



I AM THE RIVER THE RIVER IS ME

ZINDOC PRESENTS I AM THE RIVER, THE RIVER IS ME A FILM BY CORINNE VAN EGERAAT & PETR LOM
WITH NED TAPA DESMOND CANTERBURY BRENDAN KENNEDY MELISSA KENNEDY JUSTINE MULLER STEWART REWETI KANUI TAPA JIMMY THE DOG
DIRECTOR & CINEMATOGRAPHER PETR LOM PRODUCER CORINNE VAN EGERAAT EDITOR GYS ZEVENBERGEN SOUND DESIGN MARK GLYNNIE & OLMO VAN STRAALLEN
SOUND RECORDIST AD STOOP & TAHUARO A OHIA TAONGA PUORO ARTIST PUORO JEROME COMPOSERS PUORO JEROME & GEORG BULO BRAGING MICHEL RUMMENS POST JAN JAAP KUIPER
COPRODUCER KRO-NCRV DE BOEDDHISTISCHE BLIK CHIEF COMMISSIONING EDITOR LAETITIA SCHOOF COPRODUCER TEN THOUSAND IMAGES, METTE CHENG MUNTHE-KAAS
WITH THE SUPPORT OF NETHERLANDS FILMFUND NETHERLANDS FILMFUND PRODUCTION INCENTIVE NPO-FOND NORWEGIAN FILM INSTITUTE FRITT ORD FOUNDATION

ZIN

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I AM THE RIVER, THE RIVER IS ME | 89 min | 2024

Countries of production: Netherlands/Norway/New Zealand

English and Māori, with English subtitles



SHORT SYNOPSIS

A canoe trip down the Whanganui River in New Zealand, led by a Māori elder, becomes a call to action to draw closer to nature and fight climate change through a fundamental value shift.

LONG SYNOPSIS:

The Whanganui River in Aotearoa/New Zealand is the first river in the world to be recognized as a legal person, as a living and indivisible being.

Māori river guardian Ned Tapa invites a First Nations Elder from Australia and his daughter, who are activists dedicated to saving their own dying river back home, on a five-day canoe trip down this sacred river. Joining them are Ned's friends, his family, an international film crew and Ned's dog Jimmy.

The river is the main character of this film. Both mirror and inspiration, the river unites all the travelers organically, where everyone has a voice – including the crew – to share stories of humor and light, and a space to heal from the darkness of the past, of enduring historical injustice.

For the Māori, the Whanganui is a living being – their ancestor. This belief has been institutionalized by New Zealand law as of 2017. Granting the river legal personhood is a way of environmental protection for the river, and as a way of legally validating the Māori worldview.

The film is an invitation to experience these values: of thinking about our relationship to the world around us – to above all the natural world – as one of intergenerational care and guardianship rather than just ownership/use/extraction.

Made over a three-year period, in close collaboration with the Whanganui Māori, the film is a positive, urgent call to action for the rights of nature: now the fastest growing legal movement in the world.

ABOUT THE FILM

Corinne van Egeraat and Petr Lom are a filmmaking couple, who have been making independent creative human rights documentary films together for the past fifteen years. They are now shifting their focus to working on the rights of nature.

They read about the granting of personhood rights to the Whanganui River when it was world news in 2017. The story captured their attention and they travelled to New Zealand, where they had the good fortune to meet river guardian and Māori community leader Ned Tapa. They made a short film together with him about the river, and the result was one of the most watched short documentaries broadcasts in the Netherlands, on NPO2Doc-Kort. The idea of personhood rights for nature clearly resonated with a big audience.

They had struck up a friendship with Ned Tapa, and he suggested they return to make a longer film together. He had also recently met a visiting young Australian artist who worked with First Nations' Australians, and she wondered if Ned would like to invite a group of First Nations Australians advocating for the rights of their rivers in Australia to travel down the Whanganui River together. This is how the idea for the long film was born.

