Living with/out water: media, memory and gender

Joanne Garde-Hansen

There is nothing new about the fight for better British waterways or the need for improved water knowledge in the UK context, a topic largely ignored by arts and humanities researchers until recently with many water histories still to be unearthed. Like many living with water (seas, rivers, canals) I am struck by how little I know of the histories, memories and stories of these watery places and spaces. I live in Stratford-upon-Avon, UK, where the South Stratford canal meets in a basin with the River Avon in the centre of the town. The canal which I run along every day, as well as further afield up to its joining with the Grand Union canal, was saved from draining in the 1950s and 1960s by volunteer effort that restored it for new uses (liveaboard narrowboats, cruisers, paddle boards, canoes, hiking, running, cycling). We have this canal today because local people protested its closure and laboured to keep it in operation through the help of hundreds of volunteers, boy scouts, the army and even local prisoners. In the face of the district council's application for an Act of Abandonment in 1958, the threat of living without water in this canal led to the creative use of a canoeist to produce toll receipts as evidence of continued use: a triumph of mobilising bureaucracy for public good. Slowness, deliberation and the persistence of this collective through the 1960s, as well as the role of the BBC in featuring the campaign on the *Tonight* programme, secured a watercourse for my neighbourhood and I am grateful for their determination and collaboration. This history is accessible online, maintained by a local organisation and must be sought out, it is not widely known by the canal's many users, and one would be forgiven for thinking that contemporary social media campaigns to clean up rivers and canals are a new phenomenon when such histories are not widely share in a digital media culture.

The new and expanded role of social media in documenting water events, environmental disasters, shaming water misusers and celebrating clean and accessible waterways has been an important part of my own research for the book *Media and Water* (Garde-Hansen 2021). The whole field of media and communication studies has hardly concerned itself with water and water issues even though the field is replete with liquid metaphors (channels, storms and immersive experiences). The UK flood of 2007 was the starting point for my research on mediating water.[1] The flood seemed to come out of nowhere at the wrong time of year and in the wrong place but then such a perception reveals weak ties to environmental histories and community knowledge, and the overriding economic imperative to move on quickly and get back to 'business as usual'. The saturation of the media landscape with flood images (just as Facebook and Twitter were emerging) and the continued focus on floods as events to be memorialised meant water scarcity hardly seemed possible never mind imaginable. How can an island, with such a wet climate be in drought? In this chapter, I precede a focus on drought media and water scarcity culture by beginning first with the research on flood media templates as the key into understanding how a cultural *watery sense of place*

[1] One could trace the focus on the power of water within the contemporary British cultural imaginary as equally attributable to the 2007 Summer Floods (the worst peace-time disaster since the Second World War) as to the Great Swim in Lake Windermere of 2008 (with over 3000 participants). Both water events became 'mass' and 'connected' around the same time through their social mediation. Twitter was in its infancy in 2007 and the general public was setting up Facebook groups from 2006.

currently displaces an understanding of a UK flood-drought continuum. I position media, communication and digital cultures as key infrastructural requirements for water research and new appreciations of water's cultural values.

Living with (too much) water

The media representation of the 2007 Summer Floods repeated a national televisual template of biblical inundation, dramatic rescues and talking heads of experts and government spokespeople versus local residents; while local radio performed civic roles in disaster response and community reporting. What was striking was the nascent role of social media. Facebook groups were created, active and supportive, and early-adopting Twitter users were posting and tagging incidents, demonstrating the demand of citizens for sharing knowledge, feelings and practices during the flood event. As we noted:

> Remembered claims on the land (this is my flooded house, my flooded street, my flooded town) are made mobile through bodies (by walking and filming around the territory). The mobile sharing of personal accounts and perspectives through available media forms means that citizens can be seen to participate in creating common or customary – if often conflicting – narratives and memories. (Krause et al 2012: 138)

This community process of remembering directly after a flood and commemoration at anniversaries was highly mediatized considering the last massive flood in the region had been the Winter Floods of 1947. As a group of researchers interested in bringing expertise in social sciences and arts and humanities together, we saw a gap in flood knowledge, one that focused on storytelling, memories, and histories. How were memories of floods produced and practiced by individuals and communities in different settings, how were these memories and lay knowledges stored, accessed, shared? Whether communities with accessible and shareable past flood histories were more resilient to future floods and how might researchers, media organisations and local archives create informal social learning to strengthen community flood resilience? This research led to numerous successfully funded collaborations and publications with the Centre for Floods, Communities and Resilience at the University of the West of England and with the Centre for Disaster Risk Management (CEMADEN) in Brazil. What became clear after the 2007 UK floods was that a retreat of the state from flood risk management was reframed as or rebalanced by a need for more 'lay knowledge' and 'lay expertise' (and social media takes on a new and important role in sharing flood culture):

> Experts involved in emergency response should not ignore the skills, energy and ingenuity [. . .] latent in most communities; in preparing for an emergency, communities have important shared local knowledge and can harness local resources and expertise. (Cabinet Office 2008, 350)

