CHAPTER 2

A HISTORY OF LANGUAGE AND POLITICS IN MADAGASCAR

Figure 2.1  Political Map of Madagascar

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Table 2.1  Notable kings, queens, governors, and presidents of Madagascar since 1787

King Andrianampoinimerina
1787–1810

King Radama 1
1819–1828

Queen Ranavalona 1
1828–1861

King Radama 2
1861–1867

Queen Ranavalona 2
1868–1883

Queen Ranavalona 3
1883–1896

French Colonial Period 1896–1960
1896–1905
General Joseph Gallieni, governor-general

President of the First Republic
May 1, 1959–October 11, 1972
Philibert Tsiranana (b. 1910–d. 1978)

Interim Leaders Between First and Second Republics
January–May 1970
Triumvirate (acting for Tsiranana): André Résampa (b. 1924), Jacques-Félicien Rabemananjara (b. 1913), Calvin Tsiébo (b. 1902)
October 11, 1972–February 5, 1975
Gabriel Ramanantsoa (b. 1906–d. 1979) (Head of State)
February 5–11 1975
Richard Ratsimandrava (b. 1931–d. 1975) (Head of State)
February 12–June 15, 1975
Gilles Andriamahazo (b. 1919–d. 1989) (Chairman, National Military Leadership Committee)

President of the Second Republic
June 15, 1975–March 27, 1993
Didier Ratsiraka (1st term) (b. 1936) (Chairman, Supreme Revolutionary Council to January 4, 1976)

President of the Third Republic
March 27, 1993–September 5, 1996
Albert Zafy (b. 1928)

(Continued)
Language and Politics in Madagascar

Madagascar is the fourth largest island on earth. Its population in 1994, when I first arrived, was 12 million. Today, it has nearly doubled to 20 million. It is located roughly 500 kilometers from the continent of Africa, just across the Mozambique Channel from Zimbabwe and Mozambique. It is over 10,000 kilometers from the southeast Asian island of Borneo, and yet its earliest inhabitants are as likely to have hailed from there as they did the African mainland. Evidence of this is found in the Malagasy language, which shares the same language family as other Austronesian languages in southeast Asia. Language came with the migration of people by outrigger canoe and by contact through trade networks along the northern and westernmost shores of the Indian Ocean some 2,000 years ago. Originally settled as a collection of kingdoms, Madagascar today is an approximation of a representative liberal democracy with a parliamentary system of government, an executive branch composed of the president and prime minister, and the Supreme courts and High Constitutional Court forming the judicial branch.

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Table 2.1 (Continued)

| Interim Leader Between Third and Fourth Republics |
| September 5, 1996–February 9, 1997 |
| Norbert Ratsirahonana (acting) (b. 1937?) |

| President of the Fourth Republic |
| February 9, 1997–July 2002 |
| Didier Ratsiraka (2nd term) |

| President of Madagascar |
| July 2002–March 2009 |
| Marc Ravalomanana (b. 1949) |

| Current Interim Transitional Government |
| March 2009–Andry Rajoelina |

The president is elected by direct universal suffrage for a five-year term, renewable twice. The members of the National Assembly are elected by popular vote for four-year terms. A new Constitution was drafted and ratified in 1998. The principal institutions of the Republic of Madagascar are a presidency, a parliament (National Assembly and Senate), a prime ministry and cabinet, and an independent judiciary.
As in all societies, political process in urban Imerina today is contingent on the vagaries of past states and the functionality of their bureaucracies, the social and civil organizations reflecting and shaping their authority, and the state’s material dominion over its citizenry. Mediating this history of the Malagasy state and civil society, from its oligarchies to its colonial management and postcolonial republics, is the linguistic history of these highlands of Imerina. Also mediating this are Imerina phenomenologies of history that configure the unfolding of time not as unidirectional toward the future but as memory that binds language, especially in ritual, to the past as the present. Language belongs to the ancestors and to use it is to acknowledge the past’s place in the present as a creative force, an “imagined continuity” between those of the past and those in the present (Lambek 1998: 111). Language is living history itself rather than an artifact through which the historian probes to explain the present, what continues to recede, preserves what is in the process of dissolution, and reintegrates what has been definitively prized apart (Lambek 1998: 111). It represents the Imerina additive matrix of multiple voices and alternate points of view across time that are made available for consideration, without being subordinated or silenced by others or by the passing of time, what Michael Lambek (Lambek 1998: 109) has called poiesis, borrowing from the Aristotelian concept of creativity.

In its political form, language has also served as a powerful and naturalizing instrument of state power and object of revolutionary nationalist ideology at the heart of which subjectivity and memory have been explicitly and implicitly tied and tie present to past. In this respect the history of Madagascar is at once a history of language intrinsically and explicitly connected to the political and the sacred, through the sacred authority of hasina, a manifestation of power in one who hearkens to the past to possess it in the present (Bloch 1986; Lambek 1998: 109). Throughout the book we see examples of this view of history by orators, teachers of oratory, and political cartoonists. In this chapter we follow the structural political history of language policy and revolution in shaping political process, the relation between state and civil society informing it, and the historical process urging particular language ideologies and practices in political process.

To start, this chapter begins its historiography with the introduction of particular processes and practices of literacy into Imerina society through Christian missionization by the London Missionary Society, and how kabary served as a model for one form of proselytizing, the
Protestant sermon. The chapter then turns to how literacy projects of the London Missionary Society advanced a literacy policy that shaped the development of an oligarchic bureaucracy and a corresponding class system. Following this, we look at significant colonial and post-colonial nationalist movements in which certain forms of literacy served as both instruments of resistance and objects of nationalist ideology. From this historical perspective, we will look to contemporary political processes as they are manifested in linguistic communicative practice productive of public culture in Imerina. In all, this sociopolitical and linguistic history provides a temporal context for better understanding the possibilities of democracy in today’s public sphere of urban Imerina.

The First Period of Literacy in Madagascar

Madagascar has always been recognized as a particularly cosmopolitan and literate country. In fact, today’s literacy rate, measured at 54–69 percent, is said to be near the rate of precolonial Imerina’s second period of literacy, which began in the early 1820s. As early as the fifteenth century, evidence suggests that a Malagasy vernacular was transcribed in the Arabic script. This first period of literacy was probably instituted by the Antemoro of southern Madagascar who wrote great manuscripts of historical importance known as the sorabe. The Antemoro, along with the group that preceded them, the Zafi-raminia, claim to be noble descendants of those from Mecca. As Mervyn Brown suggests in his seminal text, *A History of Madagascar* (1995: 23), it was perhaps the Antemoro or the Zafi-raminia who laid claim to providing the ruling class of even the Merina, the ethnic group who settled in highland Madagascar in the area now known as the Place of the Merina, *Imerina*. This connection to Mecca may be made evident by the sorabe script itself, but has also been noted elsewhere in the annals of Indian Ocean trade and exploration. In fact, upon his arrival in Madagascar as early as the thirteenth century, Marco Polo noted that the island’s “inhabitants follow the laws and customs of Muhamed”; later European settlers in the 1800s observed that “the Madagascar tongue, it appears, is a corruption of the Arabic” (Dahle 1885: 203). Though Arabs introduced writing to the island, it did not diffuse far from the southeast diviners and the king’s court. They did, however,
leave some Arabic etymological artifacts. *Soratra*, the word for writing, is related to the Arabic *surat*; of course, this word also occurs in Malay, and is from the same source. *Taratasy*, the Malagasy word for paper, was once the word for both paper and book; with the institution of mission schools in the 1800s, “book” became *boky*. Lastly, *sary*, glossed as “picture,” such as drawing or photograph, and used with an agglutinating prefix for “map” (*sarintany*) as well as “image” (*sarinteny*), has its roots in the Arabic *tsura* or *zura* (Dahle 1896: 214).

According to artifacts of the *sorabe*, and historical and archaeological records, the Antemoro engaged in medicine, astrology, and divination. To this day, Merina and other groups employ Antemoro diviners (*mpisikidy*) or soothsayers (*ombiasy*) to indicate favorable dates for ceremonies. The first Merina king, Andrianampoinimerina (1787–1810), even had his own Antemoro diviners and soothsayers. In fact both he and his son Radama were known to use the Arabic script of this population in their administrations. This language of the state would shift significantly at the installment of King Radama after Andrianampoinimerina’s death. The skills of literacy associated with this writing seem to be limited to the diviners themselves since Protestant missionaries who first surveyed the level of literacy upon their arrival “could not find more than six people who could write this language [using] Arabic characters” (Hayes 1923). It is unclear, however, in the historical record how extensive literacy of the *sorabe* reached outside of the prestigious circles of the *ombiasy* and *mpisikidy*, and much of the historical documentation tends to originate from Christian missionary sources whose disdain for practitioners of the *sorabe* tended to downplay or at the very least bias many of their writings.

This reportedly low literacy rate of the *sorabe* may be accounted for also by the surreptitiousness with which the Malagasy practiced the rites of the *sorabe* near foreigners (*vazaha*). In fact, protecting the *sorabe* was judged necessary for the protection of the island and its culture from feared foreign invasion. This concern was most obvious in the writings of the *sorabe* made by those magic priests who weaved spells against the French: “their method was to leave near the French fort baskets full of papers and various gifts such as eggs, earthen pots, small coffins, dugouts and oars, all covered with symbols and writing” (Brown 1995: 25). This protective magic against the French also shows that despite the influence of French Catholicism in the south at this time, the believers of the *sorabe* and users of the services of *ombiasy* and *mpisikidy* were left to their own devices by the
Catholic missionaries. Although, as missionary James Sibree notes, “French Roman Catholics had worked on the island 200 years prior” to Protestantism’s arrival in 1818 and yet “appear never to have transcribed anything other than a few prayers and catechisms in the language spoken on the coast,” this all dramatically changed upon the arrival of the London Missionary Society (Sibree 1924: 69). The written word became the instrument through which belief and identity, as well as the formation of government, were negotiated and controlled.

