

My dissertation combines political ecologies of resource governance, critical geopolitics, and environmental history to analyze processes of conflict and cooperation over transboundary rivers in South Asia. Focusing on the Ganges River, my work questions the conventional wisdom that disputes over international rivers solely exist between states co-located along a watercourse. Although hydrological hazards in Bangladesh are overwhelmingly ascribed to upstream water practices in India, my work identifies enhanced vulnerability to floods, droughts, and seawater intrusion as pernicious outcomes of foreign development interventions. Once described as the “largest poorest” country, Bangladesh has been a prime target for massive infusions of foreign donor aid since its establishment in 1971. Through historical and ethnographic investigation, I document how flood control and agricultural intensification projects underwritten by foreign governments and multilateral development banks exacerbate human and environmental vulnerability to water crises in Bangladesh. This process entails physical modification of river channels, as well as institutional transformations that diminish peasant access to land and water for food production. In effect, these ostensibly pro-poor water governance and economic development programs engender cycles of crop loss, groundwater and soil salinization, diminished fisheries, and impeded navigation that are superficially indistinguishable from the effects of unilateral water withdrawals in India. I argue that these international aid programs, while purporting to facilitate sustainable development in Bangladesh, in fact perpetuate both the conditions and rationale for continued flows of aid dollars into the country.”

