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Moving Words, Managing Freedom:

The Performance of Authority in Malagasy Slam Poetry

By

Hallie E. Wells

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requirements for the degree of

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in

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:
Professor Charles L. Briggs, Co-Chair
Professor William F. Hanks, Co-Chair
Professor Charles K. Hirschkind
Professor Shannon Jackson

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Abstract

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Professor Charles L. Briggs and Professor William F. Hanks, Co-Chairs

Through an analysis of slam poetry performance in Madagascar, where poets are encouraged to express themselves freely but also to "manage" this freedom, this dissertation illuminates how speakers determine what kinds of speech are possible and appropriate in various contexts, how they perform authority, and how they anticipate and manage the consequences of their speech. Slam—a performance poetry competition created in Chicago in the 1980s—has become a popular literary and social movement around the world, but in Madagascar it has flourished in a context that includes pre-colonial genres of verbal art that are central to everyday life and to politics. In many of these genres, and especially in kabary—a form of oratory that ceremonializes major social and political events—public speech has long been reserved for elder men. Slam's insistence on "free expression" thus constitutes a radical break from long-standing notions of the social roles and risks associated with public speech. As slam poets and audiences navigate the terrain of "managed freedom" in live events as well as videos that circulate online, they forge an entirely novel mode of authoritative public discourse on the slam stage and the Facebook page in a plurilingual and rapidly urbanizing postcolonial context.

This research, based on a total of twenty-two months of multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in multiple cities across Madagascar and in Paris, France, advances scholarly debates on performance, aesthetics, media, embodiment, and politics. It is also a timely intervention into the fierce debates currently raging around the possibilities and limitations of liberal framings of "free speech." This dissertation treats the concept of free speech as historically and contextually specific rather than abstract and generalizable, and illuminates how speakers balance liberal discourses of individual freedoms with notions of responsibility and accountability, dialogic authority, and embodied relationality.

Ho an'ny poeta rehetra,
na iza na iza,
na aiza na aiza

À tous les poètes,
qui qu'ils soient,
où qu'ils soient

To all poets,
whoever they are,
wherever they are

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List of Cities, Organizations, and Acronyms

City / Town (with approximate pronunciation)	French Name	Slam Organization (as of 2015)
Antananarivo (An-*ta*-na-na-*reevoo*)	Tananarive	Madagaslam Section Tana and Madagaslam national headquarters
Antsirabe (An-tsee-ra-*bé*)	Antsirabe	none
Antsiranana (An-tsee-*ra*-na-na)	Diégo-Suarez	none
Fianarantsoa (Fee-an-ar-an-*tsooa*)	Fianarantsoa	Fianarant'slam
Mahajanga (Ma-ha-*ja*-nga)	Majunga	Slamasôva
Moramanga (Moo-ra-*ma*-nga)	Moramanga	none
Morondava (Moo-roon-*dava*)	Morondava	none
Taolagnaro (Toe-la-*nyaroo*)	Fort Dauphin	none
Toamasina (Too-ah-*ma*-seena)	Tamatave	Collectif Taly
Toliara (Too-lee-*ara*)	Tuléar	Tu'Slam
Tsihombe (Tsee-oom-*bé*)	Tsihombe	none

Other Organizations and Associations

Fi.Mpi.Ma: Fikambanan'ny Mpikabary Malagasy: Association of Malagasy Mpikabary (nationwide but headquartered in Antananarivo)

IFM: Institut Français de Madagascar: French Institute of Madagascar (Antananarivo, but part of a global network of French cultural Institutes)

AFT: Alliance Française de Tana: French Alliance of Tana (Antananarivo, but part of a nationwide and global network of French cultural Alliances/centers)

CGM: Cercle Germano-Malgache: German-Malagasy Circle (Antananarivo, but part of a global network of German cultural centers)

Havatsa-UPEM: Union des Poètes et Écrivains Malgaches: Union of Malagasy Poets and Writers (Antananarivo)

