Introduction:
Beyond Social Engineering and Primordialism

1. Civil Servants as Implementers and "Target Population" of Good Governance[1]

According to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) there is little doubt that African bureaucracies are inefficient and unsustainable. Corruption and mismanagement of public resources are identified as the main impediments to economic recovery. Good Governance is being promoted by the Bretton Woods institutions as instrument to remove these obstacles to economic growth. The term Good Governance denotes a set of policy-measures intended to transform "dysfunctional" public institutions into efficient and transparent service-providers that will be accountable to the public and subject to the rule of law. Good Governance is different from classic development interventions based on the modernization paradigm. It is neither about building roads nor transmitting superior scientific knowledge to "develop"; for example, to increase agricultural production. Good Governance seems to be about the transmission of a different type of knowledge. Its objective is the establishment of systems of managing and self-control to improve "efficiency" and "transparency".

Since the early 1990s Good Governance has become the dominant *shibboleth* of the discourse of development; without uttering this password it has become impossible for governments to receive financial support. Since there is virtually no country in the "Third World" left where the principles of Good Governance do not guide public policy it appears as if the World Bank and the IMF have succeeded in spreading their ideology over the whole world. This universal regime of Good Governance has replaced the ideological antagonism of the Cold War that cunning Third World governments were so adept at exploiting.

[1] Good Governance is written with capital letters throughout to indicate that the term refers to the brand offered by the World Bank and the IMF. The concept is not the exclusive domain of the Bretton Woods institutions. Two traditions have to be distinguished: the first one can be traced to the initiative of several leading politicians in the 1980s in the context of the Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and puts the emphasis on democracy and citizen rights, whereas the second tradition derives from the neo-liberal paradigm of the Bank and the IMF. This study is limited to the concept as it is interpreted and used by the World Bank and the IMF.

Malawi is no exception in this regard: Since the introduction of multi-party democracy in 1994 the government has implemented a whole range of Bank- and Fund-supported programmes to improve governance. A central element of this reform process is the reorganisation of the civil service. The civil service reform has as its objective to the improvement of efficiency and transparency – deemed essential preconditions for better governance. Civil servants[2] have been in a peculiar position with regard to the implementation of the civil service reform and related measures as they are both executors and addressees of the reforms, its agent and its subject. Their response has ranged from various forms of resistance to various licit and illicit extra-office income-earning activities – activities that lend little support to the notion that World Bank and IMF programmes are effectively realising their objectives. What appeared on paper as encompassing system of control provoked unanticipated responses by civil servants who had become accustomed to a privileged and safe position under Banda's autocratic rule between 1964 and 1994. Since 1994 this privileged position has become more precarious. Since the end of the Cold War and the deepening economic crisis of the 1980s, the democratic "winds of change" have also swept across Malawi. Unfortunately democratisation has brought neither welfare nor economic growth.

The reorganisation of the civil service has cast a shadow over civil servants' lives. They struggle for security in a time characterised by an overwhelming sense of crisis and uncertainty. In a bid to manipulate the reforms to their advantage, civil servants have responded in unforeseen and often illegal ways to protect their positions of relative privilege. Apart from the reorganisation their everyday experiences are already characterised by extreme uncertainty. HIV/AIDS, malaria and the pauperisation of rural kin all contribute to their sense of insecurity. Of course there has been no uniform response to the reforms. The experiences of high-ranking officials in the ministerial headquarters in Lilongwe are different from the responses of extension workers of the Ministry of Health in the suburbs of Zomba and the son or daughter of a high-ranking civil servant has had different experiences than the watchman with five children, who is the only salaried employee in his family. The following chapters unpack the categories of

[2] I.e., government employees working in the civil service and the army, including temporary workers and employees on non-established positions.

civil service and civil servants to present a nuanced account of the ways Malawian civil servants reacted to the arrival of Good Governance.

To understand civil servants' unanticipated responses to the civil service reform I follow two lines of inquiry: one vertical and one horizontal one. The vertical one follows the policy from the individual civil servant up to ministerial headquarters that issue circulars and from there to loan documents signed by representatives of the Bank and the responsible cabinet ministers. The horizontal line of inquiry casts a wide net on the everyday life of civil servants which encompasses public office and private sphere, with a focus on exchange relations and notions of solidarity. An account limited to the public office or the private sphere would only succeed at reifying artificial boundaries between the different spheres. I suggest, therefore, an analysis of the ways people connect these spheres and transgress the boundaries between them.

These movements in-between cannot be captured by the concepts of "dysfunctionality" or "patrimonialism". A cultural dualism between tradition and modernity pervades the everyday life of the employed and educated urbanites, who often were confronted with a tension between their "modern" middle-class aspirations and "traditional" morality. This tension not only manifests itself in matters of consumption; it pervades all aspects of social relationships with kin. Important aspects of these relationships include the obligation to provide support and the expectation to receive support. For many, the desire to be loyal to kin and pressures to conform to kinship solidarity conflicted with the dream of providing their children with a good education, of building a house and of enjoying the amenities of urban life. Of course these factors are of a different order than those associated with recent policy changes in Malawi. Urbanisation and modernization are *longue durée* processes in which the neo-liberal reforms of the late 1990s constitute a brief, but important episode.

Civil servants' experience of the present crisis and their ways of dealing with it is the subject of the present study. It addresses two main questions: 1) How did civil servants in the urban areas of Malawi experience the civil service reform; How did they respond to it and affect its implementation and; 2) How are their responses related to their relatively privileged position in a society where only a small fraction of the population is salaried? Thus the analysis serves two interrelated objectives: 1) To contribute to the

anthropology of the Bretton Woods institutions by presenting a comprehensive account of Malawian civil servants' ways of dealing with the reorganisation of their workplace according to neo-liberal principles. 2) To contribute to the anthropology of urban elites in Southern and Central Africa living in the shadow of Good Governance. On the one hand, the implementation of the civil service reform must be seen in the context of large-scale processes of social stratification, modernisation and globalisation while, on the other hand, Good Governance constitutes an important aspect in the everyday lives of civil servants in Malawi and elsewhere.

2. Theoretical Points of Departure

These questions necessitate the development of a theoretical framework that transcends two common assumptions: firstly, the notion of Good Governance as technical instrument of social engineering and, secondly, the representation of African civil servants as parasitic and corrupt agents of clientelistic tribal and ethnic networks, governed by "primordial" sentiments that corrupt the legal-rational bureaucracy of the former colonial masters. By contrast my analysis is based on a nuanced ethnography of civil servants' everyday practices and their ways of dealing with demands on their resources and their own needs, and also explores how civil servants' quotidian practices are related to policies designed by the Bretton Woods institutions.

