

**Conclusions:**  
**In the Shadow of Neo-liberalism**

Development planners and economists of the Bretton Woods institutions have been marketing Good Governance in Malawi since the country's transition to democracy in 1994. By including most "stakeholders" in the drafting of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, they have succeeded in establishing a general consensus in the "donor community" in matters of governance. Good Governance and civil service reform are advertised as the proper instruments to fix "dysfunctional" bureaucracies. African bureaucracies are represented as non-functioning transplants that are undermined by patrimonialism. Though, this representation has been subjected to a rigorous critique, many critiques have failed to transcend the fundamental dualism between the rational-bureaucratic state and "primordial" African social systems.

This ethnography of mundane practices of civil servants adopts a much narrower level of abstraction as its main analytical focus and presents individual civil servants and their everyday experiences in the context of neo-liberal reform. It does not reify dichotomies between Western and African institutions but, instead, focuses on the life of people in the midst of processes that restructure state institutions all around the globe. From this perspective it is possible to examine more empirically grounded questions than those usually asked by students of African politics. To paraphrase Roitman's and Mbembe's (1995) concept of the "subject in the times of crisis", what are the quotidian practices of civil servants and what does it mean to be a subject in the times of neo-liberalism? So far there has been little empirical evidence about what African civil servants actually do in the shadow of Good Governance. This study constitutes a modest contribution towards this end. In addition to collecting ethnographic evidence on civil servants in Malawi's urban areas this study has a second aim: to present an analysis of the implementation of Good Governance in Malawi to link the micro-practices of individuals to contemporary processes of globalisation.

These processes are increasingly characterised by the dominance of a neo-liberal vision of the role of the state in relation to society. Good Governance is based on this dichotomy between state and society, a conceptualisation that is contradictory. Two ways

of conceptualising this relationship can be detected in the policies of the Bank and the Fund. In this sense, Good Governance is a hybrid concept drawing on different genealogies that could be labelled as post-modern, in the sense that it is based on a mix of a modernization-paradigm and a neo-liberal paradigm of the market. According to Good Governance thinking, the state is both, instrument to affect social change and impediment to the development of the market. Good Governance is based on a concept of the state as an instrument of social engineering that ought to push back or check primordial affiliations and patrimonial structures in Africa. This conceptualisation of the state is similar to a modernization paradigm where the state is seen as an agent of modernization and national development. From this perspective African society is imagined as a potential threat to development because of its backwardness and traditional “culture”.

This conceptualisation is at odds with the neo-liberal article of faith that state intervention in the market is detrimental to economic development and growth. The World Bank Report, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Economic Growth* (1989), quoted in Chapter Four celebrates the potential of the African “entrepreneurial spirit” that has been forced into informality by predatory and inefficient state institutions. Good Governance aims to make the state more efficient, transparent and accountable. Rule of law and respect for private property are expected to unleash the “entrepreneurial spirit” that will bring about Africa’s economic recovery. This report represents African social systems as a “seedbed” for the market and state intervention as an obstructing influence. Good Governance mythically resolves this contradiction in a call for leaner and more efficient state institutions that create the “enabling environment” for the market by establishing the rule of law and an efficient administration that is accountable to the citizens.

This is only one of the many paradoxical contradictions that characterise the policies of the Bank and the Fund. Another one is the paradox between “conditionality” and “ownership” addressed by Chapter Two. My analysis shows that conditionality is used as a particular technology to create openings for the ever-expanding portfolio of reforms recommended by the Bank and the Fund. Many have criticised the use of conditionality to force Third World governments to implement Bretton Woods policy prescriptions. The representatives of the Bank and the Fund obviously do not share this

view, and argue that “conditionality” is a logical consequence of “ownership”. Conditions to loans are formally included in the agreement by request of the borrowing government. Chapter Two unmasks this construction of “ownership” as a legitimising strategy of the World Bank and the IMF. By splitting the loan documents and relying on scientific rationality, functionaries of the World Bank and the IMF try to present their policy prescriptions as purely technical instruments “owned” by the borrowing government. As obvious as this might be, it is crucial to appreciate the way the Bretton Woods institutions operate and legitimise their “technical assistance”.

