Good Governance in Malawi: Policy implementation and fissures in the civil service

by

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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. Since the 1990s Good Governance has been promoted by the international financial institutions (IFIs) 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 accountable to the public and subject to the rule of law. One of the primary instruments to improve governance has been civil service reform, the reorganisation of the state bureaucracy according to the principles of New Public Management. Accordingly, World Bank and IMF have made the reorganisation of the civil service one of the primary conditions for their financial support. In sub-Saharan Africa, where most countries have been implementing Good Governance reforms in the past decade, the reorganisation of the civil service has had mixed results. In spite of the introduction of new management and accounting systems, outsourcing and privatization of non-core government functions and the dismissal of government employees made redundant the performance and efficiency of African bureaucracies is still found wanting by the "donor community".

This article argues that the implementation of the Good Governance agenda has failed to address the underlying dynamics of postcolonial bureaucracies in sub-Saharan Africa. The policies promoted by the IFIs are based on a technocratic conception of the state as homogenous and unified actor that needs to be repaired with a set of instruments or "tools" provided by World Bank and IMF experts. This perspective is flawed since it does not account for the colonial legacy of African states and their historical trajectories since independence. Drawing on archival and ethnographic evidence[1] on the implementation of civil service reform in Malawi between 1994 and 2004 the present author argues that the

[1] Anthropological fieldwork in two urban areas, the capital Lilongwe and Zomba in the south, was carried out between November 1999 and November 2000 and February and March 2002.

implementation of civil service reform has deepened already existing fissures within the civil service rather than contributed to greater cohesion.

The article presents a case study of one of the central elements of civil service reform in Malawi, the retrenchment of government employees made redundant, deemed to be the first step toward creating a more efficient civil service by the consultants of the IFIs (World Bank 1989, 1993, 1994a, 1994b). This choice is not coincidental. The reduction of staff was one of the conditions for continued financial support from the IFIs and is usually considered to be one of the hallmarks of neo-liberal reform. The dismissal of employees also tends to be one of the most contested measures. It is, therefore, well suited for an analysis of the implementation of the Good Governance agenda. According to official figures the government of Malawi dismissed approximately 34.000 employees between 1994 and 2000, mainly support staff and junior civil servants. Staff reduction widened already existing fissures in the civil service that were the result of the creation of new agencies with support from the IFIs in the 1990s, on the one, and Malawi's colonial and postcolonial history, on the other hand.

The aim of this article, therefore, is not to establish the "failure" or "success" of civil service reform in Malawi but rather to transcend the contingent categories of development thinking defining "success" or "failure" and thereby to contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of the postcolonial state in sub-Sahara Africa. In doing so it adopts a critical view of social engineering promoted by the IFIs and consciously disengages social scientific analysis from development practice. Such a perspective builds on a growing body of critical anthropological scholarship that investigates the practice of constructing or framing the very objects of development interventions (Escobar 1995, Ferguson 1994, Mitchell 2002, Mosse and Lewis 2005, Quarles van Ufford and Giri 2003, Secher Marcussen and Arnfred 1998). The danger of conflating the categories of analysis with the categories analysed is well-known from other fields of inquiry. Bourdieu (1993), for instance, emphasised the limitations of the apparently natural categories of what he dubbed "state thinking" for the social-scientific study of the state.

Since the mid 1990s Malawi, a former British colony (until 1964) and one of the least developed countries according to the UNDP development index,[2] has implemented a number of programmes designed and financed by the IFIs that target perceived problems in the civil service. Malawi has a long history of implementing World Bank and IMF policies prescriptions. It was among the first countries to implement the notorious Structural Adjustment programmes in 1979 and has implemented the usual set of reform programmes

[2] UNDP (2006).

aimed at stimulating economic growth, generally with limited success (Harrigan 1997). Between independence and 1994 the country was ruled by Kamuzu Hastings Banda, President for Life since 1971. Under Kamuzu Banda's paternalistic rule all aspects of social and political life were closely monitored by the security services and the only legal political party, the Malawi Congress Party (MCP). The civil service did not remain unaffected. A culture of fear prevailed in the civil service and civil servants owed unconditional loyalty to Kamuzu Banda and the MCP. One-party rule ended in 1993 when the majority of the population voted for the introduction of multi-party democracy. The first free elections in 1994 where won by Bakili Muluzi and the United Democratic Front (UDF). Muluzi served as president for two terms, until 2004, when the incumbent, Bingu wa Mutharika, was elected. Especially in the first years after the introduction of multi-party democracy people enjoyed the new political liberties but soon disillusionment spread because his government was unable to reverse the economic decline that had been affecting the economy since the 1980s. In an effort to reverse the economic crisis the democratically elected governments have implemented the policy prescriptions of the IFIs ranging from deregulation of the economy to civil service reform.

