

LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Yazīd: Configurations of the Self around Interests and Identities

Abdul Aijaz

Indiana University Bloomington

Abstract:

In this paper, I argue that in resource struggles neither subject nor object is fixed with natural and essential qualities; rather they are potentialities which are materialized co-constitutively in the process of struggle. In this way, struggle is simultaneously internal, as it involves reimagining interests and identities, and external, as it informs the actions and processes which reconfigure the material articulations of the contexts. The three processes – identity, interest, struggle – are simultaneously instantiated and co-constituted. Most political ecological narratives frame resource struggles within an already totalized nature, presupposing the structural totality of capitalist production and appropriation, taking interests and identities as fixed and pre-given, and emphasizing the material use and nature of the resources at the expense of their symbolic value. Alternatively, the cultural politics of natural resources emphasizes the specificities of each struggle and ethnographic approaches to understand the everyday ways in which interests and identities are (re)constituted and the narratives of struggles are (re)framed. This paper adds to cultural critiques of political ecology first by providing a theory of subject-formation in the context of struggle building on existential phenomenology of Jean-Paul Sartre, and second by making a case for reading literary texts as the sites of symbolic conflict in a move towards a nuanced understanding of resource struggles.

Keywords: Sartre; subjectivity; cultural and political ecology; water resources; Manto; *Yazīd*.

Author contact: aijaz@iu.edu

Introduction

After the Partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947, water became a material focus of the struggles emanating from a co-constitutive reconfiguration of interests and identities. This particular configuration is context-specific rather than fixed across time, space and processes. A change in context could trigger a re-configuration, or the passage of time could make it less relevant. Cultural politics allows us to appreciate the complex, simultaneous, and shifting material and symbolic nature of resource struggles through careful ethnographic studies and helps diffuse the material-symbolic binary. However, in addition to ethnographic methods, cultural analyses can be enriched by building theoretical alliances with literary studies, which helps question the fact-fiction binary instantiated in most social and natural science literature. Efforts have been made in different academic disciplines, including anthropology (De Angelis 2003), history (Burton 2012; Jalal 2013), geography (Saunders 2010; Hones 2014), and ecocriticism (Morton 2007; Nixon 2011) among others, to bridge the gap between fact and fiction for a more nuanced understanding of complex human-nature assemblages. In accordance with such efforts, I argue that close readings of literary works provide a better understanding of how material struggles are internalized through conceptual and linguistic apparatuses. I have thus approached the cultural politics of the water conflict between India and Pakistan through a Sartrean reading of Saadat Hassan Manto's short story *Yazīd*. The story provides insights into both individual and collective subject formation along the axes of available options of identities and interests.

Understanding subjectivity in the contemporary world requires paying attention to the contextual details of the everyday ways in which people negotiate their subjective identities and objective interests. 'In the times of Hindu-Muslim communal riots,' writes Manto, reminiscing about Bombay in the final years of the British Indian Empire, 'if we had to go out to run an errand, we would keep two caps with us; a Hindu cap and a *Rumi* [Muslim] cap. While passing through a Muslim neighborhood, we would wear the Rumi cap, and in the Hindu neighborhood, we would put on the Hindu cap ... Religion used to be in people's hearts once, now it is in their caps. Politics too has been reduced to caps. Long live the caps!' (1990: 392).¹ Using the metaphor of the cap, Manto draws our attention to the dynamics of everyday socio-political encounters in this violence-stricken landscape. Encounters constitute, question, reconstruct, and/or destroy the symbolic meanings not only of different caps but also the heads inside them. To navigate this communally divided and politically charged landscape requires a constant reconfiguring of one's subjective identity and a reprioritizing of one's interests. This constant contextual negotiation between interests and identities informs the constitution of subjectivity as a certain orientation to the world. In this subjective orientation to the world, subject (of identity) and object (of interest) are simultaneously instantiated and co-constituted. Subject positions are thus like the caps which people put on and take off depending on their acknowledgement or denial of who they are and where they are.

Jean-Paul Sartre helps us understand this negotiation with the help of Aesop's tale of the fox and the sour grapes. The fox, which is unable to reach the grapes, reimagines

her relationship with the grapes in a different way. In this reconfigured relationship, not only do the grapes acquire a different identity as an object of desire but also the fox herself as the desiring subject. 'It is a transformation, of the world... to live it as though the relations between things and their potentialities were not governed by deterministic processes but by magic' (Sartre 1962: 65). By reimagining the grapes as 'too green,' the fox not only reconstructs her object of desire as sour and undesirable, but also reimagines herself as a subject which does not like the too-green, sour grapes. Neither subject nor object are fixed, nor do they have certain 'natural and essential qualities'; rather they are potentialities which are materialized co-constitutively in the process of struggle. In this way, struggle is simultaneously internal, as it involves reimagining interests and identities, and external as it informs the actions and processes which reconfigure material articulations of the contexts. The three processes – identity, interest, struggle – are simultaneously instantiated and co-constituted in a given context.

Further, this process of co-constitution does not presuppose fully-formed categories of subjective identities, objective interests, and the context of struggle as pre-given and limited, instead their co-constitution is understood as emergent. The contextual realities of their interactions keep informing them and as interests change, identities change with them and vice versa. In its dynamic conception of the interest-identities co-constitution, this paper does not reify cultures and identities as pre-figured, discrete categories which serve as the axes along which people align their interests, rather, it makes the argument that identities and interests are simultaneously instantiated in the process of struggle. This articulation of identities and interests is sensitive to Baviskar's (2003) critique of political ecology literature, that this literature generally takes collective, cultural identities as pre-determined and is not sensitive to the inequalities obscured by these collective categories. A relatively fluid conception of identities and interests adds to political ecological analyses of water resources, which often fail to address theories of subject formation.