ENS: École Normale Supérieure: Teacher's College (Antananarivo)

CRAAM: Centre de Ressources des Arts Actuels de Madagascar: Resource Center for Contemporary Arts in Madagascar (Antananarivo)

FFDSP: Fédération Française de Slam Poésie: French Federation of Slam Poetry (Paris)

Map of Madagascar

including cities represented
at the National Slam,
and major roads

Antsiranana

Mahajanga

Toamasina

Antananarivo

Moramanga

Antsirabe

Morondava

Fianarantsoa

Toliara
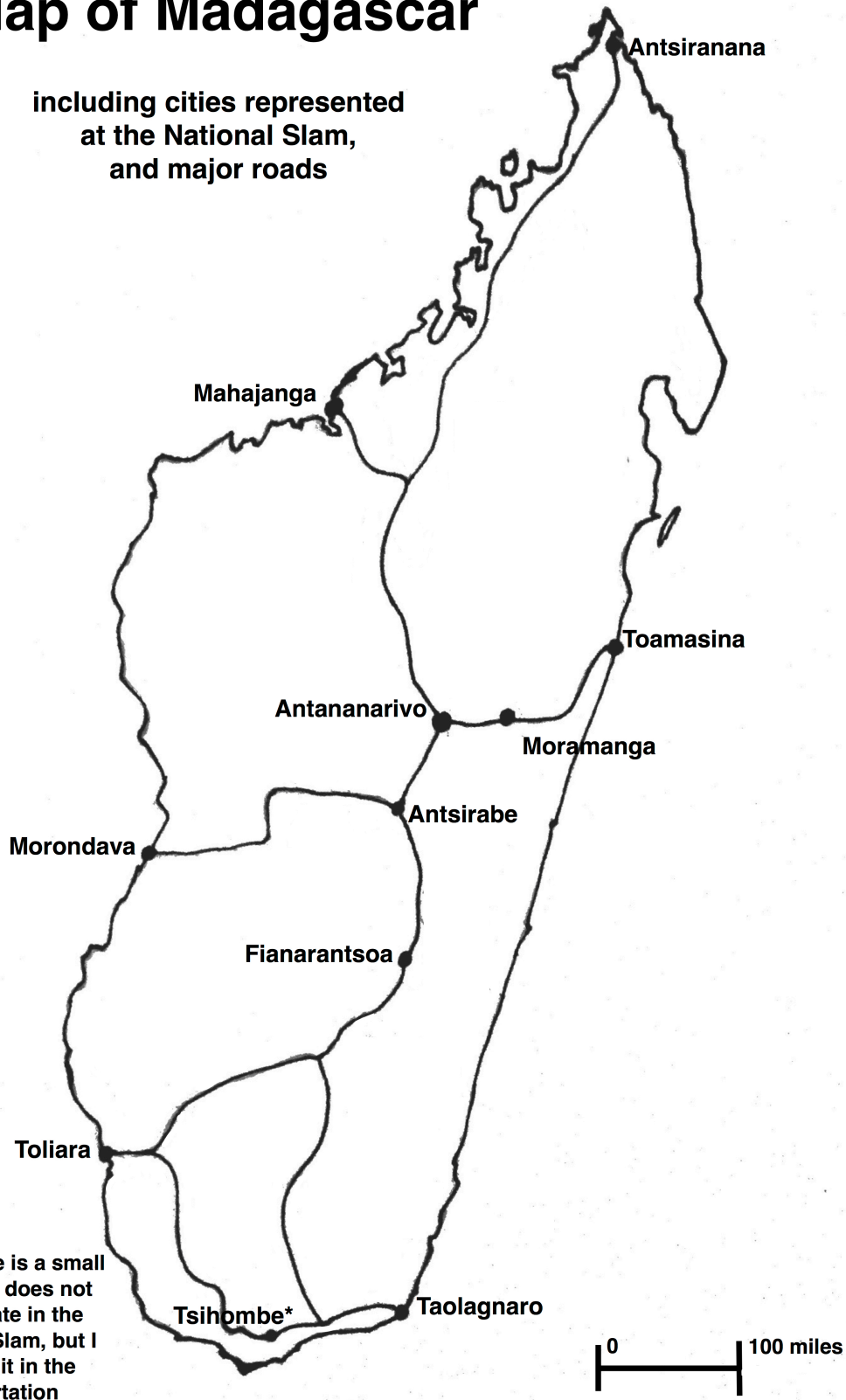
* Tsihombe is a small
town that does not
participate in the
National Slam, but I
refer to it in the
dissertation

