For politicians and campaign staff involved in Antananarivo’s provincial mayoral elections, October and November are packed with days of carnival, sports, and kabary events across Imerina’s urban (commune urbaine) and suburban/rural communities (communes rurales). The mornings during those months generally involve scurrying through the crowded city streets in one of the party’s official vehicles to run errands, get petrol, pick up various people from various locations, make cell-phone calls, attend radio interviews, and load up on voandalana, “fruits of the road,” items more plentiful and cheaper in the countryside than in the city. Leaving the city, the AVI party 4 × 4 that carried me and a handful of organizers and candidates darted in and out of the communes rurales at a speed different from that of our constituents, who respectfully or fearfully clung to the edges of the narrow dirt streets to make way for our wide girth and ensuing dust cloud. This juxtaposition between urban and suburban, driver and pedestrian, serious and idle, and other distinctions would all soon be smoothed over by the festive political campaign events. Interrupting the normal routine of going to school, field, or market, our convoy of SUVs and buses filled with urbanites from Tana and schoolchildren would storm into the town center and bring people out into the streets to join the
rally. The events would appear to be impromptu; however, they were very well planned and are intended to publicize the afternoon campaign rally and drum up support for the candidate’s arrival and the campaign’s political kabary. Soon, a throng of people who had at once abandoned their market stalls or workbenches would collect in the middle of the streets and alongside the edges of makeshift performance spaces to kick off the first event.

In the suburban community of Bemasoandro, a bustling suburb of Tana where I experienced the initial rallies of the sanctioned two-week campaign for commune rurale mayoral elections, the AVI party’s first events of the day were always truly carnivalesque in the Bakhtinian (1968) sense. Campaign officials and the sheer size of the crowd prevented the authorities from enforcing traffic laws when hundreds of us filled the streets in what was in itself an inadvertent (though informally sanctioned) act of civil disobedience. In the town square all eyes turned to the first AVI event, where a cross-dressed man sang about the mores of politics while facing friendly jeers from men in the audience. The man donned the large curls of a glossy wig, and dressed in a flowery-print dress with red lipstick loud enough to rival the glare of the hot sun that beat down on us by late morning. He incited calls and responses from the audience that complemented his didactic yet comedic morality play of the woes of political corruption and poverty. Corruption and poverty were just two issues we could all look forward to facing if the villagers did not continue to change the current political situation by voting in the upcoming election (and voting for the AVI candidates). Just as the cross-dresser paradoxically aligned his own cross-embodiment with the values of honesty and forthrightness, he implicitly indexed the misdeed of corruption as a means for perpetuating poverty, and a common practice among “other” people out there, namely the “other” political parties. His dress, curls, and songs of political corruption at once evoked in his audience a sense of unity and co-participation in the event. He did this while also co-constructing with them an image of competition with and opposition to an “other’s” politics, of which they should be wary and play against. This performance and the mere break of the workday routine engendered enough energy in the growing crowd to rally a large base of potential political constituents as audience for the afternoon’s planned events.

Following the performance of the one-“woman” play, townspeople spent the afternoon watching an impromptu game of soccer, which served as a friendly yet subtle icon of the win-or-lose competition
inherent in campaigning. In this day of impromptu celebration intensified by alcohol and a hot sun, campaign organizers aimed to steer the pomp and circumstance of an already excited sports crowd into an audience for an evening of political candidates’ *kabary politika*. Dusk set in as the dust of the soccer field settled. The spectators turned their attention to the opening lines of a political *kabary* broadcast over the loudspeakers flanking the stage at the edge of the field:

*Tompoko lasy, tompono vavy . . .
Ladies and Gentlemen . . .*

Compelled and mesmerized just by those opening words, a sports crowd already in the mood to cheer at once came alive and turned to the stage. The whirling dustbowl of the soccer field gave way to an audience of a political *kabary*. Silence followed as the candidate, Desi, continued his speech.2 Without notes or teleprompters, the candidate stood upright and delivered a speech with the cadence and intonation of a minister in an evangelical church. I have glossed the Malagasy in English and marked the English equivalent of the candidate’s intonational stress in italics:

We thank *God* because he has guided and held us, that’s why we all can meet here. My *first* word is to ask permission of *God*. If there is *honor*, if there is *worship*, if there is *praise*, then we give them to *God*, for *peace* and *approval* are for all of *us*. Is that *right*?

Beyond an intonation and cadence iconic of sermonic tradition in urban Imerina, his words were often slanted animations or evocations of the Word of God to fit with the motto of his own party, “you will be judged by the work you do.” Desi exclaimed:

Dear brothers in Our Lord, there will be judgment in Heaven, you will be judged from the work that you’ve done here in Heaven’s Kingdom.

He continued, treating everyone in the audience to a cleverly placed and delivered proverb, the first of many expected in any good *kabary*. It was chosen to package and deliver the speaker’s “message,” provoking a mental image (*sarinteny*) in his audience. Saluting the value of a candidate’s action over reputation, Desi uttered the proverb,

We are not going to praise the wife, a specialist in dance, but her dance will make it evident.
This proverb held an anticipatory meaning, as the audience had to wait to see how it was tied together along the way. But to satisfy the appetite for immediate meaning, the candidate delivered an unanticipated proverb used in a contemporary song lyric to accommodate a frame break in his performance. This interruption came as an excited and drunk spectator blurted out “Santa Claus!” (Pere Noelle!) during Desi’s speech. Like political cartoonists, her interjection adds a footnote of irony to undermine the sincerity of promises of gifts the candidate claims he will bring. Without missing a beat, Desi tucks in a request to escort the person away while gracing her with a drunk heart in the way the song is sung:

Please, take this person away, why do you let her come here, she is drunk . . . [pause] . . . and her heart is also drunk! [The crowd makes a row as the speaker makes reference to a popular song.]

This innovative reference to a contemporary song lyric provided the candidate a segue to a more contemporary style of speech, an alternate register not usually associated with kabary: the register of Western rhetorical style. This shift accommodated the topic of his message, development or fampandrosoana, and the fight against corruption through transparency (ny ady amin’ny kolikoly), two common themes of political platforms in the post-Ratsiraka days in urban Imerina.

From midday carnival to the kabary at dusk, the townspeople of Bemasoandro transformed from carrying out their daily tasks to spectators to a performance and then a sports game. In this multiple interanimation between registers indexing various sorts of oratorical contexts in Desi’s single speech – proverbs, sermons, and Western political and international development speak – this sports crowd was then transformed by speech to an audience of voters and then again transformed as members of a minister’s congregation and then as participants in the modernizing mission of the country. Shifting styles of speaking hearken toward imaginings of those social fields and all the ideologies and aesthetics associated with them. The candidate calls forth worlds – and the feelings, beliefs, and attachments associated with them – through his lexical choice, his intonation, prosody, even his gestures and posture. So doing, he implicates his audience in his own discursive attempt to generate a shared biography and common purpose with the audience through shifts in register, which act as tropes invoking images of community identity and solidarity, spoken of in Malagasy
as *fihavanana* and *firaisan-kina*, respectively. The event itself alongside the day of carnival and soccer games are rituals that capture the vitality of youth that creates a transcendent political order, not just cultivating community but harnessing *hasina* power (Bloch 1986). Within the *kabary*, proverbs foster this as they are deployed to reference a Malagasy national essence. Scripture binds an audience to a moral order and to imaginings of a Christian politic, and Western rhetoric hearkens to a larger discourse about a modern and developed country. In just three code shifts in register, three different participant role structures fluctuate in the same personnel during just a few moments of talk (Irvine 1996: 145).

These tropes in the candidate’s *kabary* are not just the idioms, metaphor, and other types of figurative language, but also constitute much of the register shifts themselves. Each serves as “great and little pre-patterns that variously channel, influence, and determine how the speaker interrelates elements of language to each other and interrelate language itself and the rest of the world” (Friedrich 1991: 54). For this political orator, they are the proverbs, the references to Christian beliefs and practices, and sound bites of reported speech concerning rapid development. This discursive poetic texture controls “how social identities are constructed, positioned politically, and how social relations between groups are negotiated” (Friedrich 1991: 26). In the case of this *kabary politika*, tropes act to “cultivate intimacy, or even a sense of complicity in language between the speaker and audience. One person’s metaphor, readily grasped by another, can become an instrument of consensus and thus community between them” (Cohen in Fernandez 1991: 196). Implicated in this moment of shared identity and purpose – however reduced and essentialized – these citizens at Bemasoandro are reminded of their obligation to vote . . . and to vote for this candidate as a true representative of this community between them, the community of citizens.