The cultural politics of water resources (Mehta 2003; Mosse 2003) draws attention to the inequalities and exclusions within the structural categories of cultural identities and pays close attention to the ways in which struggle constitutes subjects and objects as emergent. However, it does not provide a specific theory of subject formation. This paper draws on Sartre's existential phenomenology and enriches a cultural critique of political ecology by means of his theory of subjectivity. It also makes a case for using the analysis of literary texts apart from ethnographic and other methodological approaches to understand the symbolic politics of natural resources. The argument of this paper is divided into three parts. First, I outline a cultural critique of the political ecology of natural resources, which shares a theoretical affinity with Sartre's critique of some interpretations of Marxism. The second part lays out the theoretical infrastructure of Sartre's theory of individual and collective subjectivity. Finally, I provide a brief summary of eminent Urdu writer Saadat Hassan Manto's short story *Yazīd* and a contextual interpretation of the story as representative of Pakistan and India's symbolic and material struggles around the waters of the Indus Basin.

I: Cultural Critique of Political Ecology

Amitav Baviskar (2003) critiques political ecology for its economic determinism, for taking interests and identities as pre-given, and for its emphasis on the merely material use and nature of natural resources at the expense of their symbolic value. Because of its theoretical lineage in neo-Marxism, dependency theory, and world systems theory, political ecology's structural analyses explain local environmental phenomena within and through global capitalism. These analyses share a theoretical tendency in Marxism called 'economism' (Mouffe 1979). Economistic interpretations of Marxist thought provide a mechanistic understanding of human history which is determined by the material relations of production that form the base of human societies. Culture (or superstructure in the terminology of the base/superstructure model) is understood as an 'epiphenomenon' which entirely depends on, and is determined by, the economic base. Social struggles are understood in terms of their economic determinations and human subjects are imagined as the 'agents' of class struggles. Thus economism in political ecology results in an emphasis on material struggles within global economic structures, in which structural inequalities are understood in terms of class logic, and culture is given less emphasis because of its being determined by the economic base. Countering this economism requires, as Baviskar argues, 'A focus on the complex material and symbolic dimensions of how 'natural resources' come to be imagined, appropriated and contested [which] enables one to move away from the dull rigours of economic determinism that dog political ecology' (2003: 5051). Similarly making his case for a cultural politics of water resources, David Mosse (2008) writes, 'For the study of water, what is now needed are regionally and historically explained cultural ecologies of water; that is to say, approaches to studying water that overcome the kind of dualistic thinking that confines water resources (and especially irrigation) to an economic-technical domain. We need to look at water, water harvesting, water distribution, and water use as an ecological-institutional whole, overcoming the separation of the technical/economic, the political and the cultural spheres' (940).

Resource struggles do not merely stem from scarcity or abundance of a specific biophysical bundle of a resource but equally stem from, and are contested in, a symbolic economy of meanings. This symbolic economy of meanings connects identities, interests, strategies and notions of rights. A particular alignment of different interests, subjectivities and cultural identities depends on the spatio-temporal context of a given struggle and informs the collective action or strategy of the actors involved in it. This collective action or strategy mobilizes a combination of different sets of significations—e.g. interests, identities, rights, solidarities—from the plurality of options available within a given cultural and material landscape. Apart from the program or intended collective action, and confrontations and alignments stemming from it, it is necessary to pay attention to the 'everyday ways in which conflict is negotiated, deflected or pre-empted. The absence of conflict may indicate not harmony, but 'symbolic violence' when relations of domination are transfigured into affective relations through socially inculcated beliefs' (Baviskar 2003: 5054). Whereas the political ecology of water resources captures the materialities of

violence, it is less sensitive to 'symbolic violence' which can only be understood within the political economy of cultural signification and meaning-making.

Although the cultural politics of resources draws our attention to the contingent natures of interests and identities and the symbolic nature of the struggles, it provides very little theoretical guidance concerning how individuals acquire a specific subject-position and the consequent interests and identities in the process of struggle; that is, it does not provide a theory of subject-formation. Further, because of the emergent nature of the struggle, actors, and interests, ethnography is considered the only approach that can do justice to the particularities of the struggle in each context. As Baviskar (2003) argues, 'While cultural politics shares political ecology's commitment to understanding the asymmetric workings of power, it has a greater appreciation of the complex and contingent conditions under which people make history. Ethnography provides the tools best suited to represent that contingent process' (5053). This paper makes two theoretical contributions to the cultural critique of the political ecology of natural resources. First, it theorizes the process of subject formation in the process of struggle, building on Sartre's notion of subjectivity, and second, it makes the case for the use of literary texts as the site of symbolic struggles around resources which could add to the ethnographic studies of resource struggles. Using literary texts along with the material struggles and concrete histories provides a more nuanced understanding of the processes through which human beings make and remake the world that they live in.

