1 Introduction

In search of alternatives to privatisation

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In the ongoing debates about privatisation, it is often argued that those who oppose private sector involvement in service delivery do not present concrete alternatives. There is some truth to this claim, springing in part from the deep impoverishment of debate since the onset of neoliberalism, which pronounced that "there is no alternative" to privatisation. This also needs to be seen in contrast to the 1930s, and the post-World War II period when there was a strong sense of the limits and dangers of excessive domination of society by unfettered markets and private sector service provision and much greater scope for understanding the limits of capitalism and the use of state powers to ensure social integration and secure basic needs and wants.

Yet in the recent past, with the limits to privatisation and financialization becoming more apparent, a burgeoning field of enquiry around alternatives has emerged, albeit in a fragmented and inconsistent way. Social movements have developed powerful rhetoric – such as "another world is possible" and "there must be alternatives" – but with little detail on how alternatives are constructed, to what extent they are reproducible, and what normative values might guide them (if any). The literature and practices that do speak directly to "alternatives to privatisation" tend to be highly localised and sector-specific and lacking in conceptual and methodological consistency, leading to interesting but somewhat variegated case studies.

This book is an attempt to help fill this analytical and empirical gap by synthesising existing work and generating new conceptual frameworks, which directly address questions of what constitutes alternatives, what makes them successful (or not), what improvements have been achieved, and what lessons are to be learned for future service delivery debates. The analysis is backed up by a comprehensive examination of initiatives in over 50 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It covers three sectors – health care, water/sanitation, and electricity – and is the first global survey

of its kind, providing a more rigorous and robust platform for evaluating alternatives than has existed to date and allowing for better (though still challenging) comparisons across regions and sectors.

Although our research focuses on particular sectors in particular regions, the findings are relevant to other services and to other parts of the world, at least in broad conceptual terms. Information of this type is urgently required by practitioners, unionists, social movements, and analysts alike, all of whom are seeking reliable knowledge on what kinds of public models work and their main strengths and weaknesses.

To this end, the book is intended as a first step in a multipronged research process. The findings presented here offer a preliminary review of the scope and character of "successful" alternatives in the different regions and sectors investigated, while at the same time providing a testing ground for conceptual frameworks and research methods. Subsequent research will provide more fine-tuned case studies in sectors and regions identified from this research to be of particular interest, with a focus on key themes that have emerged from the studies (such as the trend towards remunicipalising water services and the tensions inherent in corporatised service delivery models). The book is therefore a starting point, not an endpoint, and is intended to act as a guide for our own future research as well as a catalyst for others.

The orientation of the research is academic but has involved activists, unionists, social movements, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from the outset. As with previous research by the Municipal Services Project,[1] the involvement of frontline workers, service users, policy makers, and others has been an essential part of the design and implementation of research, as well as of outputs and outreach. The perspectives and practices brought to the table by these various groups, based in various regions and sectors, complicate the traditional academic process, but the outcome is much richer for it. The book has thus been written to be academically rigorous but also to be accessible to policy makers, analysts, unionists, activists, and others familiar with the debates on privatisation and its alternatives. Not all chapters will resonate with all readers, but the intention is that the book will help advance our understanding of alternatives to privatisation in general and stimulate further research in this critically important area.

The book has been divided into three sections. The first looks at conceptual questions around the nature of the state in service provision, the role of labour and social movements, gendered outcomes of different service mechanisms, and the ways in which neoliberal practices and ideologies construct and constrict the push for alternative delivery systems. The second section is an empirical review of alternative models of service delivery broken down by region (Asia, Africa, and Latin America) and sector (health care, water/sanitation, and electricity). In this latter section, regionally based research teams were asked to identify as many "successful" alternatives as they could find in a given region and sector, categorise them according to predefined

typologies, and evaluate their achievements based on a set of normative criteria. The book concludes with a chapter that summarises the findings of the research and points to future directions for study, policy, and activism.

WHAT IS AN "ALTERNATIVE TO PRIVATISATION"?

