

Voluminous States

Sovereignty,
Materiality,
and the
Territorial
Imagination

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That which Oozes

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Against the Flood

By almost any measure, 2017 was a year of unprecedented climatological catastrophe. Hurricane Harvey's devastation of Texas's Gulf Coast, flooding in the Nigerian state of Benu, massive monsoonal flooding across the northern parts of South Asia, and the impacts of Hurricanes Irma and Maria (especially in Puerto Rico) all highlighted 2017 as a year of global flooding.¹ The seeming apocalyptic impacts (and media coverage) of these events bore out a trope of contemporary discussions of the Anthropocene: the global debate over climate change is dominated by metaphors of and anxieties about inevitable catastrophic inundation. Cities are to be inundated with cyclones and hurricanes, lowland areas inundated by glacial melt, borders inundated by floods of refugees displaced by these events. Anticipatory fears of inundation thus animate imagined geographies of footloose populations, catastrophic transformation, and Schumpeterian creative destruction that await our warming world.² As Roy Scranton, writing presciently of a fictional hurricane named Isaiah, put it less than a year before Harvey's landfall, "The good news is that Isaiah hasn't happened. It's an imaginary calamity based on research and models. The bad news is that it's only a matter of time before it does."³

The implications of such imaginations of the future are worrisome to say the least and deserving of their own critique.⁴ Imaginations of catastrophic

inundation tend to write over more everyday processes of ecological and demographic change. Moreover, approaching such changes in a catastrophic register privileges particular kinds of interventions while ignoring other processes and, arguably, impeding measured and thoughtful responses to them.⁵ In this brief essay, then, I wish to pivot away from catastrophic inundation as the primary logic of the future and highlight an alternative vision of environmental transformation with equally pressing, though less dramatically apparent, implications for our understanding of borders and volume. Thinking outward from the Bengal Delta and from the India-Bangladesh border that runs through it, I propose that we train our eyes away from inundation and, instead, attend to its companion processes of climatological and border swamping. I suggest that we attend to the notion of seepage.

Toward a Damp Ontology

Seepage is a concept easily defined, if hard to contain. It refers to the percolation or leakage of fluid into or out of the ground. It pertains, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to “that which oozes.”⁶ The term itself evokes viscosity, a thickness and inevitability of movement that both bleeds through and squeezes around. It signals material instability—shifts between dry and wet and a proliferation of damp intermediary states. Moreover, it invokes a failure of containment, a refutation of claims to hermetic seals and impermeable barriers.

The hydraulic action implied in the term is an apt descriptor of processes that increasingly govern life in places like the world’s megadeltas—e.g., the Bengal, the Mekong, the Mississippi, and the Nile. Deltas are ecological *vital systems* in Stephen Collier and Andrew Lakoff’s sense of the term—sites increasingly understood as both crucial to contemporary life and vulnerable to catastrophic disruption, particularly in the face of global warming.⁷ They not only house vast swaths of the world’s population, but also critical agricultural production and ports central to the workings of the global economy. Forestalling the breakdown of deltas—therein ensuring vital systems’ security—increasingly hinges on the management of seepage and ooze. This is true whether we think of downstream siltation that threatens to clog channels and rivers, thus fouling trade routes and transportation; salt-water intrusion threatening agricultural production; or various forms of toxicity and pollution that devastate fragile delta ecologies. Seepage, in its multidimensional oozings, defines the terrain of delta management. It rejects static logics of wet and dry, and signals an inexorable refusal to be contained by human intervention. At the same time, seepage proves an apt metaphor to think through the challenges that trouble border security in a

warming world. Seepage offers a contrast to visions of inundated borderlands by framing the everyday ways that people, goods, animals, and more move into and out of such spaces—squeezing around and through nets of regulation, security, and policing. It is an interiorization of the exterior and an exteriorization of the interior. Seepage describes a movement that is not catastrophic, at least not immediately so—but rather slow, steady, and insidious.

