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MAKING PUBLIC IN A PRIVATIZED WORLD

THE STRUGGLE FOR ESSENTIAL SERVICES

edited by David A. McDonald



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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Acuavalle SA	Sociedad de Acueductos y Alcantarillados del Valle del Cauca (Aqueduct and Sewerage Enterprise of Valle del Cauca, Colombia)
AEC	Ahmedabad Electricity Company (India)
ANC	African National Congress (South Africa)
ARB	Asociación de Recicladores de Bogotá (Association of Bogota Recyclers, Colombia)
BDT	Bangladeshi taka
CBO	community-based organization
CEGSS	Centro de Estudios para la Equidad y Gobernanza en los Sistemas de Salud (Research Centre for Equity and Governance in Health Systems, Guatemala)
CLTS	Community-Led Total Sanitation
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CVC	Corporación Autónoma Regional del Valle del Cauca (Autonomous Corporation of the Cauca Valley Region, Colombia)
DSK	Dushtha Shasthya Kendra (Bangladesh)
DWASA	Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Bangladesh)
EPM	Empresas Públicas de Medellín (Public Enterprises of Medellín, Colombia)
FBO	faith-based organization
ICMA	International City/County Management Association
INR	Indian rupee
IPP	independent power producer
KKPKP	Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (Trade Union of Waste Pickers and Itinerant Buyers, Pune, India)
MAS	Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement toward Socialism, Bolivia)
MHT	Mahila Housing SEWA Trust (Gujarat, India)

x | ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

MNCR	Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis (National Movement of Collectors of Recyclable Materials, Brazil)
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
PAR	participatory action-research
PuP	public–public partnership
ROA	returns on assets
SACP	South African Communist Party
SAMWU	South African Municipal Workers' Union
SDCEA	South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (South Africa)
SENASBA	Servicio Nacional para la Sostenibilidad de Servicios en Saneamiento Básico (National Service for the Sustainability of Sanitation Services, Bolivia)
SEWA	Self-Employed Women's Association (India)
Sintracuavalle	Sindicato de Trabajadores de Acuavalle (Workers' Union of Acuavalle, Colombia)
Sintrambiente	Sindicato de Trabajadores del Sistema Nacional Ambiental (Workers' Union of the National Environmental System, Colombia)
SME	small and medium enterprise
SWaCH	Solid Waste Collection and Handling Cooperative (Pune, India)
TRY	Turkish lira
UCMB	Uganda Catholic Medical Bureau
UDF	United Democratic Front (South Africa)
UGX	Ugandan shilling
UMMB	Uganda Muslim Medical Bureau
UPMB	Uganda Protestant Medical Bureau

1 | INTRODUCTION: THE WONDERFUL WORLDS OF MAKING PUBLIC

David A. McDonald

What is a public? It is a curiously obscure question, considering that few things have been more important in the development of modernity.

Michael Warner (2002, 49)

After more than three decades of privatization, the world has begun to see a revival of public provision of essential services such as water, energy and healthcare (Chavez and Torres 2014; Clò et al. 2013; Florio 2013; Wollmann 2011). The reasons for this trend are as varied as the people and places involved, and much work remains to be done in coming to grips with the complexity and diversity of what is happening on the ground.

This book is an attempt to advance our understanding of present-day efforts to (re)make public services, through case studies and an effort to conceptualize what bonds them together. With a focus on countries in the South, and a broad cross-section of actors and sectors, the chapters range from Colombia to Uganda, from bureaucrats to trade unionists, and from waste management to electricity. The people and institutions surveyed here represent a mere fraction of a much larger international reality, but they exemplify the varied – if tension-laden – ways in which essential public services are being (re)construed and (re)constructed around the world.

In some cases these initiatives are a response to failed privatization. In others they are a reaction to weak or non-existent state-delivered services. Some are about latent possibilities awaiting realization. In all cases, the chapters go beyond a mere critique of what is wrong with privatization to an assessment of what constitutes ‘good’ services, how people ‘make’ them in the face of ongoing neoliberalization, and what it means to be ‘public’. Although it is important to keep a close eye on the ever-shifting nature of private sector engagement in service

provision, fulfilling the promise of building alternatives requires more than just criticism.

