

Water Privatization

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Preface

The purpose of this report is to examine the issue of the privatization of water.

Privatization is the control, sale and distribution of the world's water for business and public use by corporations, for profit. In the coming worldwide water shortage the question becomes: is privatization the best way to manage the world's dwindling water supplies? This is an issue that in the near future will touch everyone, even Canadians, who believe they have an inexhaustible abundance of water. Ismail Serageldin, the former president of the World Bank, has expressed the gravity of the issue with his often quoted statement: "If the wars of this century were fought over oil, the wars of the next century will be fought over water."

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Summary

As the world communally realizes that there will be a severe lack of water, certain measures have been taken to try to ensure that our remaining water is handled with care. The privatization of water can be seen as one method of setting a value on the precious life-preserving liquid. By attaching a cost to the use of water, people will be more careful and less wasteful with its consumption. At its core, the purpose of water privatization is as a solution to the world's water shortage crisis.

Most experts agree, that by 2025, two-thirds of the world's population will run short of fresh drinking water. Many third-world countries are already in serious trouble as far as water supply is concerned. Water privatization is creating a situation where people now must pay more money that they do not have for a substance that they vitally need.

Unfortunately, what water privatization has become is just another way for huge companies to make money, by selling that which was once considered a human right back to the people who can afford it. If governments begin to side with large water corporations, who protects the interests of the people?

This report will explore the two sides of the issue; the possible benefits of privatization and the negative impacts of privatization. I will cover the history of the rise of the corporation and the initial contracts that labelled water a commodity. I will provide links to reveal the present power structure, with funding coming from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This issue will be examined through three in-depth

case studies: Bolivia, where the city of Cochabamba successfully ended water privatization after mass protests; India, where the local wells of Plachimada were drained by a huge Coca-Cola plant on the outskirts of town; and finally South Africa, where the town of Nelspruit's municipal water supply was sold by the government to a private enterprise with disastrous results. I will also look at the religious opposition to, or support of, the issue and the future of Canada's water. Finally, the roles of two water experts, Dr. Vandana Shiva and Maude Barlow, will be profiled along with numerous NGO's and IGO's who have contributed positively and negatively to water privatization.

Background

To fully explain the history of the privatization of water it must be split into three sections: first, the history of the corporation and the developing power shift from government to corporation, plus the related issue of the discrepancy between rich and poor. Secondly, the background of the world's water shortages, which leads directly to the escalating value of water today, will be discussed. The last section will cover the philosophical background of government decisions which have begun to give corporations the rights to the public's water supply.

Privatization is not possible without the corporation. For this reason the history of the privatization of water has only started within the last few hundred years. It is hard to believe that large transnational corporations that span the oceans have only existed for the

last hundred years or so. The very first corporations, chartered as long as 350 years ago, such as the Hudson's Bay Company and the East India Company, barely resemble what corporations have become today. Originally, companies started off with very little power separate from the governments that chartered them. For instance, the Hudson's Bay Company was granted a license from the British government to exploit the fur trade in North America. Their charter was limited to that trade and that area. Similarly, the East India Company was chartered to develop and extract riches from Britain's colony of India. In fact, early corporations went hand in hand with the exploitation of colonial power.

It is important to remember that, at this early stage, the corporation's powers were completely limited and controlled by the government. However, when individuals realized the enormous profit to be made in such enterprises, the wealthy and power-hungry began to flock to the corporate form. These corporations would eventually hold power over the very governments that first commissioned them, and with this power would begin to influence how governments provided the most essential of public services. These businesses would also aggravate an even larger gap between the rich and the poor, by extracting countries natural wealth and giving little back, resulting in a society where the poor are overlooked because corporations run by the wealthy, for the wealthy to become wealthier, are in charge of the distribution of such vital things as water.

In some places on the globe, notably impoverished Third World nations, corporations are taking over the traditional roles of governments in supplying essential goods and services to people. In fact corporations now have so much money that they have influenced public opinion to the point where people believe that governments cannot be nearly as efficient or productive as a privately owned enterprise. For instance, in the United States the majority of the population continually votes against having national health care administered by the state. Their belief that the quality would be inferior is largely due to corporate lobbying and influence. The wealth of corporations, in this climate of public mistrust of government, has grown so much that:

The top two hundred [corporations], says the Washington based Institute for Policy Studies, are so large and powerful that their combined annual sales are greater than the sum total of the economies of 182 of the 191 countries in the world (Blue Gold p. 84).

But why would corporations take an interest in water? What makes it valuable enough for them to invest their time and money? In the March 2003 issue of the *New Internationalist*, Dinyar Godrej states “It is estimated that by the year 2025 two-thirds of the world’s population will be facing severe water stress” (Godrej 10). Water stress is defined by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) as having only 1,000 to 1,700 cubic meters of water per person, per year. As well, “Water Every Drop Counts,” outlines the fact that global water consumption doubles every twenty years, so by the year 2025 the global demand for water will have grown by over forty percent. Where there is need, there is always room for profit. But what the people being most

severely affected by the water shortage needed was their government's commitment and support. What they got were huge corporations on the trail of the next big business payoff. The IMF and the World Bank, followed by hundreds of transnational corporations, foresaw the future demand for water and began years ago, through lobbying and conditions on money loans meant for industrial advancements, to force governments to privatize their remaining water.

Once water shortages guaranteed future profit in the business of water, corporations had one obstacle remaining: how to privatize and sell something that was considered by the majority of the world to be a human right. This marks the beginning of the third and most recent chapter in this history, and the true birth of water privatization.