An extended discussion of the methods and typologies developed for the collaborative research in this book is provided in Chapter 2, but it is useful to first explain what we mean by an "alternative to privatisation". We have defined alternatives in this book as (i) "public" entities that are entirely state-owned and operated (such as a municipal water utility or a provincial electricity generator) and (ii) "non-state" organisations that operate independently of the state on a not-for-profit basis and are oriented to principles of equality and social citizenship (such as certain types of NGOs or community groups). These two broadly defined groups might operate independently from each other or in some form of partnership (with "partnerships" forming a third category of sorts).

Notably, this definition includes non-state actors in notions of "public", helping to get beyond the "stale positions staked out in the public-versus-private debate", which has often limited the discussion to states versus the private sector (Bakker 2010, 218). More controversially, however, our definition excludes all forms of private, for-profit actors, be they large corporations or for-profit NGOs. In this regard our definition of privatisation covers all forms of "private" ownership and/or management, including governmental, non-governmental, or community-based organisations operating on a for-profit basis.

There are fuzzy margins here, of course, many of which complicated our data collection and analysis. After all, the majority of public services operates within capitalist environments and procure goods and services from private firms and rely on certain private distribution and collection networks. There are also many highly regarded public services that have outsourced small aspects of their operations (e.g. meter reading) but otherwise operate on a non-commercial basis. Being "purist" in this regard was not logistically practical and might have unnecessarily eliminated some interesting examples of "alternatives" from our study. There are also NGOs that offer interesting alternative service delivery schemes on a not-for-profit basis in one location but have ties to profit-making ventures in other areas. To rule out these forms of service delivery could also have meant the loss of interesting case studies. Similar parameters apply to "community" service providers, many of which can be "private" (to the extent that they are not always accountable to political authorities or to the communities within which they operate) but could not necessarily be ruled out as "public" actors, particularly if they operated in non-marketised ways.

But the most vexing question of all was (and remains) what to make of "corporatised" services – i.e. state-owned and state-operated services run (to varying degrees) on commercial principles. Corporatised entities have become extremely popular over the past 20–30 years, and some have become more private than public in their orientation. They may not operate on a for-profit basis, but they function using market doctrines, valorising the exchange rate of a service over its use value, prioritising financial cost-benefit analysis in decision making, and employing private sector management techniques such as performance-based salaries. These corporatised entities often see their service delivery mandates framed in market terms of maximising efficiency, promoting free enterprise, and serving individual consumer sovereignty (Shirley 1999, Bollier 2003, Preker and Harding 2003, Whincop 2003).

It is here that we found the biggest divisions amongst ourselves over the publicness of these corporatised entities and whether they should be considered "alternatives to privatisation". In the end it was decided that being purist on this point would not have been helpful either, knowing that some corporatised public entities have performed well when relying on (some) private sector operating principles and that democratic political processes can be used to buffer against overly marketised processes and outcomes (on the latter point, see Warner and Hefetz 2008). Individual research groups were therefore asked to determine whether they thought a particular corporatised entity was sufficiently "non-private" in its operational practice and ideologies to be included in the study. The outcome was that some corporatised service providers were included as positive examples of "alternatives to privatisation", and some were not. Uruguay's corporatised water entity, *Obras Sanitarias del Estado* (OSE), is an example of the former, having been instrumental in the transformation of water services in that country into fairer and more transparent service provision (see Chapter 15, this volume). Many others were left out, such as South Africa's parastatal electricity producer, Eskom, which initially extended subsidised electricity to millions after the end of apartheid but now acts much like a private company, cutting off low-income households for non-payment of services and aggressively pursuing privatised contracts in other parts of Africa (Greenberg 2009). This diffusion is a reflection of the conceptual differences of opinion within our research group, as well as a product of different interpretations and measurements of the more objective empirical evaluations of service performance captured in our "criteria for success", such as accountability, equity, and quality of services (on which more will be said in Chapter 2, this volume).