The essentializing effects of such a rally to unite in support of one mayoral candidate are typically punctured and offset the next day by political cartoonists’ iconicization and parodies of candidates’ political strategies and the platforms they espouse (figure 5.1). Despite the seeming unity of the soccer crowd that day in Bemasoandro, cartoonists destabilize the transmission and absorption of that sense of community solidarity campaign events attempt to set in place. As a candidate depends on interanimating different domains through registers associated with them, cartoonists interject a level of indeterminacy to these
tropes of group solidarity, shaking the assumed control over a sense of common force and public opinion that candidate feels he has secured. In this daily tête-à-tête between the words of speakers and cartoonists, who are likely never to come face-to-face with these political elites, so goes the communicative semiosocial matrix of urban Imerina’s public sphere.

Considering political *mpikabary* and political cartoonists in the contexts of their everyday political activity, this chapter begins an exploration of their interactions and the socially productive role that interaction plays in shaping political affinities and other social relations in political process. In this first chapter of three, we think on how it is that the interplay of language styles from different speech contexts is productive in socially salient ways. How is it that processes of enregisterment, that is processes through which a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms
(Agha 2003: 231), provoke the assembly and ideological attachment of particular affinities among the otherwise undifferentiated rhetoric-multitude? We do this by looking at the many ways politicians and cartoonists engage in various registers (different ways of saying the same thing in ways characteristic of different types of linguistic contexts or groups). Focusing on register variation, we will examine how such style variants brought in from one context to another index particular group styles and beliefs and beckon imaginings and attachments to particular social fields to serve particular political interests. In turn, we explore how this attachment also legitimizes the political leaders’ popular accountability and “enable them to act in the name of ‘the people’” (Gupta 1995: 386).

This work across variants has profound implications for shaping social and political relations between representatives of the state and civil society. On the other hand, register shifts matter to the participant frameworks – identities and roles people play in concert or contest with one another and (in this case) the state – constituting the material reality of the urban Imerina public sphere. In particular, I will follow the dialogical aspects of interdiscursive registers, that is the mixing of different speech registers within these genres, as a means for creating and transforming that sense of community solidarity (fihavanana) and unity of purpose (firaisan-kina) informing the character of certain publics and political public opinion. These interdiscursive registers of both kabary and cartooning play a role in the semiosocial structures of publics, a role in how these publics cohere. Register variation serves as the discursive zone of contact between agents of political kabary, political cartoons, and the publics they shape and reflect. Pre-packaged tropes accumulated from multiple contexts are brought into the political context to organize these multiple publics, their collective politic, and to provide a language for a publics’ biography. In this sense, political speeches and cartoons and the talk about them not only orient the social salience of register shifts to produce these key idioms of social community solidarity in Imerina’s public sphere, but also are actually productive of that sphere. In a broader sense this chapter will explore how through kabary events, as well as through gauging reactions in cartooning practices to state speech, representatives of the state struggle to negotiate state authority and legitimacy by constructing idioms of “community”; and how this implicates individuals in shifting subjectivities – as audiences and as certain kinds of citizens bound in a national community with other citizens.
Kabary speakers, like political cartoonists who report on them, commonly animate and reanimate the speech of others in three distinct register variants:

1. That most associated with kabary politika, which is marked by stylized structure and literary features such as metaphorically rich poetry, riddles, and (most significant to this study) the ancestral proverb.

2. Today’s political mpikabary also create and use totalizing notions of community solidarity through tropic elements of register associated with the cadence, volume, and lexical choice of the more charismatic Protestant Christian sermonic tradition in highland Madagascar.

3. They deploy the parlance of international development to index their position and membership in the neoliberal political and economic modernization of this postcolonial nation. Juxtaposition of this register with a more “traditional” style, the modern rhetoric of a modern versus traditional style, is increasingly commonplace in this new oratorical speech style of kabary.

These shifts have been duly noted and acted upon by cartoonists. To foreground the innovative register shifts of political mpikabary, political cartoonists amplify the polyphony of these same registers within the contexts of their own images of verbal performance genres. They do so with metapragmatic acts, that is linguistic acts that serve as “talk” but also say something about what that kind of talk is and does. Through reported speech and parody, of hyper-correction of standards, cartoonists accent and shake the semiotic potency of these voicings of authority, thereby subverting the pragmatic salience of kabary as an act meant to imbue animating agents with that authority.

Before heading into the ethnographic terrain of interanimating registers, we should first consider the notions of fihavanana and firaisan-kina.

On Being Gasy: Some Background on Fihavanana

Notions of “community” in “solidarity” and “unity of purpose” are often referred to in formal and informal discourse as fihavanana and firaisan-kina, respectively. Though the focus here is on how these two
terms are evoked through certain tropes, sentiments of a collective identity as well as a national consciousness are also implied in the common suffix *gasy*. *Gasy* is a truncated adjective for *Malagasy* and is applied to describe any object, action, or style that people seem to believe is unique to Malagasy identity. In ordinary usage, adding the suffix –*gasy* to a noun implies that the object, action, or style so marked is superlative to its non-marked counterpart. For example, *toka* is alcohol but *tokagasy* is alcohol with a much stronger proof. *Fanafody* is medicine, but *fanafodi-gasy* is more specialized treatments that exceed the qualities of basic medicine.

Anthropological scholars of Madagascar have discussed *fihavanana* as a structuring and reflexive ideal of community identity with the implied correlate, *firasian-kina*, understood as “with unity of purpose” (Bloch 1971; Graeber 1996, 2007; Larson 1997; Raison-Jourde 1977; Serre-Ratsimandrava 1978). Both notions are central to Merina notions of moral community, and tie in to a broader conception in which individual action is generically suspect: “collective action and collective projects should ideally stem not from some leader’s initiative but arise spontaneously from the unity of intention of a solidary moral group” (Graeber 1996: 36). This sense of community solidarity is greatly respected across urban and rural areas of the province, and of course permeates and informs all aspects of life, to include national political consciousness and action. However, as these scholars have done, it is more accurate to reckon with these not as analytic categories for speaking about collective action, but as ideological and operational categories for organizing political action and shaping political opinion from a collective political moral consciousness.

Enacted agentive categories of community solidarity and unity are historically contingent and have been the driving-force ideological idiom behind both small- and large-scale political organizing: from a mantra for workers’ unions, affinity groups of political parties and civil society, to one formulated *through* state oratory *about* the state to evoke an image of national consciousness binding the public sphere. Whenever anyone writes newspaper editorials, crafts or performs a *kabary*, or draws cartoons to address the difficulties of negotiating the diversity, the fast pace, and materialism of urban life, they address these issues as affecting *fihavanana*, something we all had “then” but not “now.” In this discourse of nostalgia, loss is linked to selfishness, greed, classism, and even a lack of family values tied to one’s homeland (*tanindrazana*).
In the context of this history to evoke and maintain a unified national biography and collective consciousness, participants are brought into a social imaginary of a unified collective identified by their gasy-ness. Quite overtly, fihavanana has been the term used as a rallying cry especially in post-independence struggles such as the 1972 nationalist project of Malagachization. In campaign speeches the loss of fihavanana has become a catch-all phrase invoked to refer to the “community” that suffered and needed to be rekindled as one, thus binding the national political consciousness of all Malagasy. In this framework, political orators invoke fihavanana either by speaking of it as an objective reality or by deploying an explicit reference to gasy-ness against something foreign (which does not mean international but simply “outside”) in order to evoke that seemingly whole social imaginary of a single, unified, and “deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 1991: 7). Outside of whole movements, however, these domains of gasy subjectivity can be accessed, objectified, and brought into the political sphere to shape a public, all below the threshold of awareness and without appearing to do so. Today, the essentializing social imaginary found in tropes of fihavanana that politicians and their pundits use is part of a utopian ideal of democratic and moral community engaged at the level of the state and civil society discourse, often disciplining the discourse used in kabary performance. Mostly, this notion of community solidarity is indexed and experienced through invocations of proverbs and other aesthetic structural elements associated with the kabary register, alongside shifts in the register to those normally associated with different contexts and their publics.

