Displaced Without Moving: In-Situ Climate Displacement, Delta Memory, and the Public Humanities of the Bengal Delta

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Abstract: Climate displacement is often understood after people move, yet deltaic communities may experience displacement while remaining in place. This first-conference manuscript lays the foundation for the postdoctoral project by reviewing literature, identifying gaps, and formulating qualitative working hypotheses. The proposed solution is a Delta Storytelling Framework that reads in-situ climate displacement through fiction, oral memory, testimony, documentary culture, and public narratives of the Bengal Delta. The review synthesises five bodies of scholarship: climate mobility, in-situ displacement and immobility, Bengal Delta studies, postcolonial ecocriticism and blue humanities, and public humanities. The preliminary synthesis shows that existing studies explain migration, hazard, and vulnerability well, but they less fully explain damaged dwelling, ecological grief, memory, gendered labour, and the right to remain. The study therefore proposes four testable qualitative hypotheses to be examined through close reading, narrative analysis, and concept mapping. Its application lies in developing a public-humanities vocabulary for climate justice, so the Bengal Delta can be understood not only as a vulnerable region but also as a theory-producing site.

Keywords: In-situ climate displacement; Bengal Delta; delta memory; public humanities; postcolonial ecocriticism

Introduction

This manuscript is prepared for the first conference stage of the Lincoln Global Postdoctoral and Research Associate Programme. The aim at this stage is not to present final findings. The aim is to establish the foundation of the research through a comprehensive literature review, a clear research gap, and testable hypotheses. The approved postdoctoral title is kept unchanged: Displaced Without Moving: In-Situ Climate Displacement, Delta Memory, and the Public Humanities of the Bengal Delta.

The central problem is that climate displacement is often discussed after movement has already taken place. People are counted when they leave a village, enter a shelter, migrate to a city, or cross an administrative boundary. This approach is necessary, but it does not capture every form of displacement. In the Bengal Delta, a family may still live in the same place while river erosion eats away land, salinity weakens agriculture, embankment failure increases risk, cyclone memory shapes fear, and livelihood loss makes staying difficult. In such cases, people may be displaced before visible migration occurs.

This research calls that condition in-situ climate displacement. In simple terms, in-situ means in the same place. The study therefore examines displacement while staying. It asks how literature, oral memory, testimony, documentary culture, and public narratives represent a damaged form of dwelling in which home remains physically present but becomes ecologically, economically, and emotionally unstable.

The Bengal Delta is a strong site for this work because it is shaped by rivers, chars, coasts, tides, mud, salinity, cyclones, and the Sundarbans. These are not only environmental features. They shape memory, labour, family life, language, attachment, fear, and justice. The project therefore treats the Bengal Delta not only as a vulnerable climate zone, but also as a site that can produce concepts for global environmental humanities.

Research Question OR Problem Statement

Problem statement: Climate displacement scholarship has developed rich accounts of mobility, risk, migration, and relocation. However, it has not sufficiently explained how literary and cultural narratives of the Bengal Delta represent people who remain in place while the conditions of home gradually collapse. This creates a need for a qualitative humanities study of in-situ displacement as a crisis of place, memory, livelihood, gender, water, and justice.

Main research question: How do literary and cultural narratives of the Bengal Delta represent in-situ climate displacement as a crisis of place, memory, livelihood, gender, water, and justice?

Supporting questions:

- How do Bengal Delta narratives show displacement before physical migration?
- How do rivers, tides, mud, erosion, salinity, and cyclones become active forces in narrative?
- How do memory, gendered labour, livelihood, and attachment shape damaged dwelling?
- How can public humanities translate delta narratives into a climate-justice vocabulary?

Related work

The related work is organised into five clusters. This organisation follows the first-conference need to review what has already been studied, identify the knowledge gap, and define the scope of the research.

First, climate mobility scholarship has shown how environmental change interacts with livelihood, economy, politics, and social vulnerability to shape migration decisions [3], [4]. The World Bank Groundswell report also frames internal climate migration as a major future challenge, especially through water scarcity, declining crop productivity, and sea-level rise [2]. This literature is strong because it explains movement and risk. Its limitation for this project is that it often gives less attention to the experience of people who remain in damaged places.

Second, recent work on climate-related in-situ displacement is directly relevant because it names displacement without spatial movement. Savelli, Bonatti, and Sieber argue that climate change may contribute to non-spatial forms of displacement and that this area remains underexplored [1]. This is a key conceptual foundation for the present project. However, this concept still needs stronger development through literary, cultural, and Bengal Delta materials.

Third, Bengal Delta and Bangladesh-focused work provides the environmental background of hazards, river erosion, cyclones, salinity, and internal displacement. The IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix reports that its 2025 national assessment estimated 4,955,527 internally displaced persons due to disasters in Bangladesh [5]. This confirms the urgency of the context. Yet official and policy documents often do not fully capture memory, grief, attachment, shame, waiting, and the meaning of home.