The presentation of the policy prescriptions as “tools” depends on their scientific and neutral character. “To get the numbers right” is the primary concern of the visiting missions of the Bank and the Fund and the staff at their headquarters. Data collection according to standardised methods is a crucial element of Bretton Woods policy planning. These numbers acquire normativity through conditionality in two ways. Numbers can be transformed into a norm or standard against which the “progress” of Malawi’s economy is measured. For example, a specified inflation rate or government expenditure can be set as necessary target to qualify for disbursement. Such numbers are performance criteria that affect disbursement. The second type of normativity of numbers applies to the collection of data by staff and consultants of the international financial institutions and government agencies. The collection of certain data sets often constitutes a condition in itself. This type of conditionality of numbers has gained more salience, partly replacing the first type, which has come to be seen as too rigid and as a violation of the concept of “ownership”. Benchmarking and the establishment of the proper systems of management and control are more important than ever in the strategies of the Band and the Fund.

I argue that we can speak of a process of *dejuridification*<sup>1</sup> with regard to the operations of the Bretton Woods institutions: if the conditionality of the loan “arrangement” is not a contract between the international financial institution in question and the government who cannot be held accountable for implementation or the failure to implement the conditions, and if the conditions do not constitute an agreement or a

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<sup>1</sup> The explosive growth of regulation, a process referred to as *juridification*, does not necessarily result in more legal accountability of the state bureaucracy (Habermas 1981, Voigt 1980, 1983). Some authors speak of *dejuridification* to describe this contradictory process (Blankenburg 1980, Vobruba 1983).

unilaterally binding declaration no one can hold the government legally accountable for the policy reforms. The details of a reform programme and its implementation remain within the sphere of discretion of the executive, in the realm of policy, outside the reach of judicial review or individual or group legal action. This ambivalence is not coincidental but, rather, is precisely the intent of policymakers of international organisations and national governments who do not want to be held legally accountable for their policies and want to avoid parliamentary control. Hence, it is apt to speak of *dejuridification* in the shadow of the process of *juridification* of the development discourse.

### **1. Neo-liberal Governmentality in Africa**

Development assistance has undergone fundamental changes since the rise of neo-liberalism in the 1980s. The reforms that fall under the label of good governance seem to be different from classic development interventions based on the modernization paradigm. Good governance is not about building roads or transmitting knowledge, Good Governance is about establishing systems of managing and self-control to further “efficiency” and “transparency”, which does not resemble knowledge transfer of classic development assistance.

Good Governance as it is promoted by the Bretton Woods institutions must be seen in the context of new systems of surveillance and control that rely on self-control through auditing and management (Barry/Osborne/Rose 1996, Burchell/Gordon/Miller 1991, Bröckling 2000, Rose 1992, 1999, Rose/Miller 1990, Shore/Wright 1997). The World Bank missions that visit Malawi to collect data, to conduct workshops and to negotiate programmes seem to be different from the activities of the extension workers described by Arce and Long (1992) or the “street-level bureaucrats” described by Lipsky (1980). All civil servants in Malawi, from the Principal Secretaries (PS) down to the junior staff, constituted the “target population” of the first major civil service reform since the colonial period. Even the highest government functionaries who participated as members of government negotiating teams had virtually no influence on the formulation of civil service reform. There was no life-world of the extension technicians of Good Governance for me to explore or understand because they were not present – the visits of

World Bank or IMF missions were usually brief and representatives of the Bank and the IMF were not involved in the actual planning and implementation of reform measures. Hence there was no “interaction” at a “knowledge interface” in Long’s terminology (1992). The interface between developers and developed is no longer defined by the border of the national territory. The development interface has become de-territorialized to a higher degree than in the past. Control and monitoring are not executed by the extension workers of Good Governance but are meant to be exercised by the Malawi government.

