

Project Title:

Between Global Dreams and Local Realities: Neoliberalism, Baloch Identity and the Politics of Place in Gwadar, Pakistan.

Abstract:

I am seeking funding for two interrelated aspects of my larger research project. One, I propose to conduct 2-3 months of archival research in the India Office Libraries in London, UK on the practices of colonial governance in Gwadar; a coastal town in the Mekran region of Balochistan Province, Pakistan. Second, I intend to carry out ethnographic fieldwork in Muscat, Oman on the socio-economic networks that connect the local people of Gwadar to the Baloch diaspora in the Sultanate of Oman. The archival research will explain how the discourses and practices of colonial governance of Mekran region affected social relations and class power. It will focus on the production, during colonial rule, of a regime of representation of local Baloch people and their territory which continues to inform Federal Government's policies and political attitudes towards Balochistan. The ethnographic fieldwork will help understand how the construction of Gwadar Port is reconfiguring older networks of kinship, employment and citizenship between the residents of Gwadar Town and Baloch diaspora in the Sultanate of Oman. These two research trajectories are integral components of my larger dissertation research on the Pakistani government's attempts to develop Gwadar into a port city of international standards. The study seeks to explore how local people in Gwadar, mostly Baloch fishermen, draw on changing interpretations of ethnic identity and class solidarity to contest the state's reorganization of landownership and access to marine resources.