The film is structured as a road trip: a five-day canoe journey down the Whanganui in two six-person canoes. The river itself is the main character of the film. For the Māori, the Whanganui is a living being – their ancestor. This belief has been institutionalized by New Zealand law as of 2017. Granting the river legal personhood is a way of environmental protection for the river, and as a way of legally validating the Māori worldview.

This way of seeing the world – and above all the values that underpin it – might be a crucial way for us to address the challenges now facing us because of the climate crisis. The film is an invitation to experience these values: of thinking about our relationship to the world around us – to above all

the natural world – as one of intergenerational care and guardianship rather than just ownership/use/extraction.

The film is also a call for unity and togetherness – the recognition that we are all – literally and metaphorically in the same boat. This sense is fostered by making everyone on the journey – including the film crew – have a voice and become a character in the film.

Traditional Māori music artist Puoro Jerome also appears in the film, composing the score of the film. His music, or *Taonga Puoro*, literally sound treasure, has healing as its original purpose. Along the film's journey, this healing takes the form of sharing stories of sorrow of the past – of colonial suffering by both the Māori and the First Nations Australians and recognizing what kind of steps for healing the present from the past still must take place. And what steps the Australians might take to help their own dying rivers that do not have the protections of the Whanganui.

The film balances both heaviness and light – structured as a joyful journey of friendship. The viewers are immersed in the overwhelming natural beauty of the Whanganui River and will feel as if they travel along on this canoe camping trip.

The film team is made up of indigenous and non-indigenous filmmakers, and the Whanganui River is an official coproducer of the film.

ZINDOC is an Amsterdam based production company. Producer Corinne van Egeraat works together with her Czech Canadian director/cinematographer partner Petr Lom. Their award-winning work has premiered at the Berlinale, Venice, IDFA and Sundance and screened at over 400 festivals around the world and has been broadcast in over 20 countries. Their 2022 film *Myanmar Diaries* won the Berlinale Documentary Award. They are both members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences.

Trailer <https://vimeo.com/876670578>

Teaser <https://vimeo.com/876670160>

Stills <https://we.tl/t-3JtBwzDxCo>

Website www.amtheriver.org

CREDITS

Director and cinematographer	Petr Lom
Producer	Corinne van Egeraat
Co-producer	Mette Cheng Munthe-Kaas
Editor	Gys Zevenbergen NCE
Sound design and mix	Mark Glynne & Olmo van Straalen
Māori taonga puoro artist	Puoro Jerome
Māori music composer	Puoro Jerome

Sami music composer	Georg Buljo
Sound	Ad Stoop & Tahuora Ohia
2nd unit camera	Richard Sidey
Grading	Michiel Rummens
Image postproduction	Jan Jaap Kuiper
Line producer	Natasja Möhrs
Script Consultant	Tamara Vuurmans

A ZINDOC production, in coproduction with the Whanganui River (Aotearoa/New Zealand), Ten Thousand Images (Norway) and KRO-NCRV/de Boeddhistische Blik (the Netherlands)

With the support of The Netherlands Film Fund
The NPO Fund
Norwegian Film Institute
Fritt Ord

Distributor Cinema Delicatessen

Netherlands cinema release will be on the 23rd of May 2024

IMPACT CAMPAIGN

ZINDOC is currently setting up an impact campaign - together with impact partners Think Film, Cinema Delicatessen and Ambassade van de Noordzee. The campaign will have a broad scope, from grassroots screenings and advocacy in countries represented in the film to an ambitious international policy level. The kick-off of the campaign will be at the premiere of the film at the Movies That Matter Film Festival in March 2024.

For the sake of future human and non-human generations, it is time for a new **nature-inclusive democracy, a new narrative** in which non-human life forms are effectively represented.

The historical recognition of the Whanganui River as a legal person sparked the worldwide **Rights of Nature movement**, which is now the fastest growing legal movement in the world.

We believe the film can help validate eco laws and the work of nature rights activists, policymakers, politicians, and NGOs: to help create unity, a change in values and contribute to the understanding of the significance of indigenous and local knowledge for a sustainable relationship with aquatic ecosystems. Of the importance of our dependency on healthy water, of a healthy relationship with water - of guardianship versus ownership, and ultimately of ourselves being water in all that is life.