II: Sartre and the question of individual freedom and collective action

Jean-Paul Sartre's theory of subjectivity in particular can enrich this cultural critique of the political ecology of natural resources because both these theoretical formations contest and critique certain versions of Marxism. In his Rome lecture titled 'Marxism and Subjectivity,' the question Sartre tries to answer is 'whether the principles and truths that constitute Marxism allow subjectivity to exist and have a function, or whether they reduce it to a set of facts that can be ignored in the dialectical study of human development' (2014 [1961]: 89). He was reacting especially to Lukács's interpretation of Marxism, which located agency in economic structures and framed human beings as the 'representation' of those material conditions. Instead of imagining human *beings* as the product and representation of the structural totality, Sartre imagines human *becoming* as a process of perpetual totalization without totality, which includes non-knowledge as its constitutive part.

What is this perpetual totalization and how does it work? Sartre (2014 [1961]) asserts that Marx understands man as 'a dialectic with three terms: need, work, enjoyment' (91). Need is something which arises inside the body but connects it with its immediate surroundings. It could be understood as an exteriority inside or an interiority outside. To satisfy these needs, human beings engage in work to appropriate that which they need, and this in turn produces enjoyment. 'The three elements form a kind of explosion of the self into 'outside being' and, at the same time, a return to and re-appropriation of the self... a self, which denies and goes beyond itself while conserving itself' (92). This theory of subjectivity imagines the human body as a dynamic site of material transformation

brought about by interests, desires, and needs, which are to be realized (or not) through work. The aspirational self is a futurity that negotiates the past and present of the self in the process of work (struggle). So, as much as our human subjects determine their needs and interests they are also determined by them. Since the totality of existence cannot be known in advance, non-knowledge is a necessary condition for human subjectivity and hence a perpetual totalization, a perpetual becoming. Sartre argues that this totality is never completely scripted in advance, which then ordains human actors to play their roles in the structural drama of 'objective totality'. The actors script the play of human history as much as they are scripted in it. 'In the course of struggle, the subjective moment, as a way of being inside the objective moment, is absolutely indispensable to the dialectical development of social life and the historical process' (111). The world materializes in between the subjective and the objective, the material and the symbolic, the being and the consciousness. Sartre allows us to go beyond binaries and pay attention to the context of this materialization in which subjects are transformed into objects and objects into subjects.

The itinerary of this notion of subjectivity in Sartre can be traced back to his earlier work *Being and Nothingness* (1956) [1943], which provides the fundamental theoretical groundwork to understand the process of individual subject formation and freedom, and his later work, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (2004) [1960], which provides insights into the formation of social groups. Denying the existence of any 'transcendental ego' distinct from the material self of the individual, Sartre explains the process of subject formation through the interconnected concepts of 'being-in-itself' and 'being-for-itself'. Being-in-itself refers to the material self, which has two aspects. First, it has its own material identity characterized by the specificities of its age, color, shape etc. Second, it is informed by the context it is part of, which works as a referential system spatially and culturally locating it in the world. Being-for-itself, on the other hand, is the consciousness of this material being. The materiality and facticity of the being-in-itself is an important factor in the shaping of being-for-itself, yet the latter has relative freedom and an existence of its own. It makes sense of the being-in-itself by constantly aligning its different aspects together to consider it as a whole geared towards a specific project of one's life. The constitution of the being-in-itself mobilized in the consciousness of the being-for-itself is dependent on the specific project that the subject aspires to achieve. This connects the aspirations of the self with the facticity of the being-in-itself. Temporally, it connects the past of the self with the future, where the present becomes the ground in which this being and nothingness are negotiated. The process of the creation of being-for-itself, then, is a creative process of simultaneous production and negation. It is a continuous process of aligning one's identity with one's interests, connecting the past with the future through the present. This is where, Sartre contends, freedom of the self lies.

Being-in-itself and being-for-itself are simultaneously and co-constitutively instantiated; subject and object are two sides of the same coin. The for-itself temporalizes itself in the in-itself as 'flight towards ... an impossible future always pursued where the for-itself will be in-itself-for-itself' (Sartre 1956: 472). This impossible project of having a fixed identity, unchanging and completely given, Sartre terms as the 'fundamental project'. Temporally, it means collapsing the past and future together into the present moment.

The impossibility of the fundamental project is made tolerable through ‘bad faith,’ which is the desire to achieve the fundamental project through the specific project of one’s individual life.

The social part of the being is explained in Sartre’s idea of ‘being-for-others.’ The internal struggle to make sense of the being is complicated by the presence of others. Others have the potential of objectifying the ‘self’ with a mere look. The consciousness of the others’ consciousness of the self necessitates the creation of solidarities where different ‘selves’ with similar projects, identities, or interests group together against the perceived ‘other.’ As the process of formation of the self, explained in the idea of being-for-itself, is a constant negotiation and never complete, so is the process of the creation of a collective self.