Following Ferguson (2009, 167), the chapters in this book ask what happens if politics is not just about ‘expressing indignation or denouncing the powerful? What if it is, instead, about getting what you want? Then we progressives must ask: what do we want? This is a quite different question (and a far more difficult question) than: what are we against?’

What do we want?

There are no easy answers to this query, and the examples in this book serve to demonstrate just how far we are from a coherent, collective response to what constitutes a good public service. Some chapters highlight the potential of revitalizing state resources while others focus on the need to build capacity among quasi-public, non-state actors. Some authors are universalistic in their approach while others emphasize the context-specific nature of change. In some cases the outcomes are the result of long-term, high-profile struggles for a different world view, while in others they are more pragmatic – even accidental. Often they represent little more than people scrambling for something better than the private enclosures they find themselves in, but these too can represent seeds of a new public imagination.

It is these commonplace expressions of public service reform that constitute the majority of cases in this book, and arguably the bulk of pro-public-service movements in the world today. They are not always as dramatic as one might expect from such a highly politicized topic, but they reveal the daily grind of making change, and the nerve-wracking ups and downs of progress. From indigenous communities holding states accountable for better public health services in rural Guatemala, to locally controlled solar electricity in Kenya, to incorporating informal reclaimers into a public waste management system in India, the cases shine light on the complex, often incongruous and always interesting ways in which people are building actually existing alternatives to privatization.

The case studies also help shake up conventional understandings of our landscapes of choice. Many anti-privatization movements have called for state ownership and management of services as a response to the ills of privatization. But what happens when the state does not act in the broader public interest (Budds and McGranahan 2003; Cumbers

2012; Grugel and Ruggirozzi 2012)? Although states have extended water, healthcare and other important public services to vast swathes of the world's population (at various levels), they have never been as universal or equitable as sometimes claimed. Many have been top-down, paternalistic systems that could not adequately accommodate for diversity, often intended to address the crises of capital accumulation (via the extension of a commodified mass consumption society) as opposed to any moral commitment to universal access (Esping-Anderson 1990; Offe 1972).

Better resources for strong and more accountable state services should be fought for where appropriate, but we must not wax nostalgic about public management models that have at times been exclusionary, opaque and blindly productivist in their orientation (Newman and Clarke 2009). As Ferguson (2009, 169) notes in the African context, 'calls for reinstating old-style developmental states ... are understandable in the wake of neoliberal restructuring ... but I am skeptical that this is an adequate response – partly because the supposedly developmental states I know from the 1970s in Africa were pretty awful, and partly because I doubt that you can run history backward.'

And what of the trend toward corporatization? In these cases, services are fully owned and operated by the state, but they are financially and managerially ring-fenced from government and increasingly run on market-oriented principles such as full cost recovery and performance-based remuneration (Kickert 2001; OECD 2005; Shirley 1999). As part of a broader set of neoliberal reforms brought about by 'new public management', corporatization has arguably affected a much larger proportion and range of public services around the world than direct private sector involvement, often serving to achieve the same aims (such as reducing taxes, creating multi-tiered levels of service, and introducing labour flexibility) without the political controversies (Aivazian, Ge and Qui 2005; Blum and Ullman 2012; van Rooyen and Hall 2007). Not all corporatized services have been run on these principles (McDonald 2014), but three decades of neoliberal restructuring have fundamentally transformed state-led services in ideological and organizational terms around the world, making calls for an expansion of – or return to – state ownership of public services problematic.

And what happens when the state simply does not exist or is too weak to provide services, as is the case in many parts of the South?

