

# Material archives; understanding urban geographies built from material circulation

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**Abstract.** The physical world is highly materialized; materials fabricate our living spaces, construct our economic and geopolitical conditions. It is the materials that define urban functionality and designs the ultimate purpose of a space. Materials have become more than how they appear to the eye, affecting not only the architecture but also other things and people around them. If one is uncertain of the visual conditions, administrative laws or social ecology on which the description and networking of a space rests. It is best to set the description against the materials and resources; the terms begin to explain themselves.

A new architecture for material circulation has been visualized by the two neighbouring countries - Pakistan and China. It is thought to challenge our existing resource system. It has been observed globally that exploitation or mismanagement of a certain high valued materials or resources have often been cited as a key factor in triggering, escalating or sustaining violent conflicts across

the globe. The purpose of the research is to explore the geographic importance and the prospects of a newly established market place under China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Such knowledge can generate perspectives on current conflicts, or obstruct the peaceful resolution of existing ones.

The architectonics of the research is strictly geographical. It defines the strategies of governance that influences urban spaces where production or distribution of material and resources is carried out. Cutting across geographies the aim is to presents circulation patterns forming global chains and networks. Perhaps, the emphasise remains, that architecture and infrastructure of cities, need to be understood in terms of protocol and systems of material.

Across the country, the public spheres of many societies have been debating upon concerns including; does the development plan between the two neighbouring territories- China and Pakistan facilitate the local community to materialise their own agendas? Which parts of the nation state will be dissected to layout the road network from Khunjerab Pass to the deep-sea port at Gwadar. Who will be among those privileged communities, to directly affiliate and benefit from this mega project? In these debates is a sense of exclusion. An exclusion which highlights, the systems that are setting up the progressive global market, have left ordinary people outside and behind much more blatantly than the academia or written knowledge could ever comprehend [[Appadurai 2001](#)]. These debates however set up a standard value of the ongoing development plan within the country. A value that is made up of postcolonial legacy. It is radically transformed and marginalised as a consequence of numerous sources involved in its development over decades. This research paper invites the reader not only to read, rather to explore familiar and somewhat unfamiliar geographies that are architected on various truth values that confront us everyday. One needs to pay close attention to the conflict of interpretation surrounding the accounts of the authorized. [[Latour, 2013](#)]

The forces that are actively participating to shape the urban geographies have committed themselves to the vision that the land they have occupied would accept them as its own. But as

Latour suggests, the laboratory is wide open for new discoveries. For better or for worse there is another reality that lies outside the frame and needs to be assembled while documenting the possibilities of China Pakistan Economic Corridor. This study focuses on a specific form of utilization and mobilization of geographic terrain, materials and resources. A form of utilization that blurs the territorial boundaries, fragments the geographies and redefines order [[Jaworski 2010](#)]. A place, as Arjun Appadurai points out, is itself the order according to which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence [[Appadurai 2001](#)]. From this viewpoint the character of a place can potentially be defined through its functionality and practical usefulness. Thus functionality can be perceived by the relation of materials in motion.

The notion of material flow and disjunction can not be logically defined in words more relevant than those of Arjun Appadurai, when he says "We are functioning in a world fundamentally characterized by objects [materials] in motion. These objects include ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technologies and techniques. This is a world of flows. It is also, of course, a world of structures, organizations, and other stable social forms. But the apparent stabilities that we see are, under close examination, usually our devices for handling objects characterized by motion..." [[Appadurai 1996](#)]. Seen in this way, the argument is divided on two grounds; it first focuses on the utilization of the material geographies that render global boundaries and their limits. These geographies provide an apparatus and have been architected as the fixed arrangements for containing the circuits of material flows. Fixed but may or may not be stable. They are fixed in terms of their location and position. Location, as identified by the coordinate systems and their position may be defined by the power configuration of the nation-state on a global economic and political scenario. The stability rests on transnational politics seeping through national borders, social integration of nation-state, and the relativity and relationship between human and material culture. The second concerns, if the architecture of a newly established market place at Gwadar can network within national politics. This question will be partially answered in the first section of the paper. But we shall be able to understand that Gwadar port has an emerging ability of becoming a member of the chaos, both political and social. It is claiming its rightful position in arranging global polarization and social reality. A