This sketch of the historical context provides the backdrop for a detailed account and analysis of the execution of the retrenchment exercise. The article is divided into three parts. The first part situates the civil service reform programme in the context of the Good Governance agenda promoted by the IFIs. The second part presents an account of the implementation of the retrenchment exercise, which shows that the framing of the object of civil service reform, i.e. the Malawian nation-state, by the IFIs failed to address the historical trajectory of the civil service in Malawi and, therefore, exacerbated already existing internal divisions. The third part, then, deals in more detail with these internal divisions and the ways they **were** affected and were widened by the implementation of the civil service reform programme.

1. The instrumentalist vision of Good Governance

Good Governance emerged as the new paradigm of development assistance in the 1990s. It heralded an era of much bolder interference in the domestic affairs of governments of developing countries. The IFIs called for the radical overhaul of the state institutions according to the neo-liberal dogma in order to create favourable conditions for economic development. Good Governance would thus contribute to "sustainable economic and social development" (World Bank 1992:5) and "macroeconomic stability, external viability, and orderly economic growth" (IMF 1997:1).[3]

The booklet *Governance and Development* published in 1992 was the World Bank's first general statement of the new development agenda. It defined governance as "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development" (1992:3). According to the Bank the key dimensions of governance are "public sector management, accountability, the legal framework for development, and information and transparency" (1992:6). Although this was the first publication to be exclusively devoted to issues of Good Governance, the Bank had addressed the problem of state bureaucracies in developing countries earlier. In 1989 a World Bank report on sub-Saharan Africa mentioned "deteriorating governance" as one of the main causes of the crisis in Africa. It attributed the economic crisis to the expansion of state services and the interference of the state in the economy after independence (World Bank 1989:30). In line with this neo-liberal critique of the interventionist state, World Bank experts designed instruments to transform "dysfunctional" and "inefficient" government institutions in order to create the envisaged "enabling environment" by "defining and protecting property rights, providing effective legal, judicial and regulatory systems, improving the efficiency of the civil service" (World Bank 1991).

In subsequent years World Bank staff and researchers developed the "governance approach" (Dia 1993) that provided an analytical framework for civil service reform in Africa. This approach attributed the failure of prior attempts to reform the civil service to the "patrimonial character" of the state in sub-Saharan Africa.[4] A variant of the "governance approach" was applied in Malawi. Key functions such as revenue collection, customs and pre-shipment inspection were removed from the civil service and became the domain of new autonomous government agencies and private companies. These measures were supplemented with a civil service reform programme, the outsourcing of non-core functions such as gardening, security services and carpenter workshops and the privatisation of state-owned companies. The "governance approach" embodied the Bank's vision of the state that would be limited to certain core functions the effective management of which would create the necessary room for private initiative to contribute to economic growth. The following part will discuss the consequences of the implementation of the "governance approach" in Malawi focusing on the dismissal of staff made redundant.

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[3] See also World Bank (1989; 1994).

[4] The World Bank approach only bears a superficial resemblance to the neo-patrimonial approach developed by Eisenstadt (1972) and Médard (1982).

2. Right-sizing the civil service

One of the main objectives of civil service reform in Malawi has been the "right-sizing" of the bureaucracy.[5] According to the experts of the IFIs a smaller, leaner and more efficient civil service is a necessary pre-condition for Good Governance. In 1996 the government of Malawi adopted an Action Plan in which it announced to outsource and privatize non-core functions, to reduce "overlap and duplication in the machinery of government", to improve performance and efficiency, and to "design and implement a retrenchment programme which will assist in the move to an affordable and sustainable civil service" (GoM 1996b:2).

The dismissal of redundant employees was deemed necessary by the IFIs to correct the skewed staff composition and to render the civil service more cost-efficient. Many civil servants perceived civil service reform as threat to the status quo and attempted to manipulate, co-opt and appropriate it. The implementation of the retrenchment exercise met the silent resistance of many in the civil service since it affected the long-standing practice of hiring large numbers of employees with little education or training to perform menial tasks.

