

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

“LOOK OUT! THE SLEEPING LOCUSTS AWAKE”

It was called the Umbrella Revolution, mostly by international press and campaign observers typically keen to capture the essence of any political event in the Third World as revolution.¹ Hundreds of thousands of colorful umbrellas, rib to rib, undulating as a wash across the parks and plazas of Antananarivo, Madagascar's capital city, lined the dirt roads headed to city center. Under them: young people, even very young people, many not so young, and even more of the old, and rather old. For days and then months, these umbrellas sheltered from the harsh equatorial sun an enormous multitude of regular people who hit the streets for over seven months in an outcry over corrupt national elections. This post-election crisis, which lasted from December 2001 until June 2002, nearly thrust Madagascar into civil war as the presidential incumbent, Didier Ratsiraka, and mayor of the capital city, Marc Ravalomanana, vied for victory and threatened run-offs. To the Malagasy, the wash of umbrellas marked not a revolution but a familiar crisis followed by a populist awakening, what the Malagasy proverb aptly refers to as the moment when sleeping locusts rise. Look out, it says, for the sleeping locusts awake! *Tandrema raha mifohaza ny valalabemandry!*

The buzz of this critical mass pressed upon local political process a change in meaning, a change in discourse, and a shift in the paradigms and idioms of political legitimacy and power. After nearly seven months under the umbrella of “democracy,” Marc Ravalomanana secured a local and international victory, Didier Ratsiraka essentially exiled from both. Democracy was certainly not a new practice to ensure and protect in Madagascar; even with structural dissidence from colonial and recent postcolonial governments, there had always been some form of vernacular direct action, a verbal militia that managed to edge a democratic voice back into the system. But to the international community this was the kind of democracy that signaled less the significance of legitimately elected government and strong civil society and more the requisite “transition” to liberal democracy that allowed for a different set of consequences beyond politics. Under its own umbrella ribbed in tropes of development, freedom, participation, and empowerment, this democracy pointed more to the potential for transnationalization and neoliberal economic reforms and opportunities. Marc Ravalomanana would soon come to embody this narrative of democratic transition and economic progressiveness. But he would come also to represent its failure.

This book is about the possibilities and limits of democracy told through the story of the Ravalomanana administration and the civil society that emerged to bring it to victory in 2002 and to eventually escort it out through a coup d'état in March 2009. If we are to imagine all the ways we know our political leaders, what they look like, what they believe in, how they might resolve a problem, we come to realize that apart from some unique opportunity in which we see or meet them in person, we know them mostly through mediated talk: through a prepared speech, through newspapers, radio, television, and all the voices of these media who speak for or about these leaders. This talk, talk about talk, and representations of talk constitute and shape democratic process. The interactions between national and international political speechwriters and political speakers, political cartoonists (as audiences and to audiences), tell the unfolding of democracy as it organized and experienced, what is at stake, locally in Imerina and as it is construed (or misconstrued) by bi-national government and non-governmental organization (NGO) development experts. Democracy is most certainly dependent on what that relationship looks like in the capital province of Madagascar, Imerina. Also, democracy can only be reckoned with based on its productive role

of a multiplicity of publics, which cohere through the access and legitimization of social actors' access to linguistic and political markets. Most significantly, whereas democracy may be used to describe a state of governance, it is a mode of action rather than an artifice of governmental regimes with the power to regulate and control. It is a continual process of action productive of – even as it is reliant on – a market of communicative resources and their accessibility and distribution.

Within this *local* political economy, democracy can only be understood within the contexts of its postcolonial history and the global politics and publics circulating and undergirding how local governance is organized and experienced. And even still, all of this is always already mediated, by *talk* and the beliefs, opinions, and straight-from-the-gut feelings about what *talk* accomplishes, what it *means*. In thinking about the possibilities and limitations of democracy, then, we must consider the place of talk. This ethnography does just that, through the practices of political orators, their speechwriters, and political cartoonists who work in the capital-city region of Imerina.