Further, in his analysis of social formations, Sartre argues that general human conditions are characterized by scarcity (2004 [1960]: 125). Scarcity here is not necessarily material scarcity; it rather represents a distance between what human beings have and what they desire as ‘we ourselves produce new forms of it as the milieu of our life’ (124). This creates the possibility of human history. It is not just what tears us apart as in conflicts and wars but also that which brings us together, creating solidarities. Sartre’s analysis of the social is completely an extension of his analysis of the individual self. The production of social solidarities creates the collective being-in-itself. This collective self aligns its being-in-itself with being-for-itself through specific project or the objectives it aspires to achieve. As the individual specific project produces unintended results as a necessary and contingent condition of its materialization, so does the social project. This materialization of human praxis produces counterfinalities (183) as the unintended consequences of social praxis, along with finalities or intended results. These counterfinalities become part of the being-in-itself (the material self) of the collective or social. Sartre calls this social being-in-itself the ‘practico-inert’. This practico-inert progressively writes the world as the phenomenological expression of a ‘free will’ of the social, and conditions the human praxis in such a way ‘that human beings become a product of their own product’ (Sherman 2003: 180). The dialectic between practico-inert and social praxis is governed by the ‘interest,’ which Sartre defines as ‘being-wholly outside-oneself-in-a-thing in so far as it conditions praxis as a categorical imperative’ (Sartre 2004 [1960]: 197). These interests are to be shared with some and to be denied others. This creates the context of struggle on the one hand, while on the other hand it creates individual identities, group solidarities and social exclusions. In such a framing, agency is diffused across different actors in the process of struggle and the material context of the struggle itself becomes an actor insofar as it conditions social praxis as practico-inert. In the next section, I elaborate on this theoretical understanding by providing a contextual interpretation of Manto’s short story *Yazīd* in the context of the Partition of India and the subsequent struggles of Hindus and Muslims around interests, identities, and resources.

III: *Yazīd*, an expression of symbolic violence

Acclaimed Urdu writer Saadat Hassan Manto wrote *Yazīd* in 1951, when the newly formed independent nation-states of India and Pakistan were on the verge of a war over the issue of water. I use the contextual interpretation of this story to understand the twin social projects of the creation of Pakistan and the Partition of India, which brought together certain sections of the Muslim population in India to assert a collective Muslim self and aspire for an independent political identity and a state of their own. At the same time, the story provides insights into the process of individual subject formation within the larger social context of the immediate aftermath of the Partition and the violence which it generated. Through the materialization of the social project of the creation of an Islamic state and its counterfinalities, the Muslims of the subcontinent become ‘a product of their own product.’ The title of the story ‘*Yazīd*’ hints at equally intense symbolic struggles to reorient the individual and collective identities within the material realities of the Partition, violence, and its aftermath. Before going into the analysis of the story, I offer a snippet of the history of the Partition of the subcontinent, an equally brief introduction to Saadat Hassan Manto, and a very short summary of the story.

Yazīd is set in the socio-political context of the aftermath of the Partition of British India into the separate states of India and Pakistan at the time of its independence in 1947. The anticolonial struggle had gained momentum at the start of World War II; however, the two major political parties, the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress, had drifted further apart in their ideologies and aims. The Muslim League positioned itself as the champion of the rights of the Muslim community in India while the Indian National Congress ostensibly represented the secular national interest of all Indians; however, a majority of its membership came from the Hindu community, who also make up a majority of the population of the subcontinent. The political chasm between the two parties also resulted in increased tension between these two largest religious communities of India, at times erupting in communal violence. Unable to negotiate a political, constitutional future for undivided India, the major stakeholders agreed on a proposal to partition undivided India into the independent states of India and Pakistan (Ali 1967; Sayeed 1968; Jalal 1985). The hastily and arbitrarily drawn borders left communities stranded on the ‘wrong side,’ precipitating the forced migration of around fourteen and a half million people (the largest in history) and resulting in enormous and devastating outbreaks of communal violence in which an estimated two million people were killed (Khan 2007; Zamindar 2007; Jalal 2013).

Saadat Hassan Manto himself had to migrate to Lahore from Bombay as the communal tensions there increased. Although born and raised in Punjab, Manto had relocated to Bombay, seeking work in the burgeoning center of the Indian cinema industry, in the 1930s. Growing up in a political landscape rife with colonial brutality and anticolonial struggles, Manto could not keep himself away from politics. ‘Bristling with anti-British sentiments but skeptical of the Congress and Muslim League leadership, he was captivated by the popular folk hero Bhagat Singh, a radical young Sikh hanged by the British in Lahore in 1931 for killing a police officer and hurling a bomb in the central assembly’ (Jalal 2013: 34). At the time of the Partition, Manto was in Bombay and experienced firsthand one of the bloodiest episodes of communal violence in human

history. His stories depict the horror, cruelty and utter abjection of the Partition and the ensuing communal violence and migration. His heartfelt, organic, and unembellished narrations of the horror of the Partition earned him the title of ‘the undisputed master of the Indian short story from Salman Rushdie’ (Daiya 2008: 55).