Impact Context

- Flowing through the heart of New Zealand's North Island, from the Mount Tongariro active volcano to the Tasman Sea, the 290km Whanganui River is one of the country's most important natural resources. Māori Whanganui tribes have relied on the Whanganui River for at least 880 years - more than 700 years before European settlers arrived.
- In 2017, Whanganui River became the first river in the world to be recognized as a legal person. In effect, this grant of personhood by the New Zealand Supreme Court recognized in law that harming the Whanganui River is the same as harming the Whanganui tribe. It represented a seismic shift to a kin centric worldview, which sees humans as an equal part of an extended ecological family that shares ancestry and origins. This worldview positions living entities as relatives, not resources. This in turn shapes social conduct that emphasizes respect and responsibility to the natural world.
- For many Indigenous people, the concept of nature as sentient is nothing new. In Maori culture, it is the community's duty to protect both the natural landscape they have inherited, and the ancestors who came before them who are embodied in that landscape. Humans and water are especially believed to be intertwined.
- New Zealand had a precedent of granting legal personhood to natural resources. The status was previously granted to Te Urewera park and Mount Taranki volcano. In practical terms, realization of these legal rights relies on appointed guardians acting on behalf of the natural feature.
- The grant to the Whanganui River sparked a global Indigenous-led campaign echoing the rights of nature movement, which aims to provide concrete protections for the natural landscape. The Ganges and Yamuna rivers in India, all rivers in Bangladesh, the Magpie River in Canada, the Klamath River in the USA and the Amazon in Colombia have each subsequently been given legal rights - although in India the decision was later revoked.
- The campaign for nature personhood has also been taken up in places without Indigenous communities but valuing a deeper relationship with nature and land; notably in Spain, where the saltwater lake Mar Menor has recently been granted personhood rights, and efforts in France for the Loire and in the UK for the River Frome. This development is a particularly interesting component of this conversation which challenges the increasingly dominant notion that Indigenous people have exclusivity of expertise on how best to protect nature. The UK proposal would simply have made the local council and a local charity joint river guardian, tasked with balancing the river's interest with the health and safety of local people.
- Nature personhood raises the profile of natural landmarks by drawing attention to their beauty and cultural significance. It encourages eco-tourism, and the growth of this non-extractive economy could be key to protecting natural landscapes more broadly. Eco-tourism gets more people involved in river conservation and offers a positive way for Indigenous communities to gain a voice, and educate travellers on the environmental threats in their territories and importance of protecting vital waterways.
- Focusing on legal personhood has a purpose to tackle actions that threaten or destroy nature

that are legal but not aligned with a regenerative culture. Furthering the concept of nature rights, the Earth Law Centre has developed a Universal Declaration of River Rights. This draws both from grants of rights made worldwide and scientific understandings of healthy river systems. Governments have used the Declaration as a basis for legislation, adapting the text to local laws and culture.

- Communities have acted on behalf of rivers in court: In Ecuador, which pioneered the establishment of nature rights in its constitution, the court ruled in favour of the Vilcabamba River and ordered damage caused to it by a road-widening project to be remediated. In May 2021, a network of streams, lakes and marshes in Orange County, Florida, sued a developer and the state to try and stop a housing development from destroying them.

Impact partners

Think-Film (global)

<https://tfip.org/>

Cinema Delicatessen (Netherlands)

<https://cinemadelicatessen.nl/>

Ambassade van de Noordzee (Netherlands)

<https://www.ambassadevandenoordzee.nl/>

FILMOGRAPHY ZINDOC

We are the River (2024) Feature documentary about the Whanganui River, the first river in the world to be granted personhood rights. A 'river road trip'. Directed by Petr Lom, produced by Corinne van Egeraat. In coproduction with the Whanganui River, Ten Thousand Images Norway, KRO-NCRV/de Boeddhistische Blik. Premiere TBD, Netherlands cinema release with distributor Cinema Delicatessen - 23rd May 2024.