**Proverbs as Modes of Authority and as Portable Tropes across Space and Time**

On May 13, 2002 at La Place du 13 Mai in downtown Tana, Marc Ravalomanana declared his presidential election victory, despite controversy that had thrown the country into crisis for nearly six months. Exactly thirty years earlier at this same place, Malagasy citizens took to the streets to oust the first president of Madagascar, Tsiranana, whom they believed to be only a puppet and agent for the recently disbanded French colonial government. In protest, the mass of protesters burned down the city hall. This historical moment changed this
plot of ground in the city center from a burning Hôtel de Ville to a landmark signifying the defiant populist political struggle for liberty through regime change. Thirty years later, a righteous Ravalomanana and his numerous supporters felt certain of their presidential victory. This victory would oust an oppressive regime, and they concluded that it was time to move the country forward just as on that thirteenth day of May in 1972. To sum up his conviction, competence, and ambition to radically modernize Madagascar, Ravalomanana offered up a proverb in his kabary. To the attentive crowd that stretched from one end of the Avenue de l’Indépendance to the next, he declared:

_Hande ha hanapoaka sarom-bilany._
The rice top is about to be blown from its pot.

This is equivalent to the American expression “enough is enough,” with the added implication that something has to happen to shake the current status quo. The mere utterance of this proverb in that place and time immediately built a public “we” versus a “they,” a moment tied to the here and now of a political struggle based on a common tie to past struggles. Just the mere uttering of this proverb hearkened back to that civil crisis of 1972, symbolized in La Place du 13 Mai and served that day in 2002 to rally Ravalomanana’s base and ensure solidarity in the ensuing fight to win back the country and its leadership. The audience roared at Ravalomanana’s evocation of the words of the ancestors, _Handeha hanapoaka sarom-bilany_, which he made as a rallying cry for swift political change. By evoking another time, place, and struggle, Ravalomanana mapped events of the present onto a memory of the past through the words of the ancestors. In this, he assured his own _hasina_, because invoking the memory of ancestors is central to how people remember the past and make sense of the present (Delivré 1974; Feeley-Harnik 1984; Graeber 1996, 2007). Ancestors may bless or they may curse, and Ravalomanana’s fleeting ability to negotiate successfully and draw on ancestral power through fellowship with their words became a key to determining his fate with the crowd that day. As he cultivated an intimacy in time, he did as well among his crowd (Fernandez 1991: 223). Implicated in this moment of common identity and purpose, Ravalomanana’s “we” took to the streets to ensure this leader would soon become president of “their” country.

Because of the mobilizing effect of this proverb, the code of _kabary politika_ marked by this metaphorical feature is not only reproduced in
public events, but also can transform that public. As ubiquitous elements of political kabary register, ancestral proverbs (ohabolana) imbue a speaker with authority by his proximity to the will of the ancestors. This presupposed authority is linked to an ideal of language and kinship between ancestors and progeny (Bloch and Parry 1982: 223). It is this authority that undergirds the transformational qualities of kabary and its proverbs. Proverbs lend credence to the orator’s argument because his words do not stand alone but stand the test of time, and “ring with the authority of the ancients” (Haring 1992: 64). The pragmatic salience of proverbs in Madagascar is corroborated by today’s orators who rightly suggest proverbs are handy forms through which “one steps into a role of authority and addresses measured words to his listeners, words which they understand to epitomize the word of the ancestors” (Haring 1992: 65). In fact, engaging words that are not his own through this enacted dialogical relation with the ancestors, the speaker aligns his footing and keys this recontextualized voicing of the ancestors in the present to index a “Malagasy” moral imaginary of the past (Goffman 1974: 44). Depending on the relationship between speaker, audience, and their shared imaginaries of the mythic past, the speaker can displace his intention and responsibility onto the supposed authors, the ancestors, while inhabiting the cloak of authority and status. In this, the meaning behind his speech is less about this intention and more about the social relations he just cultivated in the process. Also, the felicitous utterance of the proverb helps displace the voice of the speaker, a perspectival shift of deictic reference or “dequotative” move that situates the speaker, by means of the proverb, for the ancestors themselves to speak through him (Lee and Urban 1989: 29). The speaker qua animator is but the vehicle for the words. In fact, Razafy gave frequent examples of the paramount experience in kabary oratory, when the animator is only that, possession embodied, to channel those words.

Though 2002 and 1972 appear temporally distant, that day for Ravalomanana was not a discrete moment “but a mass of different combinations past and present” (Bakhtin 1981: 37). With this presumed role of authority as animator of the ancestors, deliverers of proverbs have the social and semiotic capacity to connect historical moments together, synthesizing wisdom of the past to what a speaker is trying to convey in the present. Conflating past and present (this situation now is just like that situation back then), speakers establish an emerging and imagined continuity across social encounters in time.
and space. As aesthetically and culturally appropriate metaphors, proverbs in particular contexts presuppose an authority of perspective and entail analogies between otherwise disparate moments and circumstances and “operate by pattern matching in which two concepts – source, or vehicle, and target, or tenor – are linked through the intersection of common attributes” (Fernandez 1991: 257). Analogical structures figuratively keyed to narrative modes straddle multiple chronotopes of “that–there–then” and “this–here–now,” compressing the “elsewhere” with the “here” of the entextualized speech event itself. In this way, proverbs bring the past into the present, and in some cases bring the future to the imagination of those in the present. This timelessness of the proverb is boosted by the internal organization of kabary’s literary elements, which “give [the] ritual text a semblance of self-sufficient autonomy from its physical context” (Silverstein 2003: 41). This is such that proverbs in kabary constitute by their very utterance a double contextualization – what we might call chronotopic portability – which conlates apperceptions of situations of the past with those of the present. This compression in time and space of register “draws the two or more discursive occasions together within the same chronotopic frame, across which discourse seems to ‘move’ from originary to secondary occasion, no matter whether ‘backward’ or ‘forward’ in orientation within the frame”; “though such tropes have a temporal structure in that they occur and endure in time,” they are logically “out of time” (Silverstein 2003: 6); that is, the text-as-emergent is effectively constituted by a semiotic process of making similarities between people, places, and events of the past to those of today. Just as the authority in proverbs is motivated by the immutability of the voices of the past in the present, their potency lies in this transportability across time.

Like the stones and tombs of one’s ancestral land (tanindrazana), memories become lodged in proverbs and so contribute to the establishment of a sense of community with shared norms and ideologies for interpreting and meaningfully transferring the valence of yesterday’s sign to today’s sociopolitical issues, without appearing to do so (Graeber 1996: 69). In this position they do great work to shape public opinion vis-à-vis evaluations of social situations, by means of a monologic third-party intrusion, the immutable presence and voice of the ancestors. The proverb tsy maintsy mipoaka ny sarom-bilany – “the rice top must blow from its pot” – then binds today’s audience in a shared notion of community solidarity, tied to a timeless gasy past.
The success of the politician then is predicated not on his message, but on the audience’s ratification of today’s co-articulation with the past emerging under one sign, the proverb. It is this evaluation by the public that politicians seek to sway for political effect; and it is this attempt to control the evaluation that cartoonists attempt to thwart in their caricatured social critique.

**Cartooning’s Thwarting of Political Opinion and Social Imaginaries of Fihavanana**

Political cartoonists shake the authority that proverbs otherwise presuppose, and deny the purported fixity of those “stones of the past” by contextualizing and explaining them in the present. And quite often, as politicians deploy proverbs to incite feelings of unity and smooth over difference, cartoonists foreground disparity and difference within the community, interanimating proverbs previously uttered in *kabary* events. Through discursive reanimations of a *kabary* proverb in cartoons, cartoonists reembody it as iconic of a stereotyped individual or group, persons who would never say such a proverb much less inhabit the role of *mpikabary* and the pragmatic power that genre presupposes. These caricatured icons parody the register of *kabary* in a different social accent, throwing into relief those issues ordinarily not noticed, and thus otherwise unaccounted for differences in a complex community.