Second Period of Literacy

At the invitation of King Radama, king of the central highlands of Imerina, missionaries from the Wales-based London Missionary Society (LMS) arrived in Madagascar in 1818 and began proselytizing, teaching, and reducing the Malagasy language to written form in the Roman script by 1820. At the time of the arrival of the LMS, Radama already had strong economic alliances with the British because of the 1814 Treaty of Paris relinquishing control of the neighboring plantation colony of Mauritius by the French to the British. This alliance was established as Mauritius’ Governor Sir Robert Townsend Farquhar enjoyed regular shipments of slaves provided by Radama, until slavery was abolished officially in Great Britain. Continuing surreptitiously to secure slaves after the treaty, Farquhar signed a treaty with Radama recognizing him as king of Madagascar. He backed this acknowledgment with provisions of guns to aid in Radama’s mission to enlarge the army and support his imperial ventures to colonize the whole of Madagascar.

At this time, the island was controlled by multiple oligarchies in the south and north, the Sakalava being the largest and most difficult for the king to subdue. Radama looked to the literacy and technology provided by the Protestant missionaries to create a far-reaching imperial bureaucracy, while also accepting military and technical support from the British government in order to build an offense that would reach, conquer, and rule the entirety of the island beyond the central highlands. As agents of this sort, the LMS missionaries built an informal Malagasy empire through the development of literacy institutions of government such as education and establishing a standard official
language. These geopolitical goals were achieved with the help of the missionaries, even as their main goal remained to spread Protestantism. Farquhar supported the LMS financially, logistically, and diplomatically to serve as royal emissaries to Radama. British agents served in Merina government positions. For example, Hastie, who was Radama’s prime minister, ensured a steady supply of food and labor to Mauritius while also aiding Radama in negotiations with Sakalava kings. This cooperation between the British and the Merina monarchy enabled the British to urge Radama to dismantle his slave trade, a labor economy that saw four to five thousand people a year indentured into slavery through birth, battle, or at the mere whim of the king. Radama received from the British one dollar for every slave as compensation for this loss. And, after Radama signed the official treaty, the British educated a number of native youths in England as well as training and arming the king’s soldiers after “the European plan” (Ellis 1870: 7).

Under the direction of Welshmen David Jones and David Griffiths, the LMS in 1820 began to teach the Malagasy writing, reading, arithmetic, grammar, geography, and needlework of all kinds, and of course, “religious knowledge” (Sibree 1924: 197). Radama was soon pleased with his relationship with Jones (especially since he benefited from British services and resources while still managing to covertly continue his slave trade). In May 1821 Prince Ratafy, brother-in-law to the king, attended the meeting of the London Missionary Society in London. With him, he brought a letter from King Radama, which stated:

Mr. Jones, your missionary, having satisfied me that those sent out by your society have no other object than to enlighten the people by persuasion and conviction, and to discover to them the means of becoming happy; therefore, gentlemen, I request you to send me as many missionaries as you may deem proper, together with their families if you desire it, provided you also send skillful artisans to make my people workmen as well as good Christians. And I promise all the protection, safety, and respect, which the missionaries may require from my subjects . . . Saith Radama Manjaka, 1876. (Cited in Hayes 1923: 23–4)

Within just a few years, David Jones and the other Welsh missionaries following his arrival transformed Malagasy society and everyday life by introducing Christianity and Christian worship via the simultaneous introduction of literacy and schooling. From the time of the introduction
of Protestant Christianity into Madagascar up to the present day, “the progress of the gospel has been inseparably connected with the translation and study and reception of the Word of God” (Sibree 1924: 201). According to missionaries like Sibree, the only way to Christ was through the Bible, and that had to be translated into Malagasy: “No record exists . . . of any mission, whatever be its methods or history, making much real progress and becoming permanent among any people, if the Bible has not been given to them in their own vernacular” (Lovedale in Smith 1930: 13). What is more, missionaries from the LMS saw the impending effects of translating the Bible as beneficial to state and civil society construction, just as it was for the Welsh themselves:

Consider for example, the effect of translating the Bible into Welsh . . . If to-day Wales has a national system of education, a highly developed religious life, great literature, a national drama, a new quickly developed national consciousness – if all of this is true, and it is, then Wales owes it primarily to the translation of the Bible in Welsh. (Lovedale in Smith 1930: 82)

On his arrival in 1820, Jones “found no written language, no literature, no learned class”; to create them, he and the others had to first learn the language, collect vocabulary, study grammar and idioms, and “settle its orthography” (Sibree 1924: 202). Jones and the other missionaries primarily concerned themselves with learning the Malagasy language, and from there worked diligently to translate the Bible into Malagasy, write dictionaries, and operate primary schools for children recruited by royal edict (McMahon 1914: 30). The missionaries worked closely with Malagasy counterparts to construct grammars sufficient for translating the scriptures, catechisms, and hymns into Malagasy. Recalling the work of the LMS at this time, Bell McPherson Campbell explains, “we have commenced at the capital regular service in the Malagasy language . . . and we have also formed a small collection of hymns for the use of the schools and of the natives who attend the services” (Campbell 1889: 32). These services were extremely popular with nearly two to three thousand people attending Sunday services; even Radama’s band stopped playing on Sundays except for “God Save the King,” “which they look upon as a hymn” (ibid.).

David Jones and his fellow missionary David Griffiths were the first to give the Malagasy a translation of the complete Bible. Three years after their arrival, the missionaries were preaching in the language, and
in 1828, the whole Bible was completed in manuscript. What is particularly significant about the process is that many Malagasy converts learned English and then aided in the translation of the Bible into their native tongue. According to recollections in the *Gospel in Madagascar*, some of the children first taught in the schools, now begin to translate catechisms from the English language into their own, and they appear likely, in the course of time, to afford assistance in the translation of the Scriptures. Other boys are framing school-lessons in their own tongue, and are beginning to instruct the younger ones on Sundays.

(n.a. 1876: 31–2)

That religion and written language were “brought to intelligibility” in Malagasy through English licensed the Western text as exemplary (n.a. 1876: 33). The work of LMS missionaries as agents of literacy and God grounded a division of linguistic descriptive labor such that written European vernaculars could mediate between both pagan speech and holy writ (Errington 2001). What is more, that the translation techniques applied by the missionaries were rigid and often lacked relevance to the social context of Malagasy language suggests that they applied a narrow understanding of language to their literacy work and had little interest in the Malagasy oral tradition outside of its use in religious conversion (Larson 1997: 973; Raison-Jourde 1977: 639–41).

**Language Engineering**

The work of the LMS to reduce the Malagasy language to a written form was completed in the “best tradition of Western academies and universities of the eighteenth century” (Raison-Jourde 1977: 639). With only some slight changes, this written form of Malagasy has been in use for over one hundred years. King Radama’s literacy project with the LMS engineered a written form of the Malagasy language spoken in the highlands, disseminated it in schools set up by the mission, and instituted it in many other ways which ultimately led to its establishment as official Malagasy, *Malagasy ofisialy*.

When the missionaries set out to establish the Malagasy alphabet and begin transcription of Malagasy speech in 1822, King Radama was assured a role in the process; in fact, he ultimately lengthened the
process of determining the alphabet to two years. As he stated in a letter to British agent Hastie in 1822: “As to writing the language, and as it is I that is to speak it, none else is to approve or decide on the manners in which it is to be written” (Berg 1996: 44). The king’s entangled alliances with both the French and British were evidenced in his declarations concerning how the Malagasy alphabet would be written. He proclaimed that the Malagasy consonants would be written as the British wrote them in English, while the vowels would be scripted according to those of French (this decision would also resolve the problems introduced by the Welsh system, which seemed to the king to be flawed with redundancies). In this, he symbolically negotiated his alliance with these two nations. Not only was the Malagasy sound system of consonants and vowels transcribed in accord to political alignments of the time, but the Malagasy alphabet’s lack of the letters C, Q, U, W, and X was another politically symbolic gesture on the part of Radama: the king did not negotiate redundancy of competing letters in an alphabet, just as he did not negotiate the redundancy of competing kings. For sounds or phonemes accomplished by more than one letter, Radama chose one and removed the others. Radama and the LMS made their effort to fix meaning in this language engineering project in order to fix the king’s sovereignty over the entire island. Controlling the Roman-Malagasy script was one means to ensure control over his army and those who proved their loyalty to him (Berg 1996: 44). Education was another.

The period from 1821 to 1826 was the most prosperous in Madagascar in terms of educational development. The LMS established primary schools in Imerina between 1820 and 1835. It built school stations, set up a printing press, and designed a system for village preaching. Radama impelled his subjects to “mind your work, and let the children mind their instructions” but eventually instituted compulsory schooling and service (n.a. 1876: 31). School became compulsory for children in Imerina in 1821, and Radama sent ten Malagasy to Great Britain and ten to Mauritius to study English and return to teach. Nearly twelve thousand children went to school under obligation to the throne, and by 1826 four thousand students could read.

By 1826, LMS missionaries had completed their New Testament translation and readied it for printing. According to missionary records, Radama actively encouraged people to turn away from the old practices of worshipping idols, even castigating those who showed allegiance to them. For example, when the people requested from Radama a
cloth to cover their idol, he retorted, “Why surely he must be very poor if he cannot get a piece of cloth for himself. If he be a god, he can surely provide his own garments” (n.a. 1863: 31). Bambi Schieffelin’s observations about Kaluli religious conversion through literacy speak to this situation in which local people “came to question their own society and, in many cases, came to regard it as morally and technologically inferior” (Schieffelin 2000: 295). The work of the LMS intensified this inferiority as they extended the mission of Christianity to build a technologically advanced and literate Malagasy society.

The LMS mission was tenacious in its effort to stimulate technological development in the nineteenth century. Because its missionizing proceeded at a pace faster than many other such interventions by precolonial agents, social change was also rapid. Haste came with the LMS’s ardent desire to save souls, and Radama’s desire to build the technological capacity of his country and the administrative capacity of his government. He allowed the LMS to bring religion as long as it also gave him the systematic means for building his dominion at home and expanding his alliance abroad, a point we will return to later.