Letter to San Zaw Htway (2024). Collaborative doc made from letters written in memoriam to a Burmese artist and activist. Directed by Petr Lom, produced by Corinne van Egeraat. Original release 2021: KRO-NCRV/de Boeddhistische Blik. Premiere IDFA 2021. Re-release short version: NY Times Op-doc to be published on February 1st 2024.

The Coriolis Effect (2024). Feature documentary about our world spinning out of control set in Cape Verde – the place where hurricanes are born. Directed by Petr Lom, produced by Corinne van Egeraat. Produced with the Netherlands Film Fund, NPO and COBO Funds, and broadcaster EO. In postproduction.

Myanmar Diaries (2022) Collective hybrid feature doc about life under the terror regime in Myanmar in the aftermath of its military coup made with ten anonymous Burmese filmmakers. Directed by The Myanmar Film Collective, produced by Corinne van Egeraat. KRO-NCRV/Buddhist Broadcaster; Netherlands Film Fund. Berlinale Panorama world premiere. Winner of the Berlinale Documentary Award and Amnesty Award.

SAD FILM (2021) Short doc about living under fear and the impossibility of creativity under a dictatorship in Myanmar. Directed by Vasili (pseudonym), produced by Corinne van Egeraat. Venice film festival premiere. HUMAN broadcaster.

We are the River (2020). Short doc about indigenous wisdom and climate change in New Zealand. Directed by Petr Lom, produced by Corinne van Egeraat. Commissioned for HUMAN, Netherlands.

Angels on Diamond Street (2020). Documentary about the new sanctuary movement in the US. Directed by Petr Lom, produced by Corinne van Egeraat. Produced with broadcaster EO, NPO and COBO funds. IDFA 2020.

Yangon Free Funeral Service (2018). Short doc about Burmese cinema idol Kyaw Thu and his NGO that has buried over 150 000 people for free in a country where funerals are unaffordable for the poor. Directed by Petr Lom, produced by Corinne van Egeraat. Commissioned for *De Correspondent*.

Burma Storybook (2017). Feature-length creative documentary about Burma's transition from dictatorship told through Burmese poetry. Directed by Petr Lom, produced by Corinne van Egeraat. Netherlands Film Fund and IKON/EO production, co-production with Northern Norwegian Film Fund. IFFR Rotterdam.

Snowden's Guardian Angel (2017). Documentary short about illegal Hong Kong immigrant who sheltered Edward Snowden while he was in hiding in Hong Kong. Directed by Petr Lom, produced by Corinne van Egeraat. Commissioned for *De Correspondent*.

ANA ANA ("I am me" in Arabic) (2013). Director, Editor, Co-Producer. Feature-length creative documentary about the inner world of four young Egyptian women. Directed by Corinne van Egeraat and Petr Lom, produced by Corinne van Egeraat. IDFA 2013.

OTHER

Back to the Square (2012). Feature-length documentary about injustice in post-revolutionary Egypt. Directed by Petr Lom, produced by Piraya Films, Torstein Grude. IFFR. Prizes: Hong Kong Film Festival Jury Prize, Planete Doc Amnesty Award.

Letters to the President (2009). Feature-length documentary about President Ahmadinejad's populism. Directed and produced by Petr Lom. Berlinale Forum.

On a Tightrope (2007). Feature-length documentary about Muslim Uighur minority in China. Directed by Petr Lom, produced by Piraya Films, Torstein Grude. Sundance, IDFA.

Speeding on the Virtual Highway (2007). Feature-length documentary about Dutch new media artist Micha Klein. Directed by Corinne van Egeraat, produced by Submarine, Femke Wolting. IDFA

Cowboys in Kosovo (2004). Short. What remains of the dreams of four friends in post-war Kosovo. Directed and produced by Corinne van Egeraat, ZINDOC. IFFR, HotDocs.

Bride Kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan (2004). Hour doc. The first film to be made about the practice of bride kidnapping in this Central Asian country. Directed and produced by Petr Lom. IDFA

Lord of the Jungle (2000). Directed and produced by Corinne van Egeraat, ZINDOC. IDFA