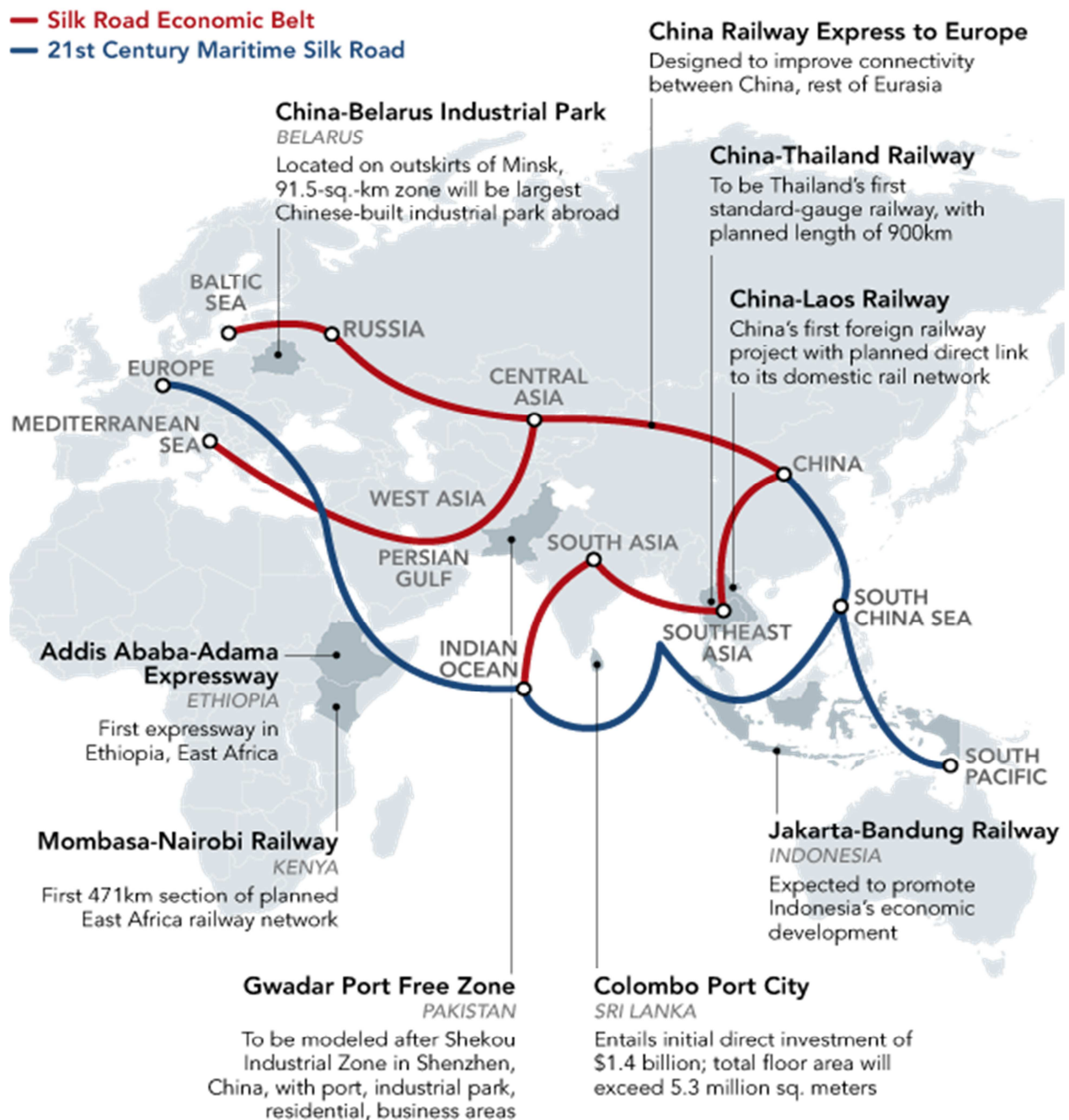
transforming social reality which is entangled in interpreting value of flow and disjunction [[Kerr 2010](#)]. The question is an attempt to see why indigenous communities see it as a threat instead of benefiting from it [[Schöttli 2016](#)]. Perceived as a point of origin and termination for material flow, can Gwadar restructure the institutional behaviour along with structuring the architecture of a society and nation.