Capacity building and additional financing are essential, but in many places it will take years, perhaps decades, to create the organizational and fiscal capacities to extend state-owned and state-operated services at scale. In some cases this governance vacuum has been filled by non-governmental organizations, community associations, labour unions, faith assemblies and others operating on a not-for-profit basis. These groups are private in the sense that they function on behalf of a clearly defined population (based on geographic, ethnic, employment or other designations) but can operate in the interests of a broader public. They can also operate in partnership with one another (sometimes across municipal and national jurisdictions), or with the state, in what are referred to as community–community partnerships or public–community partnerships (Allen 2012; Maurer and Smith 2012). The case studies in this book are illustrative of all these possibilities, demonstrating the growing diversity of new forms of public services that fall somewhere between the extremes of privatization and the monolith of the developmental state.

There is much to be celebrated in this burgeoning public service praxis. Struggles for new and different public models are rich in their variety and vigorous in their grassroots deliberation. For some, this is a necessary development, insisting that there should be no universalistic, pre-determined notion of what it means to be public: ‘Democratic conceptions of the common good will always be partial and provisional, never universal or static ... the common good can never be specified *a priori* as an input for the political system or as a static measure for the quality of governance’ (Dahl and Soss 2012, 31). If we are to arrive at new answers to what we want from our public services they can only be discovered through democratic political struggle, and they remain contested as much as shared.

I support this commitment to democratic process and contingency. As Mahoney and Clarke (2013, 92) note, if the goal is to ‘collectively create new kinds of public futures out of the conflicts of the current moment, it will be vital to recognize and robustly engage with how different versions of “crisis” work to imagine, address and position “the public”’. The chapters in this book are an attempt to do just that: identify and critically understand different expressions of public service transformation.

However, without some core shared principles and definitions we run the risk of falling into public service relativism, whereby anything

declared ‘public’ is good, with no objective reference points for evaluating these claims theoretically or empirically. Such open-ended contingency permits the defence of poorly run or undemocratic state services. It also allows for the promotion of heavily commercialized state-owned utilities that are run on market principles, often allowing governments to maintain a public façade while deepening the commodification of services at home and even seeking for-profit contracts outside of their own jurisdiction (Gentle 2009; Magdahl 2012).

At the other extreme is an anti-state position that questions the potential for any form of progressive state-led public service, often fetishizing notions of community. Much of the writing on ‘the commons’, for example, shares the belief that ‘collective management by communities’ is preferable to that of ‘market *and* state failures’ (Bakker 2007, 441, emphasis added). States are seen to be ‘inefficient and untrustworthy’ while communities are ‘the most reliable sources of social innovation’ (McCarthy 2005, 18).

This is not to dismiss the potential for non-state actors to play a progressive role in the delivery of essential services. My point is simply to illustrate once again how far we are from a counter-consensus on this thing we call ‘public’, and in answering the question ‘What do we want?’ In the end there is little that unites these calls for a commons beyond ‘their assertion of collective ownership and rights against relentless privatization and commodification’ (McCarthy 2005, 11).

Advancing publicness

Perhaps the best we can ask for at this stage is a shared distrust of commercialization. But if we are to develop an effective *pro-public* voice (a point I return to in Chapter 15) we can, and must, advance common reference points for alternatives. My proposal, drawing on previous research, is to focus on public service *outcomes* rather than getting bogged down in *a priori* debates about organizational form (McDonald 2014; McDonald and Ruiters 2012; Pigeon et al. 2012). This is not a theory of public service per se, but a methodological framework for establishing shared boundaries for what constitutes good service results, regardless of the type of public entity that produces them.

Table 1.1 outlines a set of normative criteria for evaluating the publicness of a service provider. Services that score well on these criteria would be considered to have a high degree of publicness (and

TABLE 1.1 Normative criteria for evaluating the publicness of a service provider

Normative category	Criteria	Definition	Examples of possible sub-criteria questions	Examples of possible measurement indicators
Universality	Access	Physical availability of the service at a convenient distance from user's dwelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural/urban divide? • Sufficient quantity? • Culturally acceptable service? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of population with adequate access • Time-distance to service location • Hours/day that service is available
	Affordability	Prices that ensure economic accessibility for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poorer households disproportionately burdened? • Programmes in place for cross-subsidy pricing? • Affordability a legal obligation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost as percentage of household income • Disconnection rates • Levels of subsidization by region
	Quality	Reliable, satisfactory services that create positive relations with end users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe for all users? • Responsive to user needs? • Ongoing improvement mechanisms in place? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary health outcomes • Level of service interruptions • Complaints by region
	Equity	Equality of opportunity to access quality services for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equitable quantity of service across user groups? • Equitable quality of service across user groups? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levels of access by socially disadvantaged groups • Per capita consumption by region