Tsihombe*

Taolagnaro

0   100 miles

Acknowledgments

This dissertation is the work of many. I am first, foremost, and forever indebted to the ancestors who forged the path.

I am fortunate to have had not one but two dissertation co-advisors, Charles Briggs and William Hanks, who gave me a firm footing in many of the theoretical paths I trace here, and who have patiently and enthusiastically cheered me on from the very beginning. It has been a privilege to share this journey with them. Charles Hirschkind read innumerable drafts of this document with the keenest eye any writer could ask for, and gave generously of his invaluable time, insights, and energy. Shannon Jackson enabled me to see the bird's eye view of the paths I was tracing—a tremendous gift. Courses and conversations with Laura Nader, Cori Hayden, and Julia Bryan-Wilson helped me find my footing.

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Introduction: Voha varavarana ("Opening the door")[1]

1. Introduction

This dissertation examines Malagasy slam poetry as a novel form of authoritative public speech. Slam—a contemporary performance poetry competition created in the U.S.—was founded on the principle that everyone has the innate freedom and authority to express themselves. It has become a popular literary and social movement around the world, but especially in Madagascar, where it has flourished in a context that includes pre-colonial genres of verbal art that are central to everyday life. Many of these genres—particularly kabary, a form of oratory—have historically been the exclusive domain of elder men. Authority in slam poetry, as in kabary, is dialogically produced through the embodied encounter with an audience, but Malagasy slam poets also define performative and discursive authority as inherent in all individuals regardless of training or social status. In Malagasy slam, liberal discourses of individual freedoms collide with notions of the risks and responsibilities associated with public speech, producing new orientations towards discursive authority.

The slam poetry scene in Madagascar is an especially vibrant one. Slam performances and poets are regularly featured on TV and radio stations, newspapers, and news websites; schools, cultural centers, and youth organizations host slam workshops and competitions; NGOs, government ministries, and major political events such as the World Francophonie Summit invite poets to perform at their functions and to feature in their media campaigns. Slam is thus a prominent landmark in the discursive landscape, and it is an optimal site in which to examine issues of public speech and authority, for three key reasons. The first is that the genre of slam was explicitly created to revolutionize authority, public speech, and aesthetics. Against what they often portray as old, traditional, boring, and/or exclusive genres of public speech and the evaluation thereof (such as the academic poetry reading), slam poets claim to build a platform on which anyone can perform, and where anyone can evaluate the authority, power, beauty, or impact of performance. One way that they do this is by challenging the rigidity of participant roles in the speech event: audience members can be performers and/or judges, performers can be emcees, and emcees can be performers. Slam also challenges the rigidity of the social roles deemed to fit these participant roles by proclaiming the stage open to all, regardless of social position, training, or skill. These challenges to long-standing formations of authority and formality indicate new orientations towards participant roles and social power that are illuminating for scholarly discussions of these issues.

Secondly, slam's challenge to what it deems exclusionary speech practices is particularly compelling in Madagascar, where kabary—the authoritative speech genre par excellence—was historically the exclusive domain of elder men. Although access to the role of kabary speaker is opening up for women and young people, it remains a highly formal genre that requires significant training and skill. Slam's success in Madagascar is undoubtedly related to the prevalence of verbal art and the longstanding

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[1] In *kabary*, an oratorical genre I examine in Chapter One, this constitutes the first section of the speech.

importance of verbal aesthetics to sociopolitical processes, but its claims to "free expression" are antithetical to kabary. This conflict can help us rethink discussions of tradition and modernity, postcoloniality, and liberal discourses of the subject and individual freedoms.