The analysis of this relationship is derived from anthropological studies of development. According to these studies policy implementation is by no means a simple singular linear process from planning to outcomes. Instead it is more appropriate to conceptualise the implementation of policy as the outcome of a contest for resources, influence and meaning between different actors. From the perspective of individual civil servants the civil service reform does not constitute a grand and ambitious comprehensive plan, but only one aspect of their daily lives experienced as mundane practices such as getting one's pay-check, securing a salary advance or leaving work to take care of a private business. These are important factors that shaped the implementation of the civil service reform and were shaped by the implementation of the reform, in turn.

The everyday lives of civil servants in the urban areas of Malawi were pervaded by ambivalence and tension. They experienced tensions between their obligations

towards a wide circle of kinsfolk and their middle-class dreams in terms of a dualism between modernity and tradition. Due to civil servants' privileged positions, a wide circle of kinsfolk expected to benefit as well. Although these demands were often perceived as a burden, none of the civil servants I encountered wanted to sever ties with kin in the rural home. This tension and the ways civil servants dealt with it is an important factor for understanding the implementation of Good Governance reforms in Malawi.

a) Fragmented Sovereignty

Malawi's position within the world economy is mainly defined by its dependency on foreign assistance. Ninety percent of the development budget, the financial resources for development projects, is supplied by donor agencies and about thirty percent of the current budget is paid by donor agencies. These estimates do not include the regular balance-of-payment payments made by the IMF and national donor agencies to compensate overspending.[3] However, to acknowledge the importance of dependency on development assistance does not imply that the present study subscribes to the paradigm of dependency theory. According to the dependency model the African states are usually conceptualised as subject to external forces with the ruling elite acting as agent of global capital. Bayart (1993, 2000) moved beyond this conventional paradigm and coined the term "extraversion" to capture the active role African elites have played in the exploitation of the continent. Drawing on Bayart and a range of other studies, the present study emphasises the agency of African subjects and, consequently, conceptualises the colonial and postcolonial encounter as complex process of communication and exchange in the context of asymmetric power relation.[4]

Although the model of the nation-state has by no means become obsolete in spite of accelerated processes of globalisation, it seems to be appropriate to approach Malawi in terms of fragmented sovereignty. By fragmented or scattered sovereignty I mean that the state is only one of the sites from which power is exercised over a specific territory and population. Transnationally operating actors, such as international organisations, non-governmental organisations and commercial enterprises, have reconfigured the ways

[3] Estimates are based on figures published by World Bank, IMF and other donor agencies.
[4] Ashcroft (2001), Bayart (1993, 2000), Chanock (1985), Comaroff/Comaroff (1991, 1997), Hall (1996), Mbembe (1992, 2001), Moore (1993), Slater (1998).

by which control is exercised on the territory of the nation-state (Randeria 2003). A variety of actors exercising sovereignty and control parallel to the government can be differentiated: multilateral donor agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the European Union (EU), the World Bank and the IMF, national donor agencies and non-governmental organizations of different *couleur*. The policies of these actors tend to be framed in legal language even though they are usually not considered to be part of international law proper, thus resulting in a situation of transnational legal pluralism (Benda-Beckmann 2001, Merry 1992, Randeria 2003, Sousa Santos 1995).[5] There seems to be a trend in the area of international development assistance to avoid any legal connotations and, instead, to present policies as purely "technical assistance" to equal partners. I argue that this trend is a characteristic and highly significant feature of the development discourse requiring attention of both legal science and social sciences.

In legal scholarship the grey area of letters of intent, memoranda, mission statements, technical protocols and terms of reference of development projects has not received the attention it deserves as it is considered to be outside the scope of law.[6] If these para-legal forms are addressed at all, they are usually measured against the standard of "hard law" and dis-qualified as "soft law". Legal scholars have been usually content to call for a consideration of "soft" law, failing to explain the rise of this category and the ways it is operating in the shadow of public international law (Hillgenberg 1999, Hofmann 1998).

This failure of legal science has not been compensated for in the social sciences. On the contrary, the legal dimension has been conspicuously absent in studies of development discourse and only a handful of studies explicitly address the significance of the legal dimension of development policies and projects (Benda-Beckmann 1994, Benda-Beckmann 2001, Moore 2002, Randeria 2003, Weilenmann 2004). This negligence of the legal dimension might be attributed to the materialistic perspective of many studies in the fields of political science and anthropology that considers the legal

[5] The term legal pluralism denotes the co-existence of several legal orders in one social field, see ,e.g., Benda-Beckmann (2003), Griffiths (1986), Merry (1988).

[6] One of the few exceptions is Hey's (2003) study of decision-making procedures in international environmental law.

form as mere superstructure of the economy. This perspective ignores the ways by which power relations do not only shape these rules but are also shaped by them in turn. The complex interaction of the legal form and power relations requires a careful analysis of the available documents. Chapter Two analyses the language and form of the loan documents signed between the Bretton Woods institutions and the government of Malawi to contribute to a better understanding of the process of dejuridification of international development assistance which might be of interest to legal and anthropological audiences alike.

I do not intend to present a mindless repetition of well-known critiques of neo-liberalism. My analysis focuses on a particular situation at a specific historical moment to understand the relationship between the Bretton Woods institutions and governments like that of Malawi. The simplistic critique that accuses the World Bank and the IMF of neo-imperialism or neo-colonialism is not conducive to such an understanding of the "development encounter" (Escobar 1991). Instead I attempt to elucidate what Moore has called "an intricate, nuanced, and ambiguous ongoing process" by focusing on the details and particularities of one specific case. Like the colonial encounter, the relationship between donors and recipients of development assistance cannot be conceptualised simply in terms of the dominator/dominated dichotomy (Hall 1996). Moore points out that "the ideology of the colonizer was not a simple package, conveyed everywhere in a uniform manner and context; there were many different components transmitted in many different circumstances. And on the indigenous side a lack of direct political contention by no means bespoke consent or consensus." (1993:2,3). In a similar fashion it could also be said that Good Governance and the civil service reform were neither a simple package nor did they imply a commitment to good governance and democracy.

My study does not take the World Bank's and the IMF's claim of scientific neutrality at face value but seeks to understand how this claim legitimises the policy of the Bretton Woods institutions. In this sense it links up with the anthropology of policy and development. Shore and Wright, for example, state: "it is a feature of policies that their political nature is disguised by the objective, neutral, legal-rational idioms in which they are portrayed. In this guise, politics appear to be mere instruments for promoting efficiency and effectiveness" (1997:8). Moore stresses the same truism about politics

when she writes: "'truths' uttered by politicians and other public figures say something, but they also deny something. Often the denials underline the very things that are denied, rather than succeeding in banishing them" (1993:12). Hence one could say the present study tries to look behind the truths of good governance and to tease out the things that are denied and hidden by development discourse.

b) Development Discourse

My approach is informed by a whole range of anthropological studies of development that take a critical distance from development discourse.[7] Broadly, two approaches can be distinguished. Proponents of the first approach reflect critically on development discourse and practice but believe that better theory and a better integration of theory and practice have the potential to result in a better design of development projects (Apthorpe/Gasper 1996, Apthorpe/Krahl 1986, Long 1992, Pottier 1993, Quarles van Ufford et al. 1988). The second approach levels a more fundamental critique at development discourse and unmasks it as a disciplining discourse in the Foucauldian sense, constituting docile subjects of development (Escobar 1991, 1995, Ferguson 1994[1990]). Although both approaches have succeeded in disentangling the critical empirical analysis of development from development discourse and practice, both have serious shortcomings. Many studies adopting the first approach assume that better theory and superior data can contribute to an improvement of development projects (Long 1992, Pottier 1993). The optimism of the earlier studies of this approach has been replaced by a certain sense of disillusionment (Quarles van Ufford/Giri 2003). Often it appears that development projects are not driven by theory but rather by practice. Mosse (2003) makes exactly this point in his analysis of an agriculture development project in India where he observed that the concept of "participation" was used as a commodity to "market" the project successfully. The goal of participation did not guide action but served merely as "model for representation" to legitimise the project and attract funding.