Speakers and audiences of urban Imerina confront the political here-and-now and negotiate particular social relations through intertextual, discursive, complex genred events known well throughout Imerina as *kabary politika* (political oratory) and *kisarisary politika* (political cartoons). This story of democracy is told through the lens focused upon the daily use and interplay of these two forms of public speaking and communicative performance in Imerina as they reflect and shape shifting dynamics of political engagement and emerging modes of public participation in national democratic process. Political oratory or *kabary politika* is a highly stylized performance genre common since the first Merina Kingdom of the eighteenth century and still the norm for state political oratory. Elinor Ochs and Maurice Bloch first brought knowledge of *kabary* styles and their social and political significance to anthropology in the mid-1970s (Bloch 1971, 1975, 1985, 1986; Ochs 1975, 1996). Bloch argued in his seminal essay on language and political action that politics is primarily constituted on various kinds of speaking, and that to understand a political system is to look at that political oratory and beyond the event at other forms of talk circulating within and around it (Bloch 1975: 12). Whether it is a *kabary* for weddings, funerals, or, as this story follows, the political style, *kabary* is crafted and delivered according to a formalized structure of greetings, preemptive apologies for handling words publicly, and allegorical-type

narratives brimming with proverbs, riddles, and poetry. For a sense of the greetings, the apologies required to speak, and just how poetic this oration can be, consider this small excerpt of a *kabary* delivered by a member of the AVI political party to a delegation of provincial leaders in the capital city of Madagascar, Antananarivo (known affectionately as Tana) in 2008:

Ladies and gentlemen,

We greet all of you here. Let us thank our ancestors and God's name because they took care of us in finding our way to this place to attend this great celebration. We must thank the State rulers . . . I greet as well the *bekotromaroholatra* [war survivors] and the Army. You are the wall protecting the town, the horns protecting the neck so you are our pride. Thank you to Andrianampoinimerina, great ruler of Madagascar, who declared the limit of his ricefields are the seas. We are all Malagasy.

I must ask you to excuse me because, that's the first thing to say in a speech to honor you and to ask for permission. Don't give me the *tsiny* [blame] as well as we are used to say that the *tsiny* is light and heavy at the same time. It's a deep ravine, you'll get the vertigo if you look into it and you'll die if you fall into it. You must get rid of the *tsiny* so that you can speak without reproach.

All of us are here to preserve and to promote the Malagasy language. The ancestors' customs are neither for sale nor to be exchanged. They are carefully folded clothes so they are worth being shown. So we, the Malagasy people, lift up our Malagasy identity with this practice of *kabary*.

If the young ox feeds itself with its mother, it's not because it wants trouble, it just remembers the past. Even if little crabs move sideways, even if their gait looks weird, it's not because of danger or honor but because that's how the ancestors used to walk so that's what they should do. So it's with our tongue and with *kabary* that we show national unity now.

As Elinor Ochs describes in her comparative studies of the unmarked conversational style of talk (*resaka*) and *kabary*, "one who uses the *kabary* mode must *manolaka ny teniny* [sic], 'wind his words'" (1975: 226). That is, he must speak in an allusive manner. Elders say that *kabary* differs from *resaka* in that the former requires that the speaker draw circles around an idea (*miodidina*) whereas the latter does not. In both *resaka* and *kabary*, winding speech is highly valued. Grammatically, it is rife with the passive voice and markers of verbal politeness. Temporally, it can go on for hours.

Bloch and Ochs brought the discussion of *kabary* into anthropology at a time when this centuries-old practice had come back into the arena of national politics. This book returns to the topic of *kabary politika* to recenter it as one of the key modes of communicative practice in today's democratic national politics in Madagascar, particularly as it has come to play a central role in emerging state formations. Today *kabary politika*'s role is situated in a very different political climate than that of colonial Madagascar (1890s–1960), when the practice had been defanged of its political salience, or of the postcolonial socialist context of the 1970s that Bloch and Ochs studied, when the practice had recently reentered public political life.

Kisarisy politika are political cartoons that appear daily on the front pages of newspapers across the capital-city province. They are featured in both Malagasy and French, depending on the paper's publishing language. They were a regular aspect of news just before