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water-borne disease socio-economic patterns Financing as a proportion of overall operating costs Cost per unit of service delivered by region Employee turnover rates Levels of renewable energy use Quality of wastewater treatment Rates of respiratory infection Budget allocations and cross-subsidization mechanisms between regions/sectors Evaluation of inter-sectoral impacts (e.g. improved sanitation reducing diarrhoeal burden)? Legal mechanisms to prevent privatization
Efficiency	<p>Formalized, legalized or institutionalized goals?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infrastructure investments helping to meet social goals of the service? Locally appropriate technology choices? Short-term cost reductions undermining sustainability? 	<p>Ability to obtain the greatest benefit out of available resources to meet service mandates</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programmes in place to reduce demand on natural resources from industry and households? Respect for different cultural understandings of resources? Climate change mitigation plans in place? Service model building a stronger 'public ethos' around services? Service contributing to improvements in other service delivery sectors? Explicit safeguards against privatization and commercialization, with sufficient political support?
Environmental protection	<p>Ability to meet service mandates without compromising future resource needs or undermining cultural environmental norms</p>	<p>Ability to meet service mandates without compromising future resource needs or undermining cultural environmental norms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service model building a stronger 'public ethos' around services? Service contributing to improvements in other service delivery sectors? Explicit safeguards against privatization and commercialization, with sufficient political support?
Solidarity	<p>Cohesion among producer and user groups from all sectors and regions that builds economic, social and political commitment to a public service model</p>	<p>Cohesion among producer and user groups from all sectors and regions that builds economic, social and political commitment to a public service model</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service model building a stronger 'public ethos' around services? Service contributing to improvements in other service delivery sectors? Explicit safeguards against privatization and commercialization, with sufficient political support?
Sustainability			

TABLE 1.1 (Continued)

Normative category	Criteria	Definition	Examples of possible sub-criteria questions	Examples of possible measurement indicators
Governance	Accountability	Obligation to report on and answer for activities, and to disclose the results to the public in a transparent, readily available and understandable manner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear operational mandates linked with mechanisms of accountability at appropriate scales (local, national, regional)? • Transparent capital and operating budgets? • Adequate monitoring to assess performance on all aspects of the service? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to mechanisms of accountability by region • Documentation openly available and verifiable, in suitable languages and formats for all users • Indicators tracked to assess performance both economically and socially
	Participation	Citizen involvement in policy making and implementation of service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate levels and sufficiently representative? • Adequate resources for broad and diverse participation (transportation, time off work, etc.)? • Culturally appropriate? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of people participating in formalized consultations • Range of processes open to participation (policy making, budget decisions, etc.) • Availability of participation by region

<p>Quality of workplace</p>	<p>Commitment to a safe work environment, sensible workload, as well as fairness and trust between employees and management, contributing to quality service delivery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate numbers of workers to ensure service quality? • Mechanisms for workers/unions to participate in operation, management or policy making? • Feedback loops between frontline workers, managers and end-users? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of health and safety protocols and equipment • Transparency of hiring processes and pay equity (job type, gender, race, ethnicity, etc.) • Access to training opportunities
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their mode of delivery could be investigated for potential replication elsewhere). Those that do not could be rejected as inadequate (at least in their context) and in need of reform. This approach aims to balance the universal and the particular, establishing a common set of normative principles that can be applied everywhere but allowing for democratic process and local variation, circumventing the need for a divisive and controversial effort to develop an ‘ideal’ public service model. It can also be applied to different service sectors.