In 1990, an ideology which had begun to develop since the end of World War II, was officially named the Washington Consensus. It was a set of ideals that would later come to be called "democracy delayed," because for the most part it goes against the concept of peoples democratic rights. In Blue Gold by Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke, the Washington Consensus is explained "At the core of this ideology is the belief that the interests of capital take priority over the rights of citizens" (Blue Gold 82). The Washington Consensus was the first attack against the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This was the first step in slowly paving the way, so that corporations would eventually take over many of the service sectors once managed through taxes by governments. The Trilateral Commission, which was basically an organisation of the most wealthy and powerful three hundred and twenty five people in the world, was

created to battle the “Crisis of Democracy.” This so called “Crisis of Democracy” was defined as a fragmented economic system of individual nations that was too divided and needed to become a more global economy as documented in Blue Gold. The same group of political elites were responsible for the creation of the World Bank and the IMF at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944 and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1947. GATT was replaced in 1995 by the World Trade Organisation. These Corporations and money lenders were the backdrop to how privatization of water and other goods and services would take place in the following years.

The World Bank and the IMF were designed to create a global economy free of borders. But in a world where a huge majority of countries had, only a few years ago, won their freedom from colonialism, this new global economy brought new hardships. Third World countries were already facing huge debt due to the horrible exploitation of their natural resources while they had been colonized. The global economy made it impossible for them to compete as non-industrialized nations, against the industrial superpowers. Their debts grew. The Trilateralists of course had the perfect solution, according to Blue Gold, a system called the “Structural Adjustment Program” (SAP). Its basic purpose was for the IMF and the World Bank to enforce huge change on economic and social policies, in countries requiring loans. Calling to mind the childish saying “no strings attached.” SAPs guarantee that there are definitely strings attached to loans from the World Bank and the IMF. How do the power plays of the IMF and World Bank relate to the history of water privatization? We need to understand why a government, looking out for the basic interests of its people, would make the seemingly idiotic choice to privatize its dwindling

water supply. The answer is that they do not have the choice. In recent years, as water becomes more and more valuable, privatization has been added to the list of things that the IMF and World Bank force countries to do, in order for them to receive financial support.

All of the above manoeuvres by the Trilateral Commission, to create a world in which nothing could prevent the exploitation of the impoverished and needy, still had not abolished the notion that water was a human right. If water remained a human right, corporations could not deny water, even if the people could not pay. This would mean that corporations would be unable to make a profit, and would completely nix the entire water privatization enterprise.

Blue Gold describes the corporate world's interest in defining water as a "need," over water as a "right," in the following way. "They [Trilateralists] wanted water to be officially designated as a "need" so that the private sector, through markets would have the right and responsibility to provide this vital resource on a *for-profit basis*. If, on the other hand, water was officially recognized as a universal human right, then governments would be responsible for ensuring that all people would have *equal access on a nonprofit basis*" (Blue Gold 80). In the year 2000, at the World Water Forum 5,700 people were present when water was officially declared a basic "need," putting an end to the debate over whether water could be privatized because it had traditionally been considered a human right. The subject was only brought under debate by a group of environmentalists called the Blue Planet Project, which was co-founded by Canadian water expert Maude

Barlow. Sadly, the Blue Planet Project which came to the World Water Forum intending to help put a stop to water privatization, actually started a debate that provided official license for the water industry and took apart the final obstacle in the path of water privatization.

Power Structure

At the bottom of the power structure of water privatization are the people - poor majorities who require access to fresh water to survive. They are forced to be concerned about their basic need of water because of water scarcity. In the country of Gambia, the average amount of water being used per person, per day, is four and a half litres. In Mali it is eight litres, and in Cambodia nine and a half. The overpowering need for water in underdeveloped countries suggests that the entire world is surviving with barely any water. It simply is not so. By contrast with the developing world, the average amount of water used by each US citizen in a day according to the New Internationalist issue *Water: Every Drop Counts*, is five hundred litres. To fully understand how this can be at all possible, first the chain of events that passes power from the people to the corporation must be fully explored.

People's rights are handled by their governments. Governments seek to do what is best for their people with the power they have. But when governments become indebted in the process described earlier in the history section, to repay their debts they must act in the interests of the money lenders. Power then passes from the government to the World

Bank and the IMF who run the entire system of financial loans. These two institutions were created by and for the business advancement of Western powers, especially the United States. For this reason the IMF and World Bank look to please their markets by doing what is in the interests and future profits of the western world. The governments of these industrialized superpowers are looking, at the same time, to please their power base, so that they in turn will be re-elected and returned to positions of power in the future. Places like the United States are supported by the corporations that have basically come to run the countries through powerful lobby groups. So the final step in the power structure of water privatization is that, to please their source governments, the World Bank and IMF create contracts for multinational corporations to extort and abuse indebted non-industrialized nations.

Although many powerful worldwide organisations have raised objections to the issue of water privatization, when faced with the powerful network of banks, Superpowers and corporations, they have very little sway. The United Nations was founded on the principal of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and on Civil and Political Rights, Yet at the World Water Forum, the UN stood by and watched as water was downgraded to a “need,” instead of a “right,” as found in Blue Gold (80). The UN officials were present more as a pleasant background, not as an actual member with the power to sway the vote. Unfortunately, even if they had had such power, chances are that they would have voted for water privatization, because even though the United Nations was developed as a world organisation, it heavily favours the superpowers that support it.

The extent of US control over, and contempt for, the UN can be seen in the recent appointment of anti-UN bureaucrat John Bolton as US Ambassador to the UN (really its de facto head).

Also present at the World Water Forum meeting, however, was the aforementioned Blue Planet Project, whose protests brought about the discussion of “need” vs. “right,” in the first place. Obviously this endeavour was a failure, as the governments chose to side with corporate greed over public need, giving full license to the privatization of water.