### **Material geographies and global boundaries.**

While considering endogenous conceptions of exchange of materials, it is important to recall the ideal network of roads known as the Silk Route. Long before the world recognized a country we call China today, its people had connected the geographical lands of Asia to the Mediterranean. The Silk Route criss-crossed through regions of Eurasia, linking the East to the West. Material goods, travellers, skills and knowledge was exchanged between the great civilizations of the past through these passages. But it was particularly silk from China that attracted the buyers of the far away regions. Because of the trade of silk, a precious commodity of the past, these road circuits became commonly known to the world as Silk Route. Textiles are valuable commodities which for centuries have generated contact between cultures- through exchange of goods, as well as transfer of knowledge in terms of designs, motifs, colours and technologies involved in their production [[Simpfendorfer 2011](#)]. Textiles have been enormously influential and effective throughout the history of power and governmentality [[Joyce 2014](#), [Schoeser 2003](#)]; referring to how the peoples wore bright styles to carry their possessions and decorated their surroundings with them. Particularly in the case of silk manufacturing, the valuable fabric was only produced in China and its people had zealously kept the recipe a secret for nearly two thousand years. Two things that particularly interest us about the name of the silk route; the historic claim justifies the importance of the exclusively reserved material being extensively traded in the past. Secondly, the road stretched beyond the limitations of the land identified on the map as China. Here lies a potential of imagination that the naming of the road network was not only useful in the sense of appropriating it to the travellers. Rather spatial geographies were transformed making them appropriate to the material of flow. These well connected routes imprinted the

operations of strong powers and governance on these terrains. A form of governance reflecting to Foucault's approach in a conception of society and its relation to political subjectivity and technologies. Foucault lay emphasis on political subjectivity that would mould the life styles and physically discipline the self. His analysis is concerned with how political technologies; which are a set of practical procedures, instruments, apparatuses and measures that would physically discipline to achieve a certain goal. These technologies give meaning and stability to institutions [[Amos 2010](#)]. In his lecture series of 1977-78, Foucault claimed that government, rather than only managing is also the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed... the conduct of communities, of families,... governing in the sense means structuring the actions of others [[Foucault 2014](#)]. There is a sense of such effective political strategies and governance that existed in the past within societal relations; thus making silk the most valued and principal element of the Chinese economy for two thousand years. Even though there are deep parallels between the spatial-geographies and temporal-historical perspectives [[Warf 2008](#)]. The intention to specify the material of the past as an important economic resource is not to interpret its historic significance but as a potential of imagination through which the modern day territory can be visualised in its contemporary reality.

The routes in the modern world have evolved among a number of land and sea paths. The transformation process has given rise to new territorial boundaries and has been restructuring the leadership patterns from time to time. Recently China has planned a strategy to revive its historic culture of spatially, culturally and economically connecting the nation to rest of the world via land and seas. Under the largest economic platform in the world, 'One Belt, One Road,' China is making an investment of billions of dollars to reinstall the economic and trade relations with more than 60 countries in Europe, Asia and East Africa [[Ngai et.al 2016](#)].



Sources: Mizuho Research Institute, Chinese government data, Xinhuanet, others

**Figure 1.** Road and Belt projects initiated on geographies encircling China.  
**Source.** Mizuho Research Institute, Chinese government data, Xinhuanet.