Yet, as my ongoing research in Brazil has shown one cannot assume hydro-citizenship straightforwardly turns water story into water action if the underlying citizenship and lay knowledge are contested and cultures of water are politicised. Sarmiento, Landström and Whatmore (2019) framed the notion of hydro-citizenship as bringing democracy and

participation together. For them the prefix 'hydro signals the idea that the material, cultural, and political-economic specificities of water make it a particularly important realm through which to study emerging understandings and practices of citizenship, democratic life, and efforts to manage human/environment relations' (2019: 361). In their exploration of environmental citizenship through drought management and water governance they determined two imaginaries of hydro-citizens: people as customers who manage water resources in response to industries, and people's emotional engagements with hydrosocial spaces, where 'particular kinds of water subjects are called into being through the deployments of various techniques and technologies' (2019: 372). Living without water or living with bad water conjoins both of these forms of citizenship but is especially challenging to engage with in contexts where the notion of citizenship itself is precarious.

Protesting, campaigning and restoring watery places is much harder to achieve in the Global South and is largely hidden from view in the Global North. Yet, in both spaces it has been going on in hyperlocal ways for quite some time and has mostly been researched in the sciences and social sciences. What has changed is the reach, participation and social mediation of water issues globally that have become connective to wider cultures, multitudinous, involving diverse audiences and creative in their communication practices through social mediation. As each generation discovers anew the pollution and propaganda, the privatisation of water, and the flood and drought risk of their community, they discover that art, culture and media are more deeply connected to geography, water science and engineering. Likewise, water organisations (companies, campaign groups and communication action groups) as well an environmental agencies and risk managers are all now using the same media and communication platforms to broadcast, narrowcast and mycast their messages and experiences of living with water. The transformation of the individual into a water consumer is not entirely complete as water users demand spiritual, cultural and creative access to water and its histories and memories. Therefore, we need to be far more connective with our media and cultural research of archives for sensing and representing water (from hydrological repositories to television dramas) if we are to understand the social and cultural values that flow from water memories that (re)circulate around rivers, canals and coasts. We need more studies of the cultural, social and digital mediations of water, such as Alexander Hall's (2018) analysis of local and regional newspapers in exploring the 1953 East Coast Flood or Ruth Morgan's (2018) use of newspapers to reinterpret the cultural memory of the 1914 Australian drought.

Massive floods (particularly flashy and pluvial floods) in urban and suburban spaces bring old and new communities and collectives into being but so too does water scarcity in terms of its impacts. Collecting water from standpipes and tankers socially connects neighbours through WhatsApp who may never have spoken to one another before, and flood-drought continuum impacts reveal the social injustices of precarious or absent water management for neighbourhoods and regions most at risk. We continue to need a more connective way of thinking about water across mediated histories of its abundance and lack, pollution and power. Histories of floods and histories of drought need to be brought together and integrated with media and cultural histories. One way to do this, is to focus upon water scarcity in a predominantly 'blue' and watery United Kingdom, to recover the cultural representation of drought on television and radio which are held in media archives. Unlike floods, water scarcity is hidden, forgotten and very low on the agenda of many UK industries

and society as a whole, even though the UK passed a 'drought bill' in 1976 and appointed a Minister for Drought at the time (albeit a short-lived), a role collectively laughed away as a deluge of rain put an end to the drought in the September of 1976, returning the UK to its status quo: a wet place.[2] While researchers studying floods in other countries have noted that changes in land use, rapid urbanisation and impacts of climate change have increasingly affected the responsive capacity of communities (Coelho and Raman 2013; Douglas et al. 2012), the UK seems yet to address a culture of water scarcity. How then can we approach drought in the UK context from a more amphibious (wet/dry) perspective?

Amphibious flows

The emergence of a Blue Humanities in academic circles runs far deeper than the screened spectacles of a massive flood or the BBC's *The Blue Planet (2001)* and *Blue Planet II* (2017). We have in this emergence some new (as well as old) political and cultural economy frameworks for analysing the values of water re-circulating in contemporary society, asking critical questions about representation. For example, where are the women in water's history (an issue I focus on in this chapter) and where are Black and minoritized communities? It is assumed that the British rural landscape and waterways are the playgrounds for white people (an issue eloquently challenged in Ed Accura's 2020 documentary *Blacks Can't Swim*). Who then gets to be part of an amphibious culture (one in which people have learned the strategies, skills and knowledge needed to live wet/dry lives)? In our earlier research on flooding in England from Early Modern to Modern, we noted that

> the inhabitants of flood-prone places display "amphibian" characteristics, as M. Kempe (2007) called them. The grand narrative of flooding as catastrophic and destructive is qualified by personal and community memories of an everyday living with flood risk, flooding and landscape change. [. . .]. [As] some degree of flood risk is unavoidable, discourses and practices of living in occasionally wet landscapes need to be explored. (Krause et al 2012, 138)

There are new ways of thinking that are both 'wet-and-dry' as in Franz Krause's (2017) 'amphibious anthropology' that considers 'hydrosocial' relations of volatility, creativity and rhythm. They may be epistemologically in 'flux' as in Chen, MacLeod and Neimanis' edited collection *Thinking with Water* (2013), which cites Bachelard's *Water and Dreams: An Essay*

