

## BLUE FUTURE: PROTECTING WATER FOR PEOPLE AND THE PLANET FOREVER

Maude Barlow

Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2013

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Maude Barlow—Senior Advisor on Water to former United Nations General Assembly President Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann in 2008 and 2009, National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians, and chairperson of the Food and Water Watch board—is truly an expert on global water issues. *Blue Future* is the final instalment in Barlow's *Blue* series, a series which underscores the seriousness of the world's water crisis. In *Blue Future*, Barlow looks at water management from historical, geographical, ecological, social, political, and economic perspectives and reaches the same conclusion every time: water must be established as a public trust for the good of both humanity and the rest of the world.

In her book, Barlow lays out the important work that has already been done in the name of water justice and the significant work that remains to be done. Her solutions to the water problematic follow four key principles: 1) water is a human right, 2) water is a common heritage, 3) water has rights too, and 4) water can teach us how to live together. Through these four principles, Barlow lays out the current state of water politics. She emphasizes the necessity of legally recognizing water as a human right and establishing it as a public trust, noting the disastrous effects of privatization and

commodification of water. She argues that while protecting water sources is of great benefit to humans, water does not merely exist for our benefit; we are part of our ecosystems and we must respect that. She also highlights the fact that water inequality is directly linked to global social and economic inequality.

Instead of focusing on one region or on a handful of water basins, Barlow provides a diversity of examples of water injustice from around the world—showing that water injustice is truly a global issue—and emphasizes that while impacts of a lack of clean, affordable, accessible, and sustainable water supplies are often felt most in developing countries, water inequality is not only between rich and poor countries but also within countries. Examples of Detroit and Attawapiskat represent several cases of poorer racialized communities in urban centres as well as neglected First Nation reserves lacking adequate public water. Barlow is also diverse in her relation of activist movements fighting back against corporations and governments who see water principally as a money maker, citing inspiring examples from nearly every continent.

Barlow does not make any attempt at remaining apolitical in her explanation of the consequences of the world's dwindling water supply and her calls for significant improvement in water management. Instead, she importantly situates the issue of water into the broader global political economic context, dedicating an entire section to discussing neoliberal globalization and unbridled capitalism. These, she argues, are the real causes of the water crisis as well as several other related global crises such as food, poverty, and climate change. Unlike some environmental

publications, Barlow emphasizes that these crises are not simply a matter of reducing household consumption. While, for example, it is important not to run the tap while brushing one's teeth, this combined with other household changes are not enough to save the world's water when, as Barlow shockingly states, ninety percent of water is used by natural resource industries. Industry is where the most pressing changes are needed and these changes will only happen with a systemic political overhaul.

Like clean freshwater itself, *Blue Future* presents detailed information that is crystal clear, essential to our continued existence, and a sign of life in an overwhelmingly difficult fight for water justice. With 2015 being the deadline for the UN to achieve the Millennium Development Goals that were set in 2000 and Barlow's assertion that we are not even close to meeting the minimalist goals on water (or several other areas for that matter), the question on the minds of every concerned global citizen appears towards the end of the book: Is it too late? Barlow is hopeful that it is not, but stresses that we must act now, in a unified, unrelenting manner.

*Georgina Alonso is a writer and researcher with a Master of Arts in International Development Studies from Saint Mary's University where she conducted field research on the impacts of Canadian international development policy related to mining in Peru. Her research interests include foreign aid, sustainable development, and international political economy. Altogether, she has academic experience in five different countries (Canada, France, Spain, Bolivia, and Peru) and in three different languages (English, French, and Spanish).*