The revival of the jointly built gas-pipelines, maritime and road linkages is inevitably a leading effort to benefit the communities beyond borders of the sovereign state. The initiative is making geographic plains and invisible territories really come alive in the face of changing geopolitics. It will enhance social reproduction by closely knitting the circuits of material and cultural flows. But what it will also do is integrate and broaden China's geopolitical influence across the region. It is interesting to think at this point that the market holds a potential value to strengthen cooperation between people and/or institutions. But how effective will the cooperation prove for those wanting to improve how they trade. Also a little more for the relativist, who still has confidence in institutions today [[Latour 2013](#)]?

Perhaps in order to understand these oscillating potential values that are being transformed and marginalized every now and then. The plan to revive the circuits of material flow might seem to be directed forward by the arrow of modern times. But is it truly modern then [[Latour 2012](#)]? Latour in his book, *We Have Never Been Modern*, defines the moderns as those who unchain themselves from the objectives of the past and step forward in order to progress. But unfolding the system of operations on these geographies and reading through the material archives the whole apparatus seem to be threatened by the notion of modernization [[Latour 2013](#)]. Within these entangled geographies appropriated under the one belt one road initiative, the materials of value remains where they have belonged in the past.

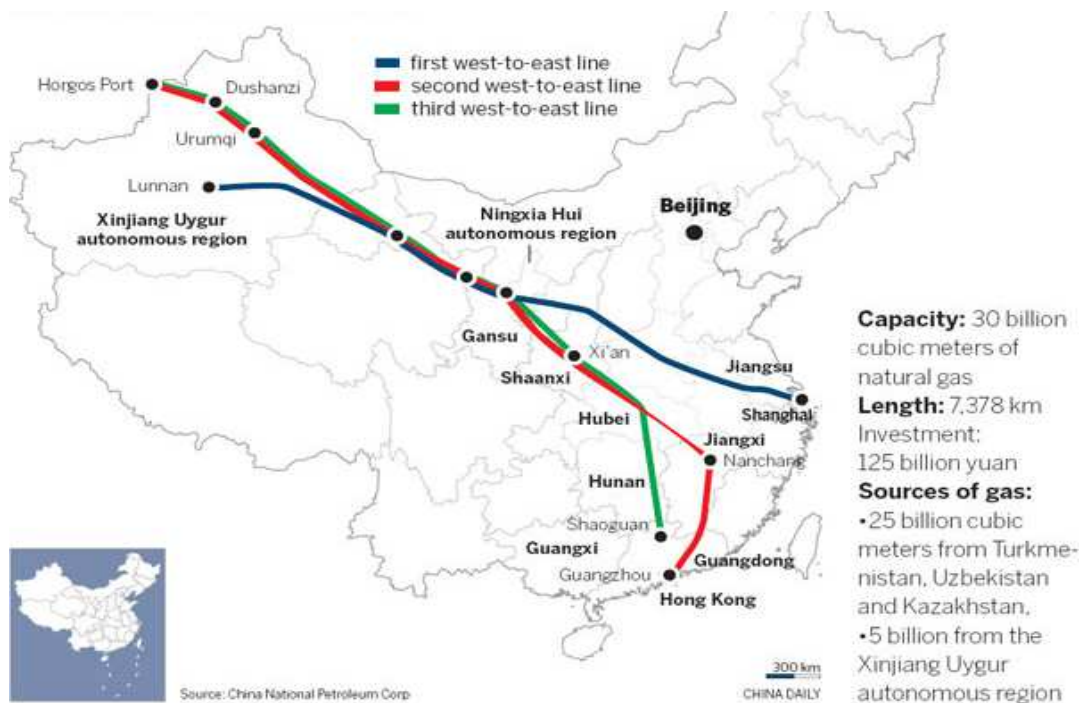
### **One belt one road projects.**

**Central Asian Gas Pipeline** is a strategic development of a 3666 Km long and 1067 mm wide natural gas supply pipe from Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to the industrialised Chinese cities. The project is operational on three different lines; Line A, Line B and Line C completed in the year 2009, 2010 and 2014 respectively. The pipes carry 55 bcm of gas annually to China. China loaned billions of dollars to Turkmenistan for developing the Turkmen gas fields after negotiating several rounds of feasibility studies of the project [[Hernandez ND](#)].