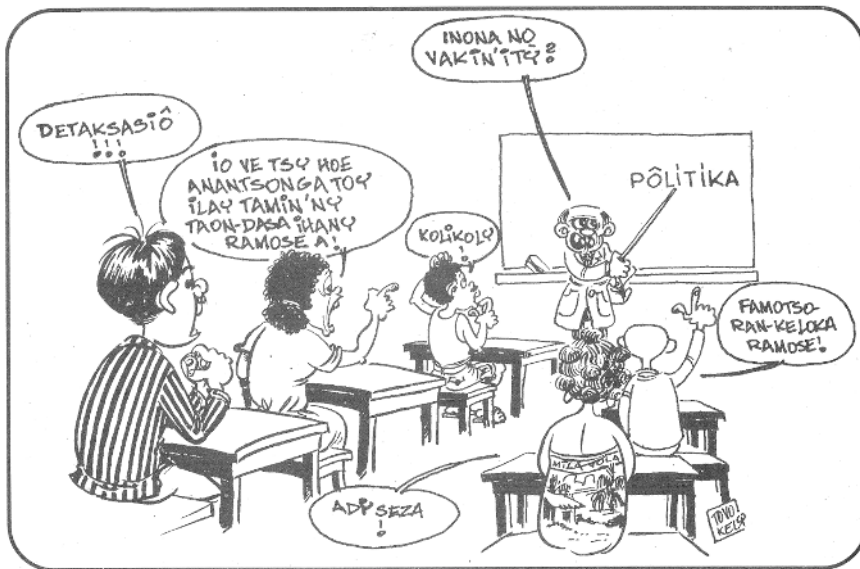


Figure 1.1 What *is* Politics? The teacher asks the class “What is the meaning of this?” word to which he points on the board. The students chime in with “detaxation,” “amnesty,” “corruption,” “fighting for a seat,” and “is it just like those greens of last year” (greens used to flavor soups and rice, an expression that likens something to things which adulterate and flavor; this is a reference to the crisis in which corruption flavored the outcome of the election). Cartoonists often engage the ambiguity of what democracy means in Madagascar by reducing the question of politics to what politicians have reduced it to, in this case a set of popular policies and issues plaguing the administration and its citizenry.

Source: Reproduced by permission of *Gazety Ngah!?*

colonialism, in the early 1900s, and following independence in 1960. Small crowds still assemble around the newspaper stalls each morning, usually gathering to read these satirical cartoons and discuss their relevance and significance.

Throughout the precolonial monarchy and postcolonial socialist and democratic periods, politicians and pundits have engaged one another between these “two coordinates . . . each serving to differentiate the other in productive rather than distinctive ways” (Bakhtin 1981: 191). Today, however, actors in the rather longstanding genres of political *kabary* are now invigorating new forms of communicative interaction that figure more closely to the US rhetorical style. In turn, contexts such as political cartoons have rebounded with recontextualizations of this shift in *kabary* through rhetorical devices such as iconicizations, parody, and reported speech of its agents. Recoding various aspects of syntax, registers, and even contexts, they discursively forefront the inherent disjunctures between heteroglossic voices that politicians just assume ameliorate under the gloss of sound bites like “Malagasy unity,” “development and modernity,” “progress,” and “transparency.”

As vehicles of rhetoric and information, and as means for enacting public identities and shaping participant roles, political oratory and political cartooning mediate social institutional change as particular performers deploy them, representing particular interests. Orators and cartoonists move in and out of multiple subject positions in order to negotiate political claims that figure into a more complex, everyday semiosocial matrix, reflecting and producing new social imaginaries undergirding the public sphere. While *kabary* speakers mediate between an audience and an authority of the mythic past they embody and that is presupposed in the form itself, political cartoonists break the indexical power of the politician to do that. They thwart this authority and the otherwise tidy and ordered social imaginary put forth by *kabary* speakers in the frames of their cartoon worlds. These modes of linguistic praxis, then, as historically and culturally contingent, serve as new forms of political representations to express ideas and to index emerging social formations shaping the state and civil society, and therefore, what democracy looks like.

This ethnography explores and clarifies three important issues that consider the productive role of political oratory and cartooning in political process. First, it explores the relations between political agency, social identity, and culturally situated modes of political representation at play in democratic process. Second, the story follows the role of

language in the production and negotiation of social relations, especially those cosmologies of assembly burgeoning at the fluid boundaries between state and civil society. Third, through the daily work of speechwriters, politicians, and cartoonists, this project illuminates the ways in which “democracy,” as a political imaginary, is mediated by arguments about how truth is represented in language, and how such arguments serve as tropes framing transnationalization and neoliberal economic reforms as driven by a moral imperative of development.