Yazīd opens with a curt reminder of the violence of the Partition: ‘The riots of 1947 came and passed like a few days of a really bad spell in otherwise normal weather’ (Manto 2005: 2075). Karīm Dād, the protagonist of the short story, experienced this violence along with the others in his village, which now fell in the Pakistani part of the subcontinent. Many people were killed, including Karīm Dād’s father and brother-in-law. Whereas other people lamented their loss, Karīm Dād had accepted it as a fact of life without making much fuss about it. Thus, even though the memories of violence and loss were still fresh in the minds of the people, he decides to get married. In this somber atmosphere of loss and mourning, his wedding procession is awkwardly incongruent. People perceive his wedding as if it were a wedding of ‘ghosts’ and not of real men. As if the direct violence of the Partition were not enough, the news arrives that ‘the enemy’ is stopping the water of the rivers irrigating the farmlands in Pakistan. This constitutes an act of indirect violence, and the people of the village try to wrap their heads around the intentions of the enemy and the consequences of this act. Sitting together and contemplating on the situation in the village *chaupaḷ*—an informal gathering place for the village’s men—people make sense of the act in different ways. Most of them think that the act is sheer meanness and abject cruelty; a *Yazīd*-ness. In one such discussion about Indian intentions in stopping or diverting the rivers, Chaudhry Natho—a village headman—curses India. Karīm Dād, having had enough of the curses, bursts into angry protest. Karīm Dād justifies his position by arguing that they should not waste their emotional energies on a worthless, meaningless act of cursing the enemy. It does not do any good. Further, invoking morality in the violent struggle is not a good strategy at all. As he leaves the village gathering and goes back to his home, he finds out that his wife has given birth to their son. With the discussion at the *chaupaḷ* still echoing in his head, he names his son Yazīd. Jīnān, his wife, cannot fathom why her husband names their son after a person who was cruel to the family of Prophet Muḥammad. Responding to the bafflement of his wife, he says ‘he needn’t be the same Yazīd. That one had stopped the river; this one will release it’ (2085). There is a lot packed in the title of the story. Yazīd is generally known as a villain in Muslim history, because in a war of succession for the seventh century Umayyad Caliphate, he sent an army to attack and besiege the Prophet Muḥammad’s grandson Ḥussain. The battle took place in the desert of Karbala in modern day Iraq during the Islamic month of Muḥarram. Yazīd blocked Ḥussain and his family’s access to the river Euphrates, the only source of water in the otherwise burning desert. He denied food and water even to the women and children in Ḥussain’s company. The heavily outnumbered army (72 against 5000) was finally captured and killed on October 10, 680 CE (i.e. Muḥarram 10, 61 AH of the Islamic calendar) (Aghaie 2005). Ever since, ‘the name Yazīd typically functions as a metonymy for un-Islamic and tyrannical rule’ (Bruce 2015, 9).

The story provides insights into the material and symbolic struggles around the Partition of India and its aftermath both at the individual and collective level. Returning

to the notion of the co-constitution of interests and identities, I argue here that social struggles are material as well as symbolic, that is, they are simultaneously fought out in both material and discursive domains. The idea of Pakistan as an independent territorial space for the Muslims of the subcontinent can be understood in this context. This material struggle is around territory—implying related material struggles of resources, privileges, and so on—whereas the discursive struggle is around a separate monolithic Islamic identity of a set of the population within the subcontinent, which believed it had the right to independent self-governance. This idea of a singular Muslim identity in the subcontinent has been questioned by scholars like Ayesha Jalal, as it was contested at the time leading up to the Partition by the All India Congress. Jalal (2000) points to the fact that the Muslims of the subcontinent had multiple frames of identity, and that there was no singular Muslim notion of the social self until it was created as part of the anti-colonial struggle. Although it is true that there were always multiple categories of subjective and collective identity available to Muslims in the subcontinent, increasingly a singular and unified Muslim subjectivity was generated by positioning the Hindu as its ‘other.’ The creation of the Hindu as the other (the third person in Sartre’s analysis) allows in turn for the possibility to materialize social solidarities among the otherwise differentiated Muslim populations of the subcontinent. Importantly, this singular Muslim identity was also predicated on the material struggles around resources and power. The production of a social or collective ‘being-for-itself’ was achieved through a creative negation of difference within the Muslim population and creative construction of a facticity of the difference with the Hindus. The social ‘being-in-itself’ was posited as the ‘other’. Tahir Kamran (2007) makes a similar argument when he asserts that Muslim identity within Pakistan was historically based on three things: Islam, Urdu, and Hindu as the other. This is the simultaneous affirmation of certain ‘facts’ of the self and negations of the others, both of the Muslims and of the Hindus who are co-constituted as mutually exclusive subject positions.

The materialization of the project of Muslim nationalism, like any other social or individual project within Sartre’s theoretical framework, was bound to create counterfinalities. The materialization of the idea of Pakistan had its consequences too. The Partition and the accompanying violence were not intended until very late in the series of historical events that led to the independence of India, however, they became part of the intended in the final equation. The arbitrarily drawn international boundaries materialized a territorial political state which did not match the expectations of the Muslim leaders. The people who in the final years of British colonial dominion had decided to support the idea of Pakistan were aligning their own selves in these social struggles. They were forced to emphasize a particular (religious) identity (even if, at times, it was a highly contested one) in order to be part of the social collective. Manto himself was forced to migrate to Pakistan for fear of communal violence. The violence that ensued only narrowed and concretized people’s communal identities until the primary distinction that remained in this context was merely between who they were to defend and who to attack. The markers of identity which came to matter in the violent struggle for territorial sovereignty had not meant much to their notion of themselves outside of this struggle. This is the point where human beings become a product of their own praxis. The praxis of Partition materializes into the

‘practico-inert’ of a landscape replete with the material and symbolic memories of violence and heightened identities based on ‘othering’ of the enemy.