[2] Baroness Birk stated in the House of Lords on the passing of the Drought Bill: 'My Lords, I beg to move that this Bill be now read a second time. My Lords, in a country with a traditional wet profile water has always been a limitless resource, interrupted only when the mains have to be repaired, but in principle available at any time and in any quantity. Indeed, it has been one of our quaint national characteristics that steady rainfall could be relied upon throughout the year, particularly in the summer. This is an assumption we can no longer afford to make. The prolonged drought means everyone has to become water conscious in quite a different sense—to think about the use of water in a conservationist context and to avoid what has always been considered natural waste. If we change our habitual thinking we shall be better able to plan both the development of our water resources and the investment needed to be put into water supply.' DROUGHT BILL [H.L.] HL Deb 20 July 1976 vol 373 cc690-732. Available at: https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1976/jul/20/drought-bill-hl.

on the Imagination of Matter, as they introduce 'material metaphors' of flux, flow and circulation in how we think and feel:

> In everyday speech, emotions "flood," "bubble up," and "surge"; a "dry" text is one that lacks feeling and passion. We "freeze up" with stage fright, join or diverge from "mainstream" populations. Money "circulates"; commodities "flood" the market. The past is a "depth" and time "evaporates". Neither is the realm of theory immune to inspiration from the liquid world: aqueous dynamics of "flux" and "flow" characterize qualities of indeterminacy and continuous change within many contemporary epistemologies, whole feminist concepts of "leakiness" and "seepage" have been mobilized to identify crucial porosities in bodies and theories alike. [. . .] Just as water animated our bodies and economies, so it also permeates the ways we think. (Chen et al: 10)

In media studies we have also thought hydro-symbolically of broadcast channels, communication flows, immersive media, and 'twitter storms', as well as the journalistic experience of a drought in 'news'. As I have argued in *Media and Water*:

> Water is in 'media' (represented by television, film, radio and print), water's actions on human habitats (flooding, drought, extreme weather) produces stories, memories, traumas, events (offline and online, public and personal); and, water produces a sense of place, identity and belonging (particularly in countries surrounded by water or with an increasingly dry sense of place). (Garde-Hansen 2021: 14)

Water's representation in media can be researched in ways that reveal insights into media genres (how we have told and tell stories of water, water as a character, stakeholders as characters), gender (who gets to speak, roles for men and women, 'women's watery work') and generation (the emergence of a climate change narrative, the roles of scientific discourse and folk knowledge, intergenerational communication). But we must think more wet-and-dry, as René ten Bos (2009: 74) noted of Peter Sloterdijk's 'amphibious' anthropology in which 'human beings are switching from one element to another. [. . .] As such, it never sticks to just one environment (e.g. earth, the mainland) but experiences a profound involvement with other environments as well'. With much of this book concerned with living with, in and around water it also makes sense to focus on cultural memories of living without it.

The UK drought narrative

Drought is widely recognised as a complex phenomenon due to the multiple aspects that concern its onset and, in the science community, the many 'types' of drought recognised (meteorological, hydrological, agricultural and civic). In the Drought Risk and You (DRY project)[3] we explored the many barriers and challenges to communicating drought in the

[3] The Drought Risk and You (DRY) project (http://dryproject.co.uk/ began in 2014 and the author was one co-investigator representing media and memory research. This £3.2m initiative was aimed at providing new evidence for managing future droughts based on science and experience with expertise in hydrology,

UK, which is defined by its watery sense of place. In the Scottish 'Eden' catchment, the team noted:

> When the idea of drought in Scotland was discussed as a local community issue, many participants tended in the rehearsal of memory to associate drought with warm, sunny weather illustrating their memories of summer droughts [. . .]. Community members generally had nostalgic positive memories of the 1976 drought. (McEwen et al 2021 [online])

While it might seem odd that media, communication and cultural studies should turn its attention to studying drought when much of the knowledge surrounding it pertains to the harder sciences of engineering, hydrology and ecology, it is clear, that drought is not only a natural hazard. It is also a hazard for cultural memory if a lack of water is effaced by popular memory and nostalgia. For if a hazard is not remembered and inherited by a community how then can it be prepared for and learned from? Weitkamp et al (2020) make this point in their research on UK drought:

> The '1976 drought' may have become a 'weather memory' (Endfield 2011), but it is only available to older members of society; our interviews suggest a dearth of weather memories relating to more recent drought experiences. This suggests communicators may struggle to tap into experience (Wachinger et al. 2013), which may lead to a normalcy bias (Omer and Alon 1994), with many people in maritime climates underestimating drought risks.

In maritime climates such as the UK's the default is always wateriness, rain and a wet land as key to national and regional identities and the imagined community. Drought happens elsewhere, far away and to others. Yet, drought emerges (often slowly and incrementally) from a complex interplay between the climate (imagined as a system to be predicted) and human activities (imagined as nudge-able). Such a position, which may miss the complex messiness of unpredictable climates and the creativity of human behaviours, requires a better understanding of the 'agency' that human actors may or may not have in a context of 'drought in the Anthropocene' (van Loon et al. 2016).