Seepage is thus a useful concept for thinking about both the Anthropocene and the dimensionality of borders. Seepage is at once above, below, and interior to.⁸ It troubles the notion of material and temporal fixity, suggesting instead unstable states and dimensional transformations. It highlights the impossibility of containing the movements of people, goods, animals, plants, water, and toxicity with structures like fences and walls. Seepage suggests changes happening at inexorably different scales and inevitably different temporalities. If inundation is a catastrophic moment, seepage is a persistent flow—a set of small changes that might add up to big consequences. Seepage is a process, not an event. As that which oozes, seepage heralds the failures of projects aiming to produce space and territory as solid containers. It forces us to think past distinctions such as solid and liquid and instead trains our attention to the damp in-betweens.

Seepage thus prompts a different understanding of borders, territory, and borderland landscapes—one which shifts analytic frameworks for talking about land, property, and terrain away from logic defined by the dry. In a recent intervention, Philip Steinberg and Kimberley Peters propose the notion of *wet ontologies* to unsettle our understanding of terrain by “unearthing a material perspective that acknowledges the volumes within which territory is practiced: a world of fluidities where place is forever in formation and where power is simultaneously projected on, through, in, and about space.”⁹ *Wet ontologies* provoke a reconsideration of volume as a viscous space that exists dynamically, both above and below the surface. It pushes us toward a fluid understanding of socionatures, where community and ecology are always already understood through the lens of ebb and flow. Yet to think volume as *wet* might not go far enough toward unsettling our catastrophic imaginary of borders in the Anthropocene. Seepage prompts us to attend not just to liquidity, but also to intermediate states of matter—to volatile transformations between land and water and to the spaces that emerge in between. It thus unsettles our understanding of volume. It trains our eyes on the ooze, on matter and materialities that are, in Stuart McLean’s evocative words, “more uncouth than vibrant, more belligerent than companionable, more a source of disquiet than enchantment.”¹⁰

In what follows, I think with the notion of seepage to imagine a *damp* ontology: an analytic of terrain, volume, and movement which foregrounds not just liquidity, but its emergences, disappearances, and oozings. In other words, I propose that we rethink terrain as damp, and see seepage as its more-than-human logic. To see environmental and demographic change as seepage implies a terrain that is categorically shot through with, but also destabilized and transformed by, a multiplicity of flows happening at radically heterogeneous times, scales, and viscosities. As Gastón Gordillo has recently argued, terrain is irreducible to human experiences of it, even as it shapes human action within it. Human action, movement, and initiatives of control are “hindered or enhanced by the raw *excess* of terrain.”¹¹ This insight is doubly true of the material instabilities of damp space which demand, even as they categorically defy and foul up, attempts at human management and control. They persistently trouble attempts to fix space as property, agricultural land, and national territory.¹² As such, seepage points us toward an ontology of terrain that abandons distinctions between solid and liquid, instead seeking to understand space and borders as both in flux and rich with that which oozes.

Thinking Seepage(s)

The southwestern delta region of Bangladesh is a productive place to think with and through damp ontologies. A delta for two of the world’s largest rivers—the Ganges and the Brahmaputra (in Bangladesh, the Padma and the Jamuna)—it is an island landscape, a network of rivers and canals bordered to the south by the Sundarbans, the world’s largest mangrove swamp. Many of the islands’ economies and ecologies are dominated by export-oriented brackish-water shrimp aquaculture—an industry which, over the past thirty years, has itself had devastating social and ecological consequences for the delta.¹³ The islands, and their residents, are acutely vulnerable to many projected effects of global warming, including sea level rise and increased cyclonic activity from the Bay of Bengal, a reality born out in two recent cyclones that ravaged the region: Sidr in 2007 and Aila in 2009.