[7] Abrahamsen (2000), Apthorpe and Gasper (1996), Apthorpe and Krahl (1986), Arce and Long (2000), Crewe and Harrison (1998), Escobar (1991, 1995), Ferguson (1994[1990]), Gardner and Lewis (1996), Grillo and Stirrat (1997), Hobart (1993), Long (2001), Long and Long (1992), Pottier (1993), Quarles van Ufford and Giri (2003), Quarles van Ufford, Kruijt and Downing (1988).

The second approach takes a much more pessimistic view and formulates a radical critique of development. Generally, its proponents reject the concept of development as such and do not share the basic belief in the integration of theory and practice. By drawing on post-colonial studies and Foucault these authors interpret development as a Western social construction (Escobar 1991, 1995, Ferguson 1994[1990]). Ferguson even draws a parallel between the development discourse and Foucault's "genealogy" of the prison (1994[1990]:20). Escobar and Ferguson represent development discourse as an encompassing, efficient and monolithic apparatus producing knowledge and exercising power. Such a representation, however, fails to account for disjunctions and differences within development thus presenting an image of development that peculiarly resonates with the claims to efficiency made by development agencies.

My own approach builds on the disengagement of social science from development practice. It neither subscribes to the belief that what is needed is a better integration of theory in practice, nor does it assume the existence of a homogeneous and efficient development discourse. My analysis of the loan documents stipulating civil service reform in Chapter Two uses a somewhat narrower definition of development discourse than Escobar and Ferguson. Discourse as I use it refers to rhetoric or talk, written and spoken, and can be distinguished from practices which are influenced by discourse. Yet in my understanding a discourse is more than just a set of connected sentences. Drawing on Foucault, I understand discourse as an ensemble of ideas constituting a regime of truth, the boundaries of knowledge and specific subjectivities. Despite this power/knowledge twist to which I subscribe, I do not conceptualise development discourse in the totalising "Manichean vision" of Escobar and Ferguson (Grillo/Stirrat 1997:vii). The notion of an encompassing system of control and surveillance in the Foucauldian sense may not be universally applicable. In her analysis of colonial medical discourse, Vaughan points out that Foucault's theory of "bio-power" might not be readily applicable to sub-Saharan Africa where the colonial administration did not succeed in establishing a system of surveillance and control producing modern subjects as described for the West (1991:1-28).

Therefore, I suggest a conceptualisation that allows for individual and collective practices at variance with the disciplinary regime of development discourse. In doing so I want to avoid the misrepresentation of development discourse as efficient and monolithic "Other". It is important to stress that the state or development projects are rarely the powerful agents of social engineering they are being represented as in official rhetoric. The reasons for discrepancies between intentions and outcomes are usually more mundane than the fundamental critiques of Escobar and Ferguson suggests. Often policy interventions are unintentionally ill-conceived, too ambitious and have insufficient resources. Too many studies of development projects and state interventions have unveiled flawed programme design and lacking implementation to take the claim of efficiency of social engineering at face value (von Benda-Beckmann 1993, Harrison 2003, Long/Long 1992, Moore 1973, Mosse 2003, Quarles van Ufford 1988).

c) Implementation of Policy

The implementation of policy cannot be adequately captured with a linear model that distinguishes planning phase, implementation and outcomes. This simplistic approach isolates the "project" from the social "context". The inside and the outside of policy intervention might not be as easily separated as this model suggests (Long 1992, 2001, Shore/Wright 1997). Instead the analysis of policy intervention must transcend the parameters defining the "space" and "time" of a particular policy measure and approach them as a subject of study rather than an *a priori* given. Drawing on Long's "deconstruction of the concept of intervention" (Long 1992:34-38, 2001:30-48) Chapter Three describes the implementation of the civil service reform programme in Malawi in terms of complicated, contested and multi-stranded processes, "which involve the reinterpretation or transformation of policy during the implementation process, such that there is no straight line from policy to outcomes" (Long 1992:34). The empirical analysis of policy implementation has to include "factors" that seem to have no direct causal relationship with the particular policy intervention on the one hand, and unintended outcomes on the other hand (Ferguson 1994/1990, Long 1992, 2001, Moore 1973, 2000/1978).

In various studies the encounter, or "interface", between development workers and the "target" population is described in terms of a gap between bureaucratic knowledge and local knowledge (Hobart 1993, Long/Long 1992). This gap results in the "mutual generation of a system of ignorance" between the worlds of the extension workers and the world of the peasants who cannot bridge the gap and implement the initiatives into the development programme (Arce/Long 1992). The present study differs from these studies in that it does not focus on the interface between bureaucratic knowledge and local knowledge. With regard to the reorganisation of the civil service the "developers" are the "developed". In other words, the implementers of the project are its "target" population. Admittedly there are considerable differences with regard to the degree that different categories of civil servants act as implementers of the civil service reform. For example, the level of "managers" who issue orders should be distinguished from the level of "street-level bureaucrats" who follow orders (Lipsky 1980). However, in the process of reinterpretation and transformation, all civil servants have a certain degree of discretion in the exercise of their authority, which obviously depends on their grade and position. Therefore, I conceptualise all civil servants – even those in the most junior positions – as being active actors in the implementation process, even when they appear to follow only orders from their superiors.

d) Everyday Life and the Experience of Crisis

Gupta (1995) argues that everyday practices of civil servants can tell us a lot about the effects of the state and policy intervention. Chapters Four, Five and Six analyse the everyday practices of civil servants to contribute to a better understanding of their responses to the civil service reform. De Certeau, one of the most influential theoreticians of quotidian practice, emphasised the importance of the study of everyday life: the modern consumer's casual, coincidental and yet cunning resistance to totalising "social production" by means of subtle almost imperceptible techniques of "improvisation". The "marginalized majority" which is excluded from the "production of culture" are "unrecognised producers, poets of their own affairs, trailblazers in the jungle of functionalist rationality" who produce "indirect" or "errant trajectories" obeying their own logic (De Certeau 1984:34). The consumers are forced to resort to tactics of the

weak, employing stratagem and exploiting opportunities as they arise. De Certeau insists on the spontaneity of everyday experiences that cannot be reduced to an abstraction as is done in other more totalising theories. Hence, he developed the concept of "anti-discipline" that does not attempt to "discipline" the ephemeral traces of the modern consumers when they move through the "rationalized, expansionist, centralized, spectacular and clamorous production" (1984:31) of modern society. I want to draw a parallel between the de-localised trajectories of de Certeau's modern consumers and the ruses and tricks of Malawi's civil servants who are confronted with the strategies of the Bretton Woods institutions to integrate the civil service in an encompassing system of control and surveillance.