The World Bank conducted two studies in 1991 and 1993 to assess problems in the civil service and make recommendations for the civil service reform (World Bank 1993; 1994a). These studies recommended reducing the number of support staff like watchmen, cleaners, workmen, messengers etc. occupying the lowest grades in the civil service, the Industrial Class (IC) and to a lesser degree the Subordinate Class (SC). The former were employed on a temporary basis and were, therefore, not part of the civil service establishment. The term civil service establishment denotes the established positions that are specified in the pay roll and controlled by the Public Service Commission, the body ultimately in charge of appointments and dismissals of civil servants. The SC, in turn, was part of the civil service establishment.[6]

Prior to the civil service reform the civil service provided employment and social security for thousands of manual labourers, gardeners, security guards, receptionists and messengers and each year more people found employment in the civil service. The expansion of staff prior was not the result of actual need but rather stemmed from a logic of allocating the state's resources, a well-documented characteristic of African bureaucracies. By 1995 more than 35 percent of all civil servants held lower ranks and had little or no formal

[5] Interview with the World Bank representative, Lilongwe, March 2000.
[6] Formally, civil servants proper are only those government employees holding established positions as opposed to temporary staff and IC staff holding non-established posts. Temporary staff and IC staff, however, were usually referred to as civil servants and counted as such in the civil service census (GoM 1996b). Hence, in this paper all government employees are referred to as civil servants.

education whereas only five percent of the civil servants occupied management and professional posts leaving many of these posts vacant due to the lack of suitable candidates (GoM 1996a:27-31).

Although the IC posts were officially only temporary IC employees never had been threatened by dismissal. Prior to the 1990s government employment was a secure life-long position that entitled its holder not only to a regular - albeit small – salary but also to a whole range of benefits such as paid sick leave and terminal benefits upon retirement. Numbers of the IC and other subordinate staff grew because the superior officers in the ministries provided clients and kin with government jobs without effective control from the ministerial top or controlling agencies. The World Bank experts were the first who challenged this *modus vivendi* in the early 1990s. They argued that the IC had to be abolished and that the staff numbers in the lower grades had to be reduced while the top positions should be upgraded and salaries for senior management and professional functions ought to be increased in order to control the civil service wage bill and improve performance (World Bank 1994a).[7]

Employment of IC employees fell within the discretion of the individual departments compared to established posts, which had to be approved centrally by the Public Service Commission and the Department of Human Resource Management and Development. The World Bank missions had identified this practice as one of the main causes for the uncontrolled growth of the IC (World Bank 1994a). It was a well-known secret that most heads of departments and other high-ranking civil servants in the departments exploited their authority to employ IC employees to provide clients and kin with jobs and social security. Often they also hired people on the instigation of politicians who used their influence to provide their clients with employment. This authority to employ IC workers without interference from The Public Service Commission or the Department of Human Resource Management was also used to employ fictive employees, so-called ghost-workers. The salaries paid for the ghost-workers were pocketed by rackets of senior civil servants in the departments and accounting sections. Consequently, the World Bank recommended to abolish the IC and to make former IC employees redundant. Many of the tasks formerly performed by support staff such as gardening, manual labour and security were earmarked for privatisation. The remaining IC employees were supposed to be integrated in the establishment of the civil service (World Bank 1994a).

[7] A notable exception constituted primary school teachers who were considered to be "juniors" but who were not threatened by retrenchment. The government had embarked on a programme to extend free primary school education and had hired thousands of primary school teachers in 1995 and 1996 thus providing employment for many dismissed civil servants.

The actual implementation of this plan was of course much messier than the documents signed between the World Bank and the government suggested. Targets were not met, deadlines were not kept, and implementation was often subject to ad-hoc decision-making, particularistic interests and unanticipated events. Nevertheless, the World Bank and the IMF maintained just enough pressure to keep the government from reverting to the former practice of hiring large numbers of support staff who enjoyed the support of patrons in the higher echelons of the civil service or politicians. Due to the transition from one-party rule to multi-party democracy there was no real opposition among the politicians of the UDF and the other political parties against civil service reform since civil servants were generally associated with Kamzu Banda's regime. The cabinet neither opposed nor promoted civil service reform for fear of causing social unrest among the civil servants with the exception of the then vice-president who promoted civil service, which fell in his portfolio. The civil service was deeply divided between those charged with the execution of the Action Plan and those resisting it as I will show.