The Blue Planet Project has been involved with many other organisations to help put a stop to water privatization, the most well-known of these being the Treaty Initiative to Share and Protect the Global Water Commons. The Blue Planet Project created this treaty in 2001 at the Vancouver Summit. It is “the primary focus of a fightback on this front [water privatization] at Rio+10. It states in clear terms that water is a public good and a human right and must not be appropriated for profit. It asks that, in signing, governments and Indigenous peoples agree to administer the world’s water as a trust” (Blue Gold 248). The treaty has been successful in creating an incredible starting place for NGOs to bond together and come out as a united front on this issue. The key is to convince governments to sign the Initiative if it is to become a world tool in the fight against privatization.

Maude Barlow, a Canadian woman who was cofounder of the Blue Planet Project, has become in the past few years one of the most renowned experts on the subject of water

privatization. In addition to publishing twelve books on various environmental issues, including Blue Gold, The Battle Against Corporate Theft of the World's Water, she is also the national chairperson for the Council of Canadians. She makes appearances around the world at every protest against corporate power, free trade agreements, and privatization. In an interview about her book Blue Gold, Maude was asked what industrialized countries could do to help the water privatization issue. She used examples from her work in Canada to frame the answer:

We're calling in Canada for a national water act, which would outline the protections needed environmentally, really put limits on the use and abuse of our water from industry, remove water from the trade agreements and exempt water from all future trade agreements. We also believe that if we can get water defined as a human right -- which it is, but if we can get it recognized -- in some kind of binding treaty at the United Nations, it would be a strong challenge to the existing situation in these trade agreements (Fleischer).

She believes that the way to battle water privatization is to fight back using the same instruments as the corporations. Removing water from the trade agreements would limit corporate power, and their ability to simply take water when they can pay.

Case Study – Cochabamba, Bolivia

Bolivia is identified by the World Bank as South America's poorest country. The IMF has recognised that almost two-thirds of Bolivia's population lives below the poverty line, and the annual per capita income, according to the IMF, is 950 dollars a year.

Cochabamba is Bolivia's third largest city, and in its semi-desert climate, water is scarce. Government after government attempted to pull Bolivia up out of poverty and establish a healthy growing economy. As described in the Public Citizen, all attempts failed, until the "Structural Adjustment Program" set up by the World Bank and the IMF collapsed in 1981 and sent Bolivia into a crisis of negative economic growth for five years. More policies were put in place by outside "aid" in an attempt to stabilize Bolivia's economy. Things have generally been looking up for Bolivia since 1987.

The huge amount of outside interference however dealing with Bolivia's social and economic policies had put great strain on the poor. As I mentioned earlier in the history section of this paper, the SAPs imposed by the IMF and the World Bank were designed to implement change in the way goods and services were handled in countries requiring financial aid. Basically in this case, the World Bank privatized a huge range of public services in Bolivia, to ensure that the loans they gave would be paid off with benefits. In 1999 the World Bank "suggested" that Cochabamba privatize its municipal water supply company, Servicio Municipal del Agua Potable y Alcantarillado (SEMAPA), (information from the Public Citizen). In reality water privatization was a condition of Bolivia's loan.

In October of 1999 the official contract was signed with a company called International Water, which is a branch of the Bechtel Corporation According to Water Wars by Vandana Shiva. These privatization endeavours provide little profit in their first few years because if being properly managed, some money must be put back into the water

facilities to guarantee effective water distribution. For this reason it is not in a corporation's interest to have short term contracts in which people could become unhappy and not renew their contracts with the corporation, which could result in an actual loss of money. Instead their initial contracts ensure that this will not take place. In Cochabamba the contract with International Water was for forty years. The cities new water supply system was fully functional by January of the following year.

Only weeks after International Water had taken over control of water distribution in Cochabamba, water prices rose by 200 to 300 percent in many cases, according to the Public Citizen. In communities where the majority monthly income is less than a hundred dollars, paying 20 dollars just on water was an impossibility. Their only other choice however was to die of thirst. Still in January of 2000 the people of Cochabamba, unable to survive under the present conditions, began staging protests against the incredible skyrocketing water costs. La Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida (The Coalition in Defence of Water and Life), an organization of the people was formed at the same time. United under a common name, the people rose up and for four consecutive days closed the city down completely. Within only a month, millions of Bolivians swarmed to Cochabamba to provide support and join in the protests. Attempts to subdue the protesters with tear gas and more violent methods resulted in hundreds injured and several blinded. As written on www.canadians.org/blueplanet/cochabamba-e.html, it was at this time that the protesters produced the Cochabamba Declaration, demanding the protection of universal water rights.

Finally as documented in the Public Citizen Water Privatization case Study:

Cochabamba, Bolivia, the municipal government agreed to meet with some of the leaders of La Coordinadora in April 2000, to put an end to the protests. What in fact took place was that, during their so-called meeting, police broke in and arrested all the protest leaders. In the weeks that followed mass uprising took place across Bolivia. According to cnn.com the end result was fifty people detained, dozens injured and six dead. Many others were arrested and sent to remote prisons. The main cry of La Coordinadora protesters was that water was a human right, which must be provided for all. There actual slogans - "Water Is God's Gift and Not a Merchandise" and "Water Is Life" - stemmed from a very religious view of humanity's right to water.

Bolivia was put under martial law by president Banzer, and many of the horrors that took place during that time are still unknown, as the freedom of the press was completely eliminated and a suspension of almost all civil rights was called into effect. On April 10th the persistence of the people of Bolivia finally brought about the termination of Bolivia's water contract. This was not, however, the end of Bolivia's troubles. According to the Public Citizen, responsibility for Cochabamba's water facilities, instead of going back under government control, were left for the people to deal with, and specifically the protest organisation La Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida. As hard as this would be, because International Water had put absolutely no money into repairing Cochabamba's leaky infrastructure, La Coordinadora was also handed the 35 million dollar debt.