**Kabary as the Model for the Sermon**

The LMS schools offered courses to train graduates as preachers. To sharpen their skills as ministers, they were taught “Conduct of Public Worship,” “Sermon Composition,” and “The Great Aim of Preaching.” But teachers and students were operating with very different ideologies about public oratory, religious or otherwise. As Sibree considers:

Perhaps someone may ask, can foreigners preach and impress Malagasy congregations much in the same way as their own countrymen can do? Yes, many have done so, and still do; although we cannot thoroughly enter into native ideas and habits of thought, yet we have certain advantages from our wider culture and knowledge and our broader view of things. Some years ago, when talking with a native friend about the different merits of Malagasy and English preaching, he said: “Of course, you Europeans do not understand our inner life and mind as we do ourselves, but there is always one thing that impresses us when
you preach, and that is *your earnestness!*" I was very thankful to hear that, and to feel that our Malagasy hearers – some of them, at least – did realize that we, like that old Hebrew judge, can still say, “I have a message from God unto thee.” (Sibree 1924: 224)

But the ways that message was communicated began to shift as the LMS graduates spread the Word.

Missionaries are said to have abandoned local folklore as a vernacular equivalent for their moral message because of its strong tie to magic and ancestral worship (Haring 1992), but they did quickly discover the Malagasy knack for oratory. Using the typical style of *kabary*, Malagasy speakers would stun LMS missionaries with their ability to impress audiences for hours on end. Sibree writes extensively, for example, about a famous Malagasy minister from Andrianaivo, named Rahanamy (also known as Rainimanga), who spoke in a speech variety of which the Malagasy were quite fond. Speaking of this *kabary* style of oratory, Sibree describes the speech of Rainimanga as a

very peculiar and striking style of oratory, which was marked by large use of an antithetic arrangement of words in his sentences, piling on one contrast after another in a remarkable way. His power of using simile and proverb and illustration was really marvelous, and gave one a very high idea of the capabilities of the Malagasy language. (Sibree 1924: 222)

As Sibree and other LMS writers note, ministers attempted to organize and deliver their sermons according to the *kabary* style of the Malagasy. Though they wanted to avoid folklore and its associations with ancestor worship, their attempt to stylize sermons based on *kabary* almost assuredly involved the use of proverbs and other stylistic literary features that would provide “images” amenable to the Christian “message.” This was done so as to neither denigrate the ancestors nor continue to lift them up as sacred. To adapt the scriptures to this local audience, for example, one of the psalms was shifted to the phrasing “The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree. He shall grow like a Kings-wood” rather than “The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree. He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon” (Psalms 92:12). And by refiguring Christian messages in the style of *kabary*, missionaries believed they had begun to penetrate the Malagasy mind and moral fiber. In fact, the wealth of proverbs so commonly used in formal and informal
Malagasy discourse made them indispensable to the Mission. As Reverend Houlder writes in 1886,

No headman’s palaver at a tribal gathering, no courtier’s address in the palace, no great officer’s harangue to the assembled thousands when the Queen’s word is proclaimed, no preacher’s sermons to a Christian congregation, would be complete without them. (Houlder 1886: 45)

Clemes confirms that “even the daily speech of the people is full of proverbs and proverbial expressions, many of them ancient” (Clemes 1885: 427). Because of the ubiquity of proverbs even in informal speech, the LMS missionaries noted the ease with which proverbs could be integrated into God’s teachings, and found them “of great use in enforcing truths that would otherwise find small acceptance with their hearers” (Clemes 1885: 431). In fact, the LMS published the *Baiboly I’Andrianamponimerina* (Bible of Andrianamponimerina), which aligned certain ancestral proverbs with Christian scripture, so that potential converts could see from these commonalities the great probability of a single great Maker (see table 2.2).

Beyond proverbs, *kabary* was important for building mental images (*sarinteny*), literally pictures made with words in sermons so that the congregation might leave meetings and ruminate upon them for their meanings: “the aid of illustrations is often called in by our native

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Testament scripture</th>
<th>Ancestral proverb equivalent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Raha misy olona mangalatra . . dia hatao maty izany mpangalatra.</em> // If there is a person who steals, he will meet the death of a thief. Deuteronomy 24:7a</td>
<td><em>Ny mangalatra olona dia ataoko mahafaty.</em> // The person who steals will meet death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ny adala manao anakampo hoe: tsy misy Andriamanitra.</em> // The reckless/insane person says to himself: There is no God. Psalm 14:1*</td>
<td><em>Aza mitsambikimikimpy, ka manao Andriamanitra, tsy misy.</em> // Do not act recklessly by claiming there is no God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sambatra ny malemy; fa izy no handova ny Tany.</em> // Blessed are the weak, for they shall inherit the earth. Matthew 5:5*</td>
<td><em>Izay ny malemy fanahy tratra am-parany.</em> // The soft in character attains the ends.*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
preachers to unfold the meaning of the text, or to carry home and enforce its lessons. These illustrations vary much in their value and force, and in their correctness and beauty” (Sibree 1924: 232). Ministers of the LMS began to construct their own sermons to contain the same level of metaphor and antithetical statements as their Malagasy counterparts, carefully aligning the teachings of the ancestors to those of the Bible, which eased conversions significantly.

In this economy of linguistically mediated exchange between proverbs and scripture, the LMS missionaries also became keen to use the style of Malagasy oratory, *kabary*. This required the LMS’s heavy reliance on Malagasy Christian converts. Pier Larson speaks to this critical dependency: “the Malagasy conversion inverted the relationship of intellectual–cultural constraint that often characterizes recent history and theory of colonial culture” (1997: 970). In what Larson calls the “hegemony of a subaltern intellectual discourse,” the LMS missionaries were obliged to transform their language and shift their theology to the way Malagasy made sense of Christianity (1997: 970). In turn, as the LMS missionaries adapted their presentation of Christianity to a Malagasy vernacular, the politically connected Malagasy elite studying in the LMS schools followed the seminary courses designed by the LMS. This give and take of variation in style, as in lessons, sermons, and other literacy activities tied to religious training, structured and mechanized the “different language ideologies, practices, and interpretive procedures that arose and were elaborated in the contact situation” (Schieffelin 2000: 296–7).

The philosophy and practice of the whole of the London Missionary Society then introduced into everyday life new forms and sources of knowledge from beyond the island in ways that changed Malagasy social and linguistic structure and style. Though these new forms and sources of knowledge were adopted into a vernacular structure of learning and conversion, literacy projects per the LMS and King Radama became the discursive means for both social and religious salvation. The projects of writing and delivering sermons, translating the words of the ancestors into the Word of God, even attending schools that institutionalized and reproduced this inadvertently (or deliberately) encouraged the Malagasy to adopt a new belief system as they experienced this new message in an oratorical vernacular to which they were accustomed. Missionaries influenced the ways in which the language worked in everyday practice. That is, they transformed the Malagasy language ideologies that mediated communicative
interaction between people and their institutions – in their schools and their councils – and this positioned these missionaries as agents not only to Christ but, ultimately, as agents of the state.

Expanding the Reach of the Bureaucratic State through Literacy and Class System

Though Radama was baptized Christian and forced upon his people formalized education in Mission schools and religious instruction, “Radama was known by many missionaries to have personally no interest in Christianity except as it was a means of bringing instructors in the useful arts to his country” (Campbell 1889: 39). These arts were a bureaucratic means for Radama to see to fruition his father’s desire for absolute sovereignty, recalled in King Andrianampoinimerina’s famous proclamation, “The sea will be the boundary of my rice field.” In fact, as McMahon, once an archdeacon of Imerina, notes, this connection between the LMS and the state was conflated to the extent that “the timid people like the Malagasy, there was always the danger of their thinking the Christian religion as part of their ‘government service,’ when officials occupied themselves with Church matters” (1914: 76). This relationship was also enabled linguistically, as the LMS literacy project contributed to what Radama saw as a necessary instrument in governing. Literacy served to establish a language of the state as well as shift categories of class status and power of Radama’s growing population of subjects.

Gerald Berg’s history of Radama’s kingdom details the linguistic means the king used to bureaucratize his control. With the advent of the Mission schools, Radama gradually replaced the Arabico-Malagasy used by his and his father’s government with Malagasy written in Roman script. Antemoro scribes in service to the court were gradually replaced with a new scribal elite trained by the LMS (Berg 1996: 43). The Roman script then could be used by generals in the field to communicate with the king but remain unintelligible to any opposition. This script guarded the confidential operations of the throne, and knowledge of it was heavily controlled by the king himself. In short, “Roman script became the new tool of government” (Berg 1996: 44), on the one hand because of the efficiency and ease with which students of the LMS schools could learn it, which increased
the number of recruits available to serve in Radama’s administration. On the other hand, the king controlled this knowledge and could arbitrarily deploy it as a device for his administration, enabling the participation and service of some subjects while barring those who were a threat to his expansion project by keeping them illiterate. The education program in the LMS schools had a great impact on the success of the kingdom, and in this respect was the primary means for feeding Radama’s system of royal service, known as *fanamboana*. Merina close to the capital benefited from schooling which also prepared them to serve the sovereign and the state. Within fifteen years, rapid advances in linguistic science and literacy empowered David Jones’ students, who took on high state and military positions. In fact, this educated elite set the stage for a bureaucratic community, and social advancement within this community became absolutely attached to knowledge of Roman script. In short, Radama used writing and his literate charges to affect the obedience and submission from tribes outside the highlands as well as reform the class status system determining royal service.

**Determining Class Status through Literacy**

The *fanamboana* system of labor *corvée* that Radama inherited from his father certainly enabled defensive forces and infrastructure necessary for military coercion, administrative efficiency, and fortifying the labor system. And though the missionaries viewed the *fanamboana* system as enslaving nearly every Malagasy in service to a divine king, their own work in producing an elite and bureaucratic free class perpetuated this system of classed labor. It also reshaped the world of power or *hasina* ideology undergirding this system of class and royal service, that power which comes not from human agency but from ancestral beneficence, materially realized through acts of blessings to and from the king. As Gerald Berg explains, “for obedient Merina, politics consisted of nothing more and nothing less than the lifelong quest to position oneself favourably in that sacred stream as close as possible to ancestors and then to reap the material benefits of that cherished association” (Berg 1996: 29). Building an educated class of scribal elites who were able to communicate written Malagasy and English provided both the bureaucratic mechanisms as well as means to shift the practical
outcomes of *hasina* ideology; these technologies of governance gave Radama his foothold across the highlands, beyond that which he had secured during his initial conquests and through a growing military defense.