Finally, Malagasy slam provides an opportunity to return to two sites of foundational scholarship in sociocultural and linguistic anthropology in the 1970s and 80s: the study of poetics and ethnopoetics (Tedlock 1972, 1983, 1985; Hymes 1981; Feld 1982, 1988, 1990; Abu-Lughod 1986), and the study of aesthetics, political process, and gender in kabary performance (Bloch 1971, 1975; Ochs 1973, 1974; Bauman 1975). In revisiting these sites, I move the discussion forward by focalizing the performance of authority as a means of understanding the link between discourse and social power. I argue that Bloch's early discussions of kabary (1971, 1975) misconstrued its dialogism, and I join more recent discussions of kabary (Hanson 2000, 2007; Jackson 2008, 2009, 2013; Raharinjanahary 2014; Somda 2014) in showing how the genre of kabary itself has transformed over time. Further, I show how kabary interfaces with slam, another prominent form of public speech but one that originated in the West relatively recently.

These are critical issues of both scholarly and public relevance. Understanding how discursive and aesthetic practices undergird sociopolitical processes has long been a central concern of linguistic anthropology, and these investigations have much to offer contemporary discussions of social and political movements, free speech, and the formation of publics and counterpublics via new media technologies. Slam's insistence on embodied co-presence and relationality, on authority as an individual aptitude, and on the political potential of performance aesthetics, provides a number of opportunities to critically reframe our understandings of politics, media, and public speech.

Slam, a mix of rap battle and poetry reading, was first conceived in Chicago in 1984 and brought to Madagascar in 2005 by a French slam poet who held workshops at French cultural centers around the country. When Malagasy slam poets step up to the microphone, they might excoriate an impotent and corrupt government or rail against Western imperialism—often in fluent French, on a French government-funded stage, in a format created in the U.S. The slam stage in Madagascar thus provides an unparalleled glimpse into the entanglements of poetics, performance, language, and politics in an increasingly urbanized and globally connected postcolonial society. I argue that slam events offer a conceptualization of authority as a feature of performance that is dialogically co-constructed with the audience, and simultaneously, as an inner capacity available to all individuals regardless of social status or prior experience. This seemingly contradictory approach to authority provides new insight into linguistic anthropological understandings of dialogism, intertextuality, and participant frameworks.

"Authority" is not a term frequently used by slam poets or by kabary speakers, but I argue that linguistic and embodied practices in both genres are oriented around skillful performance that commands the stage and the audience. Advancing linguistic anthropological discussions of authority and discourse (Gal and Woolard 2001; Bauman 2004; Dubuisson 2014, 2017), I use authority as an analytic that covers a range of

terms and ideologies about public speech, from notions of a speaker's skill or aptitude to discussions of power, force, and "managing" the stage. Slam does not empower everyone to speak their minds, though this is the discourse that some slam poets promote, nor does it burst onto the scene of a repressive "traditional" context and liberate the public sphere by democratizing public speech, though the support of foreign cultural centers may be premised on some of these notions. Slam builds a platform on an uneven surface and instructs participants to imagine that it is level. It may seem to emphasize performative competence and authority as primarily issues of individual aptitude, rather than status in a predetermined hierarchy, but—unsurprisingly—that authority is still inflected by social status and the embodied relationality of participants. Female performers are catcalled as they go onstage, non-Francophone participants may struggle to understand many of the poems and the emcee's banter, and—as we will see in Chapter Three—ethnic divisions and discrimination do not disappear the moment the slam begins. Slam does not eradicate social stratifications, but it calls into question the extent to which authoritative speech depends on them, thereby focalizing authority as something to be grappled with, critiqued, and refashioned.