Jivan, the cartoonist from *Gazetiko*, gives us an example in figure 5.2 of the way cartoonists disrupt the seamless analogy invoked by Ravalomanana during the 2002 crisis at La Place du 13 Mai. Upsetting the proverb’s contextual relevance across multiple temporal grounds, the cartoonist provides an alternative analogy. He quotes the famous proverb as it might be deployed by Ravalomanana’s senators. However, he decontextualizes that proverb from political *kabary* and recontextualizes it in behind-the-scenes talk within tight circles of political representatives who claim to be on “our side.” Surreptitious talk off stage about contentious issues—use of state monies to purchase a 757 airplane for the president’s sole use, $4 	imes 4$s for use by Assembly representatives, or the detaxation of the president’s private business—indexes corruption in their *kabary* because what they say does not match what they do. In this, Jivan suggests that a false sense
of solidarity with leadership, put forth in kabary, perhaps will cause the “rice top to blow.” Parodic redeployment within multiple contexts – in a cartoon, within a different context of speech, informal talk (resaka) in a tight circle of public representatives – disrupts the

Figure 5.2  Jivan reports on the excessive spending by the majority TIM Senate and its favors to the president’s business, TIKO. Air Force One refers to the expensive 747 Jet Ravalomanana purchased for his personal and state use. The 4 × 4 – Depiote refers to the expensive 4 × 4s purchased for the use of deputies in TIM provinces. The reference to Detaxation TIKO is satire regarding the Senate’s decision to release the president’s company from tax obligations. After all of this, Jivan borrows from the famous proverb used by Ravalomanana himself during the crisis: “The rice top is about to blow”. Source: Reproduced by permission of Gazetiko/Midi-Madagasikara.
value of the proverb as political currency to affect public opinion. Parodying a proverb otherwise indexically linked to the register of kabary weakens the form itself and depletes it of its prior social meaning, associated with its historical link and social stereotypes of who is imagined to carry the message of that speech; and as the proverb’s political valence is neutralized, so too is the authority and ability of its original speaker to affect public opinion and to rally a base under that proverb.

Despite the fact that proverbs serve as tropes to politicians and their political pundits, political orators today use fewer proverbs in their daily speeches. And it is not so much that their critics parody them so well. As we saw in the opening example of this chapter when Desi referenced song lyrics following an ancestral proverb, political orators today pull out proverbs more often for special occasions, or as clinchers in stump speeches, more than to motivate the progression of the speech itself. Because they enact a temporary token nod to an imagined heritage, proverbs potentiate the speaker’s embodiment of gasy-ness. Once that is established, speakers move to more politically significant roles to inhabit, significantly the role of the Christian modern. Though the two are ultimately conflated in this context, we shall turn our focus to this first subject position, the Christian, and look to the stance of the modern in the subsequent section.

Rather than deploy potentially stale proverbs, speakers slot in the register of the Christian sermon as substitute for kabary style in which proverbs play a major role. Interanimating these registers in crafty ways ensures a new range of alliances as references to the Christian sermonic register call upon audience members’ attachments to other social fields beyond the political. The most common substitution in political speech comes from scripture that accomplishes denotationally the message of proverbs or, at the very least, the intonation, lexicon, and grammar associated with the Protestant Christian sermonic tradition in urban Imerina. The popularity of such Christianized modes of public speaking throughout Imerina’s history has been resurrected in the postcolonial Madagascar kabary register such that the formalized oratorical structure is maintained even while its register shifts to one of the sermon. Scripture reference not only creates a new variant of kabary politika, and a convergence between the social fields in which these registers circulate, but also entails a new kind of public sphere. In the next section we will examine this new variant on the sermonic registers within kabary and political cartooning to show its social role.
in producing a particular kind of public and enabling participation in political process by certain groups of people.

The Durable Exchange between Proverbs and Scripture

As we witnessed in the opening story of this chapter, political mpikabary Desi deftly shifted the line he took with his audience when a drunk audience member stumbled through the crowd yelling “Santa Claus!” The politician quickly recovered from this break in frame by referring to a song with a proverb’s intonation and rhythm. Just as he shifted his footing by moving away from traditional proverbs but using a style of proverb performance, so too Imerina political orators commonly shift to intonations and lexical choices associated with genres of Protestant Christian sermons. Orators like Desi often eliminate proverbs completely and instead cast new phrases in the familiar tetrameter pattern of proverb – symmetrical, doubled-symmetrical, order-of-climax, or topic-comment (Haring 1992: 180).

This substitution is exemplified in Desi’s address at the Bemasoandro mayoral campaign rally in October (table 5.1), an address that was preceded by a Christian sermon, prayer, and selection of hymns. In the context where he would normally quote proverbs, such as during the fitalan-tsiny, he instead asks God for permission to speak. Using the if–then form of some proverbs but with a cadence of a minister in the pulpit, Desi states, “if there is honor, if there is worship, if there is praise, then we give them to God, for peace and approval are for all of us.” This replacement of one linguistic feature that carries the iconic function of another may have the same generic valence as an actual token of a proverb, but as an utterance it produces different publics, participant roles, and positional identities, and involves unifying a different consciousness of a public and community. Shifting to the register of the pulpit has the pragmatic effect of associating with the authority of one who may use proverbs, as well as deliver a Christian sermon.

In another example, Desi addresses the audience as “brothers in Our Lord” to cleverly orient the political event, its participants, as well as the political party’s campaign slogan to a joint biography: they are no longer merely citizens, or political servants and voters, but Christians: “Dear brothers in Our Lord, there will be no judgment
Shifting Registers, Building Publics

"...you will be judged from the work that you’ve done in Heaven’s Kingdom." This style matched well with the ministers’ words of prayer, hymn, and short sermon preceding Desi’s speech, all validating and buttressing his attempt to gain the mayoral seat. This calibration of footing between speaker and audience carries the semiotic potential to produce a certain kind of public, positional identities and roles. Referring to a political audience as Christians unifies a different consciousness among the group according to a particular set of interests and informs how that group sees itself as a group and how it will act in solidarity under that collective membership. Candidates for council seats continued his speech style and the event was brought to a climax by the party’s leader, who delivered his kabary with the

### Table 5.1 Excerpts from Desi’s Kabary (lexical stress is noted in capitalized letters rather than the IPA symbol, `)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Fiarahabana</th>
<th>We thank God because he has guided and held us, that’s why we all can meet here.</th>
<th>Misaotra an’Andriamanatra izahay satria nitantana sy nitondra antsika izy.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(greeting)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Fialan-tsiny</td>
<td>My FIRST word IS to ask perMISSion of GOD. If there is HOnor, if there is WORship, if there is Praise; then WE give them to GOD; For PEACE and appROVal are for US all [to speak]. Is that right, EH?!</td>
<td>Ny VOAlohan-TENY aloha IZAny dia fanGATaka ANDRiamanatra. Raha Misy ary VONinaHITra é, raha Misy VAavaka, raha Misy DEra, atolotrinTSIKA an’AndriaMANATRA izay, fa ny fADANana KOsa sy fankosiTHana ho anTSika, izay ve É?!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(permission to speak and reprieve from impending guilt)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Rajan-kabary</td>
<td>Dear brothers in Our Lord. There will be judgment in Heaven, you will be judged from the work that you’ve done here in Heaven’s Kingdom.</td>
<td>Ry havana malala ao amin’ny Tompo. Tsy hisy fitsarana akory ny any an-danitra fa ny asa vitanao no ifampitsarana aminao rehefa tonga izay fanjakana’ ny lanitra izay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(body of the speech, literally the calf muscle)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
tenor and cadence of a charismatic Christian sermon, embodying the authority and presence of a minister in the pulpit.

When political *mpikabary* shift from the usual proverbs and metaphors to Christian sermonic genres, they transform both the expectations for oratory as well as the audience engaged. The *kabary* event becomes more monologic than the usual campaign *kabary*, where a speaker’s silence is often met with cheers prompted by his words. In more monologic oratory, audiences are addressed as if they were congregations, communities sharing ideals and norms based in a moral social imaginary. And it is this shared biography of believers and their joint understandings of what community solidarity looks like that *kabary* mediates. As Habermas and Benhabib (1981: 102) suggest, “public opinion is aimed at rationalizing politics in the name of morality,” and these ways of codifying and objectifying moral values evident in *kabary* register variants can shape and reflect public opinion in political process.