Drought research is now appreciating the need for improved incorporation of wider societal impacts (Bachmair et al. 2016) into risk and the necessity for a creative approach to 'drought and community storytelling' (Liguori et al 2021) and 'anticipatory adaptation' (DeSilvey 2012) that draws as much on cultural memory and future scenario-ing. Moreover, there is a recognition that while most studies focus on natural processes or socio-economic causes there is equally a place for the arts and humanities, artists and creatives, and in particular media researchers, to explore the wider human relationship with water stories, or lack thereof, that influence preparedness, lay knowledge and diverse articulations of human connectedness with water and drought. Having a critical awareness of hot weather media

---

geography, meteorology, agriculture, ecology, culture, media and communications from eight universities and research institutions. The project incorporated voices that would not usually be part of decision-making. Using a science-narrative integrative approach, which interweaves science communication with the collection of diverse drought narratives from a range of stakeholders, it aimed to democratise discourses and forms of knowledge related to drought.

templates is key and Gilligan's research makes the point that heatwaves produce media-specific templates in which representations of women to stand in for expressing the extremity of British weather and connote the rarity of seeing so much of the female body in an everyday British context:

> The wildfire is the most media friendly of the extreme hot weather subset, and the one with which British audiences are most familiar through television. Print media are more invested in reporting heat wave stories, and appear to be fond of 'blazing headlines' on the subject: the high temperatures of a heat wave lend themselves to illustration with bikini-clad models and are particularly popular with the UK tabloids. Drought is not a specific subject that attracts much attention in the UK media outside of scientific circles (Gilligan 2015: 100)

The DRY Project explored (in part) how drought narratives might incorporate strong themes of blame, shame, deviance, punishment, control and anxiety, and it explored the overt and sometimes hidden and subtle politics in representations of UK drought and water scarcity from a wide range of stakeholders and communities: water companies, farmers, water users for leisure, heritage organisations, domestic consumers and environmental agencies. This project revealed that narratives of drought, or rather, the daylighting of stories and anecdotes of drought alongside scientific modelling, offered an integration of science and narrative into an effective way of thinking back through drought histories and forwards into drought scenarios for communicating water scarcity. It unearthed everyday experiences and memories of drought from the precise recollections of popular music during hot summers to the discomforting feelings of pregnant mothers unable to keep cool, from the shock of desertification of parks and grassland to the dry-ness of favourite reservoirs and riverbeds alongside the excitement of long evenings of late-night drinking, socialising and a sense of community. The diversity of experiences of everyday stories of drought coalesced around more popular narratives that shape the past, and in particular the Summer of 1976, as a mythologisation that needs to be grappled with and incorporated into the much-needed new environmental behaviours and inherited relationships with water.

Drought media

One intervention into drought as a process that produces cultural, social and creative outputs, as much as scientific and governmental responses, is to consider the role of media in historically specific ways in a given national and cultural context. Such an intervention allows for a multi-modal and multi-perspectival approach that considers drought as a non-human 'actor' as well as acted-upon by humans, and we can unpack drought representation and experience along certain axioms: urban-rural, public-private, young-old, men-women, weather-war and ability-disability for example. These would not normally be within the purview of scientific approaches to drought history or to an iconic drought event, such as the period 1975-1976 in the United Kingdom. While the *Historic Droughts* project[4]) created a repository of data from river flows to oral history testimonies (covering hydrometeorological, environmental, agricultural, regulatory, social and cultural materials) and integrated this data with a focus on media, it was necessarily socially scientific, using

[4] See https://historicdroughts.ceh.ac.uk/ 2014-2018.

Corpus Linguistics to analyse UK newspaper archives. Weather data and geographical and historical incidences were used to target the social materiality of drought memory, but cultures of living without water in the UK were much less explored.

Therefore, rather than create new narratives of drought from contemporary memory work or confine cultural memories of drought to one media form, it can be equally insightful to bring media archives together: images, adverts, documentaries, film clips, radio reports, radio and television drama, television news items to inform journalistic accounts. A focus on popular culture and popular media offers access to hitherto neglected drought representations. For example, the representation of women in drought stories has been largely considered immaterial and yet to do so offers wider insights into women's position in society and as human bodies in relation to the natural environment. In 1970s Britain not only did women become particularly visible and vocal but the summer of 1976 has continued to be mediated as a display of women's bodies as much as dry riverbeds. A typical example is the July 26th 2018 edition of the *Express* newspaper which remediates the now iconic Press Agency photograph of the blonde slim white woman in a small bikini smiling and sunbathing on an extremely desiccated landscape (Kirkham 2018 [online]). In what follows I introduce the two key media templates of the 1976 drought as a textual, visual and audio-visual representation of women as the 'bearers of water' (domestic work) or as a 'barer of flesh' (sexual work). It is worth noting that the one key but underrated autobiographical book on the experience of drought was written by the journalist Evelyn Cox in which she said: 'I soon realized that piped mains water is the most underrated convenience of the twentieth century. It must have contributed far more to the liberation of women than all the laws of Parliament have put on the statute books in the past few years' (1978: 30).