In other words, there are no hard and fast boundaries between a "privatised" service and an "alternative to privatisation". Rather than lying along a linear trajectory of state ownership at one extreme and private ownership at the other, there are multiple criteria across different forms of provision that are fractured in relation to one another and in terms of more or less

progressive outcomes; state (i.e. public) ownership can serve elite and corporate needs and marginalise the poor, for example. The degree of state or non-state ownership and control is neither a singular nor exclusive marker of "alternatives". It is a matter of who is served and how, with substantial contextual content. And while we can argue for a definition of alternatives that is as free of private sector influence as possible – and we certainly need a stricter definition than the rather flaccid and overly compromised notions of "public" services being promoted by many United Nations (UN) agencies and international financial institutions, which can even include multinational corporations (UN-Habitat 2007, World Bank 2009) – we felt it was conceptually and politically mistaken to impose too tight a definition at this early stage of our research agenda.

We have therefore used this initial "mapping exercise" as an opportunity for constructive debate within and across the different sectors and regions we are studying to understand better how "public" service provision can be progressively sustained, rather than establishing firm guidelines for how boundaries for "alternatives" should be drawn or where these boundary lines should lie. Both the nature *and* dynamic of alternative provision are of significance. It is important to advance and defend definitions and not simply to try to stay on the right side of the border, as it were. The material presented in this book reflects some of these unresolved debates and will serve as the subject of further empirical and conceptual study.

Having said that, the overwhelming majority of "successful" alternatives to privatisation identified in this book are those run on a non-commercial basis by the state and/or by non-governmental or civic associations. The details of these services differ from place to place and are often as dissimilar to the "old style" state-run services that preceded them as they are from their more contemporary privatised counterparts. These differences are due in part to the dramatic changes that have been imposed by decentralisation and supranationalisation (with everything from local authorities to international governing bodies now taking part in service delivery), as well as the direct involvement that NGOs, social movements, and community-based groups have earned at various levels of decision making and service delivery. As a result, the divisions between governmental and non-governmental have also blurred, and this is particularly pronounced in the realm of alternatives.

Despite this fuzziness we have attempted to typologise state and non-state service delivery systems in ways that give sharper definition to alternatives than simply the term "public" (or "public-public" in cases in which there is more than one entity working together). We do so by more clearly distinguishing between governmental and non-governmental actors than has been done in the past and by differentiating between single and multiple actors (see Chapter 2 for more details, this volume). Though rather inelegant in the names and acronyms this produces – e.g. SiNP (single non-profit sector), NPNPP (non-profit/non-profit partnership) – there is a need

for more clarity around the institutional composition of alternatives if we are to comprehend better the nature and shifting differentiation of public sector alternatives.

IDENTIFYING ALTERNATIVES BY THEIR "OBJECTIVES"

We have also attempted to identify alternatives by their intended objectives and have broken them into five categories, based on how they emerged from the research. The first category refers to alternatives whose primary objective is "*defending the status quo*". In the fight against privatisation, we often forget that the vast majority of services that exist are still provided by the public sector (an estimated 90%–95% of the world's water services, for example). There is much that can be improved (even rejected) about these public sector service delivery models, but some of it is done exceptionally well, and we should not fall victim to the negative rhetoric of public sector service bashing that has become part and parcel of today's neoliberal political objective.

Our primary interest, however, lies with identifying and evaluating positive examples of alternatives to privatisation that are aimed at "*revising the status quo*". We acknowledge that many existing public services are poorly run – or non-existent – and do not meet many of our "criteria for success". Defending these services is not an acceptable route to developing alternatives. It is important therefore to explore efforts that have gone into making public services more democratic, more participatory, more equitable, more transparent, more environmentally sound, more secure, and so on, and it is essential that we understand the scope and character of these reforms. Examples range from the well-known participatory budgeting models of Latin America to lesser-known initiatives in cities, towns, and villages in Asia and Africa. In some cases the reforms leave institutional structures intact, while in others they dismantle old forms of the state with a much broader set of actors and innovative forms of governance, opening up new vistas for thinking about how the "public" can operate.