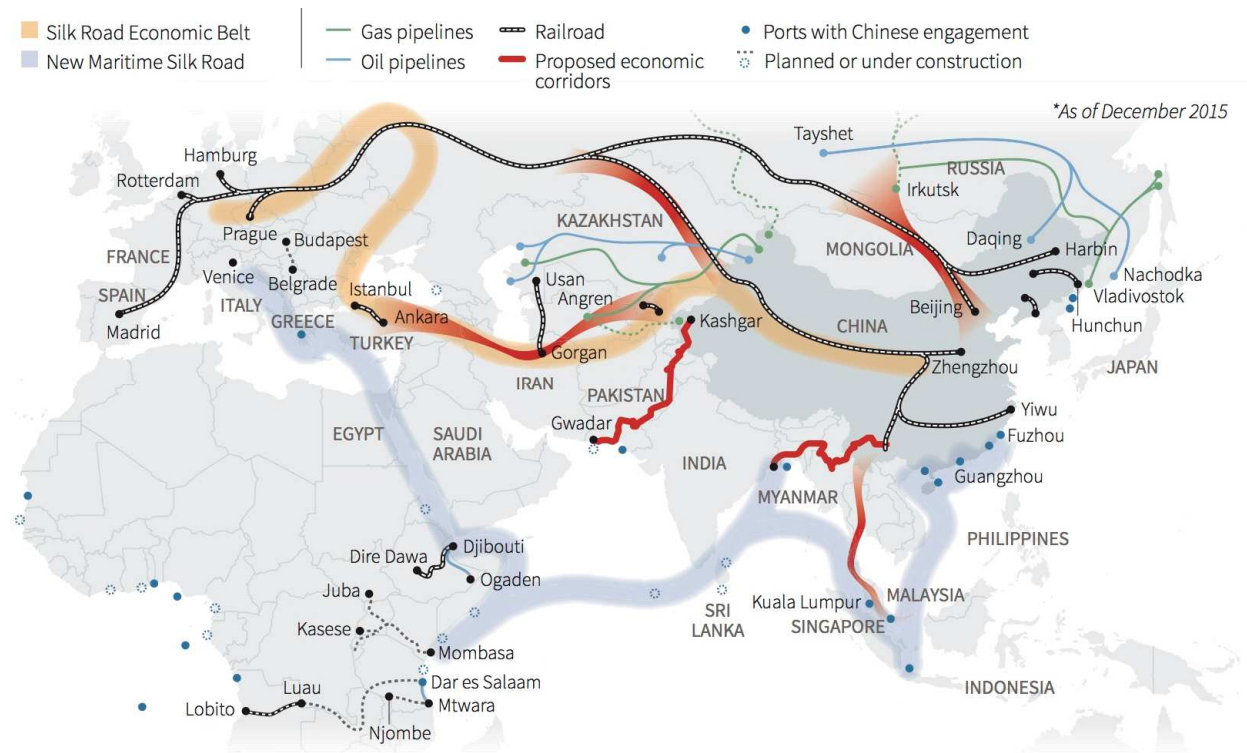
**Figure 2.** Supply route from Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to East China cities.  
**Sources.** China National Petroleum Corp.



**Figure 3.** Central Asian gas pipeline distribution network in China.  
**Sources.** China National Petroleum Corp.



**Railways to Iran and London** have been a major focus of the Chinese, with an intension to form regional integrity. Iran's geographic location provides a key access point into the Middle Eastern states. The two countries also share an economic history built on oil trade. From the Western regions of China trains travel to Tehran, en route to Khorgos Gateway in Kazakhstan, making effective the former soviet train tracks. Kazakhstan however allows for a narrow passageway into the landlocked regions of Central Asian, oil-rich Midde Eastern and Gulf States. Further away from the city of Almaty, in Kazakhstan the path forks off to London, via Russia, Poland, Germany and France [[Hernandez ND](#)].