The criteria for these evaluations have been selected for two reasons. First, they are the closest thing we have to a consensus on good service delivery outcomes in the existing literature. There may be widespread disagreement on how services should be delivered, but virtually all public services models today share the (rhetorical) goals of universality, equity and accountability (Haque 2001; Molina and McKeown 2012; Pidd 2012; Pollitt 2000). These principles can be summarized by Beetham’s (1987, 34) definition of public services as amenities that aim to be inclusive in their coverage, subject to public scrutiny, and developed according to a norm or public ethos that values citizen participation (although I have added a criterion for ‘solidarity’, which is not always found in the public services literature).

Second, we can reclaim and rework these criteria in progressive ways. The past 30 years have seen performance evaluations dominated by narrow economic metrics such as cost recovery ratios and labour productivity, as well as neoliberal terminology such as ‘customer service’, imported in no small measure from the private sector (Clarke et al. 2007). It is imperative that we break out of this discursive and fiscal trap. Finances should play a role in performance evaluation but they need not be the governing principle. Nor does the World Bank have a monopoly on how to define efficiency or accountability. As Wolff (2002, 3) notes: ‘When and where an absolute efficiency calculus is believed to exist ... one particular group (or set of groups) has established its hegemony over others ... An absolutized efficiency calculus will be used by the social groups that support it as a weapon to suppress contending social groups, their social analyses, and their programs for social change.’

We must problematize and recover this conversational terrain to better understand ways of valuing public that go beyond the narrow tropes of financial accounting and private contract law. To do so requires the development of additional sub-criteria that offer

more probing and critical insights into public service objectives. Measurements of efficiency, for example, could include social factors such as loss of livelihoods as a result of service cut-offs. Affordability can be measured in terms of how the cost of a service facilitates or denies its use by women. Participation can take into consideration the cultural appropriateness of consultation mechanisms within diverse settings. Neoliberal evaluations of utility performance may pay lip service to these kinds of evaluative criteria but they are typically sidelined in practice in favour of more commodified benchmarking metrics (Lefebvre and Victorisz 2007; Nove 2011; Triantafyllou 2007).

There are dozens of critically important dimensions that could be added to mainstream evaluation systems in an effort to better reveal the strengths (and weaknesses) of pro-public alternatives. Not all of these criteria would be examined in every case, of course. Nor should we expect to find ‘perfect’ examples of public services. No single service provider can realistically excel at all of the potential criteria suggested here, and what may be seen as important in one place (e.g. community participation in budgeting decisions) may be less important in another. Nevertheless, it is possible to develop a common framework for evaluating pro-public services while at the same time recognizing that generalizations are fraught with cultural and political tensions that may be irreconcilable at times.

There is certainly a practical and political need for such an approach. As Harvey (2000, 94) notes with reference to the development of universal norms for human rights, ‘To turn our backs on such universals at this stage in our history, however fraught or even tainted, is to turn our backs on all manner of prospects for political action.’ Such expediency is all the more relevant in the world of service delivery, given the abject failures of privatization and the immediate life-and-death realities of health, water, sanitation and electricity affecting at least one third of the people on the planet. Applying universal concepts across different sectors and regions, while still allowing for local interpretation, is not only justifiable academically, it is necessary politically if we are to develop a coherent transnational dialogue about the kinds of alternative public services we want to see in the 21st century.

Structure of the book

Ironically, not all of the case studies in this book follow this methodological protocol. While some were worked out in advance as

part of a larger research programme of the Municipal Services Project, others were conducted independently and submitted for consideration at a large international conference on progressive public services organized by the project in South Africa in 2014.¹ Nevertheless, all of the authors were familiar with this framework, and submitted their papers based on a commitment to seeking a more coherent analytical model for public alternatives to privatization. In this regard, the individual chapters, and the collection as a whole, represent a methodological work-in-progress, illustrating both the limits and possibilities of a more cohesive approach to advancing our understanding of alternative public services.

The chapters are also intentionally short in length and designed to encourage readers to explore places and sectors they may not be familiar with. The book is organized into sections to highlight major themes, but what gives the collection its real strength is the diversity of outcomes it presents, revealing both the context-based nature of public services as well as some of the universalities that bind them together.