Fourth, environmental humanities, postcolonial ecocriticism, and blue humanities help read literature and culture as forms of ecological knowledge. They allow rivers, water, mud, tides, forests, animals, and weather to be studied as part of human and more-than-human life. These fields are especially helpful for reading texts such as The Hungry Tide, Gun Island, and other riverine or coastal narratives of Bengal. Their limitation is that they are not always connected to a clear public vocabulary of in-situ displacement.

Fifth, public humanities scholarship supports the social application of the project. It helps translate academic interpretation into public language for teaching, climate communication, community dialogue, and climate justice. This project uses public humanities not as an add-on, but as one of the expected applications of its literary-cultural analysis.

Table 1. Compares this work with the related work or previous research by other researchers

Work	Mobility focus	In-situ focus	Bengal Delta	Literary-cultural reading	Public humanities
[1]	Partial	Yes	No	No	Limited
[2]	Yes	No	Global/South Asia	No	Policy-oriented
[3], [4]	Yes	Indirect	Not specific	No	Limited
[5]	Yes	Disaster IDP focus	Yes	No	Policy/data
[6]-[9]	No	Indirect	Partial	Yes	Limited
This work	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Inclusion/Exclusion criteria

The study uses clear inclusion and exclusion criteria so that the literature review remains focused on the approved title and does not become a general project on climate change.

Inclusion criteria:

- Peer-reviewed articles, books, book chapters, and major scholarly essays on climate displacement, in-situ displacement, climate immobility, environmental humanities, postcolonial ecocriticism, blue humanities, and public humanities.
- Scholarship on Bangladesh, Bengal Delta, Sundarbans, chars, coastal life, river erosion, salinity, cyclone memory, embankments, livelihood loss, and disaster displacement.
- Literary and cultural texts that represent home, water, memory, displacement, damaged dwelling, ecological grief, gendered labour, or the right to remain.
- English and Bangla sources when translation, context, and cultural meaning can be handled responsibly.
- Recent scholarship for current debates, with older foundational theory included only when conceptually necessary.

Exclusion criteria:

- Purely technical climate-modelling studies with no connection to culture, narrative, society, displacement, or public humanities.
- Unverified online materials, unsupported statistics, non-academic blogs, and claims without traceable sources.
- Texts that are not connected to the Bengal Delta, riverine/coastal life, climate displacement, ecological memory, or damaged dwelling.
- Oral or testimonial materials without ethical access, clear public availability, consent, or appropriate anonymisation.
- Any source that would shift the project away from the approved proposal title.

Databases for conducting search

The search strategy combines multidisciplinary, humanities-specific, and open-access databases. The main databases are Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ProQuest, JSTOR, Project MUSE, MLA International Bibliography, DOAJ, CORE, and selected institutional repositories. Official reports from IOM, the Government of Bangladesh, and the World Bank will be used only for contextual background, not as replacements for literary-cultural analysis.

Search strings will combine three areas: the concept, the region, and the material. Example strings include:

- “in-situ displacement” AND climate AND narrative
- “climate immobility” AND Bangladesh
- “climate displacement” AND “Bengal Delta”
- “river erosion” AND displacement AND Bangladesh
- “salinity” AND livelihood AND coastal Bangladesh
- “Sundarbans” AND literature AND climate
- “The Hungry Tide” AND ecology AND Sundarbans
- “Gun Island” AND climate AND migration
- “blue humanities” AND delta
- “public humanities” AND climate justice

Review & Analyze Results | Synthesize: Strengths, Limitations

At this first-conference stage, the word results means the results of the literature review, not final findings from the whole postdoctoral research. The review produced five preliminary synthesis points.

First, climate mobility literature is strong in explaining movement, relocation, risk, and policy concern. Its limitation is that it often gives less attention to people who stay in damaged environments.

Second, in-situ displacement literature is conceptually valuable because it makes displacement without movement visible. Its limitation is that the concept has not yet been fully developed through Bengal Delta literature, oral memory, and public narratives.

Third, Bengal Delta studies provide strong regional context: erosion, salinity, cyclones, embankments, livelihoods, and the Sundarbans. Their limitation is that Bangladesh is often treated as a climate-vulnerable object rather than a theory-producing site.

Fourth, environmental humanities and blue humanities help read water, tide, mud, river, nonhuman life, and ecological memory as meaningful forces. Their limitation is that the connection to public-facing climate displacement language remains underdeveloped.

Fifth, public humanities gives the project an application beyond academic journals. Its limitation is that it needs a grounded vocabulary drawn from specific places, texts, and histories. This study answers that need by developing a Bengal Delta vocabulary of damaged dwelling, ecological grief, water-shaped belonging, and the right to remain.