As access to literacy was dependent upon class status, which was really a function of one’s proximity to *hasina* offerings to the throne, the king could, at his whim, reform the status system to shift royal will and group privilege. According to Berg’s (1996) accounts, loyal subjects to the king could have their status shifted from royal slaves (*andevo*) to nobles (*andriana*), which allowed them the chance to learn to read and write in service to the state. Radama declared in 1823 that all new grants of such noble privilege would be conferred solely upon those who learned to read, write, and transact business for the king as “secretaries” (Berg 1996: 34). In short, the central theme undergirding the status system and royal service to the kingdom during Radama’s reign was that one could increase one’s status through literacy, a form of *hasina* or blessing and offering to the divine king. With this status reform measure, rather than an abstract process represented by “rules” of kinship or descent, class status was determined by monarchs such as Radama, who would *create* descent and “made law by virtue of their skill in obtaining and maintaining power” (Berg 1996: 31). In turn, the king could also reverse the status of the noble if he felt threatened, precluding the possibilities for them to become literate. At the behest of the king, hundreds of thousands of landowning families between 1780 and 1830 lost their status when Radama altered the symbols of *hasina* power. In turn, royal servants who were diligent in their loyalty to the king were granted the rights to offer *hasina* directly to the king, which they did by learning the Roman-Malagasy script in aid to his expansion. With this literacy, they were promoted to higher status. This continued until the French colonized Madagascar and attempted to integrate what appeared as a fixed system into their own bureaucracy.

In this and the many cases in which Radama reevaluated the status of his subjects, we come to understand the historical narrative arbitrarily shaping the same class categories reckoned with and negotiated on a daily basis today in highland Madagascar and across the island. What is more, historically, as we see from Radama’s language engineering project, class and ethnic distinctions of this sort have played a role as normalized categories for defining and negotiating social relations that extend in the arena of politics. So too, politics, as constituted through
such communicative practices as linguistic interaction, has come to be regulated by notions of how one should and should not speak. Standards of grammar and dialect, pronoun, even verb usage, framing in reported speech, code-switching, and levels of literacy have come to serve as stratified indicators of statused political practice. And, these standards both iconically essentialize groups while also serving as modes of power and strategic negotiating in competitive politics (Irvine and Gal 2000). We see this in the circulation of political discourses today, which have reinvigorated since the victory of Marc Ravalomanana an entire precolonial remnant class structure. Indexed and iconicized in the register of the political elite’s speech, the history of Merina class politics, and therefore notions of a political public and its elite today, involves more than application of fixed laws of kinship and descent.

By treating Malagasy language “scientifically,” the linguistic efforts of the LMS indirectly remodeled Merina society at the level of symbolic representations and shifted the political and cultural valence of this oral tradition even as it vernacularized a written tradition. They did so primarily through codification of the language into lexical, grammatical, and semantic categories, which set the stage for conflict between spoken Malagasy, and a unified, purified, text-centered Malagasy now normalized and institutionalized in dictionaries, classrooms, and used for everyday affairs of the state. Highland Merina came to conform to current standards of linguistic prescription introduced by the missionaries’ literacy project, which eventually made way for a “purified” Malagasy language (Haring 1992: 8). Print media, a prescribed standard, and an elite group who spoke that standard further enabled this idea of a pure Malagasy that seemed to be always already there. As Errington notes in his review of this colonial linguistic history,

Print-mediated norms, licensed by the royal center, could be internalized by a newly literate Merina elite in the absence of a colonial regime. However, the emergence of those norms appeared to have exerted broadly analogous forces, creating inequality between varieties of the Merina language, class-like links to royal power, and the abstraction of linguistic conventions from the give and take of everyday life. (Errington 2001: 27)

Malagasy ofisialy is also known as the Merina dialect because it is most widely spoken in Imerina; however, more often Malagasy ofisialy
today is associated with rural Imerina and Betsileo areas bordering Imerina, as well as speech by state agents. Because of this inculcation of language as a matter of state development and royal service, the acrolect (or high dialect) of Malagasy remains associated with the Merina classes historically known as the free commoners (hova) and noble classes (andriana), two categories arbitrarily populated according to both birthright and merit gained from service to the king. Today, though this class status related to a high-dialect speaker is still very much in play, it is implicit; rather, education, proximity in occupation to institutions of the state, and economic capital stand in proxy for class differences. The linguistic standard is upheld and valorized against other forms through state and civil society institutions such as schools and heritage organizations. Those best known to preserve and subscribe to the standard are teachers of kabary or animators of its style. The complex role of literacy in relationship to status and the state will be discussed more thoroughly in an ethnographic context in chapter 6.

The Death of King Radama and the “Dark Ages” of Literacy

In 1828 Radama I died and was succeeded to the throne by one of his wives, Ranavalona. This succession saw not only the deaths of all family members competing for the throne, but also the end of the work of the LMS. The queen recognized both blood family and the proselytizing of the LMS as threats to national heritage and to her own security as leader of a place where “the ruling sovereign [had always been] called the visible God” (Ellis 1870: 29). Ranavalona’s government believed that the missionaries were only staying to undermine the security of the divine kingship and the belief system informing it, and commanded them to leave (Lovett 1899). At three famous kabary in 1835, 1849, and 1857, Ranavalona ordered the work of the LMS mission to cease. She forced the closure of schools and banned all Christians and Christian practices. The LMS missionaries were expelled and several Malagasy Christians were martyred. Baptism and communion were prohibited and masters forbidden to allow descendants of slaves to learn to read. Eventually the Bible and all texts that came off the LMS presses were banned and burned.
Following the first famous *kabary* of the queen in 1835, Reverend Griffiths offered his words of farewell to the believers on the island. He spoke of the conditions of power of his religion much as one would speak to the powers of the *tangena* ordeal, the Merina monarchy’s judicial test of innocence. The *tangena* ordeal involved drinking a poison potion. If the accused was innocent, he would be protected from the poison and escape injury or death. If, however, he was guilty, the poison would kill him. Nearly one in ten Malagasy had partaken of its drink and nearly half had died. Investing the power of his religion in the symbolism of the written Word, Griffiths held up a copy of the New Testament and proclaimed:

> You know, my friends, I have taught you that this is the Word of God; but your Queen says it is only the word of man, and she will destroy it; and if it is really as she says, no doubt she will be able to put it down. But if, as you believe this is really the Book of Him who said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My Word shall not pass away,” then all that Ranavalona can do will not destroy it, and it will live and grow. (Sibree 1924: 205–6)

The unintended backlash against Ranavalona’s persecution of tens of thousands of Christians was foreshadowed in the message of Griffiths. This persecution was meant to rid the Malagasy religious and political systems of threats but had the unintended consequence of galvanizing a public that was now barred from practicing a religion that had become a marker of their Malagasy identity. This only energized believers and encouraged them to continue the work of the LMS; missionaries were said to have gathered many boxes of Bibles, Testaments, hymn books, catechisms, and tracts and buried them in the ground; for this, missionaries report in texts such as *The Gospel in Madagascar* that “for three hundred miles round the capital endeavors were made to trace the books and tracts . . . and copies of Scriptures were secretly circulated, some even walking over 100 miles to secure copies” (n.a. 1863). According to Sibree’s account, more people learned to read and write Malagasy during the LMS hiatus from 1838 until 1862 than did during the time of the LMS’s work from 1818 until its final exodus in 1838. Sibree recalls this in his historiography of the LMS in Madagascar:

> The missionaries had to leave the island, but they left with their people the complete Word of God to be their comfort and support during
the long period of persecution and repression . . . In a comparatively short time they reduced the language to a written form, translated the whole Bible . . . and were able to leave it complete with their people, that little band of about 200 people . . . so that when the mission continued again in 1862, the 200 was 2,000. (Sibree 1924: 203–4)

After the death of Ranavalona I in 1861, her successor Radama II invited the LMS back into the country, proclaiming just hours after his accession that every man was at liberty to worship as he deemed best (Lovett 1899: 354). Within weeks of Radama II’s kabary, clergy of the LMS returned to the country to reestablish the LMS and new printing presses that would turn out 10,600 copies of the New Testament and portions of the Old Testament in Malagasy. Schools were reopened immediately and new missionaries, Reverends Ellis and James Sibree, began plans for churches to be built on the spots where Christians were martyred. Many of the spires jutting from Antananarivo’s skyline today are testament to this historical project on the return of the LMS.

The LMS survived several more queens following the strangling to death of Radama II, as well as Britain’s quick swap of Madagascar for Zanzibar with the French in 1895. The LMS may have brought the gospel to the Malagasy, but it also served to solidify a bureaucratic base from which Radama could reign as sole monarch and Britain could assure its place in that area of the Indian Ocean. The techniques of governmentality inadvertently enabled by British agents and the LMS set in motion a system of class distinctions that would play out in the colonial period as a means for French control of the native population to their political and economic advantage, while also shaping the role of literacy and educational institutions in Madagascar’s postcolonial history.

**Language-Mediated Nationalist Insurgencies during French Colonization, 1895**

With colonization by the French came not only the institutionalization of what was a seemingly fluid and arbitrary precolonial class system, but also repression of kabary as a form of state address. French was made the official language in educational and public institutions. Other
Malagasy written traditions were suppressed through either censorship or closure of presses and publication houses. Public displays, performances, and print media in the Malagasy language were banned, effectively effacing “every reminder that Madagascar had once been an independent nation,” including that associated with a tradition of writing in the indigenous language” (Adejunmobi 1994: 3). This banning and censorship were part of France’s policy of direct rule, but were also due to rebellions by Malagasy secret societies in the early days of colonization. In fact, even as Radama and the LMS instituted literacy programs for the sake of bureaucratic expansion, most of Madagascar continued to function as a primarily oral society during the spread of written literacy in Imerina (Haring 1992: 7–8). Such knowledge of proverbs and kabary served well many of the colonialist revolts, to include the covert 1907 menalamba revolt, the work of secret societies, as well as the famous insurrection of March 29, 1947. The first two were radical movements at the turn of the century that came to give future movements their nationalist character. Controls imposed by the French, as well as the fact that people in Imerina were already finding deft and subtle ways to communicate without threatening the sensitive and unstable monarchy, set the stage for a long history of covert modes of public communicative performance.

