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Preface and Acknowledgments

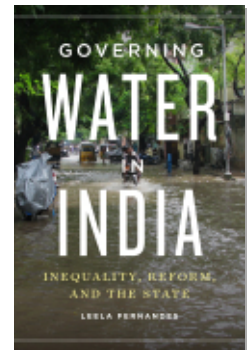
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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The twenty-first century has been marked by an unprecedented crisis of governance. In the twentieth century, proponents of programs and theories of modernization have posited a relationship between democracy and development as the ideal path forward for postcolonial nation-states. This postulation was reformulated in the 1980s into what became known as the “Washington Consensus.” The Washington Consensus posited policies of economic reform broadly geared toward privatization, liberalization, and a reduced role of the state. The post-Washington consensus shifted to include and foreground institutional reforms that were held up as the means for both economic growth and efficient and accountable governance. Yet nation-states in both the Global North and the Global South have witnessed crises as exclusionary governments often linked to right-wing populist movements have sought to hollow out democratic institutions and curtail access to democratic rights and political participation. Such crises have taken root at the moment when global challenges of climate change and local and global inequalities make effective and accountable governance one of the most pressing issues of our time. There has been no better illustration of this than the global health pandemic of COVID-19 that at various stages has acutely highlighted the stakes of ineffective governance in countries as varied as India, Brazil, and the United States.

This book grapples with the question of governance through a study of water in contemporary India. Understanding the constraints and possibilities of effective and accountable governance compels us to wrestle with complex, historically situated local, national, and global configurations in particular places. Such analyses are not glamorous, and they do not draw in

the reader with the spectacle of the suffering of marginalized communities or the comfort of abstract, modular social scientific policy responses. Rather, *Governing Water in India* invites the reader to grapple with the messy, imbricated processes that create, perpetuate, and worsen the devastating effects of water scarcity and the intensifying cycles of phenomena such as droughts and floods. Most significantly, the book seeks to disrupt the decoupling of environmental phenomena from policies of economic and institutional reform. Such environmental challenges are deeply connected to successive dominant models of economic development and, in the twenty-first century, to growth-oriented policies of economic reform. Responses to global challenges of climate change and inequality require both systemic analyses that address the impact of such policies and located studies of particular places and contexts. Responses to such challenges will ultimately require a deep understanding of the institutional contexts that will determine whether the implementation of policy prescriptions is successful or ineffective.

In this endeavor, *Governing Water in India* presents in-depth analyses of understudied institutions that make up local water bureaucracies. I am grateful to the Tamil Nadu Public Works Department and its various water institutions for providing me with access to its organizational archives. In one case, this archive consisted of a room full of documents, which included original colonial documents that almost crumbled as I turned the pages to governmental and international organization reports and assessments. Waiting for the PWD employee to break open some of the locks was a telling experience during my field research. The documents had not been accessed, and the employee did not have up-to-date keys for all the cabinets, so he was somewhat miserable when in response to his query I told him I wanted to read everything. The closed-off treasure trove of this hidden archive underlined the paradox of how much is written about bureaucracy, governance, and corruption and how little interaction there is between academics and such organizations that are actually designated with the implementation of policies. With this recognition in mind, this book is written in a style to make it accessible to a range of academic and public audiences in India and in comparative contexts. I have minimized rhetorical embellishments that sometimes nourish US academic desires for stylistic flourish in favor of accessibility and the commitment to foreground details that may matter to individuals grappling with the realities of governing water even if they do not seem to be of import to faraway academic audiences.

Fieldwork for this research took place in Chennai between 2016 and 2018. I am grateful to the Centre for Water Resources at Anna University for providing me with access to its library resources. Thanks go to numerous people for their intellectual engagement and logistical support of the field research: Dr. N. K. Ambujam, Dr. K. Ilamparuthi, Prof. S. Janakarajan, and Prof. R. Mahalingham. I am also grateful to members of several organizations whom I keep anonymous in accordance with research ethics, including those from Metrowater, PWD, TNUIFSL, Tamil Nadu's Smart Cities Mission, Tamil Nadu Employment and Exchange Offices, and the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board. Funding for this research was provided by the University of Michigan. I am also especially grateful to Saisha Nanduri for her excellent research assistance and all of the work she did in putting together the book's bibliography.

The arguments in this book were improved by feedback that I received from numerous venues. I am particularly grateful for two rounds of feedback from the Centre for Political Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University—first at their center's seminar and later when I presented comprehensive arguments as the their annual Nirman Foundation speaker. My special thanks to Asha Sarangi for organizing these events. The book benefited from feedback from discussions at Johns Hopkins University, the Michigan Society of Fellows, the University of Pittsburgh, and Shiv Nadar University. The book benefited from supportive editorial comments from my editor Lorri Hagman at the University of Washington Press. I am also especially grateful to the University of Washington Libraries for their generous support, which has allowed this book to be accessible as an open source book. My thanks also go to my colleague Anand Yang for suggesting that I submit the manuscript to UW Press. I am grateful to numerous colleagues for their professional support, including Amrita Basu, Aimee Germain, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and Nancy Naples. This book could not have come to fruition without the tremendous and long-standing personal support from Nikol Alexander-Floyd, Jane Junn, and Asha Sarangi. They have been constant models of the courage and persistence needed to develop ethical governance within our own institutions in the academy. Finally, this book relied on my precious community outside of the academy, whose members both nourished my spirit through the earthly joys of clay and continually reminded me that water matters because it ultimately transcends human control and willpower and teaches us humility.

