

Reconfiguration of interests and identities: Symbolic Politics of Pak-China Economic Corridor and Pakistani Federation

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Considering that “resource extraction is part of a regime of rule involving technologies, rationalities and institutions, made intelligible by regimes of truth that organize understanding and experience”¹, a recent body of literature at the intersection of geography, politics and anthropology asserts that these “hegemonic truths are challenged and struggled over through cultural politics”². However, in place of a fixed understanding of ‘culture’, ‘identities’ and ‘interest’ a more fluid understanding of these theoretical categories is advocated to make sense of not only material but symbolic relevance of struggles pivoted around interests and identities.

By putting in conversation political ecology of resource politics, subaltern theory of subject formation, and politics of federalism in Pakistan, this paper seeks to answer the following questions about Pak-China Economic Corridor (PCEC): 1) What is the regime of truth mobilized to legitimize PCEC? 2) What kind of reconfiguration of identity politics among different interest groups (ethnic, sectarian, juridical) PCEC necessitates? 3) What are the implications for the federal structure of Pakistani state?

Using the critical assumptions of interpretive methodology that material world could be only studied through the subjectivities of human actors and social contingencies, the paper mobilizes policy statements, individual and party positions expressed through print and electronic media to argue that PCEC offers a power context in which major ethnic identities will be internally reconfigured and externally re-aligned to maximize their interests. This will offer some serious challenges to the federal structure of the state. The responsibility of academic research is to foresee and provide theoretical tools to meet the challenges ahead of state and society in Pakistan.

¹ Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 145.

² Amita Baviskar, “For a Cultural Politics of Natural Resources”, *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, no. 48 (2003): 5051