Although de Certeau rightly emphasises the subversive potential of everyday practice he exaggerates slightly in his celebration of the "ordinary man", a "common hero". Engel, for example, points out that everyday practice is not only a site of resistance: law depends on everyday life (1993). Instead of constituting a separate sphere, the law is a domain of everyday life: "Everyday life is not opposed to law, nor does it exist merely by insinuating itself into the interstices of the law. Everyday life constitutes law and is constituted by it" (Engel 1993:126). In an attempt to decode the mutually constitutive processes of policy-intervention and civil servants' everyday practices I have thrown a wide net covering both the public office and the so-called private sphere. I could not isolate the policy-measures from the social "context", nor could I separate the public office from the private sphere. Hence I present an ethnography of civil servants' movements between office, neighbourhood, church, garden and home village in a horizontal slice.

Recent studies of Africa have pointed out that the experience of "crisis" is a dominant feature of the everyday life of modern Africans (Ferguson 1999, Mbembe/Roitman 1995). Indeed a sense of crisis was overwhelming during my fieldwork. If I had to sum up the life-world of civil servants in Lilongwe and Zomba in the late 1990s, I would be compelled to choose the words insecurity and crisis: the civil servants I encountered in the offices in Lilongwe and Zomba had a sense of insecurity and crisis in the shadow of "expenditure control" and "job evaluation". This sense of crisis transcended material insecurity and should be understood in terms of existential

uncertainty and anxiety. In line with such a conceptualisation of crisis my study does not treat people as abstract rational actors or *homo calculus*, but tries to elucidate the implementation of the civil service reform and the everyday life of civil servants through individual experiences of crisis and insecurity.

In their study of Cameroon, Mbembe and Roitman note a "lack of coincidence between the everyday practice of life (facticity) and the corpus of significations or meanings (ideality) available to explain what happens, to act efficaciously" (1995:325). This discrepancy or schizophrenia entails a sense of crisis and insecurity dominating people's everyday lives. The crisis is the realm of inexplicable and people's experience is characterized by "surprise", "perplexity" and "stupor", they "do not understand what is happening" (Mbembe/Roitman 1995:340). Like the Cameroonians observed by Mbembe and Roitman, the Malawian civil servants I encountered during my fieldwork were struggling to come to terms with the crisis and developed new "ways of doing" "based on emergent understandings of efficacious action which often issue from ambiguous and contradictory situations" (1995:341).

e) Unpacking the State Bureaucracy

An approach that acknowledges the unpredictability of policy intervention and the subversive potential of everyday practices of civil servants entails a different take on the state and its institutions. From such a perspective the state is not the homogeneous unified entity as which it is presented. Anthropology of the state faces the same difficulty as anthropology of development: it is not easy to transcend the categories of the subject of study. Bourdieu warned that "when thinking about the state one always runs the danger of adopting the thinking of the state, of applying categories produced and protected by the state and thus to fail to recognize a fundamental truth about the state" (1994). He argues that while most studies of the state only appear to reflect on the state they actually reify and reproduce the very categories of the state.

Following Bourdieu's warning this study draws on anthropological studies of the state aiming at transcending the "thinking of the state". Hansen and Stepputat (2001) argue in favour of a "denaturalising approach" to the state drawing on Foucault and Gramsci. Also borrowing from Foucault, Ferguson sees the state as a "way of tying

together, multiplying, and coordinating power relations" (1994[1990]: 273). According to Herzfeld the indifference of European bureaucrats and their bureaucratic daily routines is not the outcome of rational-legal bureaucratic structures but rather the product of nationalistic symbolism. Herzfeld (1992) argues that the distinction between bureaucrat and client is presented as natural although in fact the boundary is continuously renegotiated in the social interaction between them. Gupta and Nuijten propose an ethnography of the state by examining discourses of corruption. Their main interest is the "discursive construction" of the state in popular imagination of citizens who want to gain access to the state (Gupta 1995, Nujiten 2003). The imagination and representation of state institutions and the holders of authority in the idiom of eating and bodily functions is the subject of Bayart's (1993) and Mbembe's (1992, 2001) studies of the contemporary postcolonial state in Africa.

While the representation of the state and public authority deserve special attention, formal organisation should not be ignored in an analysis of state bureaucracy. A number of anthropological and sociological studies develop a framework for such an analysis opening up avenues of inquiry for the present study (Blau 1969[1955], Blau/Meyer 1971[1956], Britan 1981, Britan/Cohen 1980, Cohen 1980, Lipsky 1980, Wright 1994). These studies transcend the blueprint of official organisation and distinguish the formal system, the informal system and the environment of formal organisations. The formal system can be seen as an organisational chart with a defined hierarchy and clear chain of command and the informal system as the constellation of social relationships within an organisation that have a set of informal norms. The environment remains usually ill-defined in these studies and denotes everything that is outside the organisation. Wright (1994) points out that none of these systems should be conceptualised as monolithic bounded entity possessing a specific "culture". Instead, she emphasises the dynamics of the ways meaning is continually negotiated in an organisation. According to this approach each of the systems are part of the negotiated order in a specific organisation (Wright 1994).

Henceforth, it seems more appropriate to speak of the different aspects or facets of social space, which must be studied as a whole in order to understand the interrelations between the formal organisation, the informal and the outside environment. A focus on

the interrelation between these three aspects of organisation can contribute to a better understanding of the implementation of the reform policies, as well as civil servants' experience with the changes these policies effected. Especially two relationships are promising in this regard: The interrelation between the formal and the informal and the relation between the organisation and the environment. Blau's study of two government agencies is particularly revealing with regard to the former. When analysing workers' output he found that informal rather than formal norms regulated the output and that the violation of the basic informal rules was sanctioned through social isolation (1969[1955]:183-206).

