



Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water

Maude Barlow, Tony Clarke

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In this “chilling, in-depth examination of a rapidly emerging global crisis” (*In These Times*), Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke, two of the most active opponents to the privatization of water show how, contrary to received wisdom, water mainly flows uphill to the wealthy. Our most basic resource may one day be limited: our consumption doubles every twenty years—twice the rate of population increase. At the same time, increasingly transnational corporations are plotting to control the world’s dwindling water supply. In England and France, where water has already been privatized, rates have soared, and water shortages have been severe. The major bottled-water producers—Perrier, Evian, Naya, and now Coca-Cola and PepsiCo—are part of one of the fastest-growing and least-regulated industries, buying up freshwater rights and drying up crucial supplies.

A truly shocking exposé that is a call to arms to people around the world, *Blue Gold* shows in frightening detail why, as the vice president of the World Bank has pronounced, “The wars of the next century will be about water.”

Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water Details

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From Reader Review Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water for online ebook

Maura says

I'm surprised that it got so many good reviews, because this book didn't really do anything for me. I normally love reading about crises caused by things being commodified when they shouldn't be, but this book treated the issue pretty superficially and didn't really teach me anything new. The author also repeated herself a lot--like, she would say the same thing over and over again. Did I mention it was repetitive? ;)

I have no doubt that Barlow is an admirable advocate, but the whole book seemed it like it came straight off a website or something. Not to mention the fact that she discussed activists from Guyana in the "Africa" chapter--I mean, I can overlook typos, but if you're going to write a book you should at least get your basic geography straight.

Jessica Zu says

A must read in the age of green technology. In order not to fall into the same trap of the green revolution, we have to be more aware and more informed about "green" technology and ponder on just how "green" green techs are. In an interrelated world, in a globalized economy, "green" needs a new definition and a new understanding. Water is not the only problem, but it is the lens which enables you to see from another perspective. Water is something we must reflect upon in order to make sense of our human conditions. Water is not just for drinking, it is not just a material. We need to understand its cultural contexts, its political power, the consequences of its commodification and the multi-layer meanings, powers and controls that are tied up to water. It is much more than blue gold. How we conceive and use water determines our lives now and our future.

Dorothy Hynous says

The most depressing book I've ever read and a must read for every human being.

NOW

Karen says

The book is a thorough and detailed look at

1. the world's limited freshwater resources,
2. how they are being reduced, and
3. how the remaining supplies and their delivery systems are being privatized, mostly to the detriment of the world's poor.

The author's case is compelling, but the sheer volume of detail makes the book a slog to read and nulls the alarm the author is ringing. (The information is presumably a bit outdated by now, but the author wrote two

follow up books on the same topic.) All the details seem to be because the author aims to make an airtight case. I did spot at least one typo (billion instead of million), so there may be some erroneous details, but it doesn't harm the overall case.

Marc says

I have to say that this was a disappointment. The authors throw around a lot of numbers and information about the topic itself and the private companies involved. Still, when it comes to giving more insight on how these things came to be and work on the inside, the book falls flat. The writers have a strong opinion on this topic, which in itself is not a bad thing, but it also finds its way into the writing and arguing. There are too many points that were only argued from one point of view or flat out made little sense. The most glaring one being that the author mentions that the private water suppliers raise prices, but on the other hand also are responsible for increased water consumption. That is not intuitive and this paradox is never explained (besides the fact that "in order to make more profit, companies have to sell more of their products"...that is wrong they can also raise the prices...or reach more customers and at the same time decrease the per-person-consumption). Anyway, further the author makes use of the over-exhausted WTO-WB-IMF arguments. In some way the book is the same old anti-globalization debate lacking some depth on the specific topic.

Another problem is the credibility of the author. Look, in general I support the author in being suspicious about the privatization of the water sector, but I want credible accounts and not cheer for manufactured arguments with a clear bias. As soon as the first chapter the authors are about to lose a part of that credibility, when they state that "there are no more doubts by experts that humans are responsible for the climate change". Most informed people know that this is not the case. They are still enough assuming it might be a natural process to render this non-unanimous. Why can the authors not simply say that the majority of experts hold that opinion? Why taint your credibility for a rather casual argument left from the main subject? Now I have to assume that situation as described might be precarious but not (nearly) as bad as preached by the authors. I just could not trust these numbers anymore and some other points made by the author. Not to mention that now as the book is a bit dated, the situation must have been a lot worse than it seems as it was as described back then.