Our third category is that of "*reclaiming public services*". After the privatisation euphoria of the 1980s and 1990s, many national and municipal governments are finding themselves once again in control of essential services, either as a result of a political struggle to remove a private firm (such as the "Water War" of Cochabamba, Bolivia) or because the private sector service provider fled what it perceived to be an unprofitable situation, leaving the state/community to pick up the pieces (as with water services in Buenos Aires in the early 2000s). Whatever the cause (an understanding of which is essential to assessing the outcomes), there is a large and growing swathe of previously privatised services that are now back in public hands. We have attempted to identify as many positive examples of this as possible and discuss the lessons learned (we have also completed separate, in-depth research comparing water remunicipalisation in five countries, in a forthcoming publication).

Fourth, we are interested in what we call "*utopian*" models of service delivery. These are proposed/theorised systems that do not yet exist but which animate academic and popular debate. There is value in utopian thinking for several reasons. First, much policy scholarship originates from narrow-minded thinking based on what advocates believe will be acceptable to powerful interest groups and state bureaucrats. The horizons of thought are predetermined by the deadweight of the present. Utopian thinking, by contrast, allows us to start with probing questions about the ethical principles and necessity of change, rather than its feasibility as shaped by existing power relations and balance of forces (Friedmann 2000, Harvey 2000, Tormey 2005). Against having a blueprint for the future, the kind of utopian thinking we suggest allows for a discussion of processes that produce things in the present. Utopian thinking might also allow us to ask fundamental questions about the social creation of needs in contemporary society and what kind of ecological footprint we might want to leave, focusing our minds on alternative social forms, alliances, politics of scale, and processes of how we might get there.

Our final category is "*historical models*" of non-private service delivery, which we hope can shed light on what has worked and not worked in places such as the Soviet bloc, early communist China, 19th-century municipal socialisms, "African socialisms", and so on. Most of this historical research is being conducted separate from this book (such as a review of "municipal socialism" from the late 1800s to the 1940s), but some historical models find their way into the current chapters, either because they continue to operate (such as Cuba's much-vaunted medical system) or because they provide useful comparators for what is happening today (e.g. the now-defunct *Semashko* health model developed by the Soviets).

Looking at historical models is also a useful way to remind ourselves that this is not the first time there has been a debate about "alternatives to privatisation". Much of what we call "public" services today started out as private entities and were nationalised or municipalised as far back as the mid-1800s, often because privatisation was deemed to be too inefficient and unpredictable by the private sector itself (see Chapter 7 for an extended discussion, this volume). Some services have experienced several public-private swings, offering temporal insights into the rationale for, and debates over, public versus private service delivery today. Contemporary struggles have different social, technological, and ecological overtones, but many of the issues remain the same, and it is important that we locate current efforts to build alternatives in historical context.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Our objective with this book is to be "critically positive" about the nature of alternatives. While it is important to celebrate notions of "publicness" that have been so demeaned over the years, there is little value in uncritically

promoting service options that have proven to be problematic or that have been inadequately researched. As such, our evaluations may appear overly negative at times, airing on the side of caution when we are unsure of the full scope of particular changes or when we see real or potential problems lurking behind the scenes (as with some forms of corporatisation). We therefore recognise public sector failures and highlight the challenges ahead.

Having said that, we also recognise the David and Goliath nature of the battle over privatisation and want to speak loudly in favour of efforts to find, initiate, and promote positive alternatives. The dominance of institutions that back the privatisation and marketisation of essential services remains strong, as does the volume of pro-privatisation/commercialisation research by international funding agencies, NGOs, think tanks, and governments. This book has been written in direct response to this political and financial hegemony, and in doing so, joins a growing counter-narrative that has become increasingly networked and effective in its knowledge base and tactics. There may be relatively little in the way of direct funding for research and development on alternatives when compared to the billions of dollars that flow into privatisation and commercialisation initiatives each year, but unions (e.g. Unison, Canadian Union of Public Employees, South African Municipal Workers Union, Public Services International), NGOs (e.g. Food and Water Watch, Transnational Institute, Corporate Europe Observatory, Focus on the Global South, World Development Movement), social movements (e.g. Red Vida, Africa Water Network, People's Health Movement), and others have become increasingly focused on moving beyond critiques of privatisation and proposing new ways forward. There are even small pockets of resources being made available for these purposes by aid agencies and international governance institutions such as the UN. The creation of the Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance (GWOPA) by UN-Habitat to explore "public-public partnerships" is one example, as is recognition by the European Parliament that "financing and technical support available from a variety of donors for PPPs" needs to be balanced by "dedicated funds made available for PuPs [public-public partnerships]...to ensure that PuPs are an accessible option for governments seeking to enter into partnerships, and to enable PuPs to develop so that their potential can be better understood" (Tucker et al., 2010). But the fact that the first example is compromised by the presence of multinational corporations (Miranda 2007), and the latter is but a drop in the proverbial funding bucket, illustrates just how unbalanced this debate remains. Nevertheless, there are indications of a growing awareness from mainstream actors of the need to put resources into a more systematic exploration of alternatives to privatisation – if for no other reason than that the private sector continues to shun the risk of service delivery in many parts of the global South.