Living without water: remembering women's bodies

The UK 1976 summer produced a benchmark drought with days without rain ranging from 45-66 days depending on location and is more likely to be popularly remembered as the greatest 'heatwave' in living memory if you were an urbanite; or, the worst and most traumatic experience for farming, if you lived in a rural location. There is a 'heat' to city living and urban culture as expressed by Thrift (2004: 57) 'as broiling maelstroms of affect' that is assumed not to apply to rural life. Within the urban memory of 1976 women emerge as visible stereotypes of passive sexuality wallpapering the collective memory of popular culture. This attention to young women's bodies and blazing headlines was established at the time and has been remediated and remembered ever since.[5] The 3rd July 1976 article 'Heat Wave Is Making the English Act Funny' in *The New York Times* reported:

> The heat wave has thus been greeted with uninhibited enthusiasm. On Wednesday three models jumped into the fountains at Trafalgar Square and removed the tops of their bikinis. Admiral Nelson, atop his stone column, did not blink an eye, but the police did. Graciously and slowly—they moved in, told the women that there was an

[5] A number of blogs and news editorials have proliferated as contemporary heatwaves provide opportunities to recirculate media archive material and reproduce popular memory of 1976. Bradford's *Telegraph and Argus* online article (Ayres, 2020) 'Who remembers the summer of 1976?' uses photographs of three pubescent girls and a boy cooling off with a hose and their wet t-shirts and two women collecting water from a standpipe.

> ancient law prohibiting bathing in Trafalgar Square and carted them off to Cannon Street Station, where they were fined $10. (Semple Jr 1976 [online])

'Heatwave' has been represented as temporary insanity for the national imaginary, it comes on fast and furious, and then is washed away by a deluge of stereotypical rain: the mediated memory template frames the lack of water in the UK setting as a rare but welcome aberration for urbanites and ignores the stories of rural communities. The deadliness of drought (slow, creeping, paralysing) slides out of view from the public imagination[6] . Recently, as hotter summers have become the norm for Northern Europe and living without water looms as a real prospect, the BBC re-curates 1976 as a time to reminisce not a time to prepare for drought or learn from drought impacts. The BBC Breakfast News Twitter account posted a Tweet at 1.37pm GMT on 24 June 2018, and within it curated oft-repeated archival excerpts from past BBC news items into a 'Remember 1976' news video of 62 seconds. With the posting stating '☀Incredible weather outside today…☀ But does anyone remember this incredible #summer from 1976? #heatwave', there followed the image of young women bathing in 1970s style bikinis in public eliciting from the audience many opportunities for reminiscence and nostalgia. While this may have had over 47,800 views at the time of researching the 2018 heatwave (no doubt due to the opening image of women in bikinis), the many retweets and comments served to collectively remember 1976 as one of outstanding weather, youthful love, pop music and socialising. The target audience of BBC Breakfast's Twitter feed were just the right age in 2018 to recall those teenage experiences of hot weather not within a trauma narrative frame such as Evelyn Cox's largely forgotten account of the drought (noted above) but as a way of reminiscing about young women's bodies.[7]

The Pathé News' 2014 recent re-release on YouTube of a 10-minute archival video of silent film rushes of women in London in 1976 is equally confusing in its focus on women's bodies during a heatwave. Erroneously titled *Heat Wave in London: Women's Summer Fashion (1976) | British Pathé* published 13 April 2014) it is clear that 'fashion' is not the focus at all. Over 10 minutes and 40 seconds of filming, without sound, the viewer's gaze (presumably a 'male gaze') is held within the frame through several long camera takes that focus on female breasts and buttocks, sometimes headless. Not unlike the classic news footage of members of the public's bodies (always headless) used in stock news items of stories from obesity to pandemic, from travel to urban living, the footage has been unearthed and placed on YouTube to demonstrate Pathé News archival holdings pertaining to this historic hot summer.[8] At the time of writing, it had gathered a surprising number of views (over 465,000). However, it is noteworthy that in 2018, when I first presented this archival footage at conferences, the comments were switched on and I pointed out just how many were of a sexist and predatory nature, with frequent references to 'those were the days' when women were supposedly loose and bra-less and sexually accessible. The comments

[6] It is worth noting recent calls for heatwaves (described as 'silent killers') to be mediated alongside extreme weather events such as storms through a naming process. 'If it has a name, a hashtag, media coverage, then people pay attention,' Baughman McLeod explains in the article in *Euronews* (Frost 2021 [online]).

[7] Considering the current scripting of the 'popular memory' of 1976 as a period of hot summers, passions and new styles of music, it is unsurprising, then, to see these tropes re-emerge in recent popular literature for the general reader.

[8] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vP6hCx5_pYs.

have now been switched off, no doubt due to many of the comments deviating from the archive's intentions. Though it is not clear at all what Pathé News' intentions are with uploading this footage. Nevertheless, this is a framing of the female body during a heatwave as passive material for drought narrative-building that does not push that narrative of living without water forward, but places drought and heatwave in a glorious and legendary British weather past. While this heatwave video created the opportunity for viewing women as sexual objects, it also invited (when the comments were switched on) a new currency of 'memory' and urban nostalgia to re-produce a narrative around the video amongst the YouTube posters, wherein they revealed the 'imagined community' of 1976 as one that has now been lost to political correctness and women's rights. Thus, drought memory says as much about contemporary politics of gender as it does about environmental history.