The nature of the latter relationship, between the organisation and the environment, is the subject of a number of studies of the state in contemporary Africa (Bayart 1993, Britan 1980, Chabal/Daloz 1999, Diamond 1987, Mbembe 1992, 2001, Médard 1982, 2002). Early studies of the state in Africa usually adopted a Weberian approach. Britan (1980), Diamond (1987), Ekeh (1975) and Médard (1982) measure the bureaucracies in Africa against criteria derived from Weber's ideal type of rational-legal power and find that African state institutions are "dysfunctional" and "corrupted" by patronage and tribalism – in other words "primordial" ties of affection. Médard adopted Eisenstadt's (1972) concept of neo-patrimonialism to describe this hybrid nature of the African state. In the neo-patrimonial state, "the bureaucratic logic was artificially applied to a patrimonial logic" based on "primordial sentiments" (Médard 1982:179). The neo-patrimonial approach constituted an improvement from earlier studies of the African state that applied the Weberian ideal-type one-size-fits-all model. However, this approach has considerable shortcomings, especially from an anthropological perspective. Without fine-grained ethnographic descriptions an abstract macro-models slips easily into stereotypes and presents African bureaucracies and bureaucrats as pathological deviations from the Weberian ideal-type of Western rational-legal bureaucratic order.

The studies of Chabal and Daloz (1999), Bayart (1993) and Mbembe (1992, 2001) are also informed by the social-pathological paradigm but, instead of blaming clientelism as the cause of the dysfunctionality of the bureaucracy, they celebrate the subversive and creative appropriation of the bureaucracy by ethnic and tribal networks. However, due to their focus on the rational-legal model of the state, these researchers usually do not

differentiate the so-called clientelist relations that usurp the state institutions and, thus, reproduce the dualism between the Weberian legal-rational order and the "primordial" ties of affection and lump all types of social relationships under the latter. The present study relies less on abstract models and builds instead on an ethnographic account of the trajectories connecting the relationships at the office, in the neighbourhood, in the church congregation, relationships with patrons, clients and kin. Differences between these spheres are often considerable and reveal, therefore, the serious flaws of the dualism between the rational-legal and the primordial/patrimonial.

I neither deny the far-reaching influence of clientelistic networks in the civil service of Malawi, nor do I wish to dispute that failure to implement policies or render public services is the norm rather than the exception. Instead I want to build on these studies of the postcolonial state in Africa and contribute to an understanding of the contemporary state in Africa by presenting an ethnographic account of micro-practices at the state's "shop-floor level". In this sense the study takes a different perspective, not deducting from a Weberian ideal-type of legal-rational bureaucracy, but instead working upstream from the perspective of the everyday lives of civil servants in Lilongwe and Zomba to civil service reform and the neo-liberal agenda of the Bretton Woods institutions. Such an approach does not reduce subjects to mere decoration for an abstract theoretical model but remains always mindful of peoples' agency and variation in practice.

f) Obligations and Expectations between Modernity and Tradition

The civil servants I encountered were neither corrupt parasites reacting mechanically to pressure of kinship solidarity nor did they implement the civil service reform as automatons. They were people who found themselves in extremely ambivalent situations arising from a tension between their loyalty to kin, on the one hand, and their "modern" lifestyle, on the other. This ambivalence often resulted in conflicting loyalties but it also created room for manoeuvring, which my informants sometimes exploited cunningly. In this regard my study links up with earlier anthropological literature that emphasises people's agency in choosing and manipulating norms to their own benefit without

subscribing to a utilitarian rational-actor perspective (Mitchell 1969, van Velsen 1964, 1967).

It is this fundamental dichotomy between modernity and tradition/urban and rural/ African and European that has dominated the anthropological literature on urban areas in Southern and Central Africa since the early studies on social change, modernisation and urbanisation conducted by scholars associated with the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute (RLI). The RLI scholars worked within the modernisation paradigm, assuming a violent and rapid transition from traditional rural society to modern industrialised society (Gluckman 1949, 1958, Mitchell 1956, Wilson 1941, 1942).[8] Although the idea of two separated spaces (urban/rural, modern/traditional) representing different stages of an evolutionary process has been largely abandoned in the academic debate the dualism between modern/urban and traditional/rural is an "ethnographic fact" in this region of Africa that demands scholarly attention (Ferguson 1999:93).[9]

While scholars of the 1950s and 1960s clearly distinguished the culture of the modern, urbanised Africans from the traditional culture of the rural peasant population, at present there is a trend to emphasise fluidity, ambivalence and hybridity. Anthropology has disposed of the notion of culture as a bounded homogeneous object possessed by a specific group. Van Binsbergen (1999), for example, asserts "cultures do not exist". He argues that the notion of culture as a bounded homogeneous totality is a fiction reproduced by the participants in the discourse constituting culture rather than a scientific concept. Instead he prefers to talk of the "caleidoscopic effects of simultaneous criss-crossing cultural orientations" to acknowledge the situational, multiple and performative character of what is usually referred to as "culture" (van Binsbergen 1999:13). Ferguson (1999) adopts a similar approach to cultural differences among urbanites in Zambia: instead of conceptualising difference between distinct and bounded cultures he proposes the term "cultural style to refer to practices that signify differences between social categories" within a society (1999:95). "Cultural style" like "cultural orientation" emphasises the performative, multiple and fragmented character of practices, which signify difference. While earlier approaches conceptualised an individual as possessing

[8] For discussions of the lives and work of the scholars of the RLI see Ferguson (1999) and Schumaker (2001).
[9] See also Moore and Vaughan (1994).

one culture or to be at an evolutionary stage in-between two cultures, the use of the adjective "cultural" indicates that a person may combine several styles or orientations. Both, Ferguson and van Binsbergen, argue that people can have competence in different cultural styles depending on the situation.

Studies of urban Africans often focus mainly on attitudes, taste and consumption patterns. Ferguson describes how discussions on such matters as the relationships with rural kin and retirement "turned quickly from questions of remittances or visits to matters of dress, styles of speech, attitudes, habits, even body carriage" (1999:83).[10] Matters of style and taste are important but actual exchanges in social relationships should not be neglected in the analysis of African "cultural dualism". The exchange of material and moral support is a central element of people's social relationships. People rely to a great extent on various social relationships, especially with kin, for their social security and moral well-being. Usually people are both providers and recipients of support. Whether they are more providers than recipients depends on the individual circumstances, their social status and the stage in their lifecycle. While people are young they rely more on support, later they become mainly providers of support for others and in their old age they often become more reliant on support again. This aspect of social relationships has a normative and ideological dimension. However, in most societies there is a plurality of moral values and norms about what is considered to be good and proper conduct and what one may expect from others on whom one relies for support (von Benda-Beckmann/von Benda-Beckmann 1994). Normative plurality can create more choice for people but may also result in conflicts arising out of mutually exclusive "normative orders each with its own definition of needs and expectations" (von Benda-Beckmann/von Benda-Beckmann 1994:9).

Because of their relatively privileged position in society civil servants in Malawi were often seen as providers of social security by their kinsfolk in the home village. However, they were not only providers of support. To a certain degree they relied on the rural home for their own social security. The ways they dealt with the tensions between different moralities in their everyday practices is a crucial element in the analysis of Good Governance in Malawi. Civil servants in Malawi experienced a deep tension and

[10] This is not new - see Mitchell's (1987) surveys on matters of style and taste.

ambivalence between conflicting loyalties and aspirations. On the one hand, they presented themselves as modern "civilised" people building a secure existence for themselves and their nuclear families and, on the other hand, they also felt a strong sense of obligation towards kin and traditional values of kinship solidarity. Chapter Five analyses the tensions and ambivalences arising from this "cultural dualism" and ways civil servants dealt with the expectations of their rural cousins.