In the explorations of each of these lines of inquiry, this story intervenes into taken-for-granted readings of what constitutes democracy to show that democracy in Imerina is not so much predicated on individual informed choice and representative government, nor is it based on the models of liberal democracy bearing down on its governance structures at present. Rather, it is vernacular. It is historically contingent, its trajectory embedded in the *longue durée* of state formation and the social relations underlying that formation. It is understood, measured, negotiated, fought for, and celebrated based on the ways in which social agency comes from the creation of community or shared stances productive of publics rather than individual participation, pre-packaged bi-national initiatives or singular top-down power. Its political process relies on an economy of both tactile and symbolic resources, their availability, and their distribution. In this case, *kabary* and political cartooning forms stand as part of that market of resources and their apportionment enables and organizes participation of these publics in particular ways. Vernacular democracy may unfold locally through local modes of sociality such as oration and punditry, but it is a product of zones of contact between an accretion of agents, at home and that extend far and wide beyond the shorelines of Madagascar. In fact, Madagascar is important to those in the Western world because its story of democracy in a time of fast-paced large-scale neoliberal global exchange is also the West’s story. We are implicated in its history, its possibilities. We are closer to its shores than the map would suggest.

Consider this: “I want to run for president and I want to know what it will take to win.” In May 2001, a yogurt mogul and mayor of the capital city phoned a longtime friend and the mayor of a large east-coast city in the United States. He announced his intent to run for president and asked his friend’s help to run what would surely take him to victory – an “American-style” campaign. These two mayors had become political allies and friends when Ravalomanana visited the United States for a World Bank conference some years

before and had requested to meet with mayors of large US cities. With the news that Tana's mayor was running to unseat a president who had been in power for over twenty-five years, the US mayor enlisted the aid of his former campaign manager to pull together a campaign for Ravalomanana – from platform to strategy and vision; even speeches and gimmicks like hats, buttons, bumper stickers, and posters. The campaign materials were designed in the glitz and glamour of the US style and printed in Germany. They were secretly shipped to Imerina in containers marked for the mayor's yogurt business, TIKO, to elude the attention of any political opposition, of which they expected much. Leading up to the election, US political strategists and campaign advisors huddled with their Malagasy counterparts and the candidate in hotel rooms in the capital for nights on end, writing speeches and talking about the work of the speech: they strategized how the speech and embodied presidential style would allow this candidate to communicate not only his campaign platform but the personality to get elected. During the campaign season, and at least in part along these lines, the Americans and Malagasy worked to spin a campaign of slogans, metaphor, and speeches that would usher in a new concept of governance and a new type of person to lead Madagascar.

This political strategy involved crafting oratory that starkly contrasted – sometimes intentionally and other times not – with older genres of state address, *kabary politika*. In contrast to the encoded formality of the *kabary* style and context, the US campaign strategists argued that Ravalomanana should speak to the rural public in modest casual attire, not a suit and tie, offer a smile instead of a stern look, and shake hands and make eye contact rather than keep a recognizably respectable distance between leaders and led. They encouraged him to go by the more “personable” “MARC Ravalomanana” over “RAVALOMANANA Marc.” They impressed upon him the need to speak with a single, direct message, and to convey one image of the modern and moral man rather than to detail a concrete platform for Madagascar's future. In short, the Americans advocated that in all a candidate says and in the style he embodies the key to success is not about vision or problem-solving. It is realizing that “people do not care about the platform or whether or not they agree with you. They will elect you if they *like* you.”

The branding-through-image-and-message strategy carried Ravalomanana through a successful campaign with over fifty-five whistle

stops across the country – a record in Madagascar’s election campaign history. This branding continued even as the post-election crisis continued for seven months. The two Americans leading the campaign team shifted from trusted campaign advisors to international legal council for the presidential candidate, ultimately branding Ravalomanana as the victorious force of modernization and an international icon of good governance. They were instrumental in negotiating with the international community and diplomatically motivating its intervention.

On July 5, 2002, following a June 26 letter to Madagascar’s High Court Commission and the United Nations from United States President George W. Bush, recognizing Ravalomanana as victor, Ratsiraka took France up on its offer of asylum and fled abroad. His departure signified the end of the provisional government set up in his home province of coastal Toamasina, and left Ravalomanana as the only president in residence. In December 2002, parliamentary elections secured the support of both the country and the international community for Ravalomanana, as the president’s political party, “I Love Madagascar,” or TIM (*Tiako I’ Madagasikara*) won a majority of the seats, 125 out of 160 (BBC December 23, 2002). Gaining the all-important public endorsement of the former colonial power, France, Ravalomanana met with French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin to sign four aid agreements that would support the development of the country under the new administration.