By most accounts, the format of slam poetry was invented by a construction worker named Marc Smith in Chicago in the 1980s—even if its roots extend far beyond this singular "origin," as we will see in Chapter Two. The format was brought to Madagascar in 2005 by two French slam poets, Pilote le Hot from Paris and Stefan Hart de Keating from Reunion Island,[2] who held workshops at French cultural centers across the country. Some of the first attendees of these workshops in Antananarivo (the capital city—Tana for short) and in Fianarantsoa (a city in the Central Highlands south of Tana) went on to organize regular meetings and workshops. These were the seeds of the formal slam associations Madagaslam—which eventually became Madagascar's national slam organization, based primarily in Tana—and Fianarant'slam, a regional organization based in Fianarantsoa.

What Marc Smith created, and what Pilote le Hot and Stefan Hart de Keating taught in their workshops, was essentially a *format*: a set of rules that define the parameters of the slam event. Those rules—which I call the mantra conditions—have remained remarkably stable across time and space, so that emcees in Madagascar will run through more or less the same mantra as a Kenyan or Brazilian or Korean emcee: no props, no costumes, no music, three minutes on stage, judges selected randomly from the audience who give each performance a score from 0 to 10. By this definition, slam poetry is anything and everything that happens on that demarcated stage during those three minutes—it is little more than a physical and material apparatus of "stage" and "audience," much like a book is a material apparatus for text. Although the material apparatus imposes limits on what it contains, the possibilities for variations in style, content, and form within these limits are nearly infinite.

There is a second definition of slam, implicit in any imitation of slam or spoken word. Despite the first definition's insistence that slam is a format and not a genre, form,

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[2] Reunion is an Indian Ocean island near Madagascar that is administratively part of France and the European Union as a "DROM," or "Overseas Department and Region" ("départment et région d'outre-mer").

or style, there is also a homogenizing force in slam that results in a recognizable aesthetic.[3] The details of that aesthetic vary across contexts, but over time, and despite the absence of formal rules, many poets start to sound the same. The tensions between the first and second definitions—between slam as a format and slam as a style or aesthetic—will be explored further in Chapters Two and Four.

One of the elements of this recognizable aesthetic in the U.S. is the "authentic" expression of individual identities from a first-person singular perspective (Somers-Willett 2005, 2009, 2014; Johnson 2017). I argue that in Malagasy slam the performance of authority is much more often based on the expression of opinions and narratives that are thought to be collectively held or at least relevant to the community at large, however that might be defined. This is evidenced in part by the relative rarity of the first-person singular [the pronoun *aho* and passive verb ending in -(k)o, equivalent to "I" in English], in favor of poems voiced in the first-person inclusive plural [*isika* and *-(n)tsika*, roughly equivalent to the English "we"][4] or in the third-person singular or plural [*izy* and *-ny* or *izy ireo* and *-(n)dreo*, equivalent to "s/he" or "they" in English]. However, these "voicings" on behalf of "the people" often occur in French (approximately half of slam performances are exclusively or predominantly in French), a language that only around five percent of the population speaks fluently.[5] This constitutes a critical contribution to the literature on language politics and ideologies (Silverstein 1979; Irvine 1989; Rumsey 1990; Woolard and Schieffelin 1994; Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity 1998; Bauman and Briggs 2003; Kroskrity 2003), and to understandings of speaker roles and participant frameworks (Goffman 1967, 1979; Urban 1989; Peters 2016).

Madagascar, despite worrying legal trends,[6] is not governed by a totalitarian regime. People are not generally jailed for speaking ill of the government out loud, even if there have been cases of journalists jailed for criticizing government officials in print. Despite norms of public speech that have historically restricted authoritative public speech to elder males, women and young people nevertheless voice their opinions in all sorts of speech genres and contexts. What is new and different about slam is that it

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[3] For a humorous take on this aesthetic homogenization from the perspective of a seasoned slam poet, see Taylor Mali's 2005 poem "I Could Be a Poet" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnOrrknTxbI): "I have studied the poets who singsong out their lines for no other reason that that's how it's done/ In love/ with the sound/ of their/ own/ voices/ Ending every line going up/ Every single line going up"

[4] Malagasy, unlike English, has two first-person plural forms, an inclusive form that includes the addressee [*isika, -(n)tsika*], and an exclusive form that excludes the addressee [*izahay, -(n)ay*].