The Secretary of Human Resource Management calculated that the IC had to be reduced to 16.000 employees. These 16.000 employees should be incorporated into the civil service establishment. According to estimates the civil service had employed about 50.000 IC employees in 1994. This is just a rough estimate since no reliable data on the IC existed prior to the civil service census conducted in 1995 (World Bank 1994a:18). The Letter of Development Policy requesting US $ 106.4 million for the first phase of civil service reform, the Fiscal Restructuring Development Program, included the implementation of the civil service reform as a condition for financial support of the World Bank. This letter, submitted by the government to the World Bank, stated that between February and September 1995 government had already laid off about 20,000 civil servants, mainly lower-ranking support staff of the IC, as a condition for disbursement of the loan. This meant that 14.000 more civil servants had to be laid off to reach the target of 16.000 posts. The next wave of dismissals occurred between 1997 and 1998: Thousands of government employees holding junior positions were dismissed. By 2000 the dismissal of staff made redundant was by and large concluded according to senior officials interviewed by the present author in 2002.[8]

[8] The official numbers of retrenched civil servants should be treated with caution. There was no reliable data on the number of IC employees in 1994 and the number of 20.000 dismissed employees was not verifiable either. Considering that the government had an interest to report a high number of dismissed civil servants in the Letter of Policy since staff reduction constituted one of the conditions of the agreement with the World Bank it is at least possible that the government reported a high number of civil servants laid off prior to the disbursement of the credit to have a more favourable starting position for the civil service reform.

In 1997 the government established a specialized agency, the Public Sector Change Management Agency (PSCMA), with the task to conduct functional reviews of each ministry. Establishment of the PSCMA was one of the conditions for the disbursement of the credit to finance the civil service reform programme. The functional reviews had to make recommendations on the improvement of performance, the internal command structure, the "elimination of overlap and duplication" and the reduction of staff "to cut the wage bill". Most of the staff of the PSCMA was quite young, not older than 40, held university degrees in economics or human resource management and represented the professional elite of the civil service. Superior officers in the line ministries such as Health and Agriculture often refused to cooperate with PSCMA. Among the management of the ministries there was only little enthusiasm for the civil service reform that threatened to reduce their discretionary powers and the staff of PSCMA complained about delay tactics and other subversive forms of non-compliance from senior officers of the line ministries such as not keeping dead-lines and appointments or simply not following orders concerning the reorganisation of their departments.

By 2004 the functional reviews had been concluded and according to official figures all IC employees were either dismissed or incorporated into the civil service establishment on SC positions. Services such as security or gardening had been outsourced to private companies. With regard to the numbers of employees who were eventually incorporated into the civil service establishment it is quite possible that more than 16.000 employees were eventually incorporated into the civil service establishment. For example, the retrenchment exercise did not affect temporary staff working for externally funded projects executed by government departments and my evidence suggests that many people succeed to filter back into the civil service through these projects that fall outside the scope of the Department of Human Resource Management and the Public Service Commission. Due to the absence of statistics on this phenomenon it was impossible to establish how many dismissed civil servants actually succeeded in filtering back into the civil service but it is a fair guess to assume that it could be up to several thousand based on ethnographic evidence gathered during the author's fieldwork.

Even though a few thousand former employees might have succeeded in filtering back into the civil service the retrenchment exercise can be considered a success from the perspective of the IFIs since the majority of junior civil servants made redundant were dismissed thus freeing up resources for raising the salaries for scarce professionals. But "success" is a contingent notion depending on the objectives and political context of a project rather than an analytical category. Hence, this article suggests that in spite of reaching the targets set by the experts of the World Bank and the IMF the retrenchment exercise was not an unequivocal success since it widened fissures and fault-lines within the civil service threatening its cohesion in the long run.

3. Increasing fragmentation of the civil service

The account of the retrenchment exercise in the previous part warrants a closer look at the fault-lines within the civil service that were revealed and widened by its implementation. Two major fault-lines can be distinguished: The first one is the competition between new agencies with the task to promote the civil service reform and the classic line ministries and the second one is the growing gap between "bosses" and "juniors" that can be traced back to the colonial period under British rule.

