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OPEN RIVERS :

RETHINKING WATER, PLACE & COMMUNITY

WOMEN & WATER : CALLING



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from multiple perspectives within and beyond the academy.

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The cover image of Ann Raiho with a canoe, is courtesy of Natalie Warren.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO ISSUE 21

By Laurie Moberg, Editor

For *Open Rivers*, this issue started with a call—a call for submissions. In the summer of 2021, *Open Rivers* opened a call for papers, a broad invitation for contributions that foreground the complex ways women and water shape each other. The response to this call for submissions brought an abundance of stories ranging across local and global watersheds, from

personal journeys to rich research to calls to action, from investigation of water challenges to insights into Indigenous practices to stories of intersectionality. With so many varied stories to share, we decided this theme was worthy of two full issues. This issue, then, is the first and is entitled “Women & Water: Calling.”

WOMEN & WATER : CALLING



Ann Raiho surveying the horizon. Image courtesy of Natalie Warren.

We refer to the issue as “Women & Water: Calling” because collectively, these articles demonstrate the ways that water calls to people, drawing women into connection and commitment to the material world and to each other.

Some of the articles demonstrate how water calls to women and becomes a fluid foundation for their daily lives. For example, Alexandra M. Peck traces the ways that Coast Salish women’s lives were intimately tied to water to maintain family ties, economic independence, and other social and creative practices. Even as these ties to water were threatened by colonial paradigms, Peck shares the ways Coast Salish women subverted patriarchal norms, in part by reconfiguring their deep connection to the waters of the Pacific Northwest. Victoria Bradford Styrbicki takes a different approach, sharing the narratives of five women along the Mississippi River through social choreography, an embodied retelling of people’s stories. As part of a larger collection of work, this article calls us to the “movement of the Mississippi River through the lives of people connected to it.”

Some of the articles speak to the ways in which authors themselves are called to water; these calls to water, in turn, shape personal and professional practices and bring women into spaces of fulfilling—yet never simple—relationships with water. In their peer-reviewed Teaching & Practice column, Marijke Hecht, Michelle King, and Shimira Williams offer the resources of Walking Alone and Together, a practice designed with the intention to create stronger connections to water, place, and each other. Through this practice cultivated during the pandemic, the authors articulate how water served as a mentor as they forged a learning refugia in the midst of challenging times. In her peer-reviewed Perspectives column, Ayooluwateso Coker articulates how water threads through her life experiences as a BIPOC woman in STEM. Coker reminds us that the lack of diversity in STEM and the erasure of the contributions of people of color in scientific

work is harmful; she offers her story as a way to counter these patterns. Natalie Warren, author of *Hudson Bay Bound: Two Women, One Dog, Two Thousand Miles to Arctic* and the newest member of the *Open Rivers* team, also reflects on how water became a constant in her life. In an interview with *Open Rivers’* Phyllis Mauch Messenger, Warren discusses being part of the first team of women to canoe to Hudson Bay and how her experiences—with supporters, with naysayers, and with the waters she canoed—shape her commitment to helping other women and girls explore their own potential.

Two of the articles in this issue offer calls to action. Mollie Aronowitz, Jennifer Terry, Ruth McCabe, and Mary Beth Stevenson, four women coming from different professional backgrounds, demonstrate how intentional collaboration across the lands and waterscapes of central Iowa effects meaningful change, improving water quality, land productivity, and human relationships. They emphasize the need for partnerships and for relationship-building to achieve common goals for protecting land, water, and people. Also focusing on the agricultural industry in Iowa, Linda Shenk, Jean Eells, and Wren Almitra call for a change in both language and practice around women nonoperator landowners. They propose the term “stewardship partners” as a way “to empower women (and other marginalized stakeholders) as well as to support sustainable agriculture and healthier watersheds” across Iowa, and beyond.

Some of the articles are a call for help, revealing how water creates conditions of vulnerability for women. Becky L. Jacobs explains that despite legal structures meant to protect rights to water, women all over the world face the threat of gender-specific violence as they exercise these rights to gain access to water resources. Jacobs presses us to consider how we might address this global water conflict using a more wholistic approach and more creative strategies than law alone. Reinforcing this global challenge, Anindita Sarkar, in an article republished from *The*

Conversation, provides striking data on the water collection practices and risks for women in an informal settlement in Nairobi, Kenya.

Kristin Osiecki focuses on a different kind of risk, that wrought by floods. Using extensive spatial data, Osiecki maps the effects of hurricanes in the Houston area to demonstrate how female-headed households are disproportionately negatively impacted. In the contemporary moment, climate change makes these uneven risks more problematic and makes interventions even more critical.

Collectively, the articles in this issue illuminate intersections of women and water in all their

brilliance, but also in all their complexity, profoundness, and severity. Recognizing the myriad ways women connect with water—as scientists, as activists and water protectors, as policymakers, as providers, as researchers, and as artists and storytellers—we share this set of articles as a call to our readers as well: a call to meaningful action to effect change in our water systems and social systems; a call to ongoing discussion about risk and possibility, vulnerability and connection; a call to examine how our relationships with water and our privilege shape our practices; and a call to make commitments to water and each other.

Enjoy.

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About the Author

Laurie Moberg serves as editor for *Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place & Community* and as the project manager for the Environmental Stewardship, Place, and Community Initiative at the University of Minnesota. She earned her Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Minnesota in 2018. Her doctoral research investigates recurrent episodes of flooding on rivers in Thailand and queries how the ecological, social, and cosmological entanglements between people and the material world are reimagined and reconfigured in the aftermath of disasters. In her current work, she approaches public scholarship as a critical strategy for expanding whose stories are heard, for shaping our public conversations, and for forming solutions for our shared ecological challenges.