To the west, the delta is split in two by the India-Bangladesh border. This border has, since Partition in 1947, been a marker of both communal tension and of the cartographic and often lethal fiction that space in South Asia can be neatly parsed into Hindu and Muslim territory.¹⁴ It is the site of a border fence constructed by India which attempts to stem migration from Bangladesh and is a location of regular and often fatal violence.¹⁵ In recent years, this border has been recast in debates about climate security as a frontline of climate

change and a test case for the future of sovereignty. This is the case because, on the Bangladesh side of the border, twenty million residents of the delta are at acute risk of environmental displacement.¹⁶ The future of the delta at large, and the border that subdivides it, is regularly imagined and discussed through the frame of catastrophic environmental and social inundation (floods of migrants produced by floods caused by cyclones, sea level rise, etc.).¹⁷ Yet, these visions belie the processes that actually and inexorably are shaping community and ecology in the delta in ways that may prove more destabilizing across time and scale. These processes demand a different kind of dimensional and volumetric thinking about the delta and the border that cuts through it. The following are but a few illustrations of why.

Perhaps one of the most immediately apparent forms of material and dimensional instability in the delta comes from river siltation. Siltation has long been a central challenge for those seeking to tame and manage the delta.¹⁸ Yet, the challenges of siltation are only increasing in scope and urgency. Minor canals and major shipping channels alike are struggling to cope with alluvial deposits that threaten to transform fluid rivers into impassable muddy sludge. An important cause of this siltation is the construction of upstream dams and barrages in India of a number of major rivers that subsequently flow into Bangladesh. Most notable of these is the Farakka Barrage on the Ganges, which has long been a flashpoint of tension between the two states and an icon of the difficulty of ironing out crossborder water management strategies. The decreased downstream flow of water means that much of this silt, instead of flowing out into the Bay of Bengal, is accumulating in the delta itself, slowly strangling passageways as the silt sinks to the bottom of rivers which are no longer moving fast enough to carry it to the ocean.

The accumulation of this silt has tangible impacts that ripple beyond the rising riverbeds. In 2015, for example, the oil tanker *Southern Starr VII* sank in the Shela River in the midst of the Sundarbans, spilling hundreds of thousands of liters of toxic furnace oil into the ecologically sensitive mangroves. For weeks, laborers worked to clean the sticky goo from the mangroves and its animal inhabitants. The tanker had been traveling out of shipping channels and a protected forest zone when it foundered and sank. The reason for this was that a main shipping channel connecting Mongal and Bagerhat—two important urban areas in the delta—had become so clogged with silt that residents were able to walk and transport goods directly across the channel. The silting of the canal was due to more than just geopolitics and diminished downstream flow. More proximately, it was linked to political ecologies of the shrimp industry. Eighty-three feeder canals which flowed into Ghashiyakhali



Figure 13.1. Pumping the black ooze. Dredging in Ghashiyakhali. Photo by the author.

had been damned by shrimp farmers, eager to access the valuable water to fill their own *ghers* (ponds). This had also dramatically reduced flow, speeding the silting process. In 2015, the government of Bangladesh began work to reopen Ghashiyakhali, but when I visited in 2016, the feeder canals were still blocked. As an engineer working for Bangladesh’s Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) explained to me, “To keep a river alive, you have to always keep the flow in the canal correct. Water must run through it smoothly and quickly. If the flow of the river isn’t working properly, siltation will increase and problems will begin to happen everywhere.”