One example of this covert public discourse was the traveling variety show known as hiragasy, performed by troupes mostly from rural Imerina. During precolonial times these troupes were in service to the Merina monarchy as intermediaries with rural communities. During the colonial era they constituted a strong voice for their rural communities’ protests and were instrumental in communicating that protest covertly in ways that unified their audiences across Imerina (Edqvist 1997). These singers and musicians, orators and dancers were able to avoid suppression between 1896 and 1957, the period during which the French prohibited any public performances or speeches in the language of Malagasy except for entertainment purposes. Hiragasy groups were allowed to perform as entertainers, but were really up to what they always had been known for, the arts of political resistance. In their rhapsodic performances full of song, dance, and story, they deployed a mix of slang, metaphor, word play, and parody of kabary (see table 2.3). These stylistic features eluded colonial rulers and enabled hiragasy groups to coordinate major revolts across rural communities otherwise very disconnected.

40 Language and Politics in Madagascar
In urban Imerina another movement turned to covert print media to communicate its message of protest against colonialism. Of particular interest are secret societies that instilled a sense of national identity in Malagasy, despite ethnic, racial, and religious differences. Secret societies presaged the kind of rebellions that would follow early opposition to colonialism and set the stage for movements leading to independence. Through these secret societies the elite intelligentsia held meetings, formed unions and political organizations, and transformed Protestant parishes into hotbeds of subversion; the members of these parishes and those educated in the LMS school systems of the past gave the movement a ready-made communications network (Covell 1987: 23). This subversive resistance by educated elites was enabled by their shared language and class status. Though these organizations were limited at first to freemen (hova) and nobles (andriana), eventually this limitation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hiragasy</th>
<th>Malagasy</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atsa</td>
<td>Hena</td>
<td>Meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azaika?</td>
<td>Aiza?</td>
<td>Where?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bafakalary</td>
<td>Afa-baraka</td>
<td>Dishonor; embarrassment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bezambe</td>
<td>Lehibe</td>
<td>Large; big</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihana</td>
<td>Sakafo</td>
<td>Meal; food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bomatra</td>
<td>Fiara</td>
<td>Auto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dasy</td>
<td>Vady</td>
<td>Spouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falattra</td>
<td>Adala</td>
<td>Foolish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kandra</td>
<td>Ratsy</td>
<td>Bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kifa</td>
<td>Maty</td>
<td>Deceased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilira</td>
<td>Vola</td>
<td>Money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levoma</td>
<td>Veloma</td>
<td>Goodbye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maja</td>
<td>Vary</td>
<td>Rice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netra</td>
<td>Noana</td>
<td>Hungry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngorony</td>
<td>Rongony</td>
<td>Marijuana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rima</td>
<td>Hira</td>
<td>Song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanjaha</td>
<td>Vazaha</td>
<td>Foreigner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vasony</td>
<td>Sakaiza/Sipa</td>
<td>Girl/boyfriend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.3  List of slang terms used in contemporary *hiragasy* performances

Excerpts from Mauro and Raholiarisoa (2000: 146).
to certain classes became an unrealistic rule of membership. An organization appealing to a larger Malagasy audience was formed in 1912 with the expressed purpose of expanding participation in a nationalist movement. This society came to be known as the VVS, the *Vy, Vato, Sakelika* (Steel, Stone, Pillar). The VVS attempted to publish articles asserting nationalist aspirations at a time when censorship was casually enforced by the colonial administration; however, with the VVS and other secret societies thwarting the power of the government, thus abusing the “liberalism of the current regime,” this was short-lived (Rabearimanana 1980: 45). The French government instituted a program in 1901 for censoring the Malagasy press, administered from the Bureau of Indigenous Press, an office of the Bureau of Public Affairs, “so that it did not enjoy the same status and equal freedom with the French language press (Adejunmobi 1994: 3). It also instituted a series of laws concerning print and freedom of assembly. These *indigénat* laws included

pre-publication censorship of newspapers in languages other than French that included a blanket interdiction of all discussions of local politics; and the banning of meetings other than family and traditional gatherings. In general, any activity likely to have a “disturbing” effect on public opinion was forbidden. (Covell 1987: 23)

Such bans on liberty of the press ultimately forced the closure of five Malagasy newspapers, including *Teny Soa*, Madagascar’s first (1866). *Teny Soa*, first started by the LMS Mission in 1866, published the ideals of the VVS, despite the mission’s general avoidance of all things political at that time. These were the first closures since Queen Ranavalona shut down the publications of the LMS, and the very first prohibition of a national mass media newspaper press. In addition, schools were taught only in French and any school using oral or written Malagasy was shut down (Bemananjara and Ramamonjisoa 1985: 452).

Even without a free press or liberty to assemble, both this literary movement and the song and dance of *hiragasy* connected otherwise disparate communities of peoples in common purpose. This combination of literature and performance, backed by numerous community revolts, created “audiences” who shared the knowledge needed to read messages in their covert codes; and in this shared knowledge an inchoate sense of a *national Malagasy* community burgeoned. With a flourishing nationalist ideology centered mainly in the urban and learned classes,
a social imaginary of “Malagasy” arose at the turn of the century, for perhaps the first time. Alongside this community arose a language ideology that linked a common identity with both colonial and post-colonial resistance movements. The imprisonment of VVS members based on accusations that they plotted an uprising only galvanized and enabled a nationalist-driven politics in and with the shared language of Malagasy. What is more, Malagasy flourished as an object of nationalist ideology when the simple fact of writing in the Malagasy language inevitably identified one as anti-French (Adejunmobi 1994: 4–5). The poetry of Ny Avana, which mourned a nation in bondage, for example, was composed during this period.

By 1922 the press is said to have recovered its vitality, albeit under strict conditions of language choice (Rabearimanana 1980, 46). Most news articles were written in French, though articles written in Malagasy deemed benign by the government could be censored by the political press bureau and then published. With the rise of the popular front in the 1930s, the Malagasy press pushed the colonial government to form all-Malagasy or bilingual papers, of which several emerged by 1939: *Mongo* (The Oppressed, 1937), *Ny Fandrosoam-Baovao* (The New Progressive, 1927), and *Feon’ny Vahoaka* (The Voice of the People, April 1939–40). But by the end of 1939 the government reinstituted through a decree of August 27 preventative controls on printed media of all types in the interest of national defense. With this, the press was again reduced to silence (Rabearimanana 1980: 47). Not until negotiations following World War II and the subsequent insurrection of 1947 did the French government begin to discuss liberalizing the press as a step toward independence.

### Madagascar’s First Republic

Beginning with the 1947 rebellion, a tenacious nationalist battle was waged against the colonial regime, which had promised the country independence in exchange for its service to the French during World War II. Following the 1947 rebellion, political life in Madagascar disintegrated as the state inhibited any attempts at organization. This suppression disallowed any potential Malagasy leaders to shine, and paved the way for the French National Assembly’s impromptu and poorly planned program for handing over the country at independ-
ence. Though the colonial administration had devoted some development monies to building village-level administrative support since 1947, it was not until the passing of the *loi cadre* in 1956 that the French administration was forced to take steps toward establishing an acceptable Malagasy-led regime (Covell 1987: 30). The French turned not to the intelligentsia of the Merina highlands but to a coastal electoral district deputy, Philibert Tsiranana. Perhaps this choice was due to Tsiranana’s intellect, ambition, and superior performance in the Groupe d’Etudes Communiste; however, it is likely he did not threaten French interests, evidenced for example when he denounced the powerful student organizations forming in the capital as too nationalist and too Merina. What is more, Tsiranana was not of the former pre-colonial Merina elite, whose power, at least in theory and in memory, was most affected by the colonial takeover in 1895. In short, he was positioned to serve as leader to a classic “neocolonial regime in which an elite, selected and prepared by the departing colonial power, moves into government positions, exchanging its protection of the interests of the former colonial power for that power’s protection of its own position” (Covell 1987: 29). In May 1959 Tsiranana became Madagascar’s *de facto* first president.

**Class Struggle, Language, and Political Resistance within the Nationalist Movements of Postcolonial Madagascar**

Developing a state in which the essentials of French economic, political, and linguistic presence would be maintained involved a series of agreements signed by France and Madagascar in April 1960. The four most important agreements concerned defense, foreign relations, economics, and education (Covell 1987: 33). These agreements would eventually become the rallying point for nationalists demanding Tsiranana’s removal, leading to the downfall of the First Republic. Education policy was perhaps most important across the island and was to become the main issue fueling the populist uprising of the early 1970s. The education system continued to be modeled on the French system with French financing, professorships, and standards for matriculation. These standards may have been made to legitimize the education system of Madagascar outside its own boundaries, but more so, it
assured that all Malagasy elites would continue to be francophone and educated in the spirit of French culture and values, with a considerable knowledge of French history and politics (Covell 1987). In fact, some of my research participants who were young students at the time recalled that history courses in middle and high school began with “our ancestors, the Gauls.”

These cooperative agreements put into place ways and means for strong military alliances between the Malagasy and French. They included French subsidies, access to ports, and maintenance of the Antsiranana (Diego) base in northern Madagascar. Tsiranana’s regime found this partnership helpful in preventing communist subversion and Chinese expansionism. Madagascar’s cooperation with France in foreign and economic matters padded the pockets of the coastal politicians who were introduced into matters of government by their French colonial allies. Madagascar continued to participate economically in the franc zone, which eased the way for continued business by French companies post-independence.