3. Methodology I

This section is divided into two parts. The first part presents some background information on the civil service and deals with my "field", civil servants as an occupational category and the practicalities of fieldwork among civil servants. The second part presents my strategy of "studying up" by "following the policy" drawing on Nader (1972, 1980) and Marcus (1995).

a) Preliminary Information about the Civil Service

In 2001 the government of Malawi had a total estimated expenditure of approximately US$ 421 million (MK 45,874 million). The total budget consists of statutory expenditure for public debts, pensions and gratuities, recurrent expenditure voted by parliament and capital or development expenditure. The former refers to the costs for running the government apparatus whereas the latter includes development projects implemented by the government. As a rule of thumb the former is mainly financed by the government whereas the latter is financed to 90 percent by donor agencies. In 2001 statutory expenditure was estimated at ca. US$ 100 million (MK 10,729 million), voted (recurrent) expenditure at US$ 197 million (MK 21,469 million) and capital or development expenditure at about US$ 125 million (MK 13,676 million). The government employed about 120,000 employees and served a total population of about 11 million people (ratio 1:100). In the same year the city council of Amsterdam had a total expenditure of about US$ 5,000 million in 2001 and employed about 14,000 employees serving a population of 700,000 (ratio 1: 50 not counting regional and federal civil servants and government employees) (GoM 2002b).

According to the Malawi civil service census conducted in 1995 the civil service numbered 112,975 civil servants (28,706 women and 84,269 men) (GoM 1996a).[11] By 2000 this number had grown to approximately 120,000, mainly due to an increase in primary school teachers. The largest ministries were the Ministry of Education, with nearly 60,000 civil servants, the Ministry of Health, with 15,300 civil servants, the Ministry of Agriculture, with 10,000 civil servants and the Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries and Environmental Affairs with 8,000 civil servants (GoM 1999a:67). In 2000, the Army numbered around 10,000 and the Police about 6,000.

Salaries were generally quite low. In 1999 and 2000, the time of my fieldwork, most junior grade employees, such as security guards, gardeners and messengers earned about MK 1000 (US$ 25) per month. Extension workers and primary school teachers earned between US$ 30 and US$ 45 per month. Even officers with higher qualifications, like a diploma or a bachelor's degree, rarely earned more than US$ 80 per month. Secondary school teachers with a bachelor degree, for example, had a monthly salary of US$ 50-60. The highest grades, in the so-called Superscale, earned not more than US$ 250 per month. This is not much considering that the rent for servants' quarters[12] in Lilongwe was about US$ 100 per month and only slightly less in Zomba. The rents for houses in the better areas of Lilongwe and Zomba were between US$ 500 and US$ 800 and ever rising. Most civil servants were forced to live in outlying townships (in Lilongwe, for example, Area 23 and Area 25) where rents were still affordable. To reach their work they were forced to use public transport, on which they could easily US$ 20 per month. Chapter Four addresses in more detail the consequences of inflation on salaries and ways civil servants dealt with the resulting uncertainty.

[11] Formally, civil servants are only those government employees occupying established positions as opposed to temporary staff and Industrial Class (IC) workers with non-established posts excluding army and police personnel. However, police officers, temporary staff and IC workers were counted as civil servants in the civil service census. Usually all employees of the civil service, whether they hold established or non-established posts, are considered to be civil servants (Malawi Public Service Regulations (MPSR), Public Service Act). One of the measures of the civil service reform was to incorporate the IC into established posts. Hence, when I speak of civil servants I usually mean all government employees holding established and non-established posts in the civil service, the police and the army.

[12] Servants quarter is the term used in Malawi to denote a simple house without bath or kitchen, usually in the backyard of a larger, higher standard house. Often inhabited by domestic staff employed in the "master's house"; hence the name servants' quarter.

In October 2000, the terms of work and the remuneration for the higher grades in the Superscale (S4/P4 and above, Deputy Secretary up to Principal Secretary) were radically changed. Officers in those grades had the option to retire from the civil service and be employed on contract terms. The scheme, which was in line with recommendations of the World Bank (1994b), was supposed to improve the performance of officers occupying managing positions and to make the remuneration more attractive. The officers received three year contracts that could be terminated any time with one month due notice if the performance of the officer was deemed unsatisfactory. These contracts offered much higher remuneration than before. In 2000 an officer in the S2/P2 grade (Prinicipal Secretary) earned almost MK 200,000 per month (US$ 3000), including more than MK 150,000 of allowances that were not subject to income tax. By 2002 most officers eligible for the performance-based contracts were on contract, although, there was fear of so-called political retrenchments. Under the old conditions their salary was significantly lower but the Superscale officers could not be easily dismissed.

Apart from their salary civil servants, enjoy also various benefits including institutional housing and travel allowances. The value of these benefits is substantial and might be many times higher than the salary. Especially senior officers who regularly attend workshops and travel outside Malawi enjoy allowances that considerably exceed their salaries considerably. Senior civil servants are also provided with telephones, cellular phones and vehicles. Since January 2002 all civil servants have received housing allowances that exceed their salaries up to 100 percent. In 2002, it appeared that the unrest and conflict that had dominated the implementation of the reform since its announcement in June 2000 had subsided. Due to the new housing allowances civil servants remuneration had improved considerably. The new housing allowance and the consequences of inflation and economic crisis that have been undermining these improvements will be discussed in more detail in Chapters Three and Four.

b) “The Field”

Of course I knew that the field is no longer the taken-for-granted space for the European ethnographer to explore (Gupta/Ferguson 1997). Nevertheless I was surprised by the variety of meanings I encountered for the word “field” during my stay in Malawi. After

my arrival in Zomba employees of the Centre for Social Research (CSR), the institute with which I was affiliated, asked me when I would be going to the field. This was a month or two after my arrival in Zomba, one of my two field sites, yet they expected I would prepare to "go to the field". A little callously I responded that I was already in the field and, in fact, I had started doing interviews four weeks after my arrival. However, they did not take this answer seriously, people would look at me incredulously, thinking I was joking since conversations with their peers in the adjacent government offices did not seem to qualify as proper fieldwork to them.