Enclaves vs. line ministries

In line with the "enclave approach" the World Bank singled out government departments and agencies that would function as enclaves. These enclaves were expected to operate as centres from where the reform would spread throughout the whole civil service. Enclaves were either already existing ministries usually with cross-ministerial mandates such as the Ministry of Finance[9] and the National Economic Council (NEC), formerly the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, or newly established agencies such as PSCMA with the mandate to implement the various measures of the civil service reform. Of course, these ministries and agencies were not the only government agencies supported by the World Bank. The National Statistics Office, for example, received World Bank funding and assistance to improve data collection and the Department of Human Resource Management received assistance to implement the new computerised payroll system.

Due to the financial and logistical support of the World Bank the Ministry of Finance, NEC, the National Statistics Office and units such as the PSCMA tended to have more resources and better qualified staff at their disposal. Generally, the cooperation of individual government departments or agencies with their respective donor agency was often better than between government departments. Considerable differences existed between bureaucratic routines and requirements of the various multilateral and bilateral donor agencies, which

[9] The Ministry of Finance usually has the "overall responsibility for managing the programme, and for monitoring and reporting responsibilities" (interview Ministry of Finance, March 2000) and functions as principal contact for World Bank staff and visiting missions.

resulted in different bureaucratic practices between and even inside departments depending on the donor agency funding the projects.

With regard to the implementation of the civil service reform conflicts arose between the "enclave" agencies supported by the World Bank with the task to implement the various measures of the civil service reform and parts of the senior staff of the classic line ministries who tended to resist what they perceived as interference in their own affairs (cf. Botchewey et al. 1998: 81). These senior functionaries, having been socialised under Kamuzu Banda's autocratic rule and in fact owing their positions to him often were confronted with younger civil servants who were mainly employed in the new "enclave" agencies.

This finding adds another dimension to the competition between the "enclave" agencies and the classic line ministries. The "enclave" agencies employed a high percentage of younger university-trained economists who are adept at using econometric theory. By contrast, many of the senior civil servants in the line ministries belonged to an older generation that made their career in the 1970s. I denote the former as technocrats and the latter as old-school officials. Most of the technocrats were in their thirties and joined the service in the late 1980s. They had enjoyed a better education than the older generation, either abroad or at the University of Malawi that had been established in the 1970s. They often identified with the emerging transnational class of consultants and bureaucrats working for international organisations such as the World Bank, the IMF and the UN. This class set the example for the technocrats in terms of remuneration and career opportunities.

The old-school bureaucrats had joined the service in the 1970s under the autocratic regime of Kamuzu Banda who ruled Malawi between 1964, when Malawi gained independence from Britain, and 1994, when the first multi-party elections were held. They had usually enjoyed less education due to the scarcity of educational facilities during the colonial era and had progressed slowly up the ranks by accumulating years of service. Their outlook was more national and they primarily perceived of themselves as being rooted in Malawian society. Owing their position to Kamuzu Banda, considered the father of the nation who secured independence from the British, they were brought up in a highly hierarchical culture where superiors' decisions were never questioned. Under Kamuzu Banda decisions were usually referred to the top, often to Banda himself, and people were often simply afraid to take decisions for fear of being accused of being a dissident. Moreover, most of them had served as junior officers in the colonial administration where Africans were required to follow the orders from their European superiors without questioning, a characteristic of the Malawian civil service addressed in more detail in the following section.

These attitudes go a long way in explaining the absence of open protest by the old-school officials who resisted retrenchment. Furthermore, they were afraid of losing their positions after the transition to multi-party democracy and preferred to keep a low profile in order not to attract undue attention from their new political leaders who sought to replace many of those suspected of being closely associated with Kamuzu Banda and the MCP. In fact this fear was unfounded since Malawi is hampered by a lack of trained professionals willing to work in government service and the new government was compelled to rely on the civil service it inherited it bears testimony to the attitude of avoiding decisions and keeping low acquired during the years of authoritarianism as a survival strategy.