The entire region is, of course, composed of silt—much of it accumulated over millennia. Even so, managing new siltation requires massive and constant dredging in both inland waterways and major shipping channels. Dredgers fan out from the region’s main port, Mongla, and crawl up and down the channels and canals, pumping millions of gallons of silt in the form of a black ooze from the rivers and onto the banks. The fine powdered remnants of the dredging spray coat everything—trees, fields, and even the interiors of mosques and schools—often more than a half kilometer away from canal banks. It stands in pools at the mouth of dredge pipes like the one in figure 13.1. As water

evaporates from these pools, they slowly turn into muddy plains. The constant spraying of this silt onto the embankments presents its own problem—that of removal. What should be done with all the excess matter? The answers to this question are not clear. As the BIWTA's chief engineer recently pointed out, "We may be able to dump dredge spoils for one more year. But it won't be possible to manage the dredge spoils from 2018 if the deposited spoils are not removed from the dyke."¹⁹

Saltwater intrusion, another outcome of decreased downstream flow, constitutes another form of seepage and a companion process to siltation. As the volume of water flowing downstream decreases, water from the bay flows further upstream on the flood tides. The Sundarbans region has long been an area where the dynamics of downstream and upstream flow have created an ecology where the rivers contain *labon pani* (saltwater) in the dry season leading up to the monsoons. Now, the saltwater period seems to be growing in length. Many residents of the Sundarbans region told me that when they were younger saltwater would remain in the river for three months of the year, and for the rest of the time the water would be fresh. Today, they report, that ratio has reversed. Increasingly, this saltwater penetrates islands of the delta, seeping into freshwater aquifers and creating a severe shortage of *mishri pani* (sweet water) for drinking and agricultural production. Saltwater seepage from the rivers is, again, compounded by shrimp aquaculture. On islands that have been dominated by shrimp for decades, seepage from the brackish water in shrimp ghers has caused salination of neighboring land. This has transformed island landscapes in radical ways, withering fruit trees and reducing yields in adjacent fields. Arable land is increasingly covered in saltwater. The result is a brackish environment in which the salinity is palpable in the very air.²⁰ These compounding causes of salinity have called the ability for residents to farm into question.²¹ Despite increasing availability of saline-tolerant rice varieties engineered by organizations such as the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute, the steady saline seepage has squeezed agriculture and decreased rice yields in many places in the delta.

If siltation threatens to turn liquid into solid, and saline intrusion to turn sweet water into salt, river erosion offers a different set of dimensional shifts. Like siltation, riverbank erosion is the outcome of a combination of factors and has long been a feature of delta ecology. Silt from the banks is slowly washed into the river until whole banks collapse with little forewarning. People living in the delta regularly recount stories of waking in the middle of the night to find their homes being swept into the river beneath them. Erosion is yet another seeping transformation—a slow process that adds up to sudden shifts where solid land becomes liquid flowing into the river itself. Many



Figure 13.2. House perched on an eroding embankment, Mongla, Bangladesh. Photo by the author.

projections of climate change suggest that greater monsoonal flooding may cause increased erosion and subsequent environmental displacement. Erosion is insidious, particularly because it tends to most dramatically affect poor and landless families who make their homes on precarious embankments. Many of these families have been repeatedly displaced, moving from land and homes swept away in similar fashion at earlier dates.

There is an ongoing attempt to shore up island embankments in the delta and mitigate erosion. Many of these embankments date to the mid-1960s, when they were built by the Coastal Embankment Project—a massive infrastructure initiative mounted at the behest of the Pakistan government by the World Bank. The goal of this project was to make islands in the delta safe for the Green Revolution's high-yield rice varieties.²² In other words, the embankments sought to make damp alluvial land stable for agricultural production. The embankments, however, took on other functions. The burgeoning shrimp industry of the 1980s and 1990s prompted landowners to use embankments to keep brackish water *inside* islands, often by drilling holes through them to the rivers outside, a process which itself weakens embankments and makes them more vulnerable to storm surges.²³ Today, another massive World Bank project—the Coastal Embankment Improvement Project—seeks to shore up decaying embankments against erosion. The project involves repairing damaged sluice

gates and placing large concrete blocks along vulnerable embankments. Yet these attempts to fix land in a solid state are prone to ongoing seepages and a refusal of the delta landscape to remain dry. Placement of these blocks provides temporary respite from erosion, though silt continues to seep through gaps between the granite slabs, setting the stage for erosions to come.