This book hopes to address this imbalance by bringing together academics, activists, unionists, social movements, and non-governmental organisations involved in the debates over alternatives to privatisation,

all of whom are seeking better conceptual models and methodologies for more rigorous, comparative research on public service provision. Chapter 2 lays out our collective thinking on definitions of "successful" alternatives and how we went about identifying and studying them. This is followed by a series of chapters in Part I that provide insights on actors, issues and ideologies associated with alternative service delivery models, with a combination of theory and empirical evidence that covers some of the overarching themes of the book, such as the role of social movements, organised labour, community-based groups, contested notions of the state, and the challenges of incorporating gender into our understandings of what makes for a successful alternative system. We also include an overview of contemporary neoliberalism and how this phenomenon both constrains and energises alternatives to privatisation. Although the aim of the book is to get beyond a critique of privatisation, it is important to situate ourselves within a particular understanding of the contemporary neoliberal world order and comprehend how this shapes thinking and practice on what kinds of alternatives are possible.

Part II of the book is a series of regional and sectoral studies looking at the evolution of alternative services in health care, water/sanitation, and electricity in Asia, Africa, and Latin America – a total of nine chapters. We have opted to organise these discussions by region due to the strong geographic similarities we found across sectors and have provided short regional overviews that offer basic historical and political-economic context for readers less familiar with these regions and minimise repetition in the chapters.

Finally, we conclude in Part III with a discussion of ways forward. As noted earlier, we see this book as a starting point for a more coherent and coordinated set of research activities on alternatives, and we use this final chapter to point to potential future research activities for ourselves and to encourage others to develop related research programmes, conceptual models, and methodologies.

MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS

There are no simple or singular lessons to be taken from this book. It is important to read each chapter for what is has to offer. This is due in part to the enormous variations across regions, sectors, and actors. It is also a product of new conceptual and methodological frameworks that allow for competing interpretations of what constitutes "public" and how one defines a "successful" alternative to privatisation. Some contributors, for example, are more supportive of NGO involvement in services than others. Some contributors are insistent on strong state roles while others are more sceptical. Some are accepting/supportive of corporatisation. We take this as a healthy sign of a diverse and complex research topic and of the need to see

alternatives in context. Nevertheless, there are a few broad generalisations that we can make about the research findings.

Vibrant debates

The first, and most important, finding to highlight is that there is considerable vibrancy in the world of alternatives to privatisation. Despite what the mainstream press would have us believe, debate and practice in this area is robust, and there are a myriad of positive examples of "public" service delivery across all sectors and regions.

Water appears to be the most dynamic. This is likely due to the fact that it has been one of the services most affected and politicised by privatisation, but also because it is the only truly "non-substitutable" service of the three sectors under study and because it is also relatively simple, technologically speaking, and the easiest to imagine having more community/public control over. There is also an effective and well-coordinated cluster of regional and international groups that have opposed water privatisation and which are now proposing alternatives.

Electricity is by far the *least* organised of the sectors, mainly in terms of the development and conceptualisation of alternatives, largely for the opposite reasons as those given for water – i.e. alternative forms of energy exist, it is highly technical and capital intensive (though it need not be), and there has been relatively little understanding of the complex nature of unbundling that has taken place in the sector. As a result, few regional – and no international – fora exist that are working on alternatives to privatisation in electricity. Positive examples of alternatives exist, but they are fewer in number and more isolated in their activities.