Aside from the force, resources, and appeal of the US-style campaign that saw Marc Ravalomanana to victory, the churches played an integral role in assuring this ardent Protestant’s success in taking power and getting the support of the people (BBC January 22, 2003). Very forward with integrating his beliefs into all aspects of life, Ravalomanana held the position of Vice President of the Protestant association FJKM (*Fiangonana Jesosy Kristy I’ Madagasikara*) just prior to the election, and required the employees of his private multi-million dollar business, TIKO, to go to church and to hold prayer meetings before beginning work each morning. Involving the church in matters of the city, he had regularly consulted with church leaders concerning his policies. Many agree that without his uncompromising religious fervor and alliance with the churches, Ravalomanana would not have secured the presidency.

Coming out of Ravalomanana’s victory was a kind of national agenda centered on what he frequently referred to, often in English

(a language he speaks better than French), as his rapid and durable “development plan.” This plan fell under a single rubric of modernization with all of its handmaidens: democracy as a mask for neoliberalism; anti-corruption schemes which undermine one bureaucracy with another bureaucracy; and reproduction of class systems and class power divided according to who is considered traditional, who is a modern, and what actions are corrupt, and which reflect the moral imperative of truth through transparency. Implicated in this modernization and moralization of government and civil society has been a change in the ways the president and other leaders speak to and about the country.

Language played a key role in the crisis as the state oratorical style, *kabary politika*, became an object of the rivals’ focus. Their talk about this kind of talk emerged as a means for mediating the debate between candidates, and served as means through which voters and political pundits might continue to judge the potential of their candidates. During the crisis, speechwriters met to write *kabary* that would serve as the punch in the next day’s match for president. Ratsiraka was known as an impeccable debater through *kabary*, while Ravalomanana’s reputation was poor, to say the least. As mayor, he had been known for very quick speeches, which ran against the grain of the usually lengthy and poetic rounds of *kabary*. However, Ravalomanana’s strength was argued as his style of delivery, which many believe matched his penchant for developing the country economically: direct and transparent. As he recalled to reporters, “I’m a businessman . . . I am all about setting an agenda. Setting a time frame. Going through that agenda. One. Two. Three” (*Christian Science Monitor* 2002). Ravalomanana’s way of speaking created an enduring impression on how the public sphere unfolds daily in urban Madagascar. And as exemplary speech, it set the pace, the evaluative purview, and the potential for other ways of speaking and how that speech signaled leadership and power.

This story and the details about people’s lives and work herein point us to a semiotics of political praxis in relation to language as a mode of social material practice, an object of ideology, and an institution disciplining communicative practice within particular public social fields in emerging formations of state structures and citizen subjects. It provides an entry into various modalities of communicative collectivity and moral accountability by which the state and the discursive construction of “democracy” come to be imagined and legitimized (Gupta 1995: 392). In this process the very nature of communication

itself becomes the object of scrutiny, and so too do these social actors inhabiting its contexts. Ways of speaking read as ways of being are wrapped up in ideologies of what language is and does as an instrument of information, as well as how language functions ideologically and aesthetically as an instrument of representation and identity. Such ideologically and emotionally bound framings – in short, phenomenological framings – function socially to affect how political action is evaluated. Also, apperceptions of language and language users serve as structures that both shape and reflect political relations and participant frameworks, which enable or disable everyday political agency in the public sphere. Broadly, such a complex network of interactions links the semiotic evaluation and practices of *kabary* and cartooning performance with those of political participation; link the productive stance of these social actors – both speakers and audiences – in a dialogic with the *longue durée* of various modes of verbal art as political performance that have come before and remain active in the creation of publics substantiating civil society in Imerina (Bauman 1975); link ways of speaking as ways of being classed, religious, traditional, modern, moral, corrupt; and link oratory and cartooning as means for enacting shared intersubjective awareness of the relationship between language, politics, and morality. With this framework in mind this book follows the question of agency in political process as the possibilities for social action are articulated through modes of communicative practice mediating the emergence of a democratic postcolonial state and civil society.