So what makes the field a field? The importance of money should not be underestimated with respect to the constitution of the field. For all of us, the Centre's junior staff of enumerators and data entry typists, the researchers and myself, the field was the site where we earned our money – or at least part of it – by doing research. And this was exactly the reason why Zomba town was not considered to be a proper field by the staff at the CSR. To me Zomba town had turned into a possible field when I received the research grant. The moment I would hire enumerators and other support staff the town would also turn into a field for them. Yet Zomba town never became a field for the junior staff since I conducted a qualitative study with a small sample and relied on participant observation, and hired assistants privately when I needed them.[13]

Another difference between my field and their field was related to my type of research and my subject. They were not accustomed to seeing civil servants, government employees like themselves, as a subject of study. This was due to the focus of the studies conducted by researchers of the CSR on poverty, food security and vulnerable groups in society, which was largely driven by the funding of donor agencies who were keen on collecting data on the problems of development policy. All capacity was absorbed by the demands of donor agencies to do applied research. Many of the researchers at the CSR and the University of Malawi lamented this definition of their field by donor interests, a trend they found difficult to resist since they relied on this type of work for their income. In Malawi, as in other African countries, researchers interested in non-applied work currently suffer from a lack of available funding and are often compelled to seek

[13] This statement refers only to my own research; it does not imply that Zomba town was never considered to be a field for the staff at the CSR. In fact, they had conducted earlier quantitative studies of urban areas focusing on the poor (Devereux 1999, Roe 1991).

employment in the West, while those who stay are forced to do consultancy work for donor agencies to make ends meet (Zeleza 2002).

The field turned out to be a recurrent theme during my research, not only for me, but also for my informants. For the civil servants I met in the course of my fieldwork, the field was a place where they would earn allowances. To them the field could be any place outside the service station where they would receive an allowance to cover their expenses. For example, once I tried to meet a senior officer of the District Administration only to be told again and again "that he is in the field" where he supplemented his meager salary. Later I learned that the good man did not go to the "field" but entertained his friends and girl-friends in a nearby bottle-store spending his field-allowance – but then who was I to decide what the field was for him.

c) Field Sites

I should make clear, however, that the selection of my field sites was not exclusively determined by pecuniary considerations. Lilongwe, the capital, and Zomba were selected for one obvious reason: both towns contain sizeable populations of civil servants. Between November 1999 and November 2000 and in February and March 2002, I commuted between Lilongwe in the Central Region and Zomba in the south. In colonial times Lilongwe was a small administrative post with a few Asian traders. The town was declared the new national capital in 1974, and the population grew considerably after the establishment of the ministerial headquarters. In the late 20th century there were approximately 400,000 inhabitants. All ministries have their headquarters in Lilongwe where a large proportion of the staff is concentrated. According to my own estimates about 20,000 civil servants lived in Lilongwe in the late 1990s (GoM 1996).[14] My research in Lilongwe was concentrated on Capital Hill and the township Biwi.

Zomba was the colonial capital and the capital of Malawi until 1974. The population had always been small and in 2000 it numbered about 70,000, making it one of the four major urban areas in mainly rural Malawi. Zomba hosts Chancellor College, the largest constituent college of the University of Malawi, the headquarters of several

[14] It is important to note that the civil service census in 1995 only presented numbers on civil servants in the districts of Lilongwe and Zomba, hence the estimates given here for the towns are lower than the numbers in the census to account for civil servants who live outside town in the district (GoM 1996).

government departments, and a large army base. Zomba town probably numbered about 10,000 civil servants in the late 1990s (GoM 1996). Research in Zomba concentrated mainly on the National Statistics Office, Geological Surveys, the General Hospital and the district administration. Most informants lived in Mable Lines and the new township of Matawale, which was built with financial assistance of the World Bank, about five kilometres east of Zomba. Others lived in Sadzi, a township located on the road to Blantyre.

The two cities were very different in character, reflecting Malawi's past and present. In Lilongwe, new buildings were under construction all over town in 2000 and 2002. Many of them were built around City Centre, the business part of town, to house government departments and development agencies. Belief in some kind of development and progress seemed to be common, although it had been considerably shattered by the economic crisis and famine in 2002. Nevertheless Lilongwe was the place where "things happened", it was vibrant, with expensive hotels and nightclubs. Development agencies and foreign diplomatic missions were based in Lilongwe.

Zomba, by contrast, was a quiet town that breathed the air of decay and past glory. Its physical appearance was dominated by its colonial heritage. Most government offices were in dilapidated buildings that used to house the colonial administration. Many officers lived in colonial houses dating back to the early twentieth century, while in town only very little construction activity could be observed. The main reason for these differences was money, or rather the lack of it. Lilongwe became the entry point for development aid and the national centre, while Zomba had been cut off from direct access to development aid and was degraded to a provincial centre.

d) Civil Servants – A Heterogeneous Occupational Category

Civil service reform affected all civil servants and ministries. My informants represented all salary grades and various ministries, including senior officers in the Superscale, professional officers, senior technical officers, technical officers, nurses, primary and secondary school teachers, messengers, and cleaners and watchmen in the Subordinate and Industrial Classes. Most worked for the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of

Education, the Army, the Veterinary Department, District Administration, the National Statistics Office, Geological Surveys, the Ministry of Gender and the Ministry of Works.

About half of my informants were women. Virtually all informants except for the very young were married and had children. The female informants usually had spouses who also worked in the civil service or had other formal employment, often in higher positions than the woman. With regard to the male informants, the picture was more mixed. Sometimes the wife also worked for the government, but usually in a lower position, and sometimes the wife would be a "housewife", by which people meant that she was involved in subsistence farming and small-scale business to earn some cash and, if possible, contribute to the household income.

It is important to note that civil servants do not make up a homogenous category. They are defined by their employment in the civil service, which is an occupational category differentiated by factors such as grade, department, age, sex, function, and education and training. For my analysis I found it useful to go beyond job descriptions and develop a comprehensive physiology[15] of the Malawian civil servant. I distinguish broadly the following social types: the young junior officer who enjoyed a good education with a high social status and urban family background; the old junior officer who enjoyed only little education with a low status family background; the younger senior officer with university education, high social status and urban family background; and the older senior officers with relatively little education and a long career. In the case studies of individual civil servants in Chapters Four, Five and Six, elements of these types will be easily recognizable.

Although all people working in the public sector were affected by policy reforms such as retrenchment and privatisation, my study is limited to those working in the civil service and the army, and excludes staff of state-owned companies such as Malawi Post and Telecommunications (MPTC) and the Malawi Development Corporation (MDC), so-called parastatals, and the university. The conditions of employment for the staff of these

[15] One could also use the term ideal-type. I use physiology to take distance from the systemic character of Weber's concept. I borrow the term physiology from a popular literary genre in nineteenth century France. Balzac wrote a physiology of the civil servant that made fun of the way natural sciences classified human beings and nature but, nevertheless, provided a useful distinction between different types of civil servants depending on their status, way of life and residence. Obviously, my ambition differs from Balzac's but I sympathise with his ironic distance from attempts to classify.

organisations differ from those of the civil service and are more similar to the private sector. Furthermore, these organisations were not targeted by the civil service reform, although all of them were forced to implement austerity measures and reorganise.