Living without water: remembering women's labour

A second key example concerns a different but equally iconic representation of older women or housewives (likely to be mothers) passively queuing at standpipes in 1976, or carrying buckets to standpipes, in various television news items, which are then remediated in newspapers and online. A Google image search of UK drought 1976 brings to the surface many newspaper images and repeated television news footage of middle-aged housewives standing in queues waiting for water, appearing to chat but mostly patiently waiting. Some of this iconicity predates 1976, as we can find in the Pathé News archive published news footage from 1952 'Rain and Drought: Water on the Ration' in Sussex, wherein much of the footage shows women (dressed in housewife attire) walking to the town pump with their containers; and, from 1959 'News in Flashes', containing film footage showing an older woman at the standpipe during a drought in Edinburgh.[9] In these early examples, film news footage (for cinema release) can be seen to be working hard to make a spectacle of drought and they do so through two iconic images that have become short-hand for drought and water shortage ever since. The dried and cracked reservoir bed and the woman at the watering place. Thus, we have footage of a dried out Gladhouse Reservoir in the 1959 footage, followed by some kind of externalised domestic scene, with the woman and the children, ordinarily 'in the kitchen', finding themselves out into the street at the standpipe. Likewise, framed as waiting happily, patiently and politely by news broadcasters. Their 'keep calm and carry on' aspiration of British women recurs in 1976 through iconic imagery of women doing what many women around the world still do and will have done in the not too distant past: waited and chatted at the community watering place before carrying home the water.

What we have, then, if we currently search online for media pertaining to the 'UK Drought 1976' is a visual representation of women that is either reminiscent of the misogyny around the 'heatwave' culture of the late 1970s or positions older women (often mothers) as passive actors in water scarcity – waiting for the men to deliver the water, to turn on supplies or to fix the problem. In either case, women are (literally) thrown back in time to a time before liberation and emancipatory social movements of the 1970s. Consequently,

[9] British Pathé (1952) 'Rain and Drought: Water on the Ration' Published 13 April 2014 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7m1FUB0iGE and (1959) 'News in Flashes' Published on 13 Apr 2014 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBFf5SD6Kek

women's unpaid domestic 'labour' and relationship-building that ensure a resilient community slide out of view as emphasis is placed on their shrill and trivial chatter at standpipes. The television news footage from Channel 4 News website from 1976 uploaded to YouTube in 2012 showing an interview with a woman at the standpipe who states:

> We've all been rather upset to see that half the constituency are, sort of, on and we're off, and I think that, like the war, we don't mind if everybody else is the same as we are but you rather object to carrying buckets and buckets of water every day when you find that someone around the corner has got theirs turned on (ITN Source)[10]

The final interview in the archival clip is with a man in the street who signs off with him laughing to the reporter that he will send the bill for his wife's damaged leg – a reference to the huge amount of water women were expected to carry back and forth that summer.

In summary, in this second iconic representation of women in the 1976 drought brought to us by from Channel 4's YouTube site we have user comments switched on and much of the debate pertains to lamenting the loss of 1976. This is a typical comment with the most 'likes': 'The best summer I have ever experienced. England was a much better place then, in EVERY way. Disagree? Go back to 1976 and then you'd see. Every decade has had its problems, but the 1970s were so much better than what we're living in today.' Followed by a retort from a female commenter: 'Sexism and prejudice were a lot more acceptable then. Pictures of naked or near-naked women hung on the walls of almost every garage and discrimination and dirty jokes existed in almost every workplace.'[11]

Living without water: remembering the woman journalist of the summer of 1976

Look beyond the current mainstream social mediation of 1976 and we can find that the popularity of the memories of 'heatwave' or the drudgery of expected women's work at the standpipes and tankers can be countered by significant and extensive shared memories of traumatic drought, particularly in the agricultural sector and rural communities. Evelyn Cox's *The Great Drought* (1978) details in depth and records with close attention to water usage the unusually dry winter which was followed by a dry spring and summer that included sixteen consecutive days of temperatures over 30 degrees Celsius. This resulted in many reservoirs drying up and significant water rationing on her farm with a water deficit that continued for several months. Paying close attention to drought storytelling is a methodological issue: it requires patience, slow memory and a long durée approach to understanding human relationships with water. It details the daily and time-consuming mitigation practices and the sacrifices necessary to ensure the very basics of provision. Living with drought in the UK is neither expected nor remembered well, rather drought has been reduced to media spectacle, and what is more spectacular than barely clad women's bodies or desiccated reservoirs, or even both together as noted above. The reality of UK

[10] This ITN footage is available at Channel 4 News 'Drought 1976: archive pictures of the driest summer' at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unJoZHD0AM8).

[11] See Comments at ITN Source: Drought 1976: archive pictures of the driest summer at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unJoZHD0AM8

drought in journalist-turned-farmer Cox's account is representable through slow remembrance, deliberatively conveyed in writing and documented as a diarisation of environmental and mundane domestic experience.