Already the people, led by a man named Olivera, had decided upon a plan of action for the future of Cochabamba's water that involved neither help from the government nor outside aid from a corporation seeking to privatize. Members of La Coordinadora intend to set up a teaching system to educate local people as to the best way to manage a water supply company. They are trying to create a water democracy, which in theory could benefit the community immensely, but could also create even greater debt in an already over-burdened city. On top of this, Bechtel is also in the process of suing Bolivia for their lost contract, a right guaranteed them by international trade laws. At the same time Olivera and other members of La Coordinadora have been threatened by the Bolivian government. Through all of this, the citizens of Cochabamba and the rest of Bolivia have remained strong, and proven that the public can still fight against water privatization and come out victorious. The damages to Bolivia's society are significant. Much of the trust between the people and the government has been lost, because President Banzer sided with International Water. As well, much of city life was disrupted during the multiple protests and the following arrests and 90 day suspension of the majority of civil rights. The trade options and future investment in Bolivia have also been damaged, as large corporations will be timid to put money into a place that has such a violent history in relation to corporate contracts.

The story of water privatization in Bolivia is very similar to other stories across South America, Africa, and all other areas of the globe. What makes it different and worthy of more than the average amount of interest is the stories end. Bolivia has become the main example among Latin American countries of how to manage water without handing

control over to the corporate world. Bolivia's proposed method of creating small local companies to democratically run the entire system is a revolutionary solution that gives all of the profit and job positions back to the local people. The Bolivian people have supplied their own solutions to the momentous task of pulling Cochabamba's water system out of debt. The surety with which they have accomplished the initial planning, has activists waiting with fingers crossed, hoping that the entire project will be a success.

Case Study - Plachimada, India

Water privatization is not always directed towards the control of public distribution companies, it also exploits water reserves, and massive dam projects. India has become a hot spot for multinational bottling companies. It presently houses over 90 factories owned by Pepsi and Coca-cola, information from The Water Dossier. According to the Water Resources: FAO chart titled Water Availability Per Person Per Year, which is available in the appendices of this paper, India is already a water vulnerable country. Water vulnerability is defined by UNEP as 1,700 to 2,500 cubic meters of water per person per year. It is estimated by that each of the 90 multinational pumping stations in India, removes one and a half million litres of water a day. To produce a single litre of Coke, it takes nine litres of clean water (Vandana Siva, The Water Dossier).

In this case study I will discuss the situation in Plachimada, a small community drained of its once rich supply of water by the Coca-Cola factory on its outskirts. The plant, which was licensed in March of 2000 to produce 1,224,000 bottles of pop [Vandana

Shiva—India: soft drinks, hard cases], created six bore wells in order to begin illegally removing up to one and a half million litres of water a day, which far exceeded their licensed amount. The effect upon the local town's people was almost immediate. Wells dried up, and those that remained became dangerously contaminated with the haphazardly disposed of waste products from the factory. The Coke plant had disposed of solid waste products outside of its own premises, which had bled into the ground and inevitably into the remaining wells during the rainy season as seen in Plachimada vs Coca-Cola by N P Chekkutty. In total, 260 of the towns public wells designed for domestic and agricultural purposes dried up completely. Without the wells they had always relied upon the people of Plachimada were forced to walk miles to the nearest clean water reserve. Vandana Shiva quotes in her article "Building Water Democracy," "Coca-Cola had created a water scarcity in a water abundant region."

After it became clear to the local people that there was little hope of receiving outside aid, a local tribal leader named C. K. Janu started the Plachimada agitation against the Coca-Cola plant in April of 2002 [Chekkutty]. The fight against the illegal extraction of a town's only water supply was therefore initially fought by a group of female tribal leaders, many of them well over the age of fifty. They protested by sitting in front of the gates of the plant, and holding peaceful marches. In response they were attacked with threats and in some cases physical abuse leading to arrests. Seven women were severely injured. Almost a year after the agitation was officially started, the National Alliance for People's Movement led a march through Plachimada, finally bringing national attention to the issue. The local government, run by the Left Democratic Front cancelled the

contract with Coca-Cola, only to have the state government reissue the licence. The tribal women kept up their agitation even when it appeared to be causing little or no effect upon the corporation, which sat behind its cement walls guzzling the town's priceless and vital resource.

Finally the breakthrough in the Plachimada protests came in January of 2004 when the BBC released a report condemning Coca-Cola as the lead cause of pollution in the area. Activists like Maude Barlow, Jose Bove and Vandana Shiva were invited to a World Water Conference in Plachimada to discuss the future of Plachimada's water. As a result of all of these events, the Kerala High Court put out a declaration stating:

It can be safely concluded that the underground water belongs to the public. The state and its instrumentalities should act as trustees of this great wealth. The state has a duty to protect groundwater against excessive exploitation and inaction of the state in this regard will be tantamount to infringement of the right to life of the people guaranteed in Article 21 of the Constitution (Chekkutty).

Even though the Ministry of Water Resources tried to fight this declaration, it was to no avail, and in February of 2004, the plant was forced to stop using Plachimada's water for commercial purposes.

The summer of 2004 marked the closure of two plants on the outskirts of Plachimada, the much debated Coca-Cola plant as well as a more distant Pepsi factory. Sadly, they were closed due to incredible drought, which effected the local people to an even greater extent. Today the plants still stand, although they are no longer pumping out India's

water. Like shadows they loom over Plachimada, unwilling to simply abandon such a profitable enterprise. Plachimada's agitation, which successfully saw over 1000 days, still watches the plants with furrowed brows, as their wells will not be restored for many years to come, and the threat of drought is still at the forefront of their thoughts.

This case study is only one of ninety in India, let alone the globe. Plachimada's form of privatization, spawned by the same superpowers that created the World Bank and the IMF, deals in a different kind of profit, one that is in many cases even more startling. Although it takes place on a smaller scale, it is a more drastic waste of the world's precious remaining water. Places like Plachimada, which were only years ago considered water rich, are being left barren so that huge multinationals can export Coke to the wealthy. The battle in Plachimada has not been won; the Hindustan Coca-Cola plant is far from ready to leave the outskirts of Plachimada. They will continue to pressure the local governments and try to seek aid from other multinational organisations in order to bully or bribe the country into letting them reopen business. As people like C. K. Janu know, it is likely that in the next few years the factories will be open and pumping once more. It appears to be a losing battle, but these people stand steady behind their ideal that water is, and always will be, a human right.