In addition to heavily studied sectors such as water and healthcare, the book examines lesser known debates on the publicness of electricity, waste management and banking. The cases cover urban and rural locations in Africa, Asia and Latin America (as well as one chapter on municipal ‘insourcing’ in the United States) operating at various levels of governance. The authors are new and established scholars, social movement activists, unionists and NGO representatives. In this respect the book can claim some degree of representativeness in terms of the variety of struggles taking place on the ground.

The first part of the book is entitled ‘Engaging communities and workers’, and starts with an examination of efforts to build a labour–community alliance for water delivery in Valle del Cauca, Colombia. This is a coalition between two public sector trade unions (representing workers from the department’s water provider and environmental agency) and members of a community-run aqueduct in La Sirena (a low-income suburb of Cali). In this case the alliance has served to strengthen autonomous community water management – despite significant governance differences with the public utility – serving to recognize the importance of community-owned water systems as functionally and culturally appropriate in peri-urban and rural settings. The chapter highlights the long, demanding process of

creating this public alliance and the distinct organizational forms and capacities that managed to come together in their mutual mistrust of privatization.

Chapter 3 explores an under-examined service sector: that of waste management, and specifically that of ‘reclaimers’ – informal waste pickers who salvage reusable and recyclable materials. Municipalities in the South are slowly expanding their waste management systems to include recycling, but standard discourse and practice assumes that modern recycling must be technology-intensive and run by the state or private companies. Reclaimers are seen as atavistic, dirty and marring the modern image of the city. Most recycling systems thus exclude informal workers, with municipalities often contracting out mechanized companies to do recycling work. Fighting against this trend, organized reclaimers have been mobilizing to secure formal integration into public municipal waste management systems. Belo Horizonte (Brazil), Pune (India) and Bogotá (Colombia) are positive illustrations of these developments and this chapter argues that official inclusion of reclaimers in these cities’ waste management systems is expanding both the public sector and the public sphere, transforming relations between government, the formal and informal economy, and residents, creating a more inclusive, participatory and democratic public service.

Labour–community alliances are once again the subject of Chapter 4. In this case, however, the chapter’s subject is more accurately described as *potential* coalitions – the possibility of reigniting what used to be a powerful labour–community alliance culture in South Africa. The author reviews the history of alliance building that once worked to oppose privatization and asks how these associations can be rebuilt to promote public service alternatives in the future. There are ongoing efforts to reclaim these initiatives in thought and practice via a unity of class struggle that is grounded in mutual respect and learning, a tactical focus on grassroots mobilization, an organizational culture of internal democracy, and the forging of a principled, socially progressive, accountable and committed leadership. The present-day picture is a far cry from the strong coalitions of the anti-apartheid era and the early promises of the post-apartheid period, but there are examples of re-emerging alliances that offer sparks of hope.

Chapter 5 takes us to rural Guatemala, where indigenous communities have historically been unable to access public healthcare

services on an equal footing with wealthier urban populations. Using a rights-based approach and participatory action-research methodology, civil society organizations have developed and implemented a system of citizen monitoring of public healthcare services to enhance their quality and empower communities in six municipalities in the western highlands, all with a majority indigenous population. This approach includes capacity-building activities aiming to enhance the knowledge and skills of indigenous populations, particularly about their human rights and legal entitlement to public services. Participatory action-research in this case is not only a methodological tool but an approach that can be used in adult education to trigger political action. Five years since implementation, communities have influenced the improvement of public health services at the local level, as well as the allocation of resources, contributing to a more robust and democratic form of public health services.