Heatwave media culture (fast, blazing, repetitive and sizzling in its content) only obfuscates the slow memories of living without water and the invisible and slow-onset of the drying of the land. Cox's book presents the active and adaptable emergence of a powerful and entrepreneurial female subjectivity but she does this through a dry form of storytelling: documenting, evidencing and detailing each change in circumstance. Such a method of storytelling does not fit with the popular and nostalgic collective memory of the summer of 1976. While it should not be forgotten that the Women's Movement was particularly active throughout the 1970s (we had the 1970 Equal Pay Act and *Spare Rib* Magazine in 1972), the patriarchal determination for remediating the summer of 1976 as a peculiarly English heatwave (de-centred from other drought narratives that happen in faraway Global South countries) continues to shape the psycho-geography of a masculine-maritime culture wherein real stories of water scarcity and women's labour therein have been silenced and made invisible. As I noted in *Media and Water* (2022: 110): 'If we continue within the current template of popular narratives of heatwaves, where drought is for scientists and heatwaves are for the tabloids, we will indeed be taken by surprise every time.' We need a way of representing and remembering water and it's lack that acknowledges slowness and slow-onset invisible eventhood because water scarcity is very likely to creep up, disable, cripple and paralyse communities, and many groups who are silenced or forgotten (especially women and ethnic minorities) will continue to be disproportionately impacted.

Conclusion

In *Disaster Writing: The Cultural Politics of Catastrophe in Latin America* by Mark Anderson (2011), we have an important arts and humanities approach to drought risk and resilience, one that has informed my own media and memory research of drought stories in the UK and Brazil. Water scarcity is not simply a matter of policy (scientific, economic, public engagement), it is also a matter of cultural policy, cultural values and by extension cultural narratives (which are nationally specific but also globally shared) and these play a significant part in perception, reception and behaviour. Anderson's chapter on 'Drought and the Literary Construction of Risk' pertains to Brazil and the late 19th and early part of the 20th centuries and makes the case that as scientific data was absent at the time, then literary data, folk culture and imaginative constructions served as evidence of drought and its impacts. Before science could make drought visible, art and culture served as the early warning systems. Drought then requires a persistence of vision across culture and media discourses, forms and practices: drought stories are memorable and sustainable but require multi-modal and interdisciplinary attention. Anderson mentions several types of drought narratives at work in Brazilian literary cultures that construct and ultimately institutionalise drought in the Brazilian national imaginary (there was the Great Drought of 1877-1879 and the drought of 1915 as key events):

> These texts reformulated the vague notion of drought as a purely natural phenomenon of incalculable destructive force into a refined system governed by the interaction of classifiable variables, including social and political factors not formerly

> considered. More than impartial ethnographies, these novels' meticulous descriptions of local economic contexts, cultural customs, and political and social orders correspond to the calculated objectivity of risk assessment, with its aim of assigning contingent values to unknown quantities. (Anderson, 2011: 66)

In a geographical and socio-political UK context dominated by maritime histories, island mentality and a watery sense of place, drought narratives work against the cultural norms of media templates, cultural memories and gender conformity. There is, however, the short novel *The Drought* (1965) by J. G. Ballard, that is worth remembering in pandemic times. In the story the tipping point has been reached and water is the new currency as humans struggle for survival. In John Harrison's 2014 introduction to *The Drought* he states:

> The drought at the heart of *The Drought* is cultural. Culture is withering. In the guise of rainfall, old social and political meanings run down to the sea and are decreasingly renewed. Where the land seemed fertile, its inhabitants can now admit that it is exhausted.

In reading *living without water* through media, memory and gender I have sought to daylight the cultural representations of UK water scarcity in opposition to the dominant narratives of a watery sense of place. The role of women has been fundamental to the mediated spectacle of UK drought as the undressed, tabloid-framed body and in terms of hidden physical (domestic, farming) and cultural (journalism, storytelling) labour. Yet, as Ballard writes: 'Catherine gazed out at the exposed lake-bed. "It's almost dry. Don't you feel, doctor, that everything is being drained away, all the memories and stale sentiments?'"

References

Accura, E. (2020) *Blacks Can't Swim.* Available at: https://blackscantswim.com/

Anderson, M. (2011) *Disaster Writing: The Cultural Politics of Catastrophe in Latin America,* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

Ayres, O. (2020) 'This Month in the Past: Who remembers the summer of 1976?' *Telegraph and Argus*, 28 August 2020. Available at: https://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/18681083.month-past-remembers-summer-1976/ date accessed 20 July 2021.

Bachmair, S. C. Svensson , J. Hannaford , L. J. Barker , and K. Stahl (2016) 'A quantitative analysis to objectively appraise drought indicators and model drought impacts' *Hydrology and Earth System Sciences*, 20, 2589-2609.

Ballard, J.G. (1965) (2014) *The Drought*, London: Fourth Estate.

BBC1 (2017-2018) *Blue Planet II* (TV Series).

BBC1 (2001-2002) *The Blue Planet* (TV Series).

Bos, Rene ten (2009) ‘Towards an amphibious anthropology: water and Peter Sloterdijk’ *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27, 73- 86.

Cabinet Office (2008) ‘The Pitt review: lessons learned from the 2007 floods.’ The National Archives https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20100807034701/http:/archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/pittreview/_/media/assets/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/flooding_review/pitt_review_full%20pdf.pdf. Accessed 4 January 2022.