The health sector, for its part, also has many positive "alternatives" to point to, but it is more fragmented than the other two sectors in its capacity to recognise and promote these models. This is due in part to the existence of primary, secondary, and tertiary systems that often do not interact with one another, making health less vertically integrated than the other two sectors in its structures and governance (though they need not be). There are also highly personal aspects to the user-provider relationship that make the experience with health care less predictable or homogeneous than that with water or electricity. Nevertheless, experiences with privatised systems have served to bring together otherwise disparate groups, and renewed interest in alternative forms of health care have further contributed to thinking about alternative delivery mechanisms.

In short, all three sectors are experiencing debates about alternatives to privatisation, but there is as much that differentiates these discussions as binds them together. The intersectoral approach we have taken in this book is therefore both its strength and its challenge, attempting to find common ground and promote intersectoral dialogue and practice, while at the same time recognising and respecting the unique realities of each.

In the end, we are advancing a notion of *health system*s, which, drawing on the World Health Organization's definition, involves "all actions whose primary purpose is to promote, restore, or maintain health" (WHO 2000). In other words, health includes "upstream" social determinants (in this case, water/sanitation and electricity), as well as the potential for the health sector itself to act as social determinant by shaping "downstream" access to health care services by the disadvantaged, reaching back upwards to shape the socio-political environment (Gilson et al., 2007, viii). Taken this way, health systems are a totality of interactions, with different sectors having reciprocating effects on one another and reshaping the health system as a whole.

From a geographic point of view, the largest number of interesting alternatives are to be found in Latin America. This will come as no surprise to readers familiar with the region's larger set of experiments with socialism, and alternatives to neoliberalism more generally, as well as its long history of anti-corporate struggle. Africa, by contrast, is the weakest region in terms of "successful" alternatives, constrained in large part by the ongoing stranglehold of international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the relatively conservative/neoliberal regimes in power, and limited state capacities. There is robust resistance to privatisation on the continent, but this has not yet morphed into as effective a voice on alternatives to privatisation as we have seen in the other two regions. Despite the differences, it is hoped that lessons learned from each region – whether positive or negative – will be of use in the others, as well as in the struggles for alternative service delivery systems in the global North.

No "ideal models"

We found many different types of alternatives to privatisation, but there are no "ideal models". None excelled at *all* of the criteria we identified for "success" and few could be neatly typologised into the categories we created. This too should come as no surprise. Context, empowerment, and democracy are remarkably important. This is stating the obvious, of course, but given the one-size-fits-all approach of the proponents of privatisation/commercialisation (or even a mix-of-templates-fits-all), it is important to state that "alternatives to privatisation" need not fit into neat little boxes and need not be replicable elsewhere. The ideological milieu, the institutional make-up, the capacity of states and civil society, the availability of capital, and environmental conditions are but some of the factors that can make or break an alternative, and a model that works in one place may prove a failure in another, for any combination of reasons. Uganda is not Uruguay is not Ulan Bator.

This does not mean we should abandon a commitment to certain universal norms and expectations – we have built our study around such normative criteria, such as equity, sustainability, and transparency – but

these must be contextually meaningful and practical. Research methods must be equally elastic, with sufficiently flexible conceptual frameworks needed to take into account particularities, while at the same time allowing for meaningful comparisons across regions and sectors. There may be no single model that works for every sector in every place, but there may be certain factors that raise the likelihood of an alternative to privatisation being considered successful. Chapter 2 discusses this methodological challenge at length.

Scale matters (but not too much)

We identified successful alternatives to privatisation across a wide range of scales: from highly localised water provision systems in small rural areas that service several hundred people, to national health systems that service millions. The scale of a service system is not, therefore, an a priori *determinant* of success, but it is important when considering efficiency, universal standards of coverage, resource requirements, ease of regulation, and so on. Being big can be beneficial in some ways (economies of scale, national standards) but detrimental in others (public participation, cultural appropriateness). Ditto for being small, where we must be particularly watchful of the sometimes blind push for decentralisation of services over the past few decades (largely from neoliberals but also from the left) and the potential to fetishise the local. Small may be beautiful at times, and large may be efficient at others, but neither should be considered ontological categories of their own, and there is nothing axiomatic about scale when it comes to alternatives to privatisation.