The next cluster of chapters falls under the heading of ‘Recognizing quasi-public actors’ which, as the title suggests, explores the role of non-state actors in service delivery and how they should be recognized as legitimate public actors. Chapter 6 reviews the experiences of two NGOs based in Ahmedabad, India – the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) and Saath – and their role in an equity-oriented slum electrification programme. This initiative was a response to a need for innovative approaches to affordable legal electricity in informal settlements. Over 100,000 homes were electrified in Ahmedabad by 2008, and the programme is being replicated in smaller cities in the states of Gujarat and Rajasthan. The study showcases inventive ways of addressing land tenure issues for women in particular, devising equitable systems of paying for state-generated electricity, improving management processes, dealing with non-payment, and developing information and reporting systems to provide feedback to utilities and municipalities. It is a community–community partnership in a field dominated by big government and big capital. Democratizing the nature of state delivery – in part through the insertion of NGOs working in partnership with residents and local authorities – is seen to build new, equity-oriented forms of publicness. Involving NGOs in slum electrification is labour-intensive and expensive, however, and the chapter reveals how the absence of policy guidance and financial resources represents the biggest impediment for their NGOs’ participation in public projects.

Chapter 7 also looks at partnerships with communities, this time with a focus on sanitation. Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) programmes are designed to ‘force’ communities to recognize that the practice of open defecation causes sickness and disease, and ‘trigger’ them to take action, ensuring that every household builds at least a pit latrine in an effort to make the community defecation-free. At one level, CLTS can be considered a typical neoliberal tactic on the part of the mainstream sanitation fraternity, downloading the costs and physical labour of actual service delivery onto communities. But it can also be viewed as an acknowledgement of the need to revive the publicness of sanitation services by making them more democratic and participatory, and acting as a form of redress for the ineffectiveness of top-down state delivered sanitation services in the past. This chapter explores the degree to which such programmes can be considered public by invoking the ‘messiness’ of community in an effort to avoid the false dualism of either strengthening neoliberalism through self-help programmes or uncritically celebrating an abstract public ideal.

Chapter 8 is our only look at faith-based service provision as a public option. In Uganda, faith-based health facilities (Christian and Muslim) are deeply integrated into the public system, often serving areas where there are few, if any, state-managed services available. These healthcare facilities have been operating in the country since the late-19th century, where they focus on primary care in rural areas, charging affordable user fees and treating those who cannot pay, regardless of their religious affiliation. They promote solidarity through multi-stakeholder engagement and cross-subsidization, using mechanisms such as community health financing schemes that protect the community against catastrophic out-of-pocket health expenditures. Nevertheless, there are questions as to whether faith-based establishments let the state off the financial hook, the extent to which they appear to be seeking profit opportunities to subsidize other areas of work, and concerns over the role that religion can play in controversial health-related topics such as contraception.

The third part of the book is entitled ‘Promoting equity and democratic control’, starting with a focused examination of gendered conceptualizations of public water in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in Chapter 9. Based on the premise that poor women are constrained by illegality and water scarcity, the chapter seeks to pry open the ‘black box’ of

household and community by exploring gendered inclusions and exclusions in the city's public water system and outlines the beginnings of a broader conceptual framework for socially just and equitable delivery mechanisms that are responsive to women's needs and conducive to the emergence of a politicized sense of self and autonomy. The study reveals a strong preference among women for publicly provided municipal water, shaped by affordability and a desire for full citizenship and legal standing.

Returning to Colombia, Chapter 10 looks at the city of Medellín and its much-celebrated public multi-utility company – Empresas Públicas de Medellín (EPM). EPM has long contributed to the overall welfare of the city, but now operates across Latin America and has implemented a number of market-oriented operating principles in its activities, raising challenging questions about its public character. With approximately 66,000 households in Medellín being denied access to water by EPM for non-payment of bills, or because their land tenure status remains illegal, this chapter explores the relationship between infrastructure networks, citizenship and access to water, revealing how marginalized people fight to reclaim what they consider to be a public good.

Renewable energy in sub-Saharan Africa is the focus of Chapter 11. Paradoxically, Africa is the most under-serviced region of the world when it comes to electricity provision but ranks as one of the best-endowed in terms of potential production, especially in renewable sources such as solar, wind and geothermal. Renewable energy also opens up possibilities for off-grid and mini-grid access, as well as localized solutions that can rapidly escalate access and democratize electricity provision, potentially making it more public. This chapter explores what such public energy systems might look like in terms of ownership and control, outlining the state of renewable energy debates on the continent. The struggle for publicly owned renewable electricity systems in Africa that are democratic, accountable, affordable and accessible will not be easy, but it must start with a realistic account of what exists and what lies on the road ahead.