After the Partition, the co-constitution of identities and interests materialized in struggles around water. Water became a new rallying point for collective identity and interests simultaneously. The Partition plan did not provide a specific formula for the division of the waters of the rivers and canals which the two new countries shared. Although the representatives of the two countries agreed that ‘there would be no interference whatsoever with the then existing flow of water’ (Ali 1967: 320), there was no written agreement to that effect. To settle disputes between the two countries that arose out of the partition, an Arbitral Tribunal was organized. In the reconfigured geography of the subcontinent after the Partition, India became an upstream country with the strategic advantage of being able, through a system of dams, to ‘turn off the tap’ to Pakistan if it wanted. On April 1st, 1948, the Arbitral Tribunal ‘ceased to exist... water was shut off from Pakistan canals on which the irrigation of 1.66 million acres depended’ (ibid). That same year, the Delhi Agreement was signed between the two countries under which ‘Pakistan agreed to pay India seigniorage charges which India claimed for transporting water through canals on its territory’ (Alam 1998: 80). A final solution, however, was not reached and conflict continued to simmer under the surface of the apparently calm waters of India-Pakistan relationship. The issue appeared so grave that David Lilienthal (1951) called it a ‘powder-keg’ within the larger volatile political and security landscape of Kashmir conflict and the cold war. On September 6, 1951, World Bank President Eugene Black wrote to the prime ministers of India and Pakistan ‘offering the good offices of the Bank’ to mediate the dispute. On August 19, 1951, Pakistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a communiqué stating that India intended to ‘divert supplies of water vital to Pakistan.’ This was the historical context in which Manto’s *Yazīd* was written, on October 14, 1951.² More importantly, Manto wrote it on the 13th of Muḥarram,³ which meant that both imminent war with India and the rituals of remembering Karbala in Lahore imbued the material and symbolic backdrop of its writing.

The narrator of the story takes us into the world of *Yazīd*, where the threat of war looms large over the people’s heads, and the memories of the Partition violence are still fresh in their minds. Rumors are circulating that “the enemy”—India is so overdetermined in this position that its name is not even stated— is going to stop the waters of the rivers, and people seek catharsis of their frustrations and fears by cursing the enemy. However, Karīm Dād thinks that by doing so they are wasting their energies on a futile act; he would prefer physical rather than symbolic retribution. Although hurting the enemy materially does not seem a practical possibility in the story, it gives an impression of how memories of violence inform the ‘free choice’ of the individuals of their projects and create a landscape of symbolic violence. These sentiments linger on as the practico-inert of the praxis of the Partition becomes material and invites new praxes in the face of the possibility that India might block the waters of the rivers from reaching Pakistan.

The story helps make sense of the individual’s subject formation. Karīm Dād, like the rest of the villagers, had to confront the violence of the Partition. Portrayed as a stoic person, although he lost his father—who was his only friend and parent—during the

communal violence, he has accepted this loss without a great display of grief. The violence, and the experience of the Partition, however, make him confront a situation in which he must re-think his project of life and make sense of a different context. This involves a simultaneous creative affirmation and negation of his self. He forgets the violence of the Partition and his own losses quite easily and in this way, he negates the part of his self which is jarring and painful. At the same time, his marriage is an act of affirmation of his own self, and of life and its pleasures. Despite his best efforts to move on and forget the violent past, he cannot escape the context, which is haunted by the memories of loss. He cannot escape his own self which has been determined by that violence.

Manto vividly portrays a landscape which is doubly haunted. On the one hand, there are material memories of the violence; he writes that ‘the village had turned into a vast graveyard a year after the riots,’ (Manto 2005: 2077) describing burnt houses, maimed bodies, and destroyed crops. On the other hand, Manto weaves together the material and the symbolic through his ominous allusions to Yazīd and the similarity between the current moment and the historic battle at Karbala. Manto keeps dropping hints throughout the story linking and comparing the present situation with the one Ḥussain and his family had to face. We are told that the month of Muḥarram is approaching, which explicitly connects the present threat of war with the historical battle at Karbala. Karīm Dād’s wife chides him for being happy at a time ‘when God knows what sort of Karbala will be visited upon us’ (2080), again linking the possible blockage of water and incumbent threat of conflict with the siege at Karbala. At the end of the story, Karīm Dād’s wife gives birth, and to the shock of his wife, he names his son Yazīd, which not only completes the allusion/trope of the Karbala battle but completely refigures it. Partition and Karbala, war and water, identities and interests bleed into each other and underpin the subjectivities of the people who populate the material and symbolic landscape of *Yazīd*. These hauntings are also possibilities, which negotiate their material expressions in and through the reconfigured interests and identities of the individual and collective subjectivities in the postcolonial subcontinent. And herein lies the mastery of Manto, as he portrays a site of pure potentiality which can be materialized and read in multiple possible ways. *Yazīd* could be read as a justification of a unified, monolithic Muslim subjectivity or of Muslim League politics, as Alok Bhalla (2012: 27) thinks Khaled Hasan (1997) does. It can also be read as a radical appropriation of otherness to undo any differentiations as Bhalla (2012) himself does when he argues; ‘Yazid is not someone whose faith is different from our own, but is *a part of each of us*, Hindus and Muslims alike’ (27, original emphasis). *Yazīd* can also be read as inviting an ethical commitment to the other as Gregory Maxwell Bruce (2015) does. By inviting different and often contradictory interpretations, the story performs the inherent ambiguity and uncertainty of the very historical moment it narrates. While Khaled (1997) seeks a legitimation of ‘the great divide,’ Bhalla reads it as a ‘most convincing refutation of two-nation-theory;’ ironically enough they both reify the same communal discourses which Manto holds responsible for the Partition and jingoistic ideologies of India and Pakistan. Bruce’s (2015) reading of the story as the protagonist’s heroic ‘refusal to name India as enemy, and... implicate himself in the discourse of enmity’ fails to take into account the internal evidence of the text. When a baffled Natho asks Karīm Dād, ‘What

are they to you?’ Karīm Dād replies, ‘what are they to me?... they are my enemies’ (Manto 2005: 2083). An overemphasis on *Yazīd* as a metaphor of violence results in ignoring the significance of water and the struggles around it which constitute people as villains or heroes. A closer attention to the text and the context reveals that the story is one of a stoic acceptance rather than a heroic refusal of the Partition.