The political and economic system of Tsiranana’s administration enabled the formation of a privileged class that blurred the Merina/Coastal division among the elite. This new-money elite garnered the educational benefits once limited to the highland elite in the capital city as foreign domination of economic policy and political posts continued. Aside from the benefits that Tsiranana, his political party the Social Democrat Party (PSD), and Malagasy civil servants reaped from corruption, these policies did not enrich the lives of Malagasy. The agreements ushered in monopolies by large French companies and Indian and Chinese communities that controlled distribution. By the late 1960s, production of rice and cash crops stagnated, importation of rice became necessary, unemployment rose, and starvation ensued in the rural south, where a drought exacerbated the effects of economic decline. With degradation of the rural agricultural economy came a huge increase in population in the capital, mostly descendants of slaves, who were unemployed and extremely poor (Ravaloson and Zafy 1994: 35). Studies estimate that 10 percent of the population, both European and Malagasy, consumed 80 percent of the total income of the island, and that real income of both rural and urban populations declined by as much as 30 percent during the First Republic (Covell 1987; Rakoto 1969; Rasolo 1984). This pauperization on a large scale resulted in a strong black market at first, but it eventually led to strikes across the island.
With these protests, intellectuals, mostly from the university, had let their dissent be heard through articles in newspapers. The press was strong, and included for the first time biting political cartoons filling the entire front page of the several dailies circulated in the city (see figure 2.2). Not much is known about cartoonists themselves but their style strongly influenced cartoonists of today. Much as it is today, the subject of the cartoons was often corruption. To show this

Figure 2.2  A 1972 political cartoon in the popular and controversial Gazety Hehy. As this example attests, most political cartoons filled the entire front page of newspapers at that time and most were quite critical of the government. In this cartoon the “doctor of elections” is “fixing” the results of the vote.
Source: Reproduced by permission of Foiben’ny Arisivam-Pirenena Malagasy.
corruption within an overall focus on educational opportunity and nationalism, the cartoons then pointed out the exclusion of those outside the Tsiranana/French system, the benefits of this foreign domination, and the construction of an edifice of privilege from which they were excluded (Covell 1987: 35). From this incipient radical movement in the university, research centers of the capital, and strikes in the rural south and urban highlands came the nationalist movements of 1971. Student-led organizations and political parties that attracted the interests of both the intelligentsia and the proletariat developed a critique of the government that emphasized educational reform, class struggle, generational conflict, opposition to imperialism, and Third World solidarity. The student-led organizations held teach-ins and seminars on how to strive for a fair education system. But, as they struggled to mobilize their movement, military and paramilitary forces were always at the ready to suppress them. A scholar at the University of Antananarivo who was a secondary student during Tsiranana’s regime, Irene Rabenoro, recalls the lead-up to what was to become a struggle toward Madagascar’s “second independence”:

In ’71 there were officially eighty people dead because they revolted against the regime, mainly in the south of Madagascar, because they were starving. You know the south is very dry, and from time to time, there is a famine and people starving. You know, they were really very oppressed. Officially it was said there were eighty dead, but really there were three thousand dead during this depression. So those who did not die, but who had revolted against the regime, were arrested and put in jail on Nosy Lava, a place where you go to die. (Interview with Irene Rabenoro, October 12, 2003)

To deal with the problem of obfuscating authorities, the coalition turned to the precolonial style of political literary writings and to a group known for its strength in organizing. This group was ZWAM (Young “Western” Slaves of Madagascar or Zatovo Western Andevo l’Madagasikara). ZWAM was composed mainly of a large group of struggling urban unemployed youth considered to be descendants of slaves, the landless lower class in the precolonial Madagascar Merina class system. This group represented a proletarian stronghold in the ghetto of Isotry in downtown Tana, and they modeled themselves on characters in Clint Eastwood spaghetti westerns popular at that time (hence the reference to “western” in their title). Many were school dropouts due to the oppressive compulsory examination standards imposed by
the French system and were thought to be nothing more than petty thieves. However, they were extremely organized, and they openly criticized the education system of Tsiranana’s Republic. As spokesman of the movement under the auspices of his political party, the MFM, *Mpitolona ho amin’ny Fanjakan’ny Madinika* (The party of militants for the power of the proletariat), Rakotonirina Manandafy politicized ZWAM and brought it from the streets of Isotry to the front of the meetinghouse. In their politicized form they were reincarnated as ZOAM, “the unemployed youth of the capital of Madagascar” (*Zatovo Oriam’asa Anivon’ny Madagasikara*). ZOAM became extremely active in organizing meetings preceding the May 1972 socialist revolution.

Together with street organizers like ZOAM, the intelligentsia published public arguments in a semi-clandestine journal called *Ny Andry* (The Pillar), and their attempts to give political content to the activities of this proletariat group were a crucial element in the creation of the coalition that made the May 1972 uprising (*Althabe* 1969; *Bouillon* 1973). Coupling the public voice of *Ny Andry* with their ability to organize and rally support from across social, political, and economic class lines, ZOAM mobilized a loose coalition of groups and created an argot known as *zomaka*. This lexicon would become an indispensable tool for communicating between diverse groups that came together in the “movement” against the administration. This widely circulated linguistic argot helped spread the word of the struggle but also lent another characteristic of commonality to their nationwide movement, this time in defining a new public in language and context. As a mode of political resistance and material evidence of solidarity, ZOAM’s covert lexicon was secret to non-members, accomplishing what *hiragasy* performers had been doing for a long time: word play for the sake of political resistance (table 2.4).

As table 2.4 shows, ZOAM created a slang that Malagasy police and paramilitary forces would not understand, allowing for secret planning meetings right under their noses. This argot became the legacy of ZOAM and the grassroots nationalist movement to oust Tsiranana and the French presence. Through the success of the May movement and the historical narrative that persists today to frame it as a class struggle, the *zomaka* lexicon of ZOAM endures as an index of class, identity, and continued class struggle.

On May 13, 1972, after much political unrest – arrests, burning of the police headquarters at the Hotel de Ville in Tana’s city center, and threats from the president against his own people – Tsiranana stepped
Table 2.4  List of slang terms initiated by ZOAM in the 1970s to elude law enforcement and expand their movement through a secret lexicon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ZOAM Zomaka</th>
<th>Malagasy</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Kaozy, Manja, Milay, Masaka</td>
<td>Ekena, tsara</td>
<td>Good; well; <em>Masaka</em> glosses in official Malagasy as ripe or ready and in this case is a derogatory term often used to refer to women by men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Tsy bonne</td>
<td>Tsy tsara</td>
<td>No good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaozy dia raozy</td>
<td>Tsaratsara rehetra</td>
<td>Everything is good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Midegany, ‘midegà</td>
<td>Sakaisa</td>
<td>Boy/girlfriend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon-tiana, namana, sipa, joba, bera, pawa, kofa, bokaka</td>
<td>Sakaisa</td>
<td>Boy/girlfriend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ögany, ösika, ‘pra Kôfy</td>
<td>Polisy</td>
<td>Policeman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ôgany, ôsika, ‘pra</td>
<td>Polisy</td>
<td>Policeman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Bódegany Play, play-bany</td>
<td>Zandary</td>
<td>Paramilitary forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play, play-bany</td>
<td>Ngetroka (adj.); mpangoron-karena</td>
<td>Bourgeoisie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demi-play, demi-pl</td>
<td>Ngetrokakely; mpangoron-karena kely</td>
<td>Petite bourgeoisie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Kala, ‘kala be</td>
<td>Mpangoron-karena; kilemaina (cripple)</td>
<td>A rich person; also a handicapped person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandy</td>
<td>Avy ny Chef de Bandy, Ratsiraka</td>
<td>Group (of youth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Angaredona Totohondry</td>
<td>Totohondry</td>
<td>Street fighting between rival gangs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lasso</td>
<td>Olona izay miteny mahitsy</td>
<td>Someone who picks pockets or steals (an influence from the Westerns film genre)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotaka</td>
<td>Firotahana</td>
<td>Protest event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandrotaka, rotahana, voarotaka</td>
<td>Mpanao fihetsiketsehana; mpirotaka</td>
<td>To protest or participate in a protest event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baomanga, baomany</td>
<td>Andevo</td>
<td>Descendants of slaves; <em>Baomanga</em> is literally a sweet potato</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
down from office. From 1972 to 1975 Madagascar was controlled by a military government, which was led by General Ramanantsoa. In 1972 Ramanantsoa tried to control ZOAM by offering jobs to its most vocal members, but it became too difficult with nearly one hundred thousand per year entering the workforce in the capital region. Emerging from this new government effort to compensate for General Ramanantsoa’s lack of political savvy, and to address domestic policy reforms in education and unemployment, was Minister of Interior Colonel Richard Ratsimandrava.

Ratsimandrava was appointed by Ramanantsoa to address changes in policy in response to the aspirations of ZOAM, the students, and the workers of the movement. Having once served under Tsiranana as head of the gendarme, Ratsimandrava had taken part in the repression of the urban uprisings between 1971 and 1972. For this reason he had to overcome his unpopularity across the island, and he did so by targeting rural and poor urban communities. “He traveled extensively over the island talking and listening to the peasants while elaborating a radical, almost revolutionary, reform programme” (Brown 1995: 323). His reforms would bring jobs to the urban unemployed and restore the fokonolona, or local-level village councils, in which representatives would be directly elected rather than appointed. This reform drew intellectuals and workers of the movement to his socialist and participatory and representative democracy, but threatened the

Table 2.4 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ZOAM Zomaka</th>
<th>Malagasy</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parotsa, potsapa,</td>
<td>Vola</td>
<td>Money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>firotsaka, sôsy,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drala, dôlaka,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parata</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Pi</td>
<td>Toaka</td>
<td>Alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maina, daina</td>
<td>Rongony</td>
<td>Marijuana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Revy</td>
<td>Rongony; koa, heloka</td>
<td>Drugs and alcohol; crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiholahy</td>
<td>Mpangalatra</td>
<td>Thief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dahalo, malavo</td>
<td>Dahalo</td>
<td>Cattle thief</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*denotes terms still in popular use today
bourgeois and local officials of the capital, mostly those of the leading party, the PSD.

Alongside Ratsimandrava’s grassroots socialism and participatory democracy developed the alternative Marxist centralism of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Admiral Didier Ratsiraka. Ratsiraka managed to steer clear of domestic policy issues that were at the heart of the corruption and in-fighting of the Ramanantsoa/Ratsimandrava interim regime. What is more, his intellectual leftist leanings appealed to the bourgeoisie, while his coastal origins and promises of decentralization appealed to members of what is often reduced to the demographic category of non-Merina, côtiers. All of this played in Ratsiraka’s favor when, within days of his inauguration, Ratsimandrava was assassinated. At Ratsimandrava’s death, martial law ensued and political parties were immediately dissolved. The military directorate scurried to gain control over the country and Ratsiraka positioned himself for appointment as head of state by the directorate within days of the assassination.