The seeping processes that turn land into liquid can also turn it back again. Land accretion is a central hydrodynamic feature of the delta. Silt washed away from the riverbanks regularly reemerges downstream as siltation islands, or *chars*. These new islands are often unstable, but quickly accrue populations seeking to claim the rich agricultural land. The precarious nature of this land and its residents makes these islands targets for a host of climate adaptation projects.²⁴ Moreover, the disappearance and reemergence of these islands has posed a range of conundrums for political rule in the delta. For example, the hastily drawn Radcliffe Line, which divided West Bengal and East Pakistan (now the border between India and Bangladesh) at Partition in 1947, used deltaic rivers as lines of demarcation for approximately one thousand of the forty-one hundred kilometers of the new border.²⁵ Chars emerging in the midst of these rivers have been regular flashpoints in border disputes, as it is unclear to which state the new land belongs.²⁶ Such shifts highlight another seeping paradox of the border: despite efforts to fix territory through demarcating and policing, the land itself refuses to stay put, seeping back and forth across the boundary. These small-scale movements of land mirror processes unfolding at broader scales and temporalities. Here, the Sundarbans itself seeps out of India and into Bangladesh as plate-tectonic tilt causes a gradual eastward flow of the mangroves, as well as the flora and fauna within them. Though gradual, this seepage figures into speculative plans to rethink the delta space (especially on the Indian side of the border). The fugitive landscape of the India-Bangladesh borderlands itself thus refuses to be fixed in place.

These geological and ecological seepages coupled with other processes of displacement—especially the collapse of the agrarian labor market following the expansion of shrimp—have been central to producing a slow, if steady, human seepage of migrants across the border and out of the delta on both circular and permanent bases.²⁷ Migrants tunnel under, climb over, and move through the boundary. This movement reflects both long patterns of mobility in the delta, the need to find jobs, and ties of crossborder kinship.²⁸ The movement persists despite Indian attempts to block passage with constant border patrols and a floodlit border fence. The presence of Bangladeshi migrants in India has historically been both a point of tension between India and Bangladesh and a rallying point for Hindu nationalist parties within India.²⁹ It has

also been a source of what Meagan Moodie has called *demographic anxiety*—a mobilization of Hindu nationalist common sense around the figure of the Bangladeshi migrant. While such fears are often expressed in terms of catastrophic inundation, at their heart is a fear of population seepage, the gradual absorption and transformation of a Hindu nation by Muslim migrant Others. These anxieties are exacerbated by the difficulty of sorting out Bangladeshi from Bengali, and Muslim immigrant from Muslim citizen in local populations, a “crisis of the exterior in the interior.”³⁰ Such anxieties are particularly apparent in Indian states bordering and near to Bangladesh, which have seen marked violence against presumed Bangladeshi migrants in recent years.³¹ Yet, as Moodie’s work shows, this anxiety is widely dispersed throughout India, an oozing dread of polluted national identity that is concentrated and mobilized in urban spaces in the throes of rapid growth and change.

It is not only people that seep across the border. The political technologies of territory making are no better at containing fauna moving in the Sundarbans than they are at preventing people from moving across the boundary. Animals such as the Royal Bengal tiger and the giant estuarine crocodile drift through rivers and the tangled swamp network of the Sundarbans into and out of each country, posing challenges to conservation groups and occasional public spats about the national identity of charismatic megafauna. Seepage thus muddies the ongoing postcolonial project of delineating and clarifying the contours of the nation.³²

These various seepages compound each other and collectively produce movements that are steady, ongoing, and quotidian, yet have broad cumulative effects. They profoundly shape the experiences of life within the delta, but always exceed the bounds of the human.³³ Seepages are at once visible and invisible flows, constituted by remote and proximate forces, shaped by both anthropogenic and more-than-human processes. In short, seepage moves in the logic of damp ontologies—demanding that we think the terrain of both the Bengal Delta and the Bengal borderland not from the standpoint of solid and liquid, but rather from the standpoint of ooze.