To interrogate this semiosocial matrix in which agents of *kabary* political oratory and cartooning performance interact daily, this ethnography moves through the discussions, productions, and performances of *kabary politika* and *kisarisy politika* across a period of President Ravalomanana's first term in power, between 2002 and 2005. This meant looking at the generally taken-for-granted aspects of language, which also have social bearing at both the immediate and macro or institutional level. I probe, for example, how shifting syntax, registers, and contexts are at play in oratory and cartooning as literary features recontextualized to reflect notions of alliance and difference. And, in turn, the study looks to how the engagement of these very features is productive of particular kinds of roles, stances, and publics, all of which shape "the equation of performance to power" that undergird or inform local meanings of democracy (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997: 133). In this way, I reckon with *kabary* and cartooning according to

the ways in which speechwriters and cartoonists have or delimit access to particular linguistic resources fueling agentive potential (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997; Hasty 2005; Paley 2001, 2002). In this sense, *kabary* and political cartooning projects may be read as sites for ongoing negotiation of governance, civil society, political authority, and the ways circulation of political power is socially mediated.

Organization of the Study

Each of the chapters attends to particular linguistic features and the socially productive aspects of both oratory and cartooning to gauge how it is they shape and reflect ideologies and aesthetics of language and language users. I examine stylistic and structural variation in syntax, register, and context as they do the social work of reflecting and producing new kinds of publics and within them enabling certain social relations and modes of participation in the public sphere while also mediating apperceptions of verbally embodied identity and agency in language.

The political categories bounding the practice of any governance system are conditioned by specific local, sociohistorical ways of organizing people and institutions. The social realities of democracy and democratic practice in urban Imerina are contingent on the myriad social and historical forces of past, present, and pending. Such forces, as realities or as memories, determine the possibilities for transforming subject positions into political agents and speaking and writing into public and political action (Bakhtin 1981: 272; Goffman 1974; Silverstein 1998). Chapter 2 illuminates the social and political institutional configurations conditioning local meanings and models of political power motivating governing models across time. The chapter traces the linguistic and political history of Imerina, from the language engineering projects of the Merina monarchy, famous *kabary* of the queen, the incipient precolonial newspaper and political cartoons, to the linguistic revolution forged by Malagasy nationalists and the ensuing struggle toward redressing a colonial past that suppressed a rather organized civil society. Through this historiography the chapter situates political oratory and cartooning today in relation to language policy and engineering, political revolution, and issues of political agency based on alliances across governing domains and the very

arbitrary and fluid distinctions of religious, ethnic, and social class distinctions among citizen-subjects.

Chapters 3 and 4 bring the setting and daily structural and stylistic processes of *kabary* and cartoon production and interaction to the fore. The chapters outline the ways in which orators and comics understand and describe their engagement in political practice through *kabary politika* and cartooning such that they are politically authoritative and effective, and have a role in negotiating and reproducing public opinion and marketing of political ideas and national projects. In this, we come to learn what structural and stylistic aspects of performance or representation are felicitous to engage politically and persuasively.

Urban Imerina's public sphere involves a cross-section of social fields with varying publics constituting its semiosocial matrix through varying levels of social action. Following the sketch in chapters 3 and 4 of the structural qualities of *kabary politika* and political cartooning, I turn to the question of style, examining how actors in these everyday dialogic events cohere these myriad "special interest" publics or affinities constituting the public sphere. How are these publics produced and maintained? What triggers and assures their attachment as affines, imagined and/or materially assembled? Specifically, chapter 5 looks to the specific *techne* of *kabary politika* and cartooning that effectively produce or counter notions of community solidarity, the acts out of which *particular* and distinct publics are made. The *techne* of focus in chapter 5 is register shift within single *kabary*, and their metapragmatic reception by other *kabary* speakers as well as cartoonists. The role of shifting registers within single genres and the ways in which this shift is picked up and re-entextualized appears productive and counterproductive for generating the conditions cohering publics according to shared memory, beliefs, identity, or other social categories.

Today, *kabary politika*, as a context of speaking that structures state discourse and power, is based on borrowings from other registers of experience. Not only is today's *kabary politika* based in the proverbs of its traditional form, but also it includes the register of the Protestant sermon, as well as the occupational register of the international development world. It is public verbal art keyed as performance shaping and unifying public opinion and asserting local modes of rule and resistance (Bauman 1975). As a social force, it indexes the conditions under which power is organized, reproduced, legitimized, and institutionalized through a moral order predicated on the imagined collective of *fihavanana*. Incited through certain linguistic routines, this joint

experience is appropriated for use in the present to objectify and reinvigorate social imaginaries of democracy and a moral collective bound by an equally essentialized notion of community solidarity and collective consciousness.