Case Study – Nelspruit, South Africa

The majority of the information in this section comes from two main sources, www.citizen.org's "Water Privatization Fiascos", and Anna Weekes' "Fight over Water

Privatization in South Africa” article.

The story of the privatization of Nelspruit’s municipal water supply is considered one of the greatest water privatization fiascos the world has ever seen. South Africa is ranked 150th of 180 countries in water availability per person per year, according to the water availability chart in the appendices of this paper. South Africa hangs just above the water scarcity line, which is less than 1000 cubic metres of water per person per year. South Africa’s past has also been riddled with social issues such as apartheid, which created racial discrimination and great instability. This created the perfect atmosphere for the World Bank and IMF to help bring the country into the modern world by offering a whole list of privatization arrangements.

Nelspruit’s municipal water was originally meant to be privatized in 1997, but the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) managed, through protests and general unrest, to delay the contract for almost two years. In the end the corporation would have its way, however, and in 1999 a 30 year contract with Biwater was signed for the responsibility of Nelspruit’s water facilities. South Africa has always encouraged outside aid in the form of privatization, because their infrastructure is, for the majority of the country, abysmal. Corporations will make large investments to ensure that money will not be lost through leaks and malfunctioning equipment, which also greatly benefits the local communities. Sadly, in Nelspruit’s case, Biwater had great difficulty raising money and in the end was forced to turn to the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA), a

state owned bank for a loan of 125 million dollars to complete the needed structural adjustments [Fiascos]. With so little money available, Biwater has not improved the poor distribution system in Nelspruit. The people who have seen no improvement in their water system, but who are being forced to pay much more than in the past, have stopped paying their water bills. Biwater does not seem to care; a senior manager explained, “What is the point of pumping money in while we are not sure of cost recovery?” (Water Privatization Fiascos).

Since Biwater took control of municipal water delivery in Nelspruit, the people’s list of complaints has doubled. They have no access to water at night, because Biwater turns it off to conserve money. Whole communities have been left without any water for days on end, because Biwater does not respond to the notifications of broken water pipes in any timely fashion. Water bills have soared above what is reasonable or accurate, and great controversy has been invoked, because white neighbourhoods are receiving more water than black neighbourhoods. In a country that has such a troubled history with racial issues it seems insane to re-enact injustices of the past by allowing racial prejudices and distribution of wealth to govern the way that water is distributed. Yet that is what seems to be happening:

More than half of South Africa’s raw water is used for white-dominated commercial agriculture, and half of that water is wasted in poor irrigation practices. Another quarter is used in mining and industry. About 12 percent of South Africa’s water is consumed by households, but of that amount, more than

half goes into white households, including water for gardens and swimming pools (Blue Gold 69).

This social inequality is largely due to the fact that the corporations that run South Africa's water services cater to their supporters, the wealthy and wasteful.

Biwater has also caused a huge increase in the number of communities with households that have been disconnected from the water distribution system. These disconnections have also begun to be performed illegally. With no warning whatsoever, a family can find itself with no water, and with no easy way to be reconnected to the municipal Biwater grid. The entire system has fallen apart and the people, who remain unorganized and unmotivated, are allowing their municipal water to degrade into a completely useless and money-wasting corporate payoff. Biwater, which has spent almost none of their own money, continues to bill the public each and every day for its pathetically inadequate water services.

The metering system charges people for water even when the water isn't there...

In some townships, Biwater was switching water on only for three hours a day or less—and for a good portion of that time, taps were on but no water came out.

Yet during this period, household meters run, so it seems that people are being charged for air, (SAMWU, water privatization fiascos).

It is hard to know what is best for Nelspruit because, even before Biwater took control, Nelspruit was having difficulty managing water distribution to the local area. Things did become much worse after privatization, but the people and local governments so far have not provided any other possible solutions.

The greatest tragedy in the story of Nelspruit South Africa is that South Africa is actually the only country on the entire planet that has people's right to water actually written into its constitution. By right the people of South Africa are entitled to 6000 litres of free water per household, per month according to Blue Gold. As the above story of Nelspruit shows, although this is an incredible plan on the part of the government, it is far from an actuality. It has however pushed many citizens of South Africa to rise up against Biwater and other similar corporations across South Africa. The people of Nelspruit should follow the lead of many other communities in the country, who have stopped paying water bills, and have the most technically advanced members of the community do rounds to visit and illegally reconnect disconnected households. There are also numerous people and organisations that the people of Nelspruit could at least seek to contact to ask for outside assistance. The situation in Nelspruit and in many areas of South Africa is desolate. In the year 2000 over 100,000 people became sick with cholera, due to the failing of local water pumps in KwaZulu-Natal province. There were more than 220 deaths in a ten-month period [Blue Gold 54]. The stories that can be told of water privatization abuses in South Africa are too numerous to name.

Religious and Spiritual Aspects of Water Privatization

Water is the liquid of life. Without it, we as a species, and the entire planet with all its multitude of creatures, would cease to exist. All religions and spiritualities of the world are based upon a basic respect and worship of life. It therefore should not come as a

surprise that many religions, as well as humanity's instinct towards spirituality, should have created a certain aura around the incredible phenomena that is water. There are water gods and river gods, as well as sacred basins, lakes and streams, and in the Catholic Church children are baptized and purified by water. In the Qur'an it is written, "water is the source of all life," (Water Wars 131) and in the Islamic faith the devout follow the Sharia, which translates to mean "Path to Water," (Water Wars 20). These religions have people's right to water written right into their religious texts. As will later be discussed in the case study on Bolivia, many water privatization protesters were motivated for religious or spiritual reasons and even had religious messages in their marching slogans.