Technological (r)evolutions

A related point is the question of technology. Whereas much of the scalar debate takes place with reference to politics (participation, democratic oversight, etc.), the kinds of technologies employed can have equally important influences on the success or failure of an alternative service delivery system. That so little exists in the way of coordinated alternatives to privatisation in the electricity sector is in part because most electricity systems are national/regional high-voltage grids that require coordination on an equally large political scale, with massive amounts of capital and considerable technical knowledge. Water production, on the other hand, is still artisanal in places and even where it is fully industrialised it tends to be locally managed due to transport issues. Water treatment and distribution involves relatively simple technology, as can some health care provision, with localised health systems able to use relatively simple techniques such as oral rehydration that can be provided with minimal training (very different, of course, from high-end tertiary health care, which has tended to use technology as a way of insulating itself from public accountability, a point that is taken up at

length in each of the chapters on health in this book). Some service sectors therefore lend themselves better to technological innovations that are appropriate for de-scaled applications with community control and ownership. However, within sectors, technology choices are also important, and evidence exists that high-end technology is not always the most efficient and cost-effective option available.

These technologically determined scenarios need not be the case, but it is critical to see the roles that technology can play in shaping alternatives to privatisation. This is highlighted most poignantly in the chapter on electricity in Africa (Chapter 13, this volume), whereby small-scale electricity production systems are seen as one way out of the highly commercialised giganticism of continental dams and grids that hand power to multinational capital and unaccountable (regional) governments.

And finally, gender

Whereas there is a growing literature on the gendered dimensions of privatisation, virtually nothing has been written about gender and "alternatives to privatisation". The chapter on gender included in this book is seen as both a preliminary corrective to this lacuna as well as a call for better conceptual and methodological modelling for future studies.

The methodological frameworks employed for the current research included specific references to gender (equity, participation, access, etc.), and efforts were made to identify important gender gains/gaps in the alternatives that were identified, but given the desktop nature of this "mapping exercise", we have not been able to disaggregate adequately the gendered dimensions of the models we explored (nor for class, race, age, and other important socio-demographic characteristics). It is hoped that the discussion provided in the chapter on gender will help us better investigate these finer-tuned aspects of alternatives in the future, as well as contribute to ongoing struggles for more gender-equitable service provision on the ground.

CONCLUSION

In this book we proceed both empirically and theoretically to look at the question of alternatives to privatisation and, more broadly, of alternatives to neoliberalism. We will not necessarily just "find" alternatives waiting to be discovered. But by combining historical, contemporary, and future (imagined) insights into alternatives, with a theoretically informed understanding of political economy and the state, we hope to provide helpful ways forward. While we seek to distil key lessons and exemplary cases from "what was and is out there", we realise there remains a deep poverty of practice and thinking around alternatives, and that many public entities

have too often imbibed the neoliberal spirit. Yet the sheer variety of alternatives and achievements that do exist (from traditional welfare and socialist states to more contemporary innovations), and the multitude of large- and small-scale efforts to produce them, provide hope.

Human beings have the capacity to develop new ideas of social life and species being, but as Harvey argues,

> to propose different rights from those held sacrosanct by neoliberalism carries with it an obligation to specify alternative social processes within which such alternative rights can inhere. The profoundly antidemocratic nature of neoliberalism backed by the authoritarianism of the neoconservatives should surely be the main focus of political struggle. (2005, 204–205)

Democracy, understood as popular control of state institutions with social equality and open democratic institutions, means liberating the state from the control of narrow elites and corporations and rolling back the frontiers of market power. Alternative service delivery models in water, health care, and electricity may only be a small part of this larger frontier, but they are important pieces of the puzzle.

NOTES

1. For more information on the project, see www.municipalservicesproject.org.

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