In order to operate these systems of self-control, the national government requires the transfer of expert knowledge. To this end the international financial institutions take an active interest in the training of members of the national elites (Dezalay/Garth 2002). This strategy has also been employed in Malawi albeit on a smaller scale than in Brazil or Argentina. The World Bank financed the establishment of the Malawi Institute of Management (MIM) where civil servants were to be trained in the new management and accounting techniques. Furthermore, World Bank and IMF regularly organised workshops to train civil servants and “stakeholders” in the basic principles of the new economic thinking. However, these efforts only reached a small minority of civil servants and the few Malawian civil servants who were trained in the new technologies of management and controlling rarely identified with the discourse on New Public Management and Good Governance.

Documents of the World Bank and the IMF argue that the implementation of the proper management “tools” will improve the performance of the civil service. This, in turn, will eventually contribute to the creation of an “enabling environment” for “entrepreneurs” who, according to the Bretton Woods institutions, will realise the economic recovery of sub-Saharan Africa. According to this logic it is not the failure of the Bretton Woods institutions to design better programmes but bloated and parasitic state bureaucracies that are responsible for the absence of economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa. By adopting the Good Governance and an anti-corruption agenda the Bank and the Fund successfully divert at least some of their critics’ attention away from their policies toward corrupt and parasitic African civil servants. One ought to remember

that Wolfensohn decided to redefine the “C” word at a time when the Bank was under attack from a far more threatening adversary than NGOs and other progressive critics.

Theories of governmentality and bio-power assume a degree of control and subjectification that was never been realized by the colonial state. In spite of ubiquitous categorizing of “natives”, the weak colonial state in Africa continued, to a considerable degree, to rely on repressive power (Comaroff 2002, Vaughan 1991). I think a similar critique should be applied to the present debate on neo-liberal governmentality. The vertical slice of the implementation of the civil service reform and the horizontal slice of civil servants’ everyday practices do not lend support to the notion of encompassing neo-liberal governmentality in Malawi and it is likely that evidence from other African countries would point in a similar direction although this would have to be verified through other ethnographic studies of civil servants.

This theoretical argument applies also to the instrumentalist vision of the architects of Good Governance and affiliated scientists who want to design “better” and more “efficient” instruments. Their belief in the power of their models to effect change is similar to the representation of modern institutions in the totalising theories of Foucault and others. The fundamental critics and the engineers of the development discourse are diametrically opposed to each other but, oddly enough, both base their argument on representations of a monolithic and efficacious nature of the state and development apparatus.

## 2. Fissures in the Civil Service

Comaroff argues that British colonial administrators failed to produce docile African subjects. “Far from instilling compliant self-discipline, the capillary techniques of colonial states played a great part in sparking processes of challenge and riposte, of transgression, transformation and hybridisation; a greater part than did brute force” (Comaroff 2002:124). Attempts to establish management and control through civil service reform in Malawi in the 1990s “failed” in a similar way. All civil servants, whether they were high- or low-ranking, resisted civil service reform because it constituted a threat to the relatively privileged positions to which they had become accustomed under Kamuzu Banda’s rule. This resistance, however, was not the result of a

shared political agenda or class interest, and it remained uncoordinated, spontaneous and situational. Development anthropology is well aware of the unpredictable and subversive responses of “target populations” to policy intervention. De Vries aptly speaks of “unruly clients” with regard to the capability of the addressees of policy to thwart well-meant efforts to “develop” them (1997). The way civil servants in Malawi reacted to the advent of Good Governance and the resulting overhaul of their workplace was not different from resistances displayed by other “target populations”. Their resistance transformed the implementation process transformed into something never intended by the architects of Good Governance in Washington, D.C.