Not all is bad though. I liked the non-anti-globalization and anti-privatization parts, especially the early chapters on how the natural water cycle works and how we are about to do harm to it. Still I would assume there are more objective books on the market about this important subject.

David says

Brilliant book about water has been used as political, economical weapon from bankers, elites, and countries with geographical advantages over the weaker..Countries, banks, corporations have been relentlessly trying to capture limited global fresh water resources..and by leveraging the ownership of the water supplies; corporations, countries and banks, especially so called WTO, IMF, World Banks are united together, can control other countries for maximizing their own advantages without any regard for human lives. The so called New World Order and the Elites are using international trade pacts, agreements to kidnap and steal those with resources. Likewise, applies to rare-earth, metals, copper, oil, food, seeds...Must read book to understand the basic flaw of Supply/Demand when it is being used on universal supply of water..

Julia says

Overall, I found this issue compelling and the book well-written. Although I was certainly aware of many of these issues prior to reading this book, it brought more clarity into the truly terrifying water crises that are to come. I would have enjoyed the book more had it not been repetitive in places. I tired of the same stories being repeated. Given that the authors did appear to be on a rant in some places, I'm interested to get counterpoints on the trade policies that are described in this book.

Crystine says

I would only recommend reading this if you are fully prepared to weep with guilt every time you wash the dishes. Maude Barlow's stance of the global water crisis is fairly compelling, though I wish she had more clearly articulated the effect water privatization has on the developing world. The examples of shoddy business and lack of regulations on the behalves of water companies like Vivendi and Suez are certainly shocking, but I personally feel like the point could have been driven home a little further if the every day implications of paying for access to clean water were outlined. Throughout the middle of the book the information does tend to get a little dry (no pun intended), but overall I enjoyed reading it and would definitely recommend it to anyone interested in learning more about the anti-privatization stance on our world's most precious resource.

Friederike Knabe says

This is not a new review. The issues are nonetheless still topical...

There are not many surprises in BLUE GOLD. The primary message of Maud Barlow and Tony Clarke's book echoes the Blue Planet Project, a global campaign to assert the universal right to water, of which Barlow is one of the international leaders. It is the 'battle against the corporate world' - here in particular the 'theft of the world's water'. Of course, it is not so much a 'theft' of water - the world's water supply has been more or less stable since the beginning of time - rather the increasing control by a small group of multinationals over the water's allocation to the peoples of this planet.

Consequently, the strength of the book is in its coverage of the multi-national corporations, the 'Global Water Lords', and the exposure of their expanding power over water delivery and processing systems around the globe. Initiatives to privatize water delivery at a national level probably started with Napoleon III in France in the middle of the 19th century. At that time, governments were usually in charge of water management. Since then privatization has spread from France to the rest of the world. Today, Barlow and Clarke maintain, some 10 corporate players dominate the global water industry. Two French companies hold the lion's share. Most of these major players are multi-utility providers, which increase their hold on the water resources of countries and regions. Once a government opens a door to privatization of any of the water related services, such as water delivery or waste management, it abandons its right to take back control at any stage even if water user groups complain about bad or no service or the company does not live up to the contract. The rules and regulations of the WTO see to that, the authors claim. Although the percentage of national water systems controlled by multi-national corporations at the present time is small, Barlow and Clarke want to

warn of the trend and its implication.

Examples are described where things have gone wrong: poor quality of project implementation resulted in water pollution and environmental damage, and/or communities and local business lost the water supply altogether. In these instances corporate water suppliers maintained their profit margin through cutting back in previously promised investments and/or increasing consumer rates. The latter was implemented without any regard to the capacity of the poor to pay. As a result, they could be cut off from the service.

Barlow and Clarke's analysis of the progression of the global water crisis and its origins is less satisfactory. A reader unfamiliar with complex topic of water might find the tour d'horizon overwhelming. The review of the diversity of root causes at local, national and regional levels is superficial and tends to present generalizations where concrete examples would have been more meaningful. The tendency to paint a black and white picture with big business as the main villain sidelines other major reasons for water crises around the world. Agriculture is only mentioned in passing, although some 70% of all water resources are used by agriculture: agribusiness and millions of small-scale and mid-size farmers across industrialized and developing countries. Implementing water conservation methods (through improved irrigation, drought tolerant crops, etc) could lead to substantial water resource savings.

Recent initiatives against global corporate water control highlighted in the section 'Fightback' are selective, emphasizing well-known international as well as North American cases. The approach is usually confrontational with clearly identified opposing sides. Examples of constructive multi-stakeholder collaboration efforts in many parts of the world which attempt to tackle water scarcity are not given enough recognition.

The 'Way Forward' spells out fundamental principles and recommends a series of standards that should be included in any agreement of public-private partnerships in the water delivery sphere. These include the involvement of water users in the planning of the systems, local stewardship and watershed protection, strengthen water preservation and reclaiming of polluted water systems. Underlying all these standards is the recognition of water as an essential part of life and the right of all beings to water whatever their social or economic status. A call for capacity building and education of consumers, communities, government officials and private sector actors at all levels should be added.

BLUE GOLD is an easy read, maybe for some too easy considering the seriousness of the topic. It covers very important ground, often in an overview fashion that tends to generalize and take a black and white stand. Although it is obvious that the authors did comprehensive research in preparation of the book, it shows a certain lack of thoroughness by not providing citation references (footnotes), adequate source listings and a bibliography or reading list.

Doug says

One thing that made the book difficult to follow was the fact that it uses so many different units for water use and the citations for the statistics they use are a bit dodgy. The world has X km³ of fresh water, the average American uses B gallons/year, Los Angeles requires C barrels/year, they made a deal with Nevada to provide D acre-feet (per month? per year?) of water, and so on. The things I found to be really disturbing was aquifer depletion and diversion of freshwater sources and the lack of clean drinking water in much of the rest of the world, privatization was less problematic for me, because it seems just as much a problem of government mismanagement as corporate profiteering. Municipalities can provide cheap water if they don't spend enough on capital improvements, then when it comes time to upgrade infrastructure, instead of politically unpopular rate increases, they can privatize so consumers gripe about greedy corporations instead.

At the end of the day, this issue boils down to answering two questions: (1) Do we - as consumers, as taxpayers, as human beings - want to pay for the full impact of our current water usage? and (2) what is the mechanism by which we pay for it? The book does a good job of cataloging the impact of our trend of water depletion and mismanagement, but as long as the answer to the first question is "no," any policy proposals to attempt to answer the second questions seem academic.

Maria says

According to Clarke the next war will be for water.

Yesenia Olivo says

I give this book two stars for the sole reason that I did not enjoy the writing style. It's a very fact-heavy book, and it reads much like a pompous person with an overabundance of general knowledge that goes around saying "Did you know...?" to anyone who will listen. Nevertheless, the topic of water as a commodity is intriguing and one that people in America especially probably know nothing about, unless they have been affected by the lack of it. This book, much like water itself, is very easy to dismiss but that does not make it any less important.

Alice says

This book speaks to a very specific point of view. Liberals will read it and think "how true, that's criminal, we have to do something!". Conservatives will think "oh brother, here we go again, blah blah blah". Unfortunately, the author takes many liberal assumptions for granted - people have the right to basic human needs regardless of their ability to pay, environmental uses are as important as human uses, corporations are inherently selfish and short sighted - but doesn't even attempt to convince those who don't share that point of view. Unfortunately, over the last 10+ years since this book was written the world has continued down the path she warns us about. We'll never change things by just preaching to the converted.

Emily says

What can I say... this was one of the most overwhelming books I have ever read, it took me almost 7 months to read because I had to keep taking time off to let my brain decompress. The entire book is incredibly dense, granted with lots of good (although highly alarming) information, but it was too much for me. I really couldn't wait to get to the "Way Forward" chapter in hopes of finding something uplifting. The last two chapters were good in the solutions and ideas offered, but they got really redundant.

Overall, I would only recommend this read to people who are seriously involved in work on water rights and environmental and economic activism around water. A better option for those who have an interest and passion in water issues, but aren't able to sit through 250 pages of intense reading, is to watch "Flow: For Love of Water" which features Barlow and many other great water activists.

I did greatly enjoy the last sentence of the book: The growing number of citizens and groups around the world who belong to the Blue Planet Project and other organizations fighting for a water-secure future believe in the beauty of this dream: that our global water crisis will become the source of global peace; that finally humanity will bow before Nature and learn to live at peace within the limits Nature gives us and with one another; and that through our work together, the people of the world will declare that the sacred waters of life are the common property of the earth and all species, to be preserved for all generations to come.

Mike says

The book raises some interesting questions and has some suggestions for solving the water crisis, but the tone at times verges into the hysterical. This panicked approach may be justified because of the stakes, but it makes the book tedious to read at times. The author also irritated me by not using units consistently. They flip flopped the usage of Imperial and SI units. Sometimes the SI units are first and the Imperial would follow. Other times it was the reverse. Just pick one order and stick with it. Also ground water is two words not one.
