral, and spiritual structures of life among the residents resulting in reduced participation in religious practices and ceremonies. Furthermore, due to the lack of educational facilities on the island, the native children do not have access to adequate educational facilities. In addition, the promotion of values which conflict with the traditional value system of the region, along with other factors, has seriously disrupted the cultural integrity of the region.

As a final consequence of all the above-mentioned issues, the participants' statements can be summarized in the two concepts of reduced spiritual health and impaired social cohesion. The impairment of spiritual health

and social cohesion pose serious threats to individual and social domains, respectively. According to the participants, the damages inflicted by the behavior of the oil company in the region has gone beyond the financial and welfare issues. Moreover, they have left their traces deep down inside people and endanger their spiritual health by provoking various conflicts.

Furthermore, due to the social contradictions caused by the approach of the oil company, social cohesion has given way to permanent contradictions between the island and the company, which have sometimes escalated into clashes and sit-ins. Although these conflicts are latent in society, they can be a source of concern, especially in a region where the country's most important oil facilities are located.

## Discussion

The present study aimed to shed light on the effects of the bureaucracy of the oil terminal located on Kharg Island on the cultural and social aspects of life among the native residents of this region. Some findings obtained from the perspectives of the experts and participants focused on the processes by which the company and its governing structure assert their overwhelming dominance over social relations. Another part of the findings described the outcomes of this process in economic, social, and cultural dimensions, and finally, some study results dealt with the consequences of this issue.

Regardless of the technical and operational aspects on which the operation of the Kharg oil terminal depends, this organization seems to have a bureaucratic function that has affected various aspects of life on this island. Bureaucracy refers to the organization and administrative relations based on special administrative rules and formalities that have given rise to permanent positions (5). It manages the current affairs of the institution and advances its goals according to certain systems and regulations (6).

Such a structure is rationally designed to establish connections among the institutions of a complex society (7). It has a coherent context

or administrative power that manages the affairs of an institution according to specific systems and regulations (8). Bureaucracy dates back to before the Industrial Revolution in Europe (9). Bureaucrats are able to provide their own interpretations of the law owing to the facilities available to them. Therefore, as bureaucracies grow exponentially, their passion for power increases, and they influence not only the execution of law but also the decisions of legislators.

The bureaucracy of the oil company in Kharg island and many oil-producing areas, due to their numerous possibilities and, most importantly, the dependence of the country's economy on oil, can enter the domains of other organizations and sometimes serves for the benefits of that special office. This situation contradicts people's expectations from the government, especially a religious government. The performance of bureaucracy affects people's perception of spirituality, politics, and ethics. These bureaucrats' disregard for the basic needs of the people in the region affects the residents' perception of ethics, spirituality, politics, as well as religious and moral inclinations.

The fact that the mental, spiritual, and physical health of people is the prerequisite for the development and progress in society highlight the importance of health and spiritual well-being. Islam regards health as a prelude to achieving other perfections and indicated the importance and necessity of health, hygiene, as well as their impact on life in this world and the hereafter (10). Although biological processes and material structures are relatively the same for all people, mental health faces numerous challenges due to the multiplicity and variety of innate actions and reactions (11).

Spiritual health is the only force that harmonizes the physical and spiritual dimensions and is identified by such characteristics as stability in life, peace, as well as close relationship with God and society (12). When spiritual health endangers, the likelihood of behavioral disorders increases (13). Therefore, spiritual health is the core of human health, and its improvement can be one

of the appropriate ways to adapt to problems (14). Spiritual health enables human beings to understand meaning and purpose in life through communication with the superior power and attention to one of the most important aspects of human existence (15).

Today, human beings have achieved a wide range of welfare facilities in the field of science and technology; nevertheless, this development has not been able to bring them the ultimate and desirable peace (16). The findings of the present study demonstrated that the bureaucrats of the oil company are an obstacle to the fulfillment of some of the needs of the people, including the development of social infrastructure and civic institutions. Through proper education and information dissemination, these institutions can enable people to participate in decisions and projects that bring about fundamental changes to their lives. Peoples' nonparticipation establishes a kind of social disintegration and targets the political culture and spiritual health of citizens.

