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"Puppets at the Hands of Water: Sex Workers in Mongla, Bangladesh"

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One of the sex workers attempting to fix the eroding coast with mud from the water.

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On a summer afternoon in 2022, I made the long drive from Jessore to Mongla, a port city in southern Bangladesh. My route took me through Bangladesh's riverine ecosystem—a lush green

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landscape where water dominates the land. I followed the rivers winding their way through the earth as if left to their will, and from the corners of my eyes I could see the little huts of local farmers and fishermen. Mongla Port is known for its sex workers, who historically worked either on the mainland or on boats and were accordingly referred to by the villagers as "sex workers on water" (*jala beśya*) or "sex workers on land" (*sthala beśya*). The coexistence of these two terms reflects a common practice in the littoral geographies of Bangladesh, where names of occupations often hint at the land/river dichotomy. Yet as the ongoing climate crisis has led to sea-level rise and erosion, many littoral sex workers have lost their occupational land to the adjoining river and have been rendered amphibious (*ubhachara*)—working both on land and water. The villagers now call all the women *jala beśya* (water prostitutes)—although this is technically a misnomer. They avoid using a term that assigns animal-like attributes to humans, such as the amphibious nature of frogs, because humans are conventionally considered hierarchically superior to animals.(From the article)

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