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# WHAT ABOUT EXPERTISE?: CLIMATE CHANGE, TERRITORY, AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH



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For postcolonial, low-lying nation-states that are acutely vulnerable to sea-level rise, sea defense is associated with the promises of decolonization, or the collective recognition of bounded territory with an independent nation-state. Building on a case study of Guyana's sea defenses and related engineering expertise, I suggest that the boundaries of national territory and freedom were never a guarantee even with the end of colonial rule. Engineers' claims to territory have always been in direct conflict with the aspirations of the liberal and emergent nation-state. As I will show, engineers have etched out a space of legitimacy through other 'scalar-concepts' of territory, such as the "developed/developing world" that work to mark who belongs to their epistemic community. The brunt of engineers' inter-territorial claim-making, not only offers an alternative genealogy of decolonization, but also allows for an assessment of the distorting effects of climate change on contemporary engineering discourses about territory. Engineers, in other words, are essential storytellers of the nation-state and its climatic futures. Beyond calling out the limitations of sovereign power, they make possible an interconnected world based in expertise and the recognition of vulnerability.

*Sarah E. Vaughn's primary field is the critical study of climate change. She has engaged climate change through both ethnographic and archival research of the geotechnical engineering sciences, flooding, sea defense, and at the intersection of artisanal mining and forest mapping. At stake is the way climate change generates problem spaces and claims to expertise. This concern informs my recent articles and book in-progress entitled *Engineering Vulnerability: An Ethnography of Climate Change and Expertise*. The book develops a case study of coastal flooding in Guyana as a site to think with and through how people learn to pay attention to hydraulic modeling operations across forms of expert labor.*

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