



**Maude Barlow.** *Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water.* New York: New Press, The, 2008. 196 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-59558-186-0.



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## Water Abounds, or Does It?

Maude Barlow's *Blue Covenant* is a passionate plea to take action to rectify the global water situation before it is too late. Barlow is a lifelong activist who has worked tirelessly on this subject, and her dedication and drive comes through in this book. She provides great detail in the examples she uses to support her position and presents the reader with additional material to contemplate in her notes section at the end of the book. The one noticeable issue rests in the fact that she neglects to cite any of her information. Whereas this in and of itself is not wholly problematic, it does make it difficult for those interested in the topic to replicate her work. This stated, the book overall provides much information on a pressing global matter in a relatively short format.

Barlow argues that there are three factors that are bringing us to a crisis with regards to fresh, potable water. The first deals with the loss of freshwater. Barlow links this directly to pollution caused by humans, water displacement and relocation, and accelerating use of the resource. The second addresses the contamination of drinking water and the resulting loss of life; but, this is

couched in socioeconomic terms and links the problem directly to global inequity. The final aspect relates to a growing water cartel that is manipulating water sources for profit. The cartel is involved with all aspects of water, from bottling to damming for hydroelectric power.

Barlow explores privatization of water on a global level extensively. She presents information on the role of the World Bank and the World Trade Organization in helping to set the private water model and incorporates a section on the United Nations as well, indicating that without the assistance of the latter no privatized water model would work. Barlow indicts the World Water Forum as well for the participants' repeated failure to acknowledge access to water as a human right (chapter 2).

Barlow argues that the world is moving toward a corporate controlled freshwater cartel, with private companies, backed by governments and global institutions, making fundamental decisions about who has access to water and under what conditions (p. 91). She builds a strong case to support this with information that pertains

to property rights, investments, and markets. Additional supporting material addresses regulation, conservation, technology and the explosion of the bottled water industry.

The text does not leave the reader without hope. Chapter 4 is dedicated to acknowledging the resistance movements that have appeared globally against the incorporation of water. A series of case studies documents these struggles. They prove to be valuable as Barlow has a selection of countries from all over the world that represent the spectrum of development.

Ultimately, Barlow insists that, by failing to address the global water crisis and refusing to mitigate the problems, the world's leading politicians have exacerbated the situation almost to the point of no return. She concludes that all of the people of the earth must work towards reclamation of water as a shared commons. To

accomplish this, she suggests that we end private ownership of this natural resource and the negative requirements of a market-driven economy. Instead, we must adopt new imperatives such as "cooperation, sustainability and public stewardship" (p. 176).

*Blue Covenant* is an intriguing evaluation of the current global water situation. The solution offered is elegant in its simplicity, yet would require a paradigm shift away from capitalism. That shift may prove to be too complex, regardless of whether the solution is correct. Barlow's perspective on a future composed of water wars, a concept that many do not contemplate unless they are already residing within one of the water-critical areas, is worthy of serious consideration. Despite the lack of citations, *Blue Covenant* offers much to the reader who is interested in exploring the topic of global water access and is a good starting place for the novice or the scholar.

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