Linguistic practice mediates commonplace classificatory struggles over categories of belonging that are negotiated and reproduced through and reflected in speech. These links between language and identity determine the status of these characterizing and counter-posing actions as politically agentive action (Bourdieu 1991: 477). Chapter 6 discerns the meta-level semiotics of patterned syntactic Whorfian “fashions of speaking” in political oratory and cartooning that are presented as semantically encoded agency, and coordinated to the ways in which these patterned practices index a person, *cum* group, and their presumed internal nature mapped onto class. Building from Edward Keenan and Elinor Ochs’ work on both formal and interactional syntax structures, respectively, I follow how these patterns of practice map class identity even at the level of syntax, bringing language and identity up for grabs in the political field (Keenan 1995; Keenan and Manorohanta 2001; Ochs 1996). *Kabary* and cartooning actors provide examples of the ways in which interactionally multivalent syntactic patterns and their multiple levels of social indexicality both reproduce and disrupt pragmatic ideologies that perpetuate the notion of speaking as an available ready-made concretized model for explaining and legitimizing social distinctions. Syntax and talk about ways of being associated with fashions of speaking inform folk notions of agentive participation, and one’s capacity to perform action that may be ratified by audiences as political and politically effective. These variations in style and context are especially evinced in the structural and stylistic aspects of political *kabary politika* such as shifting from passive constructions of verb–object–subject to agent-centered active subject–verb–object constructions, as well as lexical choice in pronouns and their equivalent verbs.

In chapter 7 I look to how speakers, writers, and audiences, *as a mode of political practice* in and of itself, argue how best truth is represented in particular language structures and styles. They all metapragmatically deploy – that is, they work through their own speech contexts to evaluate another context’s structure and its affects – as a technique to argue how the morality of the speaker is indexed, or pointed to, by the context in which a speaker chooses to speak. Talking about talk in this instance addresses some moral imperative

tied to pitting a new way of talking as “transparent” against the past political system’s style as “corrupt” in its comparison to this new ideal form of government. Transparency becomes a trope of democratic modernity and talk becomes the object of scrutiny in how transparency or “truth” is being represented. In turn, speakers become the objects of this same scrutiny by other speakers as they embody the genres they use to speak *of* the way others speak.

Political elites effectively evoke a new kind of public along with rules and roles for participating in that public’s sphere and its political process by recontextualizing what community solidarity means based on register shifts, indexically salient syntactic fashions of speaking, and contexts that determine moral stances versus those marked invisible and inaudible. The constraints determining their participation are based on their ability to answer the call tied to a particular imaginary of the past grounding their *gasyness* but equipped for today as Christians and moderns. *Kabary politika* then serves as an artifact of national language and heritage. Large-scale shifts in political and economic governance began to threaten the practice of Malagasy political oratory as a salient form of social and democratic action. As politicians changed the way they speak to fit with ways of government, and audiences accepted the change as a move toward a more moral and globalizing modernity, they began to dismantle and potentially defang *kabary* of its political efficacy. Silenced even as it speaks, *kabary*’s transformation marks the cosmopolitan modernity stratifying Imerina publics and their participants in national political process. Rules of participation across the dialogical plane of speaker and audience set expectations and deepen normative beliefs, underlying how types of participants are delineated and positioned politically. This sense of order refracts from individual judgment to affect how social relations between groups are mediated through communicative interaction, and ultimately, what the democracy and its publics can look like in urban highland Madagascar.

As time would tell, the proclaimed exemplar of so-called Third World democracy and his US-mentored policy decisions and acts of “development and progress” came to threaten the country’s sensibilities – economically, politically, culturally – and their sense of being heard. And with this came many violent and fatal protests. By March 2009, President Ravalomanana was ousted by a coup d’état and exiled.

Kabary politika oratory and political cartooning “are as infrastructural to politics and public reason as markets, associations, formal institutions, and

information networks” (Hirschkind 2006: 9, 20). And the mechanisms that render some visible and audible while others stand subordinate are embedded in the very practices that enable their becoming. What is to follow is an accumulation of views and experiences of everyday public life in which multiple but unequal publics and representatives of the state participate *through* their words in decisions about governance in a national, but also very local, context. Through both their cooperative and contesting discourses, these very different publics as well as varying representations of state governance coalesce, morph, overlap, and organize with and sometimes against to engage with the most basic of decisions to the most complex.

Note

- 1 For an account of the phenomenon of coloring revolutions, see Manning (2007).

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