The orators at Bemasoandro overtly use the register of the Christian sermonic tradition by directly quoting scripture. Though scripture use by politicians can be quite overt semantically, interanimation of *kabary* and sermon practice is both overt and covert. But even more covert invocations of this register and its associated meanings occur more frequently in everyday political *kabary*. Discretion may be due to an implicit norm which links good governance to an avoidance of an overt mix of church and state. With or without such discretion, animations of the sermonic register index a political identity positioned in relation to the speaker’s faith – it is the mere deployment of the form and not necessarily an actual denoted message within the form that speaks to a Christian base. These semiosocial fields come together when state rhetoric is given the footing of the Christian sermonic register, such that scripture is uttered, and alliances between state and religious institutions are noted. More often than the more overt attempts, covert alliances between the talk of religion and the talk of the state are frequent and tend to go uncensored. The intonation, cadence, volume, and phrase-level lexical choices common to the Protestant sermonic tradition can be introduced without scriptural reference, but serve to introduce the aesthetic of this register. Covert interdiscursive relations index an inferred intent to align church and state practices and build a political base of believers (in the candidate, not in God). Politicians running for office may adapt the cadence of a sermon, as Desi did, but will not necessarily quote scripture directly. In these
slant animations of a minister in a pulpit, they do not violate the sectarian parameters of sermons or the secular tenor of the political kabary register. Another means to face the convergence of ontological worlds where different gods run the place, speakers will provide both proverbs and scripture to commune with ancestors while also indexing their Christianity. Michael Lambek’s work on Sakalava spirit possession draws similarities accounting for the usual flexibility of a cosmopolitan place in adding to traditional forms rather than full abandonment of what was in practice what Lambek (2002) describes as poiesis of history.

However, perhaps more significantly than the taboos of mixing church and state through symbolic practices like oratory, the speakers are also concerned with their usual communal relationship with ancestors and the usual way in oratory they show that, through proverbs. Communing with the dead is commonplace in all of Madagascar. Jennifer Cole notes, “Not only do the dead move among and watch the living but communication between the dead and the living is thought to be a normal – indeed necessary – daily occurrence” (2001: 614). To not invoke the words of the ancestors in kabary is not only to block the past from the present as one but also to shift the subjectivity of both speaker and audience, colonizing the mind according to what is moral versus what is not. The event and how it endures becomes a different process in a different order where memory of ancestors does not live or count.

*aza matohatra fa mino fotsiny ihany!* “Have no fear, just believe!”

Today it is seemingly impossible to campaign for office without presenting oneself as a Christian through overt acts within the kabary. Desi’s kabary that opened this chapter reflects many examples across urban Imerina’s political landscape. Consider, however, an example from perhaps the leading offender of this register shift away from prior styles to a model associated with Christian sermonic tradition, President Ravalomanana. During his tenure the president was well known for the quotations from the Bible in his speeches. In his daily public address to his multitude via statements to the Senate or mass media outlets, the president assured the citizenry of his capacity to
competently lead the country through an invocation of the Gospel of Mark 3:6. Animating the word of God, Ravalomanana summed up his personal justification for any and all state decisions or circumstances with *Aza matohatra fa mino fotsiny ihany!*, “Have no fear, just believe in me.” This biblical passage is also the motto for his dairy company, TIKO, whose employees nationwide are required to begin their day with a joint prayer and worship devotional. Ravalomanana’s scripture use here does the immediate work of indexing him as Christian, thus attaching to his role as president a belief shared by other Christians.

Speaking as both business owner and president of Madagascar, Ravalomanana actualizes a perspectival shift when voicing this scripture. As business owner, he quotes it as company motto and personal mantra, which confers strength with its recitation. As president, however, his utterance has the same authority as if he were uttering a proverb. In this way he shifts the context of the utterance away from its biblical and superhuman source toward his position as speaker, the first-person referentially indexed (in other words, him). As double-voiced, the scripture in which God is the voiced “me” urged as caretaker is instead voiced in daily public recitations of Mark 3:6 by “me,” Marc the president. The perlocutionary effect of this voicing enables the president to embody a political consciousness that is actually religious (and supernatural).

The political effect of Ravalomanana’s utterance of Mark 3:6 (to assemble believers in God and in him as president), however, had shifted in political effect with the economic downturn facing the nation in 2003. The recent suspension of taxes on non-capital goods, and the devaluation of the currency (the FMG or *Ariary*) to increase imports of foreign monies, caused the cost of staple products to soar. During the first three months of 2004 the cost of rice shot up by 12.7 percent and inflation overall exceeded 9 percent (IRIN News 2004). Given this drastic economic shift, Ravalomanana’s effort to assure people’s faith in government through the use of this scripture became an index of irascible egotism and self-promotion. Ravalomanana’s expression lost force for rallying a public and extending faith in the “messiah” to his government. As Sély laughed out loud to me one day as we took the typical Sunday stroll along L’Avenue d’Indépendence and choked down tangy ice cream, this messianic trope once prompted cheers from an audience as a rally cry, but “now people make fun of it, criticize it, joke with it when they meet each other on the street:
one will say to another, ‘Tell me how is your business?’ and the answer is always ‘Have no fear, just believe my friend.’” The cartoon in figure 5.3 exemplifies the emptiness of this catch-all phrase, as cartoonists and others “see through” what someone else says. In this case, to believe the commandment by the president to “have no fear” – as does this combatant of the 2002 presidential crisis who will never
see amnesty – is to be ignorantly driven by an unguaranteed hope. Anyone else who believes this mantra, the cartoon implies through its imprisoned figure, will surely remain ignorant in the same way. Countering the key in which Ravalomanana’s kabary register is experienced, cartoonists reorient and transform a once-common aesthetic evaluation of the utterance from a set of moral principles and values associated with a particular belief system, Christianity, to something else entirely, something empty and that cannot be trusted.

Where the first missionaries to Madagascar from the London Missionary Society sought to emulate the model of kabary to convey their message, today’s political mpikabary – from Ravalomanana to almost any candidate running for office in Imerina – have taken the sermon model out of the church and into the political arena. Sermon texts and other register elements of the sermon interanimate in cadence and in lexicon with the oratorical registers of kabary and are evaluated according to the ways in which the value systems and worldviews in these registers come to interact. This has great political effect in that the social imaginary of community solidarity made manifest by the kabary event between members of an audience now as congregation is informed by a particular communicative logic, as well as an understanding of that audience’s biography as Christian and an ideology that is based on that position rather than that of any disposition oriented toward a political ideology or aesthetic. The associated aesthetic conveys to an audience/congregation a sense of a moral imperative associated with sermons. In other words, the ideology and the aesthetic associated with talk that seems “like” a sermon can be brought to the event of kabary politika, shaping the evaluative purview of the audience as believers bound in the unity of their faith, distinct from other faiths. In this case, faith transferred to sentiments of solidarity and community can be inculcated when political parties deploy the register of the church.

Today’s missionaries of economic change in Madagascar, however, bring a different kind of political speaking to the stage. The register of the sermonic tradition finds a more prominent and effective place in kabary politika. So too the register of international development, with its lexicon, quips, and sound bites, has entered the genre of political oratory, signaling another innovative shift in the way leaders create and maintain political alliances, affect public opinion, and shape and reflect in their words the public to whom they speak.
Action Words and the Code of Modernity and Development

An iconic moment in Ravalomanana’s struggle for victory during the presidential crisis in 2002 may have been his defiant utterance of that famous proverb at Place de 13 Mai, but he is more likely to quote scripture or deliver an American speech translated into Malagasy than to weave together the wit and wisdom of a traditional political kabary. His speech style has become known for its shift from the figurative idioms of proverbs to a simplified political message, denuded of metaphor, agent-centered active-voice sentence structures, usually following the pattern of sound bites, especially of the ubiquitous genre in American political oratory and international development: “We will stand up to meet the challenge” to achieve “good governance,” “political stability,” “democracy,” “transparency,” “sustainability,” “good public service delivery.” All these sound bites are pitched as “added-value” and “economic development,” “vision,” and an “ownership society,” organized according to a “clear roadmap” to “lead the way to make this vision a reality.”

This corporatized register embodied by the businessman president himself is indicative of a shift in state rhetoric toward capitalist business and global democratic governance. What I have termed the international development register or what Harry West and Todd Sanders (2003) refer to as “development-speak” is part of a larger national state project in which international and multilingual political representatives present images of a Malagasy future with phrase-level elements and grammatical structures that mediate Western speech styles and registers. With the same intonations and gestures used when deploying a proverb, political mpikabary engage this sub-register of international development, particularly the grammatical structures and lexical items generically grounded in Western rhetoric concerning democracy and governance, economic readjustment programs, and civil-society building. On the ground, this often amounts to that familiar story from chapter 1 in which political advisors huddle together in offices or hotel rooms crafting speeches chocked full of short agent-centered active voice sentences composed of sound bites, usually translated directly from their English source. Such lexicon, stylistic, and grammatical shifts act as tropes of development and modernity, and generally stand in contrast to what is perceived to be a negatively valued, residual
category of “tradition.” Tropes of modernity versus tradition delivered in the register of Western political rhetoric activate ideological alliances toward a modern versus traditional public – and therefore a sense of *fihanana* – in distinct and divisive ways.