In a series of radio broadcasts in August 1975, Ratsiraka announced and expounded upon his Charter of the Socialist Revolution (Boky Mena). What was significant about the Boky Mena was the extent to which it emphasized the importance of both imperialism and internal class struggle (Covell 1987: 99). The charter was based partly on Chinese communism, Nyerere’s Arusha Declaration of 1967, and Soviet-inspired left-wing thought which predominated in intellectual circles in France and elsewhere in the 1950s and 1960s (Brown 1995: 329). In December 1975 the directorate was dissolved and Malagasy voters were presented with a national referendum. The referendum consolidated three questions into a single proposition, with only the option to answer “yes” to all or “no” to all:

1. Do you support the Malagasy Socialist Constitution?
2. Do you support the Charter of the Malagasy Socialist Revolution?
3. Do you support Ratsiraka for President?

As most informed me, the issue of Ratsiraka as president was the least sure option for voters, yet with only one answer available, the vote was decided by the strong support for a socialist government and the Constitution governing it. This consolidated proposal, the intensive propaganda campaign behind it, and “a general desire for stability and firm leadership after years of uncertainty ensured a massive ‘yes’ vote.

**Bureaucratizing the Ideologies and Objects of Nationalism and Class Struggle**

With the formation of the Democratic Republic of Madagascar some of ZOAM were recruited into President Ratsiraka’s *Tanora Tonga Saina* (TTS) under the direction of the Ministry of Youth. As president, Ratsiraka turned this formerly anarchist cum political activist wing of the MFM into an actual government institution. As an auxiliary of Ratsiraka’s political party AREMA (Avant-garde de la Révolution Malgache) or the Vanguard of the Malagasy Revolution (FNDR), the TTS was used to break up (but usually) precipitate strikes or protests. “For those excluded from secondary and university education, government-funded groups like the TTS represent[ed] an attempt to reward and control” Malagasy youth (Covell 1987: 92). In this, ZOAM/TTS alternated between rejecting the system of privilege and protesting their exclusion from that system. As Ratsiraka redirected ZOAM’s knack for organizing and collective protest into the TTS, he ultimately caused class friction by reifying class categories in order to control his population, a population that could organize against this new president just as they had his predecessor. Descendants of slaves came to be known as crooks in service to the administration, and continued petty thieving and violence.

In reflecting on ZOAM and Ratsiraka’s role in their institutionalization as the TTS, one reckons today with the fact that history gives clues to conflicted identities existing in the present. To write of ZOAM as a single unitary group, which led the revolt against a neocolonial and oppressive regime, would be as inaccurate as to write of the Merina class structure as a unifying structure reflecting a totalizing division of labor. In fact, though ZOAM was instrumental in leading and organizing a radical group of both intellectuals and the proletariat, once institutionalized as the TTS by Ratsiraka, it became an organized and legitimate group that could be controlled as an instrument of the state more easily. In this sense, the very ZOAM that led the revolt
The argot of *zomaka*, which was a covert instrument of political struggle, became an object of nationalism and an object symbolic of an ideology of class struggle. In developing the argot of *zomaka*, ZOAM introduced and normalized a category of speakers: members of the lower classes of *andevo* and coastal *mainity* (black people). For a while, it was the language iconic of that class of people assumed to be descendants of slaves, signifying a broader social category of *mainity* (literally “black,” an implied reference to the skin color of most *andevo*; hence both terms are often used interchangeably – and both are derogatory terms to refer to people), poor, landless people living in particular sections of the capital. This argot evolved into a larger register of slang spoken today by mostly urban, unemployed speakers still living in those areas, but it does in fact reach across class lines to today’s Imerina urban youth – literate, semi-literate, or illiterate. Today, it is usually known as street talk but has been reengaged in the genres of political cartoons and mass media arts as a mode of political allegiance in identity resistance to politics. This reinvigoration of the form was caused, in part, by the political crisis of 2002.

### 1975–1991: From *Malgachization* to Socialism to Structural Adjustment Liberalization

The argot of ZOAM went down in history as a hallmark of the everyday life of the rebellion, but the nationalist plan that had informed the tactics of the intelligentsia and proletariat leading up to the revolution had a greater sociopolitical impact. This plan came to be known as *Malgachization* and was mostly made manifest in education and language policy. *Malgachization* involved making institutions and language that were heavily laden with French influence more *Malagasy*. Following the socialist revolution of May 13, 1972, General Ramantsoa addressed the issue of *Malgachization* as a process that would take place over time. Didier Ratsiraka institutionalized it as the president of the country from 1975 to 1991, by way of the Constitution, and the tenets of the *Boky Mena*. Immediate policy changes included removing poll and cattle taxes. The minimum salary was raised. On
a larger scale, the interim government drafted new cooperation agreements with France which removed Madagascar from the franc zone, led to the departure of French forces from Madagascar, and ended other special interest relationships with France. The educational system shifted dramatically away from the French curriculum and standards to reflect a formalized notion of Malagasy history, culture, and values. French was replaced with Malagasy as the language of instruction and French teachers replaced by Malagasy. And, in many instances, French (or Western) words were given a Malagasy alternative based from the Merina dialect. For example, normale was made normaly, officiale became ofisialy, and words referring to Western objects such as watches or clocks were given Malagasy aglutinating equivalents such as famantaranandro, which literally translates to the sign or indication (famantarana) of the day (andro). Many terms in academic disciplines such as mathematics and the sciences were changed as well.

This blanket prescriptive translation project effectively precluded Malagasy professionals from participating in their professions and trades outside the island but moved the country toward modernity perceived to be in line with a national identity, “the most popular set of cards in the new government’s hands” (Brown 1995: 321). In urban Imerina this alternative modernity was not devoid of the drawbacks of a new hegemony. Malagachization policy meant replacement of French teachers by Merina teachers, even in the coastal provinces. Malagasy ofisialy as the language of instruction became standard form, and was based largely on the Merina dialect. Shifts of language and personnel were to the distinct disadvantage of the coastal students, who protested Malagachization and staged several anti-Merina riots and school strikes.

Despite Ratsiraka’s claim in his first kabary as president of Madagascar that “the only road to development is that of socialism,” by 1981 Ratsiraka’s radical changes under socialism and Malagachization in economic policy and an “all-out investment” plan for self-sufficiency had failed. The deficit was running over 41 percent and exports were covering less than 50 percent of imports, partly because of the need to import large quantities of rice; raw materials were lacking, which caused industry to run inefficiently, and inflation was at 27 percent (Brown 1995: 334). This was exacerbated by the global oil crisis in 1981, but not before Ratsiraka, unable to meet his country’s debt payments and address the country’s severe economic decline, changed course and appealed to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a bail out. In June 1980 the IMF amended agreements to refinance and
reschedule debts, and forced Ratsiraka to accept a structural adjustment plan to stabilize the country through budget austerity and economic liberalization measures. Along with the stabilization measures of the IMF, Madagascar became the recipient of massive amounts of Western aid, yet, even with aid, economic disparity continued. Under a corrupt government the black market flourished, as did assassination attempts on the president. For much of the 1980s the country remained in a state of unrest.

Of course, at this time public criticism of the government was censored, if not banned completely. Political parties were prohibited outside of the Vanguard of the Malagasy Revolution. In response, organized civil protest against the state once more took form in the church, and more than any, by the pen. Again, the opposition retreated to makeshift and sometimes covertly operated societies to protest their government and seek reform measures, only this time many did so from organized church sects as well as from outside the country. In Madagascar church leaders of the capital’s Catholic diocese published the weekly newspaper, Lakroa. In it, pastoral letters denounced the government’s policies, describing it as dictatorship. The Protestant churches joined forces with the Catholics, Lutherans, and Anglicans and formed what is today arguably the strongest formal and organized civil society institution in Madagascar, the Council of Christian Churches in Madagascar (FFKM). As a consortium of churches, the FFKM posed a threat to Ratsiraka, which he would have to contend with many more times during his tenure as president (Brown 1995: 342). In fact, it was perhaps due to the power of these churches that Ratsiraka often urged his citizenry to “read the Bible,” a practice not often associated with Marxist socialism. Political opposition in Paris set up the Union des opposants malgaches à l’exterieur (UOME), whose leaders had served as diplomats to France, and authored Le Livre vert de l’espérance malgache, in which they outlined an alternative liberal-democratic governance.

The pen and voice of the exiled, along with the sharp tongue of the FFKM, inspired the reorganization and invigoration of political parties in the capital. In March 1987 three political parties, the Vonjy, MFM, and Monima, regrouped as the “neo-opposition” to run a candidate in the presidential elections of March 12, 1989. The head of the MFM, Manandafy Rakotonirina, a former Maoist converted to liberal pro-American, ran as candidate. Despite a strong campaign at home and abroad to oust Ratsiraka, Ratsiraka won the election with
62.7 percent of the vote. This was a low margin of victory by Malagasy standards for an incumbent, despite consistent voting irregularities that most certainly went in his favor. Though this low percentage of votes suggested a decline in Ratsiraka’s popularity, the failure of corruption at the polls to swing it higher reflects the work of the newly established CNOE, the Comité National d’Observation des Élections set up at the encouragement of the FFKM (Ravaloson and Zafy 1994: 40).

Even with Ratsiraka remaining in power, the early 1990s saw a large consensus in favor of democratization and liberalization of the economy. Non-violent protest by church congregations, university students, and faculty occurred daily and remained strong. This was even as the economy grew, aid increased from Western countries, and the governing body of Madagascar, the National Assembly, abolished press censorship, ended the state monopoly of radio and television, and authorized the establishment of private broadcasting stations (Brown 1995: 346). In December 1990 the FFKM convened a meeting called the hery velona or forces vives (Active Forces or FV) to discuss a “national concertation” plan in order to demand the resignation of the current government and reform the Constitution toward a “government of transition to democracy.” Members of the FV/HV argued that the elections of 1989 were not democratic because only approved parties of the FNDR were allowed to run candidates; however, Ratsiraka maintained that he was legally elected, a position that was difficult to dispute, and that ultimately paralyzed international diplomatic intervention. On May 10, 1991 the FV/HV, five thousand strong, forced its way through the doors of the National Assembly to demand Ratsiraka’s removal. This act was reinforced by the non-violent strike of more than one hundred thousand people throughout the city. These strikes eventually shut down the civil service of the capital and enabled the FV/HV to declare and establish its own transitional government. This bold attempt at a coup d’état served as impetus for a declaration of a state of emergency in the capital by the prime minister of the legal government. Curfews were established, press censorship reinstated, and all public meetings banned. Buttressed by the stubborn tenacity of a growing movement, the press ignored censorship laws, the military did not enforce the state of emergency, and public meetings increased in size and frequency. The stalemate continued until October with two governments claiming power, though neither was able to fully exercise it. In late October the FV/HV and the churches
convened to arrange a transitional agreement that would provide “a legal framework for the realization of the popular desire for change” (Brown 1995: 349). Under this framework and the parliamentary Constitution that would emerge from it, the president had little more than a ceremonial and representative function, with almost no executive powers. Real executive powers were vested in the prime minister and the parliament, elected by proportional representation. In March 1992 a widely representative National Forum organized by the Malagasy Christian Council of Churches (FFKM) drafted a new Constitution. Troops guarding the proceedings clashed with pro-Ratsiraka “federalists” who tried to disrupt the forum in protest of draft constitutional provisions preventing the incumbent president from running again. The text of the new Constitution was put to a nationwide referendum in August 1992 and approved by a wide margin, despite efforts by federalists to disrupt balloting in several coastal areas.

Democratic Transitions, Transitions to Democracy

At this time of transition, Albert Zafy, university professor and one of the three primary leaders of the FV/HV, had been campaigning throughout Madagascar and internationally, calling for democratic elections and a system of participatory democratic governance by a body of elected representatives. Zafy, who is now referred to as the Father of Democracy in Madagascar, had served as inspiration for the daily strikes and protests throughout the country’s cities. He was the empowering voice of the FV/HV that reinstated general strikes throughout the country whenever the government abused or tightened its control over the civic freedoms he felt were owed to his fellow countrymen. With the reforms in place for the Constitution and government, Zafy was appointed president of the Haute Autorité de l’Etat (HAE) to help revive the economy, bring security to the country, and ready it for democratic elections under a more democratic Constitution.

During the campaign season, Zafy stood as a candidate, as did Ratsiraka and sixteen others. Presidential elections were held on November 25, 1992, after the High Constitutional Court (HCC) had ruled, over the FV/HV’s objections, that Ratsiraka could become a candidate. Just before the election the number had decreased to eight, most likely
due to the required deposit of 25 million francs and the number of death threats and assassination attempts on all candidates other than Ratsiraka. By election time on November 25, however, the candidates had entered into a gentlemen’s agreement to avoid abusive language and use of government resources to assist their campaigns. “With the national television station remaining neutral and offering equal space to every candidate, this was the first truly democratic election held in Madagascar” (Brown 1995: 353) – or at least as perceived by those Western observers eager to enter and work in a country newly reorganized under structural adjustment policies. Following the initial vote and runoff elections held in February 1993, the leader of the Forces Vives/Hery Velona movement, Albert Zafy, defeated Ratsiraka. With the uprising of university students fortified by the politically strong coalition of churches of the FFKM, Madagascar’s government shifted from a dictatorship to one of a parliamentary democracy under Zafy’s leadership.

Zafy was sworn in as president on March 27, 1993. His presidency was short-lived, but helped to give root to a kind of globally mediated democratic new order, in ideology if not in practice. It was during Zafy’s time that the country earned its reputation internationally as a “transitioning democracy.” With this moniker came increased freedoms for the press, a flourishing of privately owned media outlets in urban areas, and the resurgence of a critical cadre of political cartoonists. This time of “transitioning democracy” was facilitated by Western countries such as the United States, whose foreign policy to strengthen democracies across the world was motivated also by its free trade interests and heavy NGO and foreign aid service. In 1993 the United States Peace Corps installed its first volunteers in teacher training, public health, and environment. This number increased from nearly 30 every two years to over 135 total volunteers today, with several inputs per year. USAID projects have grown since that time, notably those in democracy and governance (D&G), civic education, environment, and public health.

Despite a major shift in daily political process and the state of civil society under Zafy’s leadership, the president’s popularity began to wane as he was unable to solve the country’s economic problems and broke constitutional rules on more than one occasion. On April 4, 1996 there were demonstrations in the capital city against the president and calls for a military coup. Quite swiftly, President Zafy was impeached by the National Assembly, following a defeat in the
Supreme Court in 1996 in a case about his constitutional transgres-
sions. Recovering from his impeachment, he ran again in 1997 against
Ratsiraka. Ratsiraka emerged victorious. A National Assembly domi-
nated by members of President Ratsiraka’s political party AREMA
subsequently passed the 1998 Constitution, and this move considerably
strengthened the powers of the presidency. Serving once again as the
president, Ratsiraka ushered in a political climate much like that of
his former tenure. This lasted only one term, however.

In June 2000, during Independence celebrations, Antananarivo
mayor Marc Ravalomanana announced his intention to run for presi-
dent. With the innovative and ambitious programs of this young
businessman running the capital city, his rhetoric of anti-corruption
and development, his close ties with the Western community, and his
access to resources to run an efficient and informative national cam-
paign, people in and outside of Madagascar began to envision life
beyond Ratsiraka and readied themselves for the national election of
December 2001 and what was to become the Crisis of 2002, Raharaha
2002, a struggle toward victory for Marc Ravalomanana and exile
for Didier Ratsiraka. With the end of the crisis in 2002, the vocal
civil society that Zafy and the FV/HV encouraged ten years before
was reinvigorated. A revival of institutional freedoms such as those
of a free press has been coupled with increased programs in civil
society education to operationalize some of the media outlets for
greater information flow from the government to its citizenry. Anti-
corruption initiatives set up under Ravalomanana’s administration,
but mostly funded under the auspices of international organizations,
were established to strengthen the economy by bolstering civil
society. Referred by international interests, institutions such as those
fundd by international governments emerged at the end of the crisis,
shaping a public sphere very different from that of the previous
twenty-five years.

From the early interactions between the Merina monarchy and
the London Missionary Society, to Ratsiraka’s alliances with the
Soviet Union, to Ravalomanana’s strong neoliberal cooperation with
the West, systems of governance throughout Madagascar’s history
have been aggregates of a larger transnational, co-dependent, and
increasingly plurilingual process. And in this process across sovereign-
ties, projects directed at language and literacy, arguments about
what language is and does, what it means beyond its referential
content have all mediated understandings of Malagasy identity, belief,
memory, history, and politics. Today, such ideas and assertions and the institutions that have come from them inform and reflect the political imaginary of “democracy.” By way of linguistic practice, democracy serves as an idiom of transnational governmentality and economic modernity, but is operationalized in local, ritual, and symbolic ways by Malagasy state and local modes of governance. To delve further into linguistic transformations that produce a new public culture, and to show how local practice mediates this local production and transnational interests, we turn to the next two chapters, which provide a structural description of the written and spoken contexts of kabary and political cartooning in which social actors in urban Imerina participate in emerging forms of governance and a shifting public sphere.

Notes

1 Lambek adapts here Anderson’s (1991) “imagined communities” but he is not necessarily adopting an Andersonian perspective.

2 Though I refer to urban Imerina, I refrain from speaking of the people inhabiting this region as the Merina. Historically, it is a useful moniker to aid in the understanding of class categories with which personal and group histories, recorded in what are known as the tantara, are associated and even falter yesterday and today. Ethnic identity markers such as Merina also articulate historically with the system of divine kingship. Yet outside a snapshot of history or within identity politics and the narratives that come out of that politics, the ethnic label of Merina is a misnomer for identifying inhabitants of Imerina today. This is because the Imerina region, especially its urban center of the country’s capital Antananarivo, is home to class and ethnic groups from across the island. Though many people identify as Merina in that their ancestral land (tanindrazana) is in Imerina, the term Merina serves as an ethnic imaginary on which are based identity claims and arguments of distinction often made to demarcate an “us” and “them.” The same applies to the ambiguous historical class categories of noble, commoner, and slave. See Campbell (1991), Feeley-Harnik (1991), Graeber (1995, 1996), Larson (1995, 1997), and Raison-Jourde (1977) for more concerning this.

3 The letter a is always short as /a/ (as in watch). The letter e sounds as /ey/ (as in pace). The letter i is pronounced as /i/ (as in bean). In addition, the letter j sounds as /z/ or /dz/. Finally, the letter o sounds as /u/.
The phonemes represented by $c$/k/ and /s/ are accomplished by the sound of $k$/k/ and $s$/s/; for this, $c$ was deleted from the Malagasy alphabet. The phoneme /k/ represented by $q$ is covered by $k$/k/ and $x$/k/ or /z/ is satisfied by the $k$ and $j$. The sound for $u$/u/, is replaced by the /o/ in o, w /w/ or /wh/ may be achieved through combinations of lengthened vowels.

4 Kingswood is a hardwood once revered by the Malagasy to the extent that only the king was believed worthy to own or possess it.

6 Such will and privilege were linguistically indexed through various privative forms of pronoun usage and salutations that register the rank of the speakers (Raison-Jourde 1977: 654–5). Upward styles of address to the king/queen and downward-style of address to the people were tied to how class merit versus inherited status may be materially defined (Domenichini-Ramianandana 1983: 499).

7 Gerald Berg’s (1996) historical account describes many of these reevaluative cases and is worth full review outside of this chapter.

8 This exact number could be mere exaggeration on the part of Sibree, whose hopeful account was written in the service and interest of his own mission.

9 It is anachronistic for Adejunmobi to refer to Madagascar as a nation at that time but he does so from a perspective on the past based on his present place in a nation.

10 Nosy Lava is a smaller island off the coast of Madagascar that is still designated today as a prison exile for Malagasy convicted of quite serious and violent crimes. That these protestors were sent to the island was extraordinary punishment and suggests how much political effect they were likely to have.

11 The MFM was rebaptized Mpitolona ho amin’ny Fandrosoan’i Madagasikara in the 1990s as the country entered a period of transition to democracy. Rakotonirina Manandafy continues as its leader.

References