Wars over water between different countries, or even different communities, are often disguised as religious conflicts. Religious differences have always been a source of trouble and have come to be expected, whereas water wars are for the most part kept quiet. There is much debate over whether the highly broadcasted war between Pakistan and Iraq actually stems from water tension. As was mentioned earlier in this section many rivers, lakes and basins are sacred to religious communities. When governments choose to privatize these areas, and companies like Coca-Cola and Pepsi start pumping out the water for their bottling purposes, these sacred places are destroyed. In India, for example, many of the rivers are actually considered manifestations of their gods. How can you own, bottle and sell a god? The Ganges River in India, which has 108 different names [Water Wars 141], is the centre of a festival to the God Shiva. In recent years as water privatization has grown in India, the number of participants in this festival has gone from a few thousand, to over 30 million. These people are not about to abandon their

religious or spiritual connection to water, just because it has been given a market value. “The 30 million devotees who went to bathe in the sacred Ganges for the Kumbh Mela did not see the value of the water in terms of its market price but in terms of its spiritual worth. States cannot force devotees to worship the water market” (Water Wars 139).

The above quote is from Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution, and Profit by Vandana Shiva. Shiva is the author of 20 books, and hundreds of articles on privatization, water and other environmental issues. Born in India, Shiva often writes from a religious standpoint. She won the Alternate Nobel Peace Prize (the Right Livelihood Award) in 1993 for her contributions to the environment. She is a water activist and has been present at hundreds of protests and rallies against water privatization around the world. For example, she joined in the Plachimada agitation in India, which is explained in detail as a case study in this report. Vandana Shiva was selected as one of the five most powerful people in Asia, by Asia Week, as well as being awarded over twenty other awards for her work. Her goals are similar to those of Maude Barlow, the other water expert I have discussed in this paper, although her analyses and possible solutions stem from a very different background. Both women see the first step in the battle against privatization to be a universal declaration that renames water a human right. They both believe it to be careless and absurd that the world allowed water to lose this status in the first place.

Conclusions

This report has attempted to show the incredible division of power and wealth that has created a global atmosphere that allows services in poor countries to be run not by their governments, but by huge multinational corporations out to make a profit. It has tried to illustrate the consequences on impoverished and water-starved countries, when corporations seek to take control of or buy water from these nations. In each of the three case studies discussed, this paper has sought to detail or provide simplified solutions to the issues created by water privatization. In this final section, as well as providing a look into the mechanics of water privatization in Canada, more in-depth and detailed solutions will be provided.

Canada, although fairly environmentally conscious, is still one of the world's biggest wasters of water. Canada is also listed on the New Internationalists top ten constructors of big dam projects, big dams having one of the worst effects on poor nations suffering water shortages. Dam projects are handled by multinational companies who do not give jobs to local people, and reap all profits for themselves, leaving the host countries with less money, and drained of water. As Canada becomes more and more industrialized it has begun to handle other world issues in similar ways, not upholding environmental standards and conforming more and more with the way of life of the most wasteful and selfish superpowers. As such a water rich country, Canada has a responsibility in the upcoming water crisis to preserve its water and provide assistance to other water scarce countries. The following is the history of Canadian water privatization, which has led to Canada's present situation concerning water.

Canada, unlike the three other countries discussed in this paper, is number 11 on the water availability chart, with 94,353 cubic meters of water per person per year. Canada is far from suffering water shortages, and it seems like a joke when experts predict that in the next few decades even Canada will be feeling water stress. This prediction comes not just from calculating the amount of Canadian water that Canadians will use. It also includes all of the water that will be sold to the rest of the world. The thing that most Canadian's are not aware of, or that is simply not understood, is the significance of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). When the concept of water being sold to the United States is mentioned, the majority of Canadians are quick to say that we will never let that happen. The sad fact is that it already has. Blue Gold describes the situation in the following way:

International trade regimes like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) have already declared water to be a tradable commodity by classifying it as a commercial "good," a "service," and an "investment." What this means, in effect, is that if a government were to put a ban on the sale and export of bulk water or to prevent a foreign-based water corporation from bidding on a concession for the private delivery of water services, it could be challenged as being in violation of international trade rules under the WTO or NAFTA. Both these trade regimes, in turn, contain enforcement mechanisms designed to ensure that their rulings on trade disputes are binding on their member governments [of which Canada is one], (Blue Gold 97).

Canada is especially hard-pressed by trade agreements, because it has twenty percent of the world's surface fresh water and it shares its borders with the United States, which has only one-tenth of Canada's fresh water, and a population almost nine times bigger.

George W. Bush has put Canadian activists even more on edge with his statement in July of 2001 which said "that he saw Canadian water as an extension of Canada's energy reserves, to be shared with the U.S by pipeline in the near future" (Blue Gold 71).

In 1991 the Sun Belt Water Company, originating in California, attempted to buy water from British Columbia in bulk shipments to be exported back to water-scarce California ["Getting Canada's Water"]. The government of British Columbia intervened, banning the sale on behalf of the interest of its own citizens. It might seem that this should be the end of the affair. It is not. Sun Belt Water is suing the Canadian government through NAFTA. They want 300 million dollars for their lost trade opportunity. When Canada signed NAFTA, they officially lost all right to deny outside buyers from a full range of export and privatization options. Already pipeline is being laid all across northern Canada to begin exporting huge quantities of water to California and other U.S states running short of water. The damage will not be immediate, but as the population swells, and more immigrants from water scarce countries flock to Canada, governments are also going to have to provide more water than ever before. As a whole, Canada's defence of its water rights has been sad in comparison to the fights waged by many nations to halt water privatization. There are, however, small groups of people in NGO's, as well as governmental positions, who have done great things in Canada and around the globe to offer aid in this issue. The elected official in British Colombia who prevented bulk

exports to California is only one example of these noteworthy groups. It is hard to see where Canada stands overall in relation to the rest of the world on this issue. Canada does command great respect as a country known for peace and environmental concern, and for these reasons has a legitimate right to be heard in respect to water privatization. Before that happens, Canadians will have to be awakened from their apathetic slumbers. Water shortage still seems like a distant nightmare to many Canadians. But people must understand that the choices we make today will set the stage for the future of our country, and determine whether the future of the planet is marked by disaster