To conclude that most civil servants perceived of the reforms as a threat to their privileged positions does not imply a common interest or the existence of a “strategic group” (Evers 1988). In spite of the frequent strikes, civil servants’ resistance to the new policies never resulted in a co-ordinated political struggle against the neo-liberal reforms in general. The widespread discontent and anxiety in the civil service was more diffuse, and resistance to the civil service reform rarely transcended the mundane tactics and ruses of individual civil servants who pursued their personal agendas. The countless individual acts, nevertheless, succeeded in transforming the implementation of the civil service reform programme.

The civil service proved to be fragmented and deeply divided. The World Bank’s enclave approach had deepened the gap between the classic line ministries and the enclaves, agencies with cross-cutting mandates including more established ones such as the Ministry of Finance and the Department of Human Resource Management and Development (DHRMD) and a host of temporary task forces such as the PSCMA, often staffed by younger technocrats and supplied with ample funding by the “donor community”. These centrifugal tendencies were exacerbated by other donor agencies that supported individual projects implemented by specific ministries and departments. Government agencies and departments were often better equipped to link up with their respective donor agencies than with other units of the civil service.

An important aspect of this fissure is the difference between an older generation of old-school officials who made their careers in the 1960s and 1970s and the younger generation of technocrats who enter the civil service in the 1980s and 1990s. The older

generation built their careers during the 1970s when Kamuzu Banda's regime was at its most repressive. Because of their socialisation under Kamuzu Banda's repressive regime they were not accustomed to taking initiative or to speaking openly. The new regime and the reorganisation of the civil service constituted a threat to their position and the *modus operandi* to which they were accustomed. The younger technocrats are often the offspring of old-school functionaries. Their political allegiance is more volatile. Many of them supported Malawi's transition to democracy but, in recent years, though few would like to return to autocracy, many have become disenchanted with democracy.

A far deeper fault-line existed between the "bosses", the bureaucratic elite, and the mass of middle-ranking and junior civil servants, a continuation of the colonial divide between expatriate senior officers and indigenous junior officers. The top officials in the ministerial headquarters were able to benefit from the implementation of civil service reform. The retrenchment exercise did not affect them and the monetarisation of benefits actually constituted a barely hidden salary increase for the highest grades. This was well understood by junior civil servants who were able to exert sufficient pressure on the government to ensure they were included in the new housing allowance scheme. The "juniors" observed the behaviour of their superiors with growing discontent and openly complained about their selfish "bosses" who behaved like "snakes". They lost respect for their masters and regularly resorted to strikes to add more weight to their demands. The government and the political leaders of Malawi seem to be unable and unwilling to resist these demands, as the introduction of the new housing allowance proved. At the time of writing the political leadership seemed to have chosen a path of appeasement in order to retain the loyalty of an important electorate.

Malawian civil servants responded in a myriad of mundane ways to the dramatic political and economic changes Malawi experienced in the 1990s. Salaries had been eroding for years under the pressure of the high inflation rate and most civil servants could not depend exclusively on their salary. Visits to workshops and field trips became indispensable sources of income for many civil servants. The workshop culture was facilitated by a large influx of donor agencies after the transition to democracy in 1994. All these organisations organised workshops to train the civil servants in new skills. The

civil servants responded enthusiastically – partly because of the new knowledge and partly because of the allowances.

Allowances and lucrative field trips were unevenly distributed in the civil service. Some departments had better access to workshops than others because of donor-funded projects. The senior civil servants, managers and professional cadres were in a better position to attend workshops than were the rank and file. Many senior civil servants earned many times their monthly salary through allowances. The junior civil servants complained about bosses who attended workshops and claimed generous allowances while they, the “juniors”, had to “hunt” for allowances. This uneven distribution of allowances fuelled the alienation between “bosses” and “juniors”.