In most literary analyses, the Partition and violence serve as a kind of atemporal background against which the story unfolds. It allows literary critics to conflate the distinction between sectarian and communal difference on one hand, and between Karbala and the Partition on the other to come up with equally atemporal and universal interpretations. To better understand the nuances of the story and what it says about the people and places, literary studies could profit from joining hands with history as Ayesha Jalal (2013) suggests. Paying attention to the historical details allows us to appreciate what material and symbolic struggles the text is part of. *Yazīd* provides a glimpse into the processes by which human beings become products of their own products: as Karīm Dād says, ‘whatever happened was due to our own fault’. As much as it was produced by people, the Partition and boundaries had created new peoples too, given them new identities, different subject positions, old enemies as new friends, and old friends as new enemies. Reading *Yazīd* along with *Tobā Tek Singh*, another of Manto’s Partition masterpieces, reveals the ironies inherent in the attempts to narrativize individual subjectivities into the plot of collective identity.

By naming his son Yazīd, Karīm Dād reconstitutes and rewrites his past in a revised manner in the present moment. In reconstituting his self within the available cultural grid of values, he also reconstitutes these cultural symbols. Yazīd is invoked as a reconfigured cultural symbol which combines his previous cruelty with the righteousness of a revised project: the project for the historical Yazīd was to stop the supply of water to the family of Ḥussain, whereas the project for the newly born Yazīd is to deliver water to the people of Pakistan. The material context of this struggle informs a reconfiguration of the cultural symbols and the associated identities of the actors involved in those struggles. By naming his son Yazīd, Karīm Dād appropriates the biological, material self of the newborn within the contemporary material and symbolic struggles and bequeaths his son an inheritance of struggle, interests, and identity that goes as far back as the seventh century battle at Karbala. This symbolic move clearly articulates how the past struggles bleed into the present moment of history and inform the future projects of the individuals.

The struggle between India and Pakistan over water resources continues, sixty-seven years after this story was first published in 1951. A better understanding of these struggles requires a nuanced framing which not only takes into account the economic calculus of winners and losers, or the structural logic of objective determinism, but also the symbolic and subjective orientations of the actors involved in the struggle. ‘In the course of struggle, the subjective moment, as a way of being inside the objective moment, is absolutely indispensable to the dialectical development of social life and the historical process’ (Sartre 2014 [1961]: 111). It is necessary to pay heed to the discursive and symbolic processes through which people fashion themselves as actors in the resource struggles, and the historical processes which lay out the context of the struggles. Sartre’s existential

phenomenology helps understand the intertwined nature of material and symbolic struggles.

Conclusion

The paper argues that identities and interests are mutually constitutive in the context of struggle. They are not fixed but are fluid, they inform each other and materialize into different configurations at different moments. In a given context of struggle, the mutual articulations of interests, identities, and strategies are neither entirely determined by the structural logic of economic determinism, nor completely shaped by the individual actors. A dialectic between the two creates the possibilities of human history and social development. Political ecological analyses frame their explanations of the environmental struggles within the structural logic of capitalist development. While on the one hand these narratives question the apolitical character of the Malthusian narratives of the environment (technical, ecological, developmental), they also reinscribe the nature-society binary in their structural analyses of the capitalist appropriation of nature. Nature and society thus enter into a dialectical relation fully formed, where society appropriates nature and nature subsequently conditions human development (Harvey 1982; Smith 1984). In this framework, agency rests with society alone, which is responsible for the depredation of nature under the system of capitalist production. On the other hand, within human society, human actors are imagined as the product of economic structures of capitalist appropriation, leaving little room for individual agency.

Studies of the cultural politics of natural resources make the case for being sensitive to context-specific configurations of practices, interests, and identities as a way out of the economic determinism of the literature on the political ecology of natural resources. Here, along with the material expression of the struggles, emphasis is placed on the symbolic and cultural narratives which inform, contest, and legitimize resource struggles. Ethnographies of context-specific resource struggles therefore provide a more nuanced understanding of the way the conflicts are negotiated and lived in the everyday lives of the people. However, this emphasis on the symbolic should not be understood as different and distinct from the material, as all material struggles are always already symbolic and vice versa. Because of its emphasis on the context specific analyses of struggles, cultural politics hesitates to provide a generalized theory of subject formation. In this paper, I argue that Sartre's phenomenological existentialism can enrich the cultural critique of political ecology by providing an understanding of the subject which can be theorized through and beyond its immediate practices.

