Preface

The reorganisation of bureaucracies according to neo-liberal principles is a global phenomenon. We, as employees and clients of public services, universities, development agencies and NGOs are influenced by these institutions and their policies in a myriad of unforeseen ways, but our mundane acts also shape the ways in which they operate and affect our lives. It is the aim of this study to contribute to an understanding of the links between quotidian practices and global processes, between the micro-level of individual day-to-day tactics and the macro-level of development discourse. It does so by focusing on this dynamics in a particular site and point of time, the urban areas of Lilongwe and Zomba at the turn to the 21st century.

During my fieldwork in Lilongwe and Zomba it soon became clear that these connections were far more complicated and elusive than anticipated. In the encounter with “the field” assumptions on the causal relations between policy measures and people’s actions evaporated and gave way to a far more complex and subtle connectedness. Hence, the main challenge writing this book was how to conceptualise the “impact” of “tools” such as Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), Poverty Reduction Strategy and Fiscal Restructuring and Deregulation on civil servants in Malawi’s urban areas and the ways they transformed these “tools” during implementation.

By following them on their movements between workplace, neighbourhood, church, home village, garden and business; by talking to experts of various couleur, by delving into circulars and documents, and by studying colonial and postcolonial history, a more layered image gradually emerged, which was not represented by organisational charts, implementation plans and strategy papers and I sincerely hope that this book succeeds in presenting a more accurate image of civil servants’ everyday experiences in the shadow of Good Governance.
Without the help of all the people I met in the course of this project, it would not have been possible to write this book. Over the years I have incurred a great many debts of which I am able to acknowledge only a few here. First I am grateful to Director Stanley Khaila and Senior Registrar Felix Msamba at the Centre for Social Research (CSR) in Zomba for granting me the status of affiliated researcher and their support during my stay in Malawi. Further I want to thank Wycliffe Chilowa, Alister Munthali and Anne O’Donnell at the CSR for their support and many stimulating discussions.

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To all the civil servants who agreed to become informants I owe a great debt for their remarkable kindness and patience in dealing with my requests for information. Their support and openness is much appreciated and I hope that this book contributes to a better understanding of what life in the shadow of Good Governance is like. I hope that at least some of them will be able to read it in the future and I will make sure that there will be copies available in the libraries of Chancellor College and the CSR.
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