Allowances were often linked to corruption. It was common to organise “ghost workshops”, workshops that never actually took place, and distribute the profit among the senior staff and the accountants of a department. It was common practice to declare costs for field trips that never took place. The dependence on allowances exacerbated the dependence of subordinates on the goodwill of their superiors. Whereas a civil servant was entitled to a salary he or she was only eligible for a workshop. The superior officers decided whom to send to workshops and they could use this authority to ensure personal loyalty among their subordinates. Those who “showed respect” could count on the grace of their *bwana* but those who were perceived as disrespectful were often left out.

### **3. Corruption in the Shadow of Good Governance**

The end of the “culture of fear”, the new economic and political liberties, and the insecurities spawned by the economic crisis and the civil service reform programme help to explain the explosive growth of corrupt practices among bureaucrats and politicians since 1994. I speak of a democratisation of appropriation to explain this development. During Banda’s reign Malawi had a reputation for the absence of corruption. This picture was not entirely true. Kamuzu Banda and his inner circle treated Malawi as their personal property and did not hesitate to use the resources of the state to expand their influence and to enrich themselves.

Corruption and clientelism remained largely restricted to this inner circle of MCP strongmen and high functionaries of the civil service and state-owned companies. In this

respect Malawi seems to differ from many other states in sub-Saharan Africa where corruption and clientelism pervade all levels of the bureaucratic hierarchy (Médard 2002). The “culture of fear” paralysed the civil service to such an extent that even the highest officials were too afraid to take any decisions without Kamuzu Banda’s approval. Hence, evidence indicating low levels of corruption in the civil service under Banda’s regime must be ascribed to the oppressive nature of his rule rather than to a strong civil service ethos.

This changed dramatically after democratisation in 1994. Freed from the fear of Banda’s wrath, senior party officials, managers of state-owned enterprises and senior civil servants were quick to grasp opportunities for enrichment, taking advantage of the turmoil that arose between the end of Banda’s regime and the establishment of the new order. Englund referred to this opportunism of the politicians and the country’s elite as “chameleon politics” (2002b). The rank and file of civil servants who observed their masters closely were swift to follow and grasped every opportunity to enrich themselves, though their possibilities were considerably limited because of their subordinate positions. Democratisation of appropriation, therefore, has a twofold meaning: firstly, after democratisation, corruption penetrated most government departments and offices in Malawi and, secondly, since the introduction of multi-party democracy there has been an increase rather than a decrease in corruption – the exact opposite of the objectives of Good Governance and democratisation.

The prevalence of corrupt practices in the civil service after democratisation has been facilitated by the existence of a parallel informal order. This parallel order has existed since independence and even under colonial rule, but, under Banda’s harsh rule, rather than fostering corrupt practices, it functioned mainly as an informal way for Kamuzu Banda and the MCP elite to exercise absolute control over the civil service. After the end of the Kamuzu Banda’s rule the parallel order was rewired by the “bosses” to function as a means to gain access to the resources controlled by them. Soon their subordinates joined them in the democratisation of appropriation. Moonlighting, corruption, delay tactics and silent resistance thrived not in spite of but because of democratisation and Good Governance. The breakdown of the oppressive apparatus of Kamuzu Banda’s regime and the loss of economic security created room for the parallel

order to appropriate the potentially threatening reforms and it remains to be seen whether this is merely a transient phenomenon or indicates the establishment of more lasting patterns of behaviour.

Therefore, it makes sense to approach ant-corruption policies and Good Governance in the context of the restructuring of Malawi. From such a perspective Good Governance is not the antithesis of endemic corruption. Instead, it constitutes one facet of the historic events that have taken place in Malawi since 1994. To consider corruption and anti-corruption, Good Governance and bad governance, not as opposites, but as parts of complex and multi-stranded societal changes, allows us to see the interdependence of Good Governance and corruption, the way both discourses constitute each other.