**Figure 4.** Railways lines and ports planned or constructed under Chinese engagement.  
**Source.** Mercator Institute for China Studies.

**Khorgos gateway**, located on the border of China and Kazakhstan, the massive 600-hectare of land is expected to develop as the largest dry-port in the world. Geographically, Khorgos is the farthest land on earth from the oceans. A land which remained invisible on the map till it was

pinned down and conceived to be a crossroads between the east and west, north and south; under the Chinese Belt and Road initiative. The gateway forms a network facilitating twentyseven cities of China and linking them to eleven cities in Europe. It provides an unbeatable value for long-distance transportation of materials. The dry port is expected to stretch across and blur the political borders of the two countries with its expected target to capacitate a total volume of 30 million tonnes of material per year [[Hernandez ND](#)].



**Figure 5.** Khorgos gateway  
**Source.** South China Morning Post.

**Gwadar Deep Seaport** serves multiple objective for China. With its strategic location between three significant regions; the oil rich West Asian states, land locked Central Asian states and the

densely populated South Asian states. Overlooking the Strait of Hormuz,<sup>1</sup> Gwadar gives China the required access into Middle East as an alternative route for adjusting its supplies for oil and gas. Forming a choak point, the Strait of Hormuz rests in a close proximity between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. An estimated 40% of world's oil passes through these waters. The port also provides China with a political vantage point for survailing and monitoring the activites of India, a rising power in Asia. The borders of the city, stretching out to Iran, has been a key factor to keep China energized for reviving a former Iran-Pakistan-India [IPI] gas pipeline proposal. Now being revised and altered as Iran-Pakistan-China [IPC] pipeline [[Hernandez ND](#)].



**Figure 6.** Gwadar Deep Seaport once featured on the currency of Pakistani five rupee note [no longer in circulation].

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<sup>1</sup> Besides the road and pipeline initiative, in the South China Sea, China claim over sovereignty of the ocean areas along with the islands of Paracels and Spratlys is giving rise to the most challenged geographies in South East Asia. The chain of two islands have also been claimed in parts or in whole by Vietnam, Philippines, Taiwan, Brunei and Malaysia. In 1947 China traced the 'nine-dash line' stretching hundreds of miles south and east around the waters invoking its geographical proximity between its neighbouring countries. However the line is not defined on geographical coordinates system. But China has recently backed its claim with maritime patrols. The cause of the collision, besides other issues, is mostly the potential for a massive reserve of natural resource in the waters. Alongside, the sea is also a major oil shipping route. A third of all maritime traffic worldwide passes through the South China Sea.

### **Architecture of deep sea port at gwadar.**

Gwadar till the last decade was mostly a fishing village in the largest province of Pakistan. Being actualized into a full fledged port city by China; interested in its strategic location, the foundations of the port were laid in 2002. Its organizing and controlling duties for enabling the massive volumes of material circulation have been handed over to China till the next four decades.<sup>2</sup>

Gwadar is the place from where Pakistan wants to announce itself as an international shipping hub and energy transportation corridor for external regions.

Gwadar is further 460 kilometres to the west of Karachi making it meaningful for Pakistan from defence point of view. With its geo-strategic location Pakistan's primary objective to run the port as a 'free trade zone' has been that of planning a new Dubai which will prove to be a catalyst for social development and attracting foreign investment in the least developed Balochistan.

Moreover, the architectural advancements being visualised for the city draw up the largest development proposed in the country, after its independence. Gwadar deep-sea development plan is conceived to be advantageous for entire country through trade and commerce and bringing economic stability in the region. The port will escalate the environment of a newly emerging metropolis, unfolding and offering to make city socially permeable. But the local communities mostly resist this inexorable expansion of market in Gwadar conceiving it as a threshold to intensify external influence and multi inhabitations. They see it as a way of diluting their culture; taking away opportunities of livelihood from local communities and pushing them further to the peripheries. Fearing the influx of outsiders in the area, the settlers of the least developed province argue that such a massive development is reminiscent to a mindset dating back to British colonialism of the region; the one that built roads and railways to serve its armies [[Al Jazeera 2012](#)].