[5] In 2007, the International Organization of Francophonie (Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie) estimated that 5% of the population is fully francophone and less than 16% is partially francophone (OIF 2007: 17).

[6] A so-called "cybercriminality" law (Law n°2014-006), passed in 2014, criminalized all "slander and defamation" against government officials and private citizens with a fine and a *minimum prison sentence of two years* when the target is a government official (reduced to six months when the target is a private citizen). This lead to an uproar over press freedoms and the freedom of expression. The National Assembly and Senate responded with an updated law in 2016 (Law n°2016-031), which removed the prison sentence but kept all other aspects of the prior law intact, including the fine. See Chapter Five for further discussion.

provides the *trappings* of authority: a stage, a microphone, a somewhat attentive audience, and an emcee to introduce speakers. As such, it provides speakers an opportunity to be heard and seen in a way that gives them authority over their own speech and performance, reformulating the conditions of possibility for authoritative speech as an embodied capacity open to all and co-produced with the audience.

2. Theoretical framework and contributions

This dissertation makes four critical interventions into existing scholarship. First, it advances linguistic anthropological understandings of formality and dialogism by attending to the processes through which adherence to aesthetic and formal norms contributes to social power and authority. Second, it provides much-needed ethnographic detail into understandings of free expression and public speech that are imbricated in, but not reducible to, liberal discourses of individual rights. Third, it advances theories of translation by distinguishing between translation, commensuration, and interpretation, and by examining how these processes are intertwined with understandings of diversity and difference. Finally, it contributes to media theory by taking seriously the forms that media technologies take without reifying these technologies as static or one-dimensional. In attending to processes of mediation as *orientation*, this approach furthers our understandings of mediation and media technologies as situated within complex social worlds that involve particular relations to corporeality and temporality.

These arguments are forged through a theoretical framework that integrates phenomenology and practice theory, bringing together phenomenological insights into corporeal engagements with the social world and practice theory's structural analyses of power and institutional fields. By integrating concepts from these two schools of thought, this dissertation furthers a conceptually nuanced approach to discussions of scale (Carr and Lempert 2016), attending equally to the embodied experiences of individuals and interpersonal relations as well as to social structures, institutions, and forms of categorization.

Embodied experiences and capacities, though individualized, are also socially shaped, as part of the performer's habitus (Mauss 1934, Bourdieu 1972) or "corporeal schema" (Merleau-Ponty 1945). These concepts, from practice theory and phenomenology respectively, denote an individual's innate, dynamic, and often unconscious sense of their physical and mental capabilities, built in part on what they have done before. This habitus or corporeal schema is continually shaped and reshaped by social interaction. Determining what kind of performance is socially appropriate, and when, involves at its most basic level a perception of "potential postures and motions"—what Merleau-Ponty describes as a "double horizon" (1945 [1967]: 498), in a spatial and temporal sense, of past and future postures. I draw on Sara Ahmed's (2006) infusion of feminist and queer theory into phenomenology, particularly her attention to "how bodies become orientated by how they take up time and space" (2006: 5), to analyze how linguistic practices are both orienting and oriented.