#### **4. Social Stratification in the Shadow of Neo-liberalism**

Of course, Good Governance constituted only one influence on the everyday lives of civil servants in urban Malawi. In many respects other processes such as economic crisis and social stratification proved to be far more penetrating influences on everyday life than civil service reform. The country had been experiencing economic crisis since the 1970s, which was then accelerated by the neo-liberal reforms of the 1990s. At the time of research moonlighting had effectively replaced the salary as main source of income for many civil servants. For most, business and subsistence farming were desperate efforts to fend off social decline. Only those who belonged to Malawi's small elite were able to benefit from economic liberalisation because they had the necessary social, cultural and financial capital. The highest officials owned agricultural estates, private schools, private hospitals, bars, restaurants, hotels, guesthouses, transport companies, bus companies, taxis, and fishing vessels. They were able to use their government job as a stepping-stone to lucrative business opportunities and well-paid consultancies. This elite, the *apamwamba*, benefited considerably from Malawi's political and economic liberalisation: the end of the "culture of fear" and the liberalisation of the economy opened possibilities they were able to seize upon because of the social, cultural and financial capital they had accumulated since independence.

For the majority of the middle-ranking and junior civil servants, on the other hand, the freedom that came with economic liberalisation and democratisation constituted

a threat. For the ordinary clerk, teacher or nurse, democratisation and liberalisation meant cutbacks at the office, the danger of unemployment, eroded salaries by high inflation rates, and a severe economic crisis. Their petty trading and subsistence farming, always threatened by bankruptcy and lack of money, were desperate attempts to regain a security lost and “make ends meet”. The mass of civil servants who populated overpriced rented quarters in the cheaper neighbourhoods of Lilongwe and Zomba became entrepreneurs out of necessity and struggled to realize their dream through every means available.

A small minority of the junior civil servants, however, were able to benefit from liberalisation. Many senior civil servants had been able to find employment for their children and other relatives in the lower grades of the civil service. As a consequence many junior positions in the civil service were held by the younger generation of the country’s political and bureaucratic elite. Because of their connection to wealthier relatives they were able to establish businesses that went far beyond the possibilities of their own salary. Economic liberalisation did not bring wealth to more people but rather contributed to the reproduction of the postcolonial elite. Possibilities for social advancement were scarcer than ever and access to education and employment were limited to the elite.

### **5. “Safe Distance”**

From a historical perspective Good Governance and neo-liberalism represent only a brief episode in the *longue durée* processes of urbanisation, modernisation and social stratification. My horizontal slice of the everyday practices of civil servants in Lilongwe and Zomba reveals how far an image of a homogenous primordial morality is removed from the dilemmas of people who wanted to maintain a “safe distance” from their rural kin and their exaggerated expectations. A process of stratification is taking place between “modern” urbanites and “traditional” village folk within families. On the one hand, there are relatives who work for the government or private companies and have received a formal education and, on the other hand, there are the relatives with little formal education living “in the village”. I observed closer relationships among relatives who all worked in the formal sector and lived in town and less close relationships between them

and their relatives “in the village” who they seemed to consider as less “modern” or less “civilised”.

Relationships between civil servants and their rural kin were highly ambivalent and charged with tension. None of the civil servants in Lilongwe and Zomba wanted to sever ties with their relatives in their home district. Good relations with their relatives were deemed a necessary form of social security in case of future mishap - the village constituted a potential refuge where they expected to find support and land if needed. However, it is important to note that, in practice, virtually no one wanted to leave town and return to the village. The village was considered to be a last resort, to be avoided at all costs. The village had lost a lot of its attractiveness to the urbanites. People feared the exaggerated expectations of kin in the home village, they were afraid of witchcraft, and a hard life without the amenities of urban life. Furthermore, the village no longer provided social security, in the manner it once had. Available agricultural land was scarce and costs for cultivation were high. The theft of maize and bad weather often resulted in the loss of harvest. In the densely populated Central and Southern regions many villages had become recipients of financial support and agricultural inputs.