Marc Ravalomanana ushered in both the context and the aesthetic to lead a change in political speech for the sake of indexing Madagascar’s modernity and development. Consider his acceptance speech for a poverty reduction grant awarded by the US government’s Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). Madagascar was the first grant recipient of the controversial MCC program, designed to fund leaders identified as having strong promise for instituting economic and governmental reform and development in their home country. Ravalomanana’s acceptance speech did not mirror the *kabary* style common in Madagascar. In fact, his style of speech was strikingly similar to that of MCC Director Paul Applegarth and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who both spoke that day. Note the common use of poetic triads, acronyms, and key lexical items (marked in bold), ubiquitous in US political rhetoric, in the following excerpt from Ravalomanana’s speech:

This [award] is recognition of our effort in **good governance, economic reform and social welfare**. Indeed, good governance is my highest priority. Good governance is the key to everything else. **Fighting corruption, enforcing state accountability, creating transparency, improving service delivery and the efficiency** of the justice system, these are the basis of **trust and security** . . . **Economic reform** is equally important. We have a very clear **roadmap** on how to implement this vision . . . Security and financing for farmers and **SMEs**, new opportunities to create **added value**. The MCA compact will assist us in **realizing our vision**. The approach of the MCC is also in line with our philosophy of **country ownership** . . . the first to **deliver results** . . . a **new model for economic development** in Africa . . . The road ahead is not easy, but we will rise to the challenge.

Director Applegarth’s closing remarks, by comparison, serve well to index the president’s “global speak.” Indeed, Ravalomanana’s register was so assimilated to the rhetorical style of the Americans that when he accidentally left his speech transcript on the podium, Director Applegarth suggested that instead of providing his own closing remarks, he would just reread the president’s speech: “Maybe I’ll reread yours.
I think it’s better than mine. [Laughter]” Though the president’s style can be quite extreme compared to the typical kabary style of political leaders, subtler shifts aligning speakers with the president have accustomed audiences to the new style and its implications for who they are and who they must become as a political public.

This transition is not a direct flow from old to new ways of being and doing but a political process steeped in an ideological struggle with modernity. With idiomatic expressions that translate and parallel the language of development elsewhere, register shifts by political kabary speakers are not merely semantic but point to and represent new forms of governmentality locally. Used and reused, this new aesthetic based in an alternative mode of political and economic rationalization (Bauman and Briggs 1990: 73–4) is projected by its speakers as an index of such an emerging “modern” public, to which many auditors then ally through a “yae” vote for the modern candidate. Following the register of US political rhetoric, Ravalomanana’s speech sent a rather clear message to the donor country, the United States: he is speaking their language, quite literally. This “megarhetoric of development modernization” (Appadurai 1996: 13) belongs to a “corporatized register . . . fashioned along the lines of modern advertising copy” and wields considerable power in holding the attention of an international development and governance audience (Silverstein 2003: 116). For this, Ravalomanana’s style is productive of a local sense of fihavanana in relationship to a moral code that comes from elsewhere.

Ravalomanana’s style is quite extreme compared to his political cohort, who have been trying out Western rhetoric but in such a way that tempers its distinct style and structure against typical kabary. Their compromises point to the inherent tension between old and new, a tension from appearing to abandon or disrespect the kabary process, and a tension made by the “modern” to legitimate itself by stigmatizing older, local, traditional styles. Quite often this tension is worked out when speakers – either one or several – deliver kabary full of proverbs and virtues juxtaposed with the new development register, the older serving to entertain and translate for the newer, the newer in relation to the old to serve as a nod toward their differences.

Consider two speeches delivered as a pair in a single political event, an instance juxtaposing styles in which the inadvertent “translation” of the new style by the old is exemplified. This case involves the New Year’s speeches at the State House of Iavaloha, a kabary full of proverbs
and virtues by the president of the National Assembly juxtaposed with the new register of Marc Ravalomanana, the older serving to entertain and translate for the newer, both co-dependent and both co-constructing meanings of tradition and modernity.

In Lahiriniko’s speech, he describes the incompetence of government officials in the past as an obstacle to progress:

\[ Ela \text{ izay } \text{nanaovana ho toy ny rovam voasary an-tsena ny } \text{fitantana ny firenena izay, ka ho lany vato foana amin’ny } \text{handrina. } \]

It has been a long time since the country’s management has not been taken as if it were like oranges at the market grabbed by a thief who avoids the thrown stones of a shopkeeper, all to no avail.

After Lahiriniko warmed up the audience, including those listening to television and radio, President Ravalomanana followed this traditional metaphor of oranges and stones with his own style of speaking about overcoming obstacles to development:

\[ Io \text{ ilay } \text{toe-tsaina io no anisany antony mampikorosy fahana antsika teto amin’ity firenena ity. } \]

This mentality [of incompetence] was among the reasons for our non-development.

\[ Ho \text{ ento aty ny voan-dalana tsara; hoentinay aty na ny voan-dalana betsaka. } \]

We will bring home what is good from abroad, we will bring many things.

\[ Izay \text{ no anisan’ny tarigetrantsika amin’ny fampiarana ny three-P na ny Public–Private Partnership. } \]

These are among my aims with the 3P or Public–Private Partnership.

Ravalomanana spoke the 3P as “three-P” and Public–Private Partnership in English, perhaps a signal that development not only comes through direct speech styles but also only comes in English.

Through these registers of proverbs and international development occupational jargon, these two orators alternate between two modes of rationality, one of socioeconomic modernization and one that serves as a rhetoric of cultural identity. In cases such as this, speeches that say the same thing but in different registers point to the semiotic mediation of co-occurring and alternating linguistic modes of orienting people toward collective and solidary notions of fihavanana, the gesellschaft of socioeconomic modernization and the gemeinschaft discourse of gasy cultural identity. In transformative ways kabary speakers today...
meld the idioms of normalized tradition with innovative linguistic styles, indexes of socioeconomic development. They compress tropes and modes of rationality in an aesthetic argument that identifies modernity with the ritual-we-Malagasy:

The tasks of passing on a cultural tradition, of social integration, and of socialization require the adherence to a criterion of communicative rationality. The occasions for protest and discontent originate exactly when spheres of communicative action, centered on the reproduction and transmission of values and norms, are penetrated by a form of modernization guided by standards of economic administrative rationality. (Habermas and Ben-Habib 1981: 8)

Empirically, these shifts between modes of rationality map to shifting linguistic styles and the epistemologies they index, such that to speak about development necessitates a shift in register. Alternating realms of practice are required for these “altering standards of rationalization” (Habermas and Ben-Habib 1981: 8).

The speeches delivered by the president of Madagascar and the Madagascar National Assembly president point to the semiotic mediation of these altering standards of rationalization, particularly those that mediate between local and global audiences cum publics. President Ravalomanana used the register of socioeconomic modernization in Malagasy, quite often code-switching to English whenever the register of development-speak was required. He then reperformed his speech in French, a language he does not know well but which non-Malagasy bystanders – officials from other governments, for example – need in order to understand him. As “experts” in two interacting domains of rationalization they were “each of these under the control of specialists who seem more adept at being logical in these particular ways than other people are” (Habermas and Ben-Habib 1981: 9). This attitude is confirmed by many people in my study who often admit, with great resignation, that Ravalomanana cannot “um, well, you see, he cannot mikabary,” that is, give a proper speech. President Ravalomanana speaks to the issue of a modern mentality and socioeconomic dimensions of interaction, while the president of the National Assembly conveys the aesthetic–expressive rationality of a cultural identity. Their joint prowess as shapers of public opinion, by ideological and aesthetic means, depends on the dialogical relationship between their styles of speech and a semiotic chemistry in which each depends on the other. After Ravalomanana’s speech, that of the National Assembly president
comes across as both entertaining and didactic, but would not be politically efficacious on its own. Without Ravalomanana’s kabary, which advances a new standard, Lahiriniko’s animation of ancestral proverbs as a stand-alone kabary would be deflated and misspent political action. Rather, Lahiriniko’s speech exemplifies in this case the growing patron-client relation between the state and a folk artist celebrating an object of national tradition. His performance becomes entertaining, didactic, and structurally politicized thanks to the context of the speech that precedes it.