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<sup>2</sup> However, Pakistan's dream to develop the physical infrastructure of deep sea port at Gwadar is almost as old as its existence. On the recommendation of Worth Condrick, deputed by United States for survey of Balochistan coastline in 1954, the true potential of the port was realised. Focusing on its geopolitical importance, Pakistan decided in September 1958 to pay 3 million pounds to Oman for this precious land and put an end to over 200 years old Omani control [[Rizvi, 2008](#)].

Nevertheless, social densification is as much a condition as it is the outcome of the technique of power. But no form of architecture and urban quality can sustain if people do not accept the ways it conditions their everyday life [[Schmidt, 2013](#)]. The proposed development is however questioned by the local community because of the conflicting experiences and behaviour patterns that challenge their value systems and livelihood. The fishermen are among the oldest residents; but they seem to have been abandoned by the developing authorities. In early 2000's the fishermen were moved to Komari Ward from Mulla Band. The old location was vacated making room for the deep sea port [[Dawn 2018](#)]. But their location still doesn't seem to be fixed at this new place because the proposed master plan does not clearly specify or cater to the needs of fisherman. As a result, the fishermen fear that they will be forcefully displaced from their villages and their lands being hijacked. The people of Gwadar have not been able to situate themselves in the country's race for economic development, yet leave alone the social development.

If on one hand there are talks about the advancement and architectural development of the deep sea port on an international level, the local community at their new location still have not been provided with the basic amenities. Lack of infrastructure, electricity and access to clean drinking water remains a concern. Moreover, without proper educational institutes and jobs these people can easily be plugged out of the social and economic scene of this futuristic city. Unfortunately, unemployment is seen to be the foundation cause of all the problems that give rise to social degeneration. Because individual degeneration has a direct influence on social degeneration. The marginalised and compensated livelihood is resulting in either unsocial or antisocial behaviour towards the self, community and government. This intellectual game changing plan can have no restraining powers if the issues of the native are not being timely address. The government agencies also seem to have been exploiting and taking advantage of the situation because the fisherman mostly are uneducated. Scared for their lives and for their loved ones, the residents insist that government institutions and policies can not be resisted.

However four serious Baloch insurgencies and political resistance have gained momentum in the province, since the independence of Pakistan. The first one been documented right after the

partition of Indian Subcontinent from 1947 till 1950.<sup>3</sup> The remaining three took place from 1958 - 1959,<sup>4</sup> 1963 - 1969,<sup>5</sup> and 2004 -2012.<sup>6</sup> The last insurgent movement also gained international attention and it lasted longer than the previous insurgencies. Although the demands for all four insurgencies in the past were based on the utilization of the resources and land authority be given to the people of Balochistan. But the government of Pakistan has accused international influence and particularly Indian involvement in promoting and furnishing the insurgent groups [[Fazl-e-Haider 2010](#)]. Mismanagement of the resources and lack of development across the province is still breeding anger and tension in Balochistan. Communities feel being economically marginalised and are uncertain about any future developments under Pakistan and China economic coordination that will prove fruitful for the locals. If the ongoing social issues in Gwadar remained neglected and unheard, the government might face serious challenges. A similar observation from a political-economic perspective raises a question in the research paper, The Violence Trap: why do developing countries not adopt the institutional solution(s) to the problem of political violence that developed states have adopted [[Cox et.al 2015](#)]? The answer specifies that developing countries are risked with greater return problems while controlling violence. Thus political and economic reforms can never be examined separately.

From the current scenario at Gwadar it seems that the market is producing a greater wealth at the price of increased inequality. Pakistan is taking serious measures to internationally secure its position in the newly emerging market place, across the region. Beneficial and strong ties are being knot with regional powers, which are advantageous from security point of view. But its

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<sup>3</sup> The ruler of the princely state, Khan of Kalat declared Kalat as independent after partition and later acceded to Pakistan. But refused to lay down arms and resistance against army continued till 1950.