This became clear during the food crisis in 2002 when hungry and cash-stripped villagers flocked to the town in search of support from their relatives. The famine revealed the precarious situation of large parts of the rural population. Because of their salaries, civil servants did not experience hunger, although occasional food shortages did occur. Many civil servants experienced considerable difficulties because of demands for help made by their rural relatives. The famine highlighted the importance of spatial distance. Not all villagers were able to visit their relatives in town. For those unable to reach town by foot it was often impossible to raise enough cash for the bus, so they were forced to wait for their town relatives to visit them – a trip avoided by many urbanites more concerned with their own problems.

Generally my informants used spatial distance as a device to create social distance. By maintaining spatial distance they controlled access to themselves and their resources. “Distance saved them” because their relatives did not have the financial means to visit them too often while a trip to the home village was not financially prohibitive for them. The maintenance of social and spatial distance was vital for civil servants: the fear

of jealousy, witchcraft, backbiting, and theft was a source of great anxiety among civil servants thinking about retirement. A “neutral” place promised more security than the village where their status of being “civilised” and “modern” would be threatened and their material wealth would be vulnerable to the claims of greedy relatives. Usually the “neutral place” was at a distance prohibitive to the poorer relatives in the village but not insurmountable for the retired officer.

One of the main motives for the desire to move to “neutral ground” seemed to be the, in principle, unlimited nature of kinship obligations. All of my informants complained about the exaggerated expectations of their less affluent siblings, cousins, nieces and nephews, and uncles and aunts who, though usually associated with the village, might also be lesser privileged urban residents. For such people a cousin in government service was perceived as a provider of social security in times of need. Although my informants were willing to share part of their wealth with relatives, it was vital for them to control access to their resources in order to safeguard their standard of living. Otherwise they feared they would not be able to maintain their “civilised” way of life and the standard of living to which they had become accustomed.

Civil servants in Lilongwe and Zomba felt the need to assert their autonomy and agency with regard to support to relatives by invoking their status as being “modern” and “civilised”, though in fact they often felt compelled to provide support because of a fear of social isolation, backbiting and witchcraft. Hence, they manoeuvred carefully in order not to alienate their relatives in the village on whom they wanted to count in times of distress, which had proven increasingly likely in the context of the severe economic crisis and inflation.

It is important to note, however, that a modern life-style and tradition where not mutually exclusive. For many of my informants safe distance enabled them to engage with their rural cousins on their terms, thus preventing them from exercising too much social pressure. Safe distance allowed them to control access to their resources and lead the life they wanted. Thus, to live at “safe distance” was not used to sever ties with the home village but was perceived by many as a condition to entertain cordial relations with rural kin.

## 6. Re-thinking the African State:

At the end of this book I want to return to Bourdieu's warning of the danger of "thinking about the state". He wrote "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" (Bourdieu 1994:1). When thinking about the postcolonial African state one is at even greater peril. Most studies of African states not only reify the Western imagination of the ideal state, they also reproduce well-known stereotypes about the "primordial" affiliations of African bureaucrats which undermine the proper functioning of rational-bureaucratic order.

Therefore, it is crucial to conceptualise Good Governance, civil service reform and the fight against corruption in terms of their historicity. This approach necessitates an analysis that places these phenomena in the context of Malawi's colonial and the postcolonial history. The reform of the civil service is the first major reorganisation since the colonial period. It cannot be analysed in isolation from colonial and postcolonial history. Good Governance, then, is not the end of postcolonial history but a new chapter in the history of the postcolonial state.

The contemporary postcolonial state is characterized by blurred boundaries between the Bretton Woods institutions and the sovereign government. The exercise of sovereignty is in the process of being reconfigured. This reconfiguration must not be conceptualised in terms of a straightforward transfer of power from the sovereign government to the international financial institutions. Under a neo-liberal global order the boundary between international organisations and sovereign state is less important. If systems of self-control and management are successfully established it does not matter any longer whether it is a government official, a World Bank representative, or a private consultant who operates such a system. My study shows, however, that policy implementation regularly fails to make these dreams of social engineering come true. The mundane acts of resistance of the subjects of neo-liberal governmentality prove to be more efficacious than anticipated.