Conversely, without Lahiriniko’s speech in the traditional genre of kabary, President Ravalomanana’s speech would likely have appeared too foreign, not emblematic of the gasy unity, which is evoked by the mere kabary performance itself. This dialogical relationship moves away from the normative functions of traditional speech while praising that very form of speech as an emblem of Malagasy traditional identity. The oratorical mode of enlightenment and progress and the talk of development must coexist with the communicative rationality of development-speak. This co-occurrence is necessary in order to bolster claims that the speaker is against corruption and therefore the old ways of doing politics. Any alternative mentality associated with older styles of communicative practices—linguistic or otherwise—are thus “othered,” aligning new ways of speaking with a new governmentality, and old ways as indexical of an old mentality. Eventually this style is assimilated into the context of national kabary politika and is turned into a positive attribute or one to target in the way it targets older styles. And the cycle of social change continues. For now, Lahiriniko’s badly thrown stones work alongside Ravalomanana’s 3P plan to better manage the shop, and their words together mediate notions of modernity against an objectified tradition. This has done great work to shape the audience Ravalomanana addresses. It has also affected recipient understandings of language and modernity. To become a developed nation is to speak like one.

The rationale informing what is argued as direct and transparent, often pitched by Ravalomanana as acta non verba, is also that which undergirds the demonization of older styles of kabary, which are known for their poetic and “winding speech” (teny mioloka). In short, use of the international development register indexes the incapacity of traditional kabary to encode possibilities of progress. In fact, in the face of modern development rhetoric the form and its speakers have been stigmatized and marked not only as an icon of all-talk-and-no-action
but also as a mode of government corruption because of a speaker’s ability to hide behind the poetry, riddles, and proverbs of *kabary* (this is a topic covered in depth in chapter 7). Such expressed rationalizations in this megarhetoric about the language in political *kabary* speech themselves mediate the way identities are produced and valued, and therefore how social relations are constituted in the public sphere. This builds a congruence of signs across domains, associating types of speech to speakers and audiences. In other words, ways of speaking are conflated with ways of being. As Agha (2005: 39) notes, “a judgment of likeness evokes one of distinction” in which not only are words made distinct but also individuals and groups are made distinct by their words. This semiotic linking between subjectivities, morality, and character of groups iconically essentializes group speech and opinion. In their trek to connect the constructions of language and tradition as central to actually creating the modernist project, Bauman and Briggs (2003) suggest this kind of internal conflict between socioeconomic modernity and a national cultural essence in which a practice such as the *kabary* oratory of Madagascar is caught. As a part of the modernist project in Madagascar, language has become the object of focus for telling the story of modernity; and one finds the place of *fihavanana* caught in between cosmopolitanism and nationalist sentiment, wrapped up in ways of speaking (Bauman and Briggs 2003: 223, 299).

As different registers mediate social relations, and a traditional past and a modern future, their institutionalization suppresses and reduces the actual interactional meanings circulating in a heteroglossic semiosocial matrix. It is this nexus of institutional legitimization of conflating ways of talking with a capacity for development that political cartoonists expose and criticize. They foreground disjunctures between this “image” of a modern public – local and global – and the realities of uneven development, exposing the homogenous privileged audience and the institutions of this code and style of talk serve. As this style of speech is the message, cartoonists look to the denotational and interactional aspects of the code to measure the extent to which it maps to material reality.

Cartoonists engage *kabary* speakers’ register of international development by pointing out discrepancies between the intention and effect of their words. In one sense, cartoonists expose and represent alternate versions of a public addressed and participant roles enabled by political *kabary*. This is not the local public but the international community.
on the sidelines that is very much involved in shaping Ravalomanana’s approach to governing and speaking to the country. They bring those on the sidelines to the fore, exposing “real” audiences and politically interested constituents, a public whose participation in the public sphere is perhaps more effective than any other. Political cartoonists are apt to point out inconsistencies in this style of speaking that are perhaps more productive in addressing eavesdroppers or what Goffman (1974) might refer to as “overhearers” in the public sphere (Shilling-Estes 2002: 383). These are audiences not necessarily present, but nonetheless ratified participants known or expected to hear the speech. These bystanders are also “referees” because of their vested political interests: Western agents and Malagasy political elites interested in realigning government and civil society according to a vision of political and economic modernity (Bell 1984: 186–7; Schilling-Estes 2002: 377). In fact we see in Ravalomanana’s statements at Iavaloha that he anticipates this audience not only when he uses the idiom of development and progress, but when he code-switches to English to speak of the “public–private partnership” backing his development plan. He does not explain this or translate it into French or Malagasy. He presupposes, rather, the international development community as his audience. As such, tropes in alternating and competing discourses are limited to elites whose agency is licensed by competence in a register, and enables them to circulate in the social fields in which it is used.

In another sense, the productive and social role of cartooning in the register of international development is to index the disjuncture between the material reality of the promise of progress that register purports to denotatively represent, and the plight of the local community that cartoonists see as the reality of everyday urban Imerina. In this sense the semiotic chemistry of tropes in political discourse helps to both motivate and limit imaginings of potential social futures. As figure 5.4 makes clear, the development register offers many opportunities for parody in political cartoons. The discrepancy between the rhetoric of neoliberal economies and the actual life of everyday urban Tana makes it very easy to juxtapose talk and the realities that contradict it. Cartoonists point out the unintelligibility of development initiatives and the talk about this in kabary. For example, one of my research participants, cartoonist Jôs, explained to me that the cartoon in figure 5.4 is about the attempt by the state to develop the country through “direct” measures – economic and otherwise:
It is said that there is a clearly predefined path, which leads to such a development expected for the nation. It had been agreed that that should be the way. However, based on what we see right now, the development we are experimenting seems to have no single good impact on the *vahoaka* [the people]. It is as if there has been a newly created path over here that is supposed to be direct and toward progress versus one that really goes backwards, which is what they claim is the old way of doing things. That is the reason for which this young person asks himself, “But which one is the real way?” In other words, I mean to ask through my cartoons if what we are experimenting with right now is what is the real expected development . . . where is the country.

Figure 5.4 The character stands at the divide in a road, puzzled over which direction to head because he questions exactly which way the sign marked “development” points. “Where is it that this road leads?” he asks. This cartoon iconizes the path of development lauded by politicians. Though the path toward development is spoken of by politicians as direct (as in transparent and legitimate), perhaps it is, in fact, just as circuitous (as in corrupt and underhanded) as any other path of governance.

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going and why are the economic measures we opted for not successful?
Why does mentality deteriorate, as we target the country for rapid
development? (English translation from Malagasy)

In juxtaposing talk of development with a cartoon icon depicting
someone who is not a member in that social imaginary, cartoonists
bring to the fore the gap between the images of *fihavanana* and “devel-
opment” they construct and talk about in their oratory, and the
publics disfranchised by that model public. Register choice within
political *kabary* plays a structural and stylistic role in the shaping of
constructive idioms, which a political speaker needs to effectively
engage the general public (*vahoaka*) and to solidify his base. Words
transformed into “image”-packed tropes of community, associated
with previous utterances of politicians in *kabary* speech style, are
picked up almost daily by cartoonists. In this co-optation and reas-
signment of tropes ripe for the picking, cartoonists re-voice an orator’s
words of the international development register to critique the poss-
sibility of unifying notions of solidarity within the context of a national
development plan. They hybridize language by exposing how the
modernist rabbit got put in the hat to begin with. In this they recon-
textualize not only the delivery and presentation of *kabary* register
variants and the rationale informing them, but also the social positional
identities of those political orators and the social imaginary their
speech assumes to both be in place and to create.

Operationally, cartooning counteracts the “key” in which the *kabary*
register is experienced, what Goffman (1974: 43) calls transforming the
meaning of an activity from what it appears to be in semiosocial context
to something else. Key shifts in these cartoons are often made possible
by certain framing devices such as reported speech, parody, and ana-
logical appositions of parallel social contexts otherwise materially disparate,
all for political effect (Goffman 1974: 43). They are deployed stylisti-
cally as triply iconic reported speech: “like” what the speaker uttered,
“like” those registers which they usurp and recontextualize, and
embodied by caricatures that (or “who”) are iconic tokens of real-
speaker counterparts. These cartoonists reorient the audience’s gut
evaluation of the utterance when they pitch the real-time event in a
different speech context, often in hypertropic form. They take a set of
moral principles and values associated with a memory or heritage, belief
systems such as Christianity, or stances toward development, and reori-
ent them toward hope for success in that image by the ignorant.
Through metapragmatic acts in which cartoonists animate variations of registers of *kabary* within altered contexts, they expose the contradictions and complexities of this image of a unified community. These metapragmatic contexts recontextualize not only the delivery and presentation of *kabary* register variants, but also the positional identities of those political orators who use and rely on them. By recontextualizing what community solidarity looks like – in the “traditional” style evoked by poetry and proverb, for a religious community of believers and in “modern” Malagasy – they evoke a new kind of public along with roles for participating in the public sphere. Cartoonists thwart these potential transformations by recontextualizing speech from one dimension to another, and in so doing foregrounding a heteroglossic public very different from that conveyed through *kabary*.