Orientation (*to* language, and to something *through* language) is part of the embodied encounter between poets and audiences, and "an encounter, not a communication," is precisely what Talal Asad argues "lies at the heart of authority" (2006: 212). Asad considers authority, at least in part, as "*an inner binding*" (*idem*), where he "[refers] primarily to a *constitutive* process […] and secondarily to a *regulative* one" (2006: 211). That is to say, authority is in fact incompatible with coercion and force, as Hannah Arendt notes (1954), and is not necessarily or primarily the result of an order or command. Asad's concern here is with religious authority, and thus with the processes by which religious subjects are constituted by their practices of "binding" to an authority deemed external, at least in part. In slam poetry, on the other hand, authority is understood to be inherent in the individual, cultivated through the embodied encounter with the audience, and co-constructed in the moment of performance. It may also come to be supported by texts, infrastructures, institutions, and traditions—in sum, by external authorizing discourses. But slam thumbs its nose at Hannah Arendt, for whom authority presupposes a stable hierarchy [1954 (2006): 93], and instead claims to do the magic trick of conjuring authority right before your very eyes, seemingly in the absence of an established hierarchy. As we will see, however, the apparent lack of *explicit* hierarchies does not mean there are none to be found.

The issue of orientation is also a temporal one, as speakers orient audiences towards particular relations to the past, present, and future. History and temporality have figured prominently in the anthropological literature on Madagascar (Bloch 1971, 1986; Kottak 1980; Raison-Jourde 1983; Ottino 1998; Feeley-Harnik 1991; Sharp 1993, 2002; Middleton 1999; J. Cole 2001, 2010; Evers 2002; Lambek 2002; Somda 2006; Graeber 2007; Crossland 2014). As Michael Lambek argues in his ethnograpy of Sakalava spirit mediumship and historicity in Northern Madagascar, "spirit mediums continually bring the ancestors into being—body them forth and give life, voice, and agency to the past" (Lambek 2002: 7). This is not a mere reenactment of the past, he argues, but rather "provides the principles and basis for order, integrity, and responsible practice" in the present (*idem*: 9). It also enables and informs a future, predicated on an understanding of and engagement with the past. An engagement with the past—with the paths laid down by the ancestors—is also central to the performance of kabary, which I examine in Chapter One. Throughout the dissertation we will see how different genres and kinds of mediation entail different orientations to the past.

This dissertation further considers the role of authority in dialogic movements and dwellings: how authority is performed in certain modes of circulation. As a number of analyses of flows, networks, and circulation have pointed out, these discussions must attend equally to points of friction and immobility (Stewart 1996; Tsing 2000, 2004, 2015; Gal 2007, 2018; Briggs 2013). The phenomenological perspective I take up here enables me to focus not solely on mobility, but also, crucially, on dwelling: in the figure of the double horizon, we see how embodiment is a convergence of the sensorial experience of the present moment, the sedimented layers of prior embodied experience, and the grounding this gives for imaginings, perceptions, and intuitions of future embodied experiences (movements, orientations, perceptions, etc.) I take up the challenge of describing processes of circulation, translation, and commensuration

between languages and social worlds, without—as Sara Ahmed cautions in Strange Encounters (2000), privileging movement over dwelling. As Ahmed does, I seek to rethink what it means to move and what it means to dwell—a rephrasing of "global vs. local" hierarchies of scale that foregrounds the implicit activity or attitude associated with each. When we reify certain places, people, and practices as "local," often what we mean is that we understand them to be rooted in a way that the "global" is not, as a process of continual movement and circulation. But when we look carefully at that which we have labeled "local," we see all sorts of movement; similarly, the "global" can appear stagnant, slow-moving, or stuck in a particular track.

My approach to circulation and scale also recognizes that what might seem immobile may indeed be moving, if only at a snail's pace or with severe restrictions, and, further, that immobility might not be experienced as exclusion or marginality. Indeed, a "space on the side of the road," as Kathleen Stewart's ethnography of West Virginia shows, might simultaneously be "a nervous, overstuffed, insistent place on the margins, and in the interstices, and at the center of 'America'" (Stewart 1996: 7). And as we see in Anna Tsing's ethnography of mushrooms that grow in places of devastation, on the margins and in the fallout of capitalist accumulation, these are in fact places of "contaminated diversity," a reminder that "the diversity that allows us to enter collaborations emerges from histories of extermination, imperialism, and all the rest" (Tsing 2015: 29). Similarly, the slam stage is not a site of official politics, a major economic engine, or