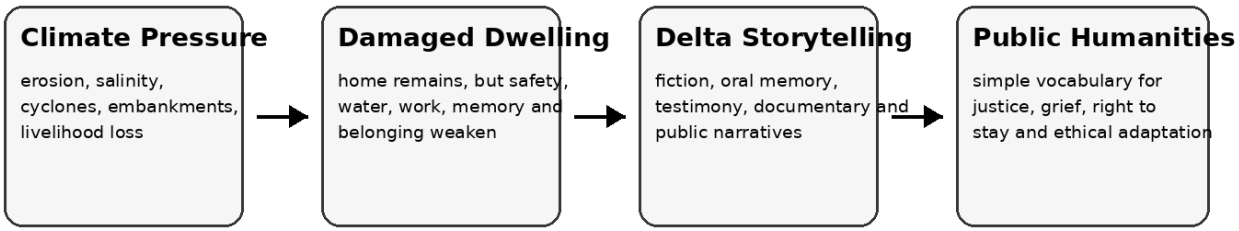


Figure 1. Foundation model for the first conference: from climate pressure to public-humanities application.

Structure of the Literature Review

The literature review will be structured in a movement from broad debate to focused intervention. It will begin with climate displacement and climate mobility, then move to immobility and in-situ displacement. After that, it will discuss Bengal Delta and Sundarbans contexts. The next part will bring in postcolonial ecocriticism, blue humanities, material ecocriticism, and more-than-human studies. The final part will connect these debates to public humanities and climate justice. This structure allows the project to show exactly where the research gap appears and why the proposed study is necessary.

Key Contribution

The key contribution of this first-conference manuscript is foundational. It does not claim to complete the full postdoctoral study. Instead, it defines the problem, organises the literature, identifies the gap, and formulates qualitative working hypotheses.

The project contributes in four ways. First, it shifts climate displacement from a movement-only model to a damaged-dwelling model. Second, it positions the Bengal Delta as a source of climate theory, not only as a disaster case. Third, it links environmental humanities with climate mobility studies through the concept of in-situ displacement. Fourth, it gives public humanities a usable vocabulary for climate justice: ecological grief, right to stay, damaged home, delta memory, and water-shaped belonging.

Method, Literature Review Process and Preliminary Results

Because this is a humanities project, it does not use laboratory experiments or statistical surveys at this stage. Its method is qualitative and interpretive. The first conference focuses on the literature review, knowledge gap, and testable qualitative hypotheses. Detailed methodology will be developed for the second conference.

The review process has four steps. First, literature will be collected through the selected databases and search strings. Second, sources will be screened by inclusion and exclusion criteria. Third, the selected literature will be grouped into conceptual clusters. Fourth, each cluster will be analysed for strength, limitation, and relevance to the approved project title.

The following hypotheses are clear and testable in a qualitative sense. They are not statistical hypotheses. They will be tested through close reading, narrative analysis, thematic recurrence, and concept mapping.

- H1: Bengal Delta narratives represent displacement as beginning before physical migration, through damage to home, land, water, livelihood, and memory.

- H2: Rivers, tides, mud, cyclones, salinity, and erosion function not only as setting but as active forces that shape human life, memory, and belonging.
- H3: In-situ displacement in Bengal Delta narratives is both ecological and historical because environmental vulnerability is connected to colonial, developmental, conservation, and state histories.
- H4: Literary and cultural narratives provide a richer public language for climate justice than policy language alone because they represent grief, waiting, attachment, survival, and the right to remain.

These hypotheses can be supported, modified, or challenged through evidence. For example, if selected texts repeatedly show home becoming unsafe before migration, H1 gains support. If water repeatedly drives plot, memory, labour, fear, or belonging, H2 gains support. If environmental damage is linked to historical power, conservation, land control, or development, H3 gains support. If literary-cultural language explains human experience more deeply than policy categories, H4 gains support.

Conclusion

This first-conference manuscript establishes the foundation of the approved postdoctoral project. It keeps the title and scope unchanged and focuses on literature review, gap identification, and qualitative hypotheses. The review shows that climate mobility scholarship explains migration and relocation well, but less fully explains the experience of people who remain in damaged places. Bengal Delta studies provide strong environmental context, but the region needs to be read more fully as a knowledge-producing site. Environmental humanities and public humanities offer the tools to make this intervention possible.

The project therefore argues that climate displacement does not begin only when people move. In the Bengal Delta, displacement may begin when home remains physically present but becomes ecologically, economically, and emotionally unliveable. The next conference will develop the detailed methodology for testing these qualitative hypotheses through corpus selection, close reading, narrative analysis, and ethical public-humanities framing.

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