Dampness of the Anthropocene

Spaces like the Bangladesh delta and Sundarbans—with their profound denial of classical categories such as wet/dry, saltwater/freshwater, land/liquid, and India/Bangladesh—beckon an analytic focused less on catastrophic events and more on seeping processes. Slow, insidious, and volumetric by nature, the analytic of seepage—and the damp ontology it entails—does not limit itself

just to the swamps and deltas of the world. Brought to the study of borders and the Anthropocene writ large, it reminds us of the stubborn refusals of landscapes to be defined and contained by political technologies of measurement and control.³⁴ Seepage trains our eyes on recalcitrant human and nonhuman processes that are constantly rewriting terrain and undercutting borders. Seepage refuses to let us think volume as a space *within* which things happen, and instead forces a reconsideration of volumetric space as itself profoundly in flux—as that which oozes.

The anthropogenic transformations of climate change urgently suggest the need for excavating a different ontology of terrain, one that is less certain about the ground upon which we stand. Rather than attending solely to the control of land, we might better set our sights on its fugitive nature, the dimensional flux into and out of liquid, its oozing seepages. Rather than fetishize the fixity of border walls, we need to understand the different trajectories and velocities of movement across them. We live in a world where we are in desperate need of analytics able to traverse terrain that is anything but fixed. Like the Bangladesh delta, the Anthropocene is shaping up to be a damp, swampy place.

NOTES

- 1 Jason Cons, "Global Flooding," *Anthropology Now* 9, no. 3 (2017): 47–52.
- 2 Joseph Masco, *The Theater of Operations: National Security Affect from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).
- 3 Roy Scranton, "When the Next Hurricane Hits Texas," *New York Times*, October 7, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/09/opinion/sunday/when-the-hurricane-hits-texas.html?mcubz=0>.
- 4 Narratives of catastrophic inundation tend to draw on classic Malthusian arguments about scarcity and coming chaos, provoking often securitized responses to and planning for a warming world. For more in-depth discussion of the manifestation of such narratives in light of climate, see Sanjay Chattervedi and Timothy Doyle, *Climate Terror: A Critical Geopolitics of Climate Change* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); and Jason Cons, "Staging Climate Security: Resilience and Heterodystopia in the Bangladesh Borderlands," *Cultural Anthropology* 33, no. 2 (2018): 266–94.
- 5 Cons, "Staging Climate Security."
- 6 "Seepage," *Oxford English Dictionary*, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/174831?redirectedFrom=seepage#eid>.
- 7 Stephen Collier and Andrew Lakoff, "Vital Systems Security: Reflexive Biopolitics and the Government of Emergency," *Theory, Culture and Society* 32, no. 2 (2015): 19–51.

