



DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - MADISON

MADISON, WISCONSIN 53706-1393 U.S.A.

Dear Dr. Lawrance and the Editors at ASR,

Thank you for the most recent round of feedback on my submission entitled, **“Nothing but Time”: Middle Figures, Student Pregnancy Policy, and the Malawian State**. Attached is the final version of the piece. I have addressed most of the concerns raised by the ASR editors and reviewers and have indicated below when doing so was not possible.

As with the initial round of revisions, I made nearly all of the changes suggested by Reviewer #1. Specifically, I clarified the content in the introductory paragraph (page 1); added Thomas (2007) to the list of citations (page 2); emphasized in more than one place that Malawi’s Readmission Policy was the first of its kind in the region (pages 2, 15); changed the language from “encounter” to “mediators of diverse relations” (page 4); reminded the readers of the policy’s overall timeline (page 5); clarified the last sentence of the full paragraph at the bottom of the page (page 6); and edited the final sentence of the concluding paragraph per Reviewer #1’s suggestion (page 15).

I was not, however, able to emphasize a class difference between Ozumba and Kasinja because such a difference didn’t really exist. Academics like Ozumba were not paid particularly well in Malawi and often had to supplement their salaries with short-term contracts themselves contingent on international funders and funding cycles. Kasinja, on the other hand, had a stable government salary, even if she lacked career mobility.

I completely agree with Reviewer #1’s point that it is very interesting and productive to think through how institutional positionality relates to social conservatism. In this case, however, I found that so many Malawians in privileged positions were socially and religiously conservative that it could be hard to tease this apart, beyond thinking through the repercussions of personal viewpoints on access to crucial project support, which I explained in the paper. For instance, both Ozumba and Phiri had extensive international connections and had lived abroad. Yet Phiri was significantly more conservative than Ozumba, which reflected the central role of evangelicalism in her life.

While I very much appreciate Reviewer #2’s feedback and have tried to take it into account when possible, I continue to believe that some of his/her comments reflect a disciplinary and methodological divide, particularly around what counts as theory, what counts as data, and the issue of external validity. As an ethnographic article, this piece does not seek to be representative, or comparable across contexts, etc. I did, however, add a note in the paper’s conclusion that, as the first country in the region to have a Readmission Policy, Malawi remains a model for other countries in its revision of the policy. Further, I tried to show the kinds of insights that ethnographic attention to a policymaking process, and to middle figures, can provide in any context.



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Further, some of Reviewer #2's feedback directly contradicts feedback that I received previously from Reviewer #1 (and that I believe has improved the paper), including the decision to purposefully integrate the three arguments that Reviewer #2 points to in his/her first comment. That is, while Reviewer #2 feels that I am doing too much by presenting arguments around middle figures, time management, and gender/sexuality *together*, Reviewer #1 emphasized how important it is to show that how the debates among middle figures were deeply moral and specifically related to sexuality and fertility. That is, attention to different understandings of sexual (im)morality is at the core of how I think through power relations in development via the actions of middle figures. I hope that this simultaneous address of the moral and the political makes the piece interesting.

Per Reviewer #2's suggestions, I did try to introduce more clearly the idea that government actors could also be middle figures, and that their main tool for leverage in shaping policy was around the use of time. I did so in particular on page 5. Reviewer #2 also asks for more explicit mapping sections at the front of each step of the policy review process for clarity. I initially followed this advice and created short tables at the start of each section, but, unfortunately, these additions drove the piece well over the word count. Accordingly, I had to remove them. Given that the Responsible Editor and Reviewer #1 did not have trouble following the piece after my last round of revisions, I chose to leave it as is in order to respect the word count. During the previous round of revisions, I made a significant effort to clarify the writing and order of events.

Finally, I went back to Reviewer #2's original feedback to see if I could further address her/his concerns that I had not fixed. Per the suggestions of both Reviewers, the final version of this piece spends significantly more time and attention on the *differences* among types of middle figures, arguing that attention to these differences can help illuminate some of the power relations in development policymaking. Reviewer #2 also asked for more information on smaller NGOs and civil organizations, as well as on the opinions of teachers, parents, and students themselves. I did add in more about the viewpoints of the teachers and parents who were called to represent school-based or "local" actors at the National Stakeholders' meeting. However, I simply did not have room to do so in greater detail, or to address the feedback of the smaller organizations that played a less direct role in the policy review process. Same with students themselves, although this latter perspective takes up a lot of space in my larger writing on this topic. I did note briefly that students tended to agree with other village-level stakeholders that returning mothers needed not only greater psychosocial support, but also *material* support.

Thank you, again, for all of the very helpful feedback that I have received throughout this process. I hope that my letter and final revisions have addressed your concerns. I look forward to hearing from you.

All best,

Rachel Silver