The younger technocrats were usually more in favour of reform than the older generation, although not necessarily always along the lines of the World Bank's ideas. Having been brought up in the 1970s they were familiar with the oppressive atmosphere under Kamuzu Banda but many of them longed for change although they were very circumspect in expressing it openly for fear of unwanted attention from the security forces and party functionaries. Having been exposed to economics and being aware of the deepening economic crisis during the later days of Banda's rule in the 1980s many of them were more open to new ideas and many tacitly supported the reforms of the 1990s. Due to their age they had been less involved in the practice of hiring large numbers of support staff and, therefore, did not have the same sense of loyalty towards those threatened by retrenchment as the old-school bureaucrats in ministries such as Health, Agriculture or Labour. Being mainly employed in the "enclave" agencies supported by the IFIs these younger economists often found themselves pitted against old-school officials in the line ministries who resisted any external interference in what they considered to be their affairs (Adamolekun et al. 1997:215-217).

Dezalay and Garth (2002) describe a similar development for Latin America where economists trained in the elite universities of the United States formed bureaucratic and political elites in their countries of origin forming a transnational class of bureaucrats who "approach problems of economics and the state from precisely the same perspective" (Dezalay and Garth 2002:28). In Malawi the influence of economists most of whom have worked either for the World Bank or the IMF is striking and it is noteworthy that the incumbent president Bingu wa Mutharika used to work for the World Bank and the minister of finance used to work for the IMF. This generation gap, however, does not imply a complete rift between the old and the young generation. Like their cousins elsewhere the young technocrats are connected to the older elites by kinship ties and share many similarities with the generation of their uncles and parents although their outlook and style is different from earlier role models. The competition between technocrats and old-school officials, therefore, was not the consequence of a generation conflict but rather constituted one dimension of the multi-faceted competition between the newly created "enclaves" and the classic line-ministries – a direct consequence of the implementation of measures to improve governance in Malawi.

"Bosses" vs. "juniors"

The dismissal of employees made redundant revealed a widening gap between top officials or managers, on the one hand, and the rank and file of the civil service, on the other. In the Malawi civil service the former were casually referred to as "bosses" and the latter as "juniors". When my informants referred to the "bosses" they usually meant functionaries high up in the hierarchy occupying administrative and professional positions with the authority to issue orders and make decisions and other senior officers who supervise subordinate staff in a department. "Bosses" constituted not more than five percent of all civil servants, i.e. about 5000 persons (GoM 1996a:29). The mass of civil servants was casually referred to as "juniors" by my informants. Under this category fell all civil servants who were considered to be subordinate including lower-ranking civil servants such as support staff, unskilled workers and extension workers with no or little formal education and middle-ranking officers such as teachers and office clerks with no authority over other civil servants.

This rigid division between "bosses" and "juniors" is one of the characteristic elements of the postcolonial state in Africa that can be traced back to the notorious colour bar between European expatriate officers and African employees found in all African colonies.[10] Under British colonial rule all senior positions in the civil service of what was then Nyasaland were held by Europeans whereas Africans were only found in junior positions such as teachers, clerks and labourers. According to Africans who served in the colonial civil service they were looked down upon by European officers who considered the African civil servants as inferior only emulating the manners of their colonial masters. Under colonial rule it was unthinkable for an African to challenge the decisions taken by Europeans and Africans were required to refer all decisions of importance to their white superiors.

The colonial division between superiors and subordinates was retained after independence in 1964 since Kamuzu Banda strongly discouraged any questioning of his authority, which he interpreted as critique of his regime. Juniors were not to challenge the orders of their superiors who, in turn, were not to challenge Kamuzu Banda's orders, who

[10] cf. Ba (1994) for French West-Africa.

exercised absolute power between 1964 and 1993. In addition Kamuzu Banda continued to rely on Europeans in running the civil service whom he considered no threat to his claim to absolute power. He only reluctantly embarked on a programme of "Africanization" and until the early 1980s a number of Britons who had already served in the colonial administration held key positions in the civil service, the police force and the army. This continuity with the colonial civil service did much to maintain colonial attitudes between "bosses" and "juniors" even after the retirement of the European officials.