**Conclusion**

Jôs and I were talking one day about the very little money cartoonists earn, and yet how much focus and passion he and his colleagues have for their work as cartoonists, political cartoonists in particular. Jôs nailed down that focus and passion as rooted in social justice, a kind of socially productive publics-making constituted between the one who can speak for the ones who cannot:

> Because most common people are not entitled to speak, they cannot express their opinions. Such people’s voice would never be heard in the community even if what they want to express is true. They have no freedom to speak though they are simple people who fight for life . . . ! I try to put myself in those people’s place and materialize (through drawings) their feelings . . . This is how they feel . . . and their opinions. I have done this about this so-called development ways the current administration has. (English gloss of Malagasy)

The very heart of the political cartoonist’s work, and the political *mpikabary’s* for that matter, is to speak to and speak for, a collective based on that consciousness and solidarity of action, *fihavanana* and *firasian-kina*. This chapter has explored how it is that register variants in state oratory and political cartooning do this kind of work and attach to a larger set of practices and social meanings across multiple temporal dimensions. In this zone of dialogical and interdiscursive contact, notions of political solidarity and opinion are negotiated,
produced, and evaluated. In daily routinized interaction between genres of kabary speakers and political cartoonists, these actors interanimate varying registers associated with different social fields in a reflexive, metapragmatic “argument of images” (Durham and Fernandez 1991). This argument is realized in part by the interanimating polyphony of different speech contexts, discursively deployed to evoke and contest notions of solidarity and community, which their very acts constitute, shaping both public opinion and the public of that opinion. Proverbs, the ancestral voice, seem monologic but are in fact polyphonic with the sermonic register and international development–speak. As a composition of poeisis, the old and new registers of kabary oratory covered in this chapter are discursively interanimated, decisively interpenetrate, and are shaped by ideologies and aesthetics of language practice in relation to notions of nation, community, social alliance, and political solidarity. Interanimating registers associated with social fields distinct and beyond the nation-state serve to mediate continual role alignment of speakers and a public that recognizes, ratifies, reproduces, and even transforms them continually (Agha 2005: 39). In this interaction shaping social relations across domains, they do great work to produce and contextualize that sentiment of fihavanana or solidarity and belonging to a particular community among participants. Based on the circulation of tropes bearing aesthetic similarity to fihavanana, pre-packaged idioms of different types of “communities” accumulated from multiple contexts are brought into one context – the speech or the cartoon – to organize this public and its politics, and to provide a language for this public’s biography. As the candidates deliver idioms of fihavanana in speeches, cohering that public at that time and in that space, political speakers presuppose two things: certain participant roles in which they and their audiences carry; and an objectifiable rational moral order that can then be built upon, reproduced, and strengthened through the actual speech event itself in that role. As both agentive and an object of ideology, ratified tropes of fihavanana require continual role alignments as participant roles for orators, cartoonists, and the publics they reflect and shape shift accordingly (Agha 2005: 39). From this semiotic process, this agentive practice implicates individuals in shifting subjectivities – as audiences and as certain kinds of citizens bound in a national community with other citizens – and shapes how publics and public opinion are inspired and coalesce.

What we should leave with from this chapter is how notions of collectivity, solidarity, and shared identities that inspire publics and
shape public opinion should not be considered a priori structures. Rather, we reckon with them as an active, agentive, local, daily process and object of ideology in which certain dispositions indexed by particular linguistic registers and other embodied practices are recognized and ratified by a collective based on some metacommunity awareness; it is this ratification by the actor himself, the audience, and others who create new words about his words that creates that “community of sentiment” (Appadurai 1996), the Malagasy fihavanana in all its many conjurings undergirding the multiple publics making up the Imerina public sphere. This community of sentiment includes not just the living but past generations. To follow a processual approach then reads collectivity as manifest through practices that put structure to its boundaries by bringing to the fore acts of metacommunity. Definitions of community are discussed and ground the ways in which speakers attempt to create that collective sense.

Such group communitas brought about through a shared sentiment, in this case enacted through linguistic embodied practices, is one predicated on the larger institutional framework those dispositions index: being traditional, being gasy, being Christian, being modern, and so forth. As the stories in the chapter tell us, these different linguistic dispositions are indexed by the use of traditional features of the kabary such as proverbs, alongside the Christian sermonic register, and the register of Western political and international development rhetoric, pointing to the sliding sense of obligatoriness in the form, that coheres auditor from one social imaginary to another (Ochs 1975: 240). Following their interconnectedness, we come to find that these interactions are not stand-alone practices and should be considered beyond the semantic level to one in which these registers discursively mingle across social domains to serve as active tropes that invoke a sense of fihavanana. Kabary speakers and political cartoonists depend on the interanimation of these varying registers associated with different social fields to persuade public opinion and to play off already in-place attachments people feel with those domains of practice. Kabary orators link ways of speaking with ways of being by demonstrating what kind of people are speaking and coming together rather than an actual political platform. Through shifts in ways of speaking, registers come to serve as tropes, tropes of “community” or fihavanana, in order to create a sense of collective solidarity, and how these tropes come from multiple social domains that orient a plurality of publics in particular and distinct ways. Politicians deliver the lexicon, cadence,
pace, and intonation of these registers in order to form political alliances based on a shared biography with this audience. In turn, political cartoonists play off of this attempt to smooth differences between the politician and “the public” by disrupting tropes drawn from different speech contexts, which are discursively deployed to evoke notions of a communal biography linking the politician to the public those attachments and alliances constitute.

Lastly, building from the ideas and events in this chapter, we hold on to the kinds of “techniques of interdiscursivity deployed as role strategies of participants” that we observe in the interanimation of registers to look closer at how such interanimations are predicated on “rules of role recruitment” (what kind of person can use what form to what kind of person referring to what kind of thing, etc.) (Silverstein 2003: 11). These rules of participation delineate types of participants in the public sphere. So, too, speech style – from registers, and now we turn to syntactic styles – is evaluated by addressees as determinants of a speaker’s mental capacity to effectively participate in political process.

In the way that interanimation registers are productive of particular publics, chapter 6 looks more in depth at this asymmetry of power enabling role alignment. We turn to how syntactic fashions of speaking reflect and shape ideologies of identity and political agency and coordinate with attitudes of character and mentality indexing class and ethnicity.

Notes

1 AVI, which stands for Asa Vita Ifampitsarana, “You are Judged By the Work You Do,” is the national political party run by one-time presidential candidate Norbert Lala Ratsirahoana. AVI backed President Ravalomanana in the run-off elections during the 2002 presidential crisis but ran candidates against him in the election of 2005.

2 Desi’s speech was recorded on October 24, 2003 at Bemasoandro, Madagascar.

3 Bauman (2005) uses this term based on Richards’ (1936) “interanimating” and in particular Kristeva’s (1980) arguments regarding intertextuality to clarify, in particular, the ideological motivations informing events of verbal political performance.

4 The exception to this is Bloch’s (1971) use of fi havanana and its derivative ny havana to explain kinship groups.
Though politicians hope to unify their crowds, the homogeneity Anderson requires, however, is not present in the Malagasy case. In fact, it is through these register shifts that the heterogeneity of the Imerina public sphere is made so apparent.

This is not to be flip or take poetic license. Ravalomanana has been referred to as a messiah by many writers and speakers, as well as those surreptitious political actors who get their word in through graffiti on city walls. Just around the corner from my house in Tana someone had spray-painted on the walls of a Catholic church courtyard, Ravalomanana inao no ny messiah, “Ravalomanana, you are the messiah.”

Excerpted from Ravalomanana’s speeches concerning the Millennium Challenge grant awarded to the Madagascar government by the US government under the Bush Administration in 2005.

As we will detail further in the next chapter, agent-centered active case is marked in Malagasy, where mostly passive-voice sentences are spoken in informal and especially formal contexts such as kabary.

Excerpts of speeches by Lahiniriko, president of the National Assembly, and Ravalomanana, January 9, 2004 New Year Kabary at Iavaloha, Antananarivo, Madagascar.

References