Since my field sites were in the central and southern regions, most informants came from these regions, although a sizeable number, especially in the senior grades and the professional grades, came from the northern region.[16] Traditionally, Northerners have been overrepresented in the higher positions in the civil service because of better access to mission education in the north of the country.[17] It is important to note, however, that some of those who stated that they came from the north had grown up or were even born in the central and southern regions as their parents had moved there. Informants often stressed these differences and had very clear ideas about "culture" – usually of other groups. Often these differences were not as clear as people suggested and I had the impression that their perceptions were based on an idealised image of Chewa and Tumbuka culture rather than on social realities in Lilongwe or Zomba.[18]

It was not easy to gain access to and the confidence of people who generally thought of a European as someone who might work for a donor agency or the government to gather information on individuals and their often illicit practices. This was especially so at a time when there was widespread uncertainty about the future of the civil service and of society at large. Access was further hindered by the "culture of fear", a legacy of Kamuzu Banda's autocratic regime, which left its traces on Malawian government offices. The closer I got to the headquarters and the top, the more difficult it was to find people who would talk freely about their life. Often people were afraid, associated me with donor agencies and audits, or simply had little time to spare between office, social obligations and moonlighting. Many people were chronically suspicious and tried to give me as little information as possible. Consequently, it was generally not so much a matter of choosing informants as of finding people who were willing to spend

[16] Only the junior officers were recruited from within the region. In the senior grades, people had various ethnic backgrounds, often from mixed marriages. Most senior officers were born and raised in other areas than their home districts because of their parents' employment. See Chapter Five for more detail on the significance of this finding.
[17] For more on the history of missionary education in the north see McCracken (2000[1977]).
[18] The AChewa are the largest ethnic group in Malawi, living mainly in the Central Region. Their kinship organisation is matrifocal with virilocal residence patterns. The ATumbuka are the largest group in the north. Their kinship organisation is patrilineal.

time with me and to talk relatively openly. In general, people who had worked most of their life during Banda's reign were very secretive and suspicious, whereas people of the new generation who had entered the civil service after the late eighties and early nineties were much more open and forthcoming. I only succeeded with a few civil servants in establishing enough trust to gain access to the more personal and intimate aspects of their lives. Obviously they were the most valuable sources of information and the most pleasant to spend time with.

e) Language and Research Assistants

Soon after my arrival I realized that I would have to acquire at least a working knowledge of Chichewa. Even among the educated urbanites who formed my pool of informants English was not used in day-to-day conversations. People were speaking Chichewa with each other, but they often changed to English words or whole phrases, and more educated switched continuously and effortlessly between languages. In everyday life among the less educated, on the markets, and in the bottle-stores people used Chichewa, in Zomba sometimes Chiyao, the vernacular of the dominant ethnic group in the Southern Region.

Since my informants came mainly from the educated strata of the population, I was able to conduct most of my interviews and conversations in English, but it was sometimes necessary to switch to Chichewa. I also employed research assistants at various stages of the fieldwork who conducted interviews in Chichewa and sometimes acted as interpreters. I discussed key concepts that I identified in the course of my research with key informants and friends who helped to translate concepts, phrases and proverbs from the local languages into English. With the help of Jean Chaponda I also collected popular songs that she translated. After my return to the Netherlands I have tried to maintain contact with my key informants and friends through the Internet. This has proved to be more frustrating than I had hoped, though they continue to provide me with valuable information. Internet access in Malawi is still a long way from being easy and, although access has been improved since 1999, logging in and sending messages is still a frustrating and infuriating exercise for those at the wrong end of the "information highway".

4. Methodology II - Follow the Policy, Studying Up

In the course of my research I moved between the tidy, air-conditioned offices of the World Bank and development agencies, the crammed offices of ministerial headquarters where a fan was a highly valued commodity, district administrations, hospitals where clients crowded every available space and were long forgotten files filled rusty cabinets, and primary schools in townships where a chair and a desk were only the privilege of the headmaster. I met senior officials in sharp suits and shining shoes, playing with a cell-phone and their car-keys. But I also met gardeners and watchmen who could not afford bus fare and had to walk 10 km every day from their grass-thatched houses in peri-urban areas to the offices carrying their only pair of shoes to protect them from dust and dirt.

In order to understand the process of policy implementation and the links between these different sites it was necessary to "study up" to investigate "processes whereby power and responsibility are exercised" (Nader 1972:284). In her study of the influence of government and companies on the formation of children, Nader speaks of taking a "vertical slice" by "studying up" as opposed to "horizontal" studies of marginalized groups and networks (1980). Thus I worked my way up the hierarchical ladder, talking to senior civil servants and local World Bank staff. When "studying up", the researcher cannot rely exclusively on localised methods to study a "translocal" phenomenon such as the state or organisations such as the World Bank (Gupta 1995). To fully understand the process of policy intervention it is necessary to draw on newspapers, policy papers, official documents, government circulars and legislation, and to combine these sources with more conventional ethnographic data (Gupta 1995, Nader 1972, Shore/Wright 1997). Riles (2001) points out that documents are an integral element in the ethnography of international NGOs and international organisations and thus should be treated as ethnographic artefacts. To contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of policy implementation my study combines the ethnography of civil servants' everyday lives with an analysis of civil service reform and other measures to improve governance.

In a variation of Marcus' (1995) conceptual vision of multi-sited fieldwork, my method could be described as "follow the policy". I moved up and down the ladder of bureaucratic hierarchy and made occasional forays into relevant localities, such as the church or the home village. The movement between different places led me to appreciate

the heterogeneity within the civil service and the complexity of the implementation process of civil service reform. Were it not for the often exhausting and difficult travels between these locations I might have felt as if I were zapping from channel to channel, like switching from Denver Clan to a grim documentary.

6. Outline

Chapter One sketches the historical context of the civil service reform in Malawi, beginning with Kamuzu Banda's rule until the democratic transition of the 1990s, and, then turning to structural adjustment and economic liberalisation. Chapter Two deals with the planning phase of civil service reform. It presents a detailed analysis of a range of connected documents signed between 1994 and 2002 between the Bretton Woods institutions and the government of Malawi about civil service reform and related policy measures intended to improve governance. Chapter Three provides an account of the implementation process of civil service reform and shows how various actors in the deeply fragmented civil service manipulated, frustrated, and subverted reforms to protect particularistic interests. It traces the implementation of civil service reform by "studying up", or by taking a "vertical slice". The following chapters then present different chunks of what I call horizontal slice. Chapter Four presents various aspects of everyday life of civil servants in Lilongwe and Zomba and addresses important issues, such as the significance of the salary, allowances, business and farming. Chapter Five addresses the tension between conflicting loyalties and aspirations between modernity and tradition. Chapter Six concentrates on corrupt practices and the moral and normative ambivalence surrounding corrupt behaviour of civil servants. The discourse on corruption and corrupt practices are seen in the context of the profound political and economic changes Malawi has been experiencing since the early 1990s. The final chapter pulls the findings of the previous chapters together and presents some tentative conclusions on civil service reform and Good Governance as promoted by the international financial institutions.