<sup>4</sup> Nawab Nauroz Khan showed resistance to the One Unit policy that decreased the representation and development rights given to the tribal areas of Balochistan.

<sup>5</sup> The Baloch separatist movement had gained momentum and insurgent base camps were installed across the tribal areas of Marri, Bugti and Mengal in Balochistan. The objective of the insurgency focused that the revenue generated from Sui gas fields should be invested in developing Balochistan.

<sup>6</sup> The Baloch political leaders presented a 15-point agenda before the government of Pakistan, demanding for greater control over the resources of the province.



local communities seem to be pushed out of the frame. Which automatically leads to a simple conclusion that the security issues have not yet been addressed. Perhaps, the intense architectural development will create jobs. But jobs for whom? Newly emerging markets must be constructed and secured under the states arrangement, by enforcing property rights, giving open access to organizations for investment and facilitating entrepreneur businesses. But Economists often interpret these pre-conditions of free markets depend on political choices; they are not natural endowments [[Cox et.al 2015](#)]. The projects seems to create and offer a one way link, all roads and pipelines leading to China. Will the development further exacerbate the polarization of material wealth and power?

**Conclusion.** In the formulation of an integrated global community witnessed today, advancements in spatial network has been an active force to precipitate and shrink the geographies. Beneath the seeming transportation grids laid out for material circulation, there in fact lies a complex, but a thoroughly formulated apparatus for political regulation and social stratification. In our world of material flows, the cultural basis of social life, economics and political systems are based on the principles of capitalism and globalized. The so called post-modern culture experienced across the globe has accelerated the pace of life; compressing time and space [[Agnew 2001](#)]. But envisaging a world alike from east to west largely rests on wishful thinking. Lets assume that people from different geographical terrains may become the subject to the same cultural stimuli, it can not be guaranteed that all the clans react in a uniformity. Moreover it is the value of materials that commands the preferences of humans. Geographical locations and places as Michel de Certeau points out are a configuration of positions [[Buchanan 2000](#)].

Over the past several decades or nearly from 1940's and onwards an irresistible and irreversible exchange of material culture and economic capital has been witnessed to globalize the world with the intention to make territorial borders seemingly less visible between societies from east to west [[Amin 2013](#)]. In recent years, along with the global material circuits an overall global order has emerged. A new dispositif for governance, a new form of sovereignty. A form of governance in



today's postmodern world, where war and insurgencies can not be separated from the basic culture of economics and politics. So to speak, violence and insurgencies, internally or externally imposed on urban geographies, determine and measure the value of materials in exchange.

While geopolitical relationships across the borders have simply become a new order which extends over the global markets. These are mostly established forces which have the potential to prove destructive for inner relationships of the nation-state. Its essence is captured in the established social reality of Gwadar. The city presents itself as an eternally unresolved duality, constantly breeding tension. Now the question arises, can the architecture of newly emerging geographies under the Chinese influence 'restore balance' between countries that are entertaining and feeding global market place? Whenever an international market is formed, resistance will be created by countries demanding to classify their position more competitively in global economic spheres. Therefore, when a resource goes out of a place there is often nothing of equal value coming back in. Part of the problem rests with strategies and tactics, built around a notion of power. These strategies and tactics are not alike for countries being classified as 'developed' and 'developing'. And developing-states lack adaptive efficiency by default. Thus, developing-states under static environments are prone to violence compared to dynamic-states [[Cox et.al 2015](#)]. Secondly, the newly assembled ports, markets, road networks and railway linkages under the process of creating demand and supply zones, are mostly places establishing niches for accommodating the excess of human growth in already existing urban spaces. So negotiating commitments among insiders is indeed a bargain of failure.

While it may be true that the One Belt and One Road initiative is the hot debate in geopolitics today. But geographical landscapes do not look the same from every angle because people are still uncertain about what the future might hold for them. This kind of uncertainty is not new in the context of China. Thus, reviving the routes in the past, the potential to produce materials of value this time might also be embedded in its local forms, but have contexts that are anything but local.

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