The last part of the book looks at 'Financing public services', beginning with the trend toward (re)making public banks. Sitting at the pinnacle of a financialized global capitalist system, it is easy to forget that many banks were (and remain) state-owned and operated, and that finance long pre-dates the market. As such, all banking institutions are

historically and socially constructed. Chapter 12 provides an overview of the history of state banks, noting that even if they charge interest they have not always had a profit mandate and can loan on strategic developmental grounds, providing the potential for counter-cyclical lending. The chapter then looks specifically at Turkey's state banks, noting that while retaining control of roughly one third of the country's banking assets today, their original mandates have become overlaid with neoliberal competitive imperatives. Efforts to reclaim their publicness are ongoing, and it is argued that public banks can serve as potentially significant sources of progressive social developmental power, providing support in times of crisis and instability, and extending access to finance mechanisms, all the while operating more 'efficiently' than private banks.

We then turn to the heartland of capitalism – the USA – where direct public provision accounts for almost half of all local government service delivery. When cities do contract out, they typically mix public and private delivery over time through insourcing and outsourcing, depending in part on the financial benefits or constraints of doing so. Chapter 13 argues that such dynamic forms of market management reinsert some level of public management control into the privatization process. Reversing privatization via 'insourcing' is a process of 'making public' among US local governments, even if it is primarily a pragmatic practice of experimentation as opposed to any particular ideological commitment to publicness per se. Empirical results suggest an important role for city managers and public sector workers in assessing private delivery and improving public service delivery, resulting in contracting that is more likely with public partners (other municipalities) than private ones, and where public ethos, accountability and openness are present. Notably, the top two reasons cited by city managers for reversing contracts were poor service quality and a lack of cost savings from private companies.

The last case study looks at water provision and financing in Bolivia. This country has been a beacon of hope for many on the left since the election of the Evo Morales government in 2006, not least because of its extensive and dramatic efforts to stop and reverse privatization in essential services and to finance them in ways that do not depend on international financial institutions. Chapter 14 looks at reforms in the water sector in particular, reviewing the significant reorientation from private to public forms of provision and finance. The Morales

government has signalled its commitment to the human right to water, which is now enshrined in the Constitution, and has established new institutions to bolster the role of the state in water management and financing. However, the formal regulatory and institutional situation of water in Bolivia is still weak, incomplete, non-existent and outdated in some areas. Nor have government agencies yet figured out how to evaluate performance on the basis of ‘social efficiency’ rather than the more narrow financial indicators established during the neoliberal era. Despite fiery anti-capitalist rhetoric and a commitment to ‘protecting Mother Earth’, the government has prioritized investments geared toward industrial take-off, particularly in the hydrocarbons and transportation sectors. In the spirit of critical engagement, the chapter argues that the Morales government could afford to invest more of its own funds to improve the publicness of the water sector instead of relying on (yet to be realized) financial support from the World Bank and other donor agencies.

The book concludes, in Chapter 15, with a review of the challenges (and opportunities) of building a more effective global pro-public movement. It points to three particularly challenging areas: the inherent (and probably intractable) complexities of what it means to build a ‘public’ service; a reluctance by some anti-privatization actors to be critical of the state-led services that we still have; and the lack of an established academic agenda for research. This is followed by an assessment of existing areas of strength – in regional and sectoral terms – and possible traction points for moving the debate and practice of service delivery alternatives forward.

No single book can possibly cover the wide range of alternative public service models that are being developed around the world today, but the hope is that this collection is broadly representative of the forms of change taking place and the kinds of outcomes they can produce. In doing so it aims to strengthen the empirical record of what is taking place, and to advance our conceptual understanding of how we might better evaluate the publicness of service delivery alternatives in the future.

Note

- 1 ‘Putting Public in Public Services: Research, Action and Equity in the Global South’, Cape Town, South Africa, 13–16 April 2014.

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