Kharg Island, as the location of the most important oil facilities in the country, is a gathering place for employees from all over the country and from different ethnic groups and tribes in order to achieve a national goal. In this regard, the capacities of this organization, including its bureaucratic capacity, must serve the national interest, the most important of which is social cohesion. Nonetheless, nowadays, the existing sense of discrimination sometimes causes conflicts and tensions among members of society and even various oil companies which may lead to adverse consequences.

Therefore, it seems necessary to reform bureaucratic structures simultaneously with cultural approaches (17). Political culture is the product of the collective history of a political system and the lives of the people who built it. The political culture of every nation stems from peoples' experiences of political processes (18). The improper functioning of a bureaucratic organization affects people's views on politics, society, government, political system, ethics, and spirituality. Furthermore, it harms the spiritual

health and social cohesion of people or makes them indifferent about the fate of society.

The disintegration of social cohesion provokes political and social violence in the society which is a serious threat to human health. Due to the importance and sensitivity of the Kharg region, the occurrence of such events can be more harmful, compared to other places. Therefore, it is necessary to strike a sufficient balance among the organizations by strengthening civil institutions in an effort to prevent any serious damage to the ethics, spirituality, and social cohesion of the people.

### Conclusion

The assessment of the cultural, economic, and social consequences of the oil company bureaucracy for Kharg residents revealed that the vast and unwieldy bureaucracy of this company allows it to influence the legislative and implementation process, as well as the allocation of resources. Consequently, it affects the behavior and mentality of people, brings a sense of institutionalized discrimination and, reduces spiritual health, and disintegrate the social cohesion of society. Therefore, it is necessary that these adverse effects be prevented by appropriate measures.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest regarding the publication of the current article.

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## همبستگی اجتماعی و سلامت معنوی آسیب دیده: توضیح اثرات بوروکراسی ترمینال شرکت نفت خارگ بر زندگی ساکنان بومی

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### چکیده

**سابقه و هدف:** نفت خام مهم‌ترین محصول صادراتی و رکن مهم اقتصاد کشور است. بخش عمده صادرات نفت ایران از پایانه نفتی خارگ صورت می‌گیرد که انجام آن مستلزم استقرار تأسیسات عظیم نفتی و نهادهای دیوان‌سالار مرتبط با آن در جزیره خارگ می‌باشد. صرف نظر از منافع این مهم بر اقتصاد کشور، بررسی پیامدهای آن بر حیات مردم جزیره در ابعاد مختلف ضروری است. در این راستا، مطالعه حاضر با هدف تبیین پیامدهای فعالیت‌های دیوان‌سالارانه آن در ابعاد فرهنگی و اجتماعی از دیدگاه صاحب‌نظران انجام شد.

**روش کار:** در پژوهش کیفی حاضر از طریق مصاحبه‌های عمیق نیمه ساختار یافته با افراد کلیدی مطلع و صاحب‌نظر که براساس برآورد پژوهشگران دارای بیشترین اطلاعات درباره موضوع پژوهش بودند، دیدگاه‌های ایشان درباره موضوع پژوهش دریافت شد و در ادامه، داده‌های به دست آمده با استفاده از روش تحلیل محتوای کیفی بررسی گردید.

**یافته‌ها:** پس از تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌های مصاحبه، کدهای اولیه استخراج شدند که پس از پالایش و طبقه‌بندی آن‌ها، ۲۴ مفهوم شناسایی گردید که این مفاهیم در نهایت، در ذیل پنج مقوله قرار گرفتند. بر این اساس، کاهش سلامت معنوی و آسیب دیدن انسجام اجتماعی ساکنان بومی خارگ، مهم‌ترین پیامد تأسیسات و پایانه نفتی جزیره خارگ در حوزه فرهنگی و اجتماعی می‌باشد.

**نتیجه‌گیری:** نگاه صرفاً اقتصادی و تکنولوژیک به توسعه و مدرنیته، ناقص و نارسا بوده و بی‌توجهی به ابعاد فرهنگی و اجتماعی آن، تبعات نامطلوبی را برای زندگی افراد به همراه دارد؛ از این رو ضرورت دارد که برای اجتناب از مخاطرات چنین اقداماتی، ابعاد یاد شده در نگاهی جامع و متوازن مورد توجه قرار گیرند.

**واژگان کلیدی:** انسجام اجتماعی، بوروکراسی، تحلیل محتوای کیفی، خارگ، سلامت معنوی، نفت.

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