It should also be noted that in spite of the ritualistic invocation of a shared African culture there is actually quite a considerable social distance between "bosses", many of whom were trained abroad and enjoyed a formal western-style education, and "juniors" who often hail from more humble origins. The "bosses", either old-school officials or technocrats, belong to Malawi's tiny elite and consider themselves to be more "modern" or "civilised" than their cousins with less social status whereas many "juniors" look with certain envy on the affluent life-style of "those at the top", referred to as *apamwamba* in Chichewa, the country's main language. Although society at large in Malawi avoids the more ostentatious consumption observed in other African countries and people generally emphasise harmony and egalitarian values it is obvious that a considerable degree of alienation between "bosses" and "juniors" existed even prior to retrenchment. Because of that social distance the heirs of the colonial masters, the high-ranking functionaries, did not really go out of their way to protect people with whom they often had very little in common and whom they tended to look down upon in spite of the pervading logic of clientelism and solidarity. Instead, the "bosses" preferred to keep a low profile in order not to jeopardize their own precarious position after the change in government after 1994.

Since the implementation of the civil service reform constituted a condition for financial assistance of the IFIs the government did not really have a choice regarding the retrenchment of the redundant support staff. Of course, the president, the ministers and the top functionaries in the "enclave "agencies knew that this decision would be extremely unpopular among the tens of thousands of "juniors" who would be threatened with the loss of their jobs. Therefore, those responsible for the retrenchment exercise tried to put at least part of the blame for the unpopular measure on the World Bank and IMF, the institutions that had demanded staff reduction. Malawi's new democratic rulers feared the wrath of the civil servants who had become accustomed to go on strike to lend more weight to their demands. In fact no year passed between 1993 and 2004 without civil servants going on strike.

Considering the frequency of strikes in the civil service since 1994 the absence of large-scale or organized protests against retrenchment is striking. Several factors need to be considered in this regard. First, the level of organization among civil servants was very low during the second half of the 1990s, the time when most support staff was dismissed. Trade-unions had been prohibited during one-party rule and the new trade-unions, which were founded after 1994, remained weak with insecure funding and few members. Owing to their weakness trade-unions such as the Civil Servants Trade Union (CSTU) played a relatively minor role in the often-spontaneous strikes prior to 2000. This changed after 2000 when the CSTU was recognized by the government as the representative of civil servants' interests but it was too late to affect the retrenchment exercise, which had been largely concluded by that time. Second, many of those made redundant found employment elsewhere while their less fortunate peers still hoped to find employment although few of them eventually found their way back in the civil service, even after years of patience. This attitude derives from the clientelistic logic permeating the civil service, a well-known phenomenon in Africa, and the attitude inherited from the colonial era. Many dismissed "juniors" thought it unwise to alienate their patrons by openly resisting retrenchment. They preferred to hover close to their patrons constantly reminding them of their obligations as patrons and some of them succeeded in finding other employment in the civil service or in the private sector due to the brokerage of patrons who succumbed to this subtle but strong social pressure.

The belief in the efficacy of clientelistic relationships, however, was thoroughly demystified when thousands realized that their patrons would not help them and many junior civil servants I worked with during my fieldwork expressed their alienation from the "bosses" whom they accused of being selfish, an accusation not taken lightly in a society where the obligation to share one's wealth is a central moral principle. The alienation between "bosses" and "juniors" can be expected to undermine future efforts at transforming the civil service since trust in superiors is one of the preconditions for a functioning civil service. The frequent strikes by junior civil servants since the mid 1990s testify to the loss of confidence in clientelism although it is the subject of future research to investigate the impact of the growing alienation of the "juniors".

Conclusions

Retrenchment of government employees made redundant was a direct consequence of the programmes designed by the experts of the IFIs with the objective to reorganise the civil service according to the principles of New Public Management to make it more efficient and performance-driven, one of the preconditions for Good Governance *à la* World Bank and IMF. The implementation of the civil service reform, however, has not affected the underlying dynamics and structures of the civil service in Malawi. Instead the case presented in this article shows that civil service reform has widened existing fault-lines and exacerbated tensions within the bureaucracy.

The analysis presented here warrants the question whether the instrumentalist vision of Good Governance promoted by the IFIs with its decontextualised and ahistorical concept of a "dysfunctional" state that is in need of repair with the "tools" offered by World Bank and IMF experts is suitable to bring about the transformation of the African bureaucracies deemed necessary by the "donor community". It rather appears that the reorganisation of the civil service in Malawi has not contributed to a more efficacious bureaucracy in spite of reaching the targets set by the IFIs in their stringent conditions such as laying off junior staff made redundant. The civil service is more fragmented than before, "enclaves" and line ministries competing for scarce resources and "juniors" being increasingly alienated from their "bosses".

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