Cultural analyses of human relationships to resources therefore stand only to be enriched by initiating theoretical conversations with literary studies. This connection will help understand how fictions of individual and collective identity carry central importance in the struggle around resources. Moreover, questioning the fact-fiction binary is absolutely necessary in understanding conflicts over resources. Water conflict between India and Pakistan goes as far back as the day of their independence in August 1947, and although there has to date been no armed conflict directly related to the issue of water, it continues to impact the Pakistan-India relationship. To better understand this ongoing

conflict over water between the two states requires that we take into account symbolic struggles along with material struggles. In the final part of this essay, I have approached Manto's short story *Yaẓīd*, as an expression of the struggles around interests and identities. While our identities inform the struggles we partake in, our struggles constitute us as subjects who get to acquire those identities. Karīm Dād's character helps us understand the poetics of resource struggles as simultaneously material and symbolic.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Jessie Speer, who helped co-organize literature and geography sessions at the annual meeting of AAG, 2016 at San Francisco. I am also thankful to Majed Akhter and Gwen Kirk who read and commented on different versions of this paper. Rebecca Lave, Purnima Bose and Ishan Ashutosh provided useful comments and suggestion for which I am grateful. Thanks are also due to the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful and helpful comments. The research for this paper was partially funded by American Institute of Pakistan Studies (AIPS) and a travel grant from Fulbright Foundation.

Notes

¹ This and all other translations from Urdu are the author's.

² This date is according to Manto's own annotation on the story. His struggles with alcoholism led to a rapid decline in his health and ultimately his untimely death but were also partly responsible for his prolific writing. Finding inspiration in that day's paper, he would often complete a short story in a single day in order to earn quick money to support his alcohol addiction (Jalal 2013).

³ The A holy month in Islam and particularly for Shi'a Muslims, who throughout the month commemorate the death anniversary of Imām Ḥussain ibn 'Alī with a variety of rituals and practices, such as elegiac poetry recitations and mourning processions, culminating on the 9th and 10th.

Works Cited

- Aciman, A. (ed) (1999) *Letters of Transit*. New York: New Press.
- Aghaie, K. (2005) The Origins of the Sunnite-Shiite Divide and the Emergence of the Taziye Tradition. *The Drama Review*, 48(4), pp. 44-47.
- Alam, U. (1998) *Water rationality: mediating the Indus Waters Treaty*. Durham Theses Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1053/>.
- Ali, C. M. (1967) *The Emergence of Pakistan*. New York and London: Columbia University Press.

- Baviskar, A. (2003) 'For a Cultural Politics of Natural Resources.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(48), pp. 5051-5055.
- Bhalla, A. (ed) (2012) *Stories About the Partition of India*. New Delhi: Manohar.
- Bruce, G. M. (2015). Names and the Critique of History in Urdu Literature: From Manto's 'Yazid' to Zaigham's 'Shakuntala'. *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, (12), pp. 1-19.
- Burton, A. (2012) Amitav Ghosh's World Histories from Below. *History of the Present*, 2(1), pp. 71-77.
- Daiya, K. (2008) *Violent Belongings: Partition, Gender, and National Culture in Postcolonial India*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- De Angelis, R. (ed.) (2003) *Between Anthropology and Literature: Interdisciplinary Discourse*. New York and London. Routledge.
- Harvey, D. (1982) *The Limits to Capital*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hasan, K. (1997) *Mottled Dawn: Fifty Sketches and Stories of Partition*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- Hones, S. (2014) *Literary Geographies: Narrative Space in Let the Great World Spin*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Jalal, A. (1985). *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jalal, A. (2000) *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asia since 1850*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Jalal, A. (2013) *The Pity of Partition: Manto's Life, Times, and Work Across the India-Pakistan Divide*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Kamran, T. (2007) Islam, Urdu, and Hindu as the Other: Instrument of Cultural Hegemony in Pakistan. In Chandra, B. and Mahajan, S. (eds) *Composite Culture in Multicultural Society*. New Delhi: Pearson Longman, pp. 93-122.
- Khan, Y. (2007) *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Lilienthal, D. (1951) Another Korea in Making. *Collier's Weekly*. 22-23.
- Manto, S. (1951) *Yazīd*. Lahore: Maktab-e Jadīd.
- Manto, S. (2005) 'Yazīd.' In Ashraf, H. (ed) *Kulliyat-e Manto*. Delhi: Educational Publishing House, pp. 2075-2084.
- Mehta, L. (2003). 'Context and Construction of Water Scarcity.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(48), pp. 5066-5072.
- Morton, T. (2007). *Ecology without nature: Rethinking environmental aesthetics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Mosse, D. (2003) *The Rule of Water: Statecraft, Ecology and Collective Action in South India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Mosse, D. (2008) 'Epilogue: The Cultural Politics of Water – A Comparative Perspective.' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34(4), pp. 939-948.
- Mouffe, C. (1979) 'Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci.' In Mouffe, C. *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*. London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp. 168-203.

- Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Sartre, J. (1956) *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*. Trans. H. E. Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Sartre, J. (1962) *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*. Trans. Mairet, P. London: Methuen & co ltd.
- Sartre, J. (2004) [1960] *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume I: Theory of Practical Ensembles*. Trans. Sheridan-Smith, A. London: Verso.
- Sartre, J. (2014) [1961] 'Marxism and Subjectivity: The Rome Lecture, 1961.' *New Left Review*, 88, pp. 89-111.
- Saunders, A. (2010) Literary geography: Reforging the connections. *Progress in Human Geography*, 34(4), pp. 436-452.
- Sayeed, K. (1968) *Pakistan: The Formative Phase, 1857-1948*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Sherman D. (2003) Jean-Paul Sartre. In Solomon, R. and Sherman, D. (eds) *A Blackwell Guide to Continental Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 163-187.
- Smith, N. (1984) *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space*. New York: Basil Blackwell.
- Zamindar, V. (2007) *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories*. New York: Columbia University Press.