Solutions

Fortunately, there are always things that can be done to stop such disasters. The question is, are people willing to do them? NAFTA was only created in the past several years. Before the creation of NAFTA, a trade agreement called the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was used. GATT, unlike NAFTA did not contain water as a “need,” “product,” or “investment.” In Canada’s case, the first step in halting water privatization and the well-planned and legally “justified” theft of our water, is to return to the use of the GATT trade agreement. This is obviously no easy option, as the United States and other superpowers looking to benefit from Canadian water reserves are well aware of GATT’s limitations were they are concerned. Like all things, however, it is possible through hard work and active protests aided by a government that will side with its own people. This battle is constantly being fought, by activists like Maude Barlow, the Council of Canadians and the blue Planet Project. They are hindered by the

incredible sway that the promise of wealth holds over individuals in positions of power. But if money were not so deadly alluring, it is hard to believe the world would have any troubles at all.

The effects of reverting back to the GATT trade agreement will be considerable. The halting of outside contracts revolving around water sales, and many other goods and services which are present in NAFTA but not in GATT, will result in a decline of incoming wealth to Canadian governments and corporations, which may have a negative effect on our economy. The social and cultural effects will mainly be from political discord, resulting from Canada adopting a more environmentally conservative governmental stance.

Answers and possible solutions for the situations across the rest of the globe are much more complicated. To create a future in which water is handled with care and is shared equally by the rich and poor would require the dismantling of the entire present power structure. The chances of efforts actually succeeding in doing so in the near future are pretty much non-existent. Other less drastic solutions do exist

For Maude Barlow in Blue Gold, the first solution she proposes, is for citizens to organize in order to fight back against the tide of corporate water grabs. The objectives are multiple: to keep, or regain public control of water distribution; to resist private contracting out of water services; to stop dams and other water mega-projects that enable water exporting to take place; to maintain public control of water quality; and ultimately, to apply the principles of sound water stewardship so that natural water systems are

restored for future generations. Canadians can and should not be averse to throwing their support behind water struggles at an international level, as water has a way of not obeying national boundaries and another country's water war could become our own.

Just as important as the fight, however, Blue Gold urges us to develop a heightened water consciousness, where public awareness and the development of common principles, will help citizens steer their governments and public institutions toward sound water policy.

Maude Barlow enumerates a list of water ethics for the coming battle, some of which harken back to worker's struggles in the early Industrial Revolution, some of which are borrowed from native and spiritual traditions we have all but lost touch with. According to Blue Gold, some of the most noteworthy principles that need to be nurtured are:

- the idea of a Water Commons
- a commitment to Water Stewardship
- a concept of Water Equality for all people
- the issue of Water Universality
- a drive towards Water Peace

If these solutions seem too idealistic for the real world, consider the alternatives, which are very few in number and can involve consequences that most of us would find unacceptable. In Marq de Villiers Water, the author spends the last chapter detailing in very stark terms just what the globe's options are. In his view, if you're short of water, "the choices are conservation, technological invention, or the politics of violence" (de Villiers 321). Water Survival Strategy 1 involves getting more water, through the

importing of surplus water from elsewhere, or by developing technologies for water reclamation, like desalination. The drawbacks are the high costs, worldwide scarcity and the immense amounts of energy required.

Water Survival Strategy 2 is to use less water. This can be accomplished by conservation, and by market pricing mechanisms. Even such an active environmentalist as Maurice Strong, founder of Earth Council and a board member of the World Water Commission, has admitted: “The key to water is market economics. Too-cheap water subsidizes inefficiency. And there are too many perverse subsidies, public funds are being used for anti-public purposes” (quoted in de Villiers). Data from the New Internationalist issue titled “Water: Every Drop Counts”, supports this notion, explaining that, even though only “0.01%” of the earth’s water is fresh and accessible for human use, this amount is more than adequate to serve the entire population of earth if handled responsibly and with care. Water activists may have to swallow this bitter pill and ensure that market friendly solutions are not ignored simply because they are associated with big business.

Water Survival Strategy 3 is a doomsday scenario in which dwindling supplies of water provide their own solution, as populations, by necessity, die off. Water Survival Strategy 4 is the most depressing of all – stealing water from others, the war of all against all in a desperate last grab for the blue elixir of life. Surely, as thinking, caring, moral creatures, we will not wait until it is too late and only the bleakest of options remain.

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Appendices

Along with the Water Availability Chart per Person per Year, which has been referred to throughout this report, two short stories have been included in this last section of the paper. The Selling is a futuristic look at the drastic consequences that could result from inactivity on the water privatization front. Swimmers, is a much more personal story, told from the perspective of a child living in a town much similar to that of Plachimada, India.

The Selling

I think they first took notice when Lake Erie ran dry. They kinda stood around with their mouths agape for a few days, and nobody drank or washed or cleaned or swam. And then the Americans blamed it on the Canadians, and the Canadians blamed it on the Americans, and the Europeans listened on with blank stares, induced by their heady perfume and their fine wine. Some naturalists predicted that we were all going to die and people wrote books on our demise. They staged debates and went on protests. But nothing really changed; I mean what were we to do? Sacrifice our bodily hygiene, our whole way of living for those poor souls in third world countries who'd been without water for years? That simply was not a possibility.