Coelho, Karen, and Nithya V. Raman (2013) ‘From the Frying Pan to the Floodplain: Negotiating Land, Water, and Fire in Chennai’s Development’. In *Ecologies of Urbanism in India: Metropolitan Civility and Sustainability*, edited by Anne Rademacher and K. Sivaramakrishnan. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Cox, E. (1978) *The Great Drought of 1976*, London: Abe Books.

Desilvey, C. (2012) ‘Making sense of transience: an anticipatory history’ *Cultural Geography* 19:1, 31–54.

Douglas, I., K. Alam, M.A. Maghenda, Y. McDonnell, L. McLean, and J. Campbell. (2012) *Unjust Waters: Climate Change, Flooding and the Urban Poor in Africa*.

Endfield, G. (2011) Reculturing and particularising climate discourses: weather, identity and the work of Gordon Manley. Osiris 26(1): 142–162.

Frost, R. (2021) ‘“A silent killer”: Why naming extreme heatwaves could help prevent deaths’ *Euronews*. Available at https://www.euronews.com/green/2021/08/23/a-silent-killer-why-naming-extreme-heatwaves-could-help-prevent-deaths date accessed 23rd August 2021.

Garde-Hansen, J. (2021) *Media and Water: Communication, Culture and Perception*, London: IB Tauris.

Garde-Hansen, J., McEwen, L. J, Holmes, A. and O. Jones (2017) 'Sustainable Flood Memory: Remembering as Resilience’ *Memory Studies* 10:4, 384-405.

Garde-Hansen J., McEwen, L. J. and O. Jones (2016) 'Towards a memo-techno-ecology: mediating memories of extreme flooding in resilient communities’. In Andrea Hajek, Christine Lohmeier and Christian Pentzold (eds) *Social Memory in a Mediated World: Remembering in troubled times*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 55-73.

Hall, A. (2018) ‘Remembering in God’s Name: The Role of the Church and Community Institutions in the Aftermath and Commemoration of Floods’ in Georgina H. Endfield and Lucy Veale (eds) *Cultural Histories, Memories and Extreme Weather: A Historical Geography*, London: Routledge, 112-132.

Kempe, M. (2007), '"Mind the Next Flood!" memories of natural disasters in northern Germany from the sixteenth century to the present', *The Medieval History Journal*, 10:1–2, 327–54.

Kirkham, M. (2018) 'UK heatwave 1976 in pictures: The scorching summer of 1976 in Britain' *Express*. Available at: https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/994560/UK-heatwave-weather-pictures-1976-heatwave-pictures, accessed 20 July 21).

Krause, F. (2017) 'Towards an Amphibious Anthropology of Delta Life' *Human Ecology*, 45: 3, 403–408.

Krause F, Garde-Hansen J. and Whyte N. (2012) 'Flood memories – media, narratives and remembrance of wet landscapes in England' *Journal of Arts and Communities* 4, 128–42.

Lambert, D. Martins, L. and Ogborn, M. (2006) 'Currents, visions and voyages: historical geographies of the sea', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 32, 479–93.

Liguori, A., McEwen, L., Blake, J., & Wilson, M. (2021) Towards 'creative participatory science': Exploring future scenarios through specialist drought science and community storytelling. Frontiers in Environmental Science, 8. Available at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fenvs.2020.589856/full

McEwen L., Bryan K., Black A., Blake J. and Afzal M. (2021) 'Science-Narrative Explorations of "Drought Thresholds" in the Maritime Eden Catchment, Scotland: Implications for Local Drought Risk Management' *Frontiers in Environmental Science.* Available at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fenvs.2021.589980/full

Morgan, R. (2018) 'On the Home Front: Australians and the 1914 Drought' in Georgina H. Endfield and Lucy Veale (eds) *Cultural Histories, Memories and Extreme Weather: A Historical Geography*, London: Routledge, 34-54.

Omer H., Alon N. (1994) 'The continuity principle: a unified approach to disaster and trauma' *American Journal of Community Psychology* 22(2): 73–287.

Pearce, C. (2018) 'Extreme Weather and the Growth of Charity: Insights from the Shipwrecked Fishermen and Mariners' Royal Benevolent Society, 1839-1860' in Georgina H. Endfield and Lucy Veale (eds) *Cultural Histories, Memories and Extreme Weather: A Historical Geography*, London: Routledge, 55-77.

Sarmiento, E., Landström, C. and Whatmore, S**.** (2019) 'Biopolitics, discipline, and hydro-citizenship: Drought management and water governance in England', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 44(2), 361–375.

Semple Jr, R., B. (1976) 'Heat Wave Is Making the English Act Funny' *The New York Times* 3rd July 1976. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/1976/07/03/archives/heat-wave-is-making-the-english-act-funny.html date accessed 20th Aug 2021.

Wachinger G., Renn O., Begg C., Kuhlicke C. (2013) 'The risk perception paradox—implications for governance and communication of natural hazard' *Risk analysis: an official publication of the Society for Risk Analysis,* 33:6 1049–1065.

Weitkamp, E., McEwen, L. and Ramirez, P. (2020) 'Communicating the hidden: toward a framework for drought risk communication in maritime climates' *Climatic Change* 163, 831–850.