- 8 Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007).
- 9 Philip Steinberg and Kimberley Peters, "Wet Ontologies, Fluid Spaces: Giving Depth to Volume through Oceanic Thinking," *Environment and Planning D* 33, no. 2 (2015): 261.
- 10 Stuart McLean, "Black Goo: Forceful Encounters with Matter in Europe's Muddy Margins," *Cultural Anthropology* 26, no. 4 (2011): 611.
- 11 Gastón Gordillo, "Terrain as Insurgent Weapon: An Affective Geometry of Warfare in the Mountains of Afghanistan," *Political Geography* 64 (2018): 61.
- 12 Debjani Bhattacharyya, *Empire and Ecology in the Bengal Delta: The Making of Calcutta* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
- 13 Kasia Paprocki and Jason Cons, "Life in a Shrimp Zone: Aqua- and Other Cultures of Bangladesh's Coastal Landscape," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 41, no. 6 (2014): 1109–30.
- 14 Jason Cons, *Sensitive Space: Fragmented Territory at the India-Bangladesh Border* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016); Sankaran Krishna, "Cartographic Anxiety: Mapping the Body Politic in India," in *Challenging Boundaries: Global Flows, Territorial Identities*, ed. Michael Shapiro and Hayward Alker, 193–214 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
- 15 Reece Jones, *Border Walls: Security and the War on Terror in the United States, India, and Israel* (New York: Zed Books, 2011); Malini Sur, "Divided Bodies: Crossing the India-Bangladesh Border," *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 13 (2014): 31–35.
- 16 Cons, "Staging Climate Security."
- 17 For example, a recent US documentary, *The Age of Consequences* (2016), showcases Bangladesh as one of the points on the map which, due to climate change, is likely to emerge as a global security risk. Commentators in the film describe displacement as a major threat to regional stability and hyperbolically—and inaccurately—describe India's border fence as "the world's first climate fence." Jared Scott, dir., *The Age of Consequences: How Climate Impacts Resource Scarcity, Migration and Conflict through the Lens of US National Security and Global Stability* (PF Pictures, 2016).
- 18 Bhattacharyya, *Empire and Ecology*; Iftekhhar Iqbal, *The Bengal Delta: Ecology, State and Social Change, 1840–1943* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
- 19 Anisur Khan, "Excavation of 83 Canals a Must," *Independent BD*, May 8, 2017, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/printversion/details/93677>.
- 20 Paprocki and Cons, "Life in a Shrimp Zone."
- 21 Indeed, a common refrain among NGOs working in the delta is that agriculture is doomed and that the delta landscape is a future ruin. For an analysis of this logic, see Kasia Paprocki, "All That Is Solid Melts into the Bay: Anticipatory Ruination on Bangladesh's Climate Frontier," in *Frontier Assemblages: The Emergent Politics of Resource Frontiers in Asia*, ed. Jason Cons and Michael Eilenberg, 25–40 (London: Wiley, 2019).
- 22 Paprocki and Cons, "Life in a Shrimp Zone."
- 23 Many people I interviewed in Gabura, a delta island where the embankments were washed away during Cyclone Aila in 2009, told me that the embankments had been made "rotten" by shrimp.

- 24 Naveeda Khan, "River and the Corruption of Memory," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 49, no. 3 (2015): 389–409.
- 25 Joya Chatterji, "The Fashioning of a Frontier: The Radcliffe Line and Bengal's Border Landscape, 1947–52," *Modern Asian Studies* 33, no. 1 (1999): 185–242; Willem van Schendel, *The Bengal Borderland: Beyond State and Nation in South Asia* (London: Anthem Press, 2005).
- 26 For example, there is a long-standing dispute over Muhuri Char on the border between Bangladesh and the Indian state of Tripura. It remains undemarcated to this day. For more on chars and border politics in post-Partition Bengal, see Chatterji, "Fashioning of a Frontier"; and van Schendel, *Bengal Borderland*.
- 27 Paprocki and Cons, "Life in a Shrimp Zone."
- 28 Sahana Ghosh, "Relative Intimacies: Belonging and Difference in Transnational Families," *Economic and Political Weekly* 52, no. 15 (2017): 45–52.
- 29 Sur, "Divided Bodies."
- 30 Megan Moodie, "'Why Can't You Say You Are from Bangladesh': Demographic Anxiety and Hindu Nationalist Common Sense in the Aftermaths of the 2008 Jaipur Bombings," *Identities* 17, no. 5 (2010): 534.
- 31 For example, in 2015, a Muslim Bengali man, who later proved to be an Indian citizen from a military family, was lynched by a mob in Dimapur, Nagaland, on suspicion that he had raped a Naga college student and that he was an illegal Bangladeshi immigrant.
- 32 Krishna, "Cartographic Anxiety."
- 33 Gordillo, "Terrain as Insurgent Weapon."
- 34 Stuart Elden, *The Birth of Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).