And of course the factories still had to run, and the cattle to graze and the pools to fill. And no one really even thought about the fish and the frogs and the birds. That is

until they all ran dry. Somewhere along the way some innovative, cash-strapped individual decided that yes, it was a fine idea, a brilliant idea to sell all Canada's water, all the world's water to the United States. I mean even if it did matter, it wouldn't affect him, or his children, or his children's children. He wasn't really responsible for the rest anyway. When the time came, the final liquid crunch, it would be their problem, and absolutely no reflection on his practices what so ever.

When all the great lakes were empty, the only thing we had left to do, we did. We died, by the hundreds and by the thousands, and by the millions. And the world died with us, slowly but surely, until nothing, absolutely nothing remained.

SWIMMERS

In the falling light, the child watches the sunrise, like a vast orange bleeding colour across the sky. Her skinny knees are cut and bleeding, as she crouches on the dry packed earth. Below in the village, people begin to stir, women lifting pots and urns into their arms, or dragging wagons loaded with other containers behind them. They stir the dirt as they walk, great processions out along the municipal roads. They are Tiny figures that waver in the heat already rising up from the ground. Her mother will be among them, and her sisters, and her grandmother. Soon she too will have to make the long trek, over miles, with the heavy bucket balanced in her arms or on her head. The way there is always the easiest; the bucket is much heavier when it is filled.

She remembers when the water from the wells, was good and clean to drink, and water was not always such a worry. She remembers when her mother used to bathe her,

by dumping water over her head, and she would run around, her bare feet drumming the ground into a mucky mess. Now when she washes it is with the water that her sisters have already used, brown water that smells like earth and stench. There is so much less time now that they are forced to make the trek. Tempers are short, and neighbors turn against neighbors, in feuds over what once would have caused only laughter. She watches from the hilltop, with a blade of grass held between her lips. She maneuvers it into the position her grandmother showed her, until when she blows, it produces a high whistling noise. It fills her ears, drowns out the other noise at her back. The noise that comes from the factory, the pumping station, and the thing that has brought everyone around her so much hardship.

In the afternoon she weaves hats out of grass, with her great grandmother. They sit in the shade near the old wells, because the ground is sometimes moist and cooling there. Her throat is parched like dead grass, and she rolls her tongue around her mouth, imagining it as a dying fish in the sand. Her great grandmother scolds her for her wandering mind, but the girl cannot focus, the heat gets into her head, like a fever that cannot be quenched, and in the end she is allowed to sleep.

In her dream she is swimming. A little fish in a pool so large, that she suspects it to go on forever. She dreams of a river, so deep and wide that is stretched across the world, to every country and every village. She dreams that the heavy rattling trucks will no longer drive down the roads of her city. The sounds they make leave a bitter taste in her mouth. She wakes up to tiny drops of water on her eyelids, and at first she thinks it is raining, but no it is only her older sister playing games with her. They have returned home and it is bathing day, all the others have already cleaned themselves. Mama has

saved her enough clean water to drink, and she savers the feeling, as it slides down her throat. The need, the wish to drink it all, to gulp it down like a madwoman, is almost overpowering. She sets the cup down on the floor out of harms way and runs outside to wash.

The water is barely cleaner than the dusty soil, but it feels cool and good along her skin. The others think that they have it better, because they are older and they get to use the water before her, but she likes going last. It means she has all the time she wants, to sprinkle it onto her legs and watch it drip back into the bucket. She dips her fingers in, one at a time, and then wriggles her hands under the surface. Finally she carries the bucket, like a baby, back inside to her mother, who will use it and the other dirty wash water from the neighbors, to water the vegetable garden outside.

When she comes in side however, her cup of water has been knocked over, and the precious liquid has already soaked into the dirt floor. Crouched in the sandy dust, in dirty clothes, with dirty hair, that seems as if it will never come clean, she begins to cry. She cannot understand what has happened, why everything has changed. Why the well water suddenly makes the villagers deathly ill, and no one comes to help them. She does not understand why on some days, her mother marches with the other tribal leaders in her village, to the great metal gates of the factory. But most of all, she cannot understand, why anyone would wish to hurt them so much.

The next morning is marching day. She knows this, because her mother does not make the trek on marching days. Some people make signs, from paper they have bought in neighboring villages, others sing songs and chants to the gods asking for water, others sit silently; they are the elders, oldest of them all. The child does not understand the

peculiar sight laid out before her, hobbled figures stooped with age, faces lined with knowledge, marching like empowered youth upon the oppressor. Today she follows in their wake, a silent ghost, witness to their anger. Even though she has been told to stay far from the plant, this is not the first time she has been drawn, to its hideous metal walls.

The sunlight pours down upon them like a curse, halting their cries and slowing their footsteps. By noon they have come to sit, like a prayer circle at the gates of the monster. Sweat dots their brows and thirst plagues their throats, and still they sit, like ghastly guardians of some immortal doorway. In the distance, the first sound of the truck's rumbling motor, drifts to them like a breeze. The girl crouches by the side of the road, alone and worried, the truck will not be able to pass through the gates. Its trail of dust is now visible on the horizon, a quick moving storm that descends like an impatient child. The girl shivers in the noonday heat, as it pulls to a stop in front of the protesters. Her eyes blur, as she strains to see what is happening. The men are off the trucks and they are yelling, in words she does not know. They are holding guns and sticks, which they shake in the women's faces, jeering, and stabbing. Her mother is there, hands and voiced raised simultaneously. She is saying that the women will not move, that it is the factory that must move. She is saying that the people were here first, and they will stay where they choose to stay.

The first blow took her in the stomach, the second in the face, and in a moment the girl was on her feet sprinting down the road, just the repetition of foot against ground. And the man did not see, the man only feared. And the man did not see, the man only assumed. And the bullet he placed, in the heart of a child, was born of greed, and human

waste. And in the dirt, he watched her die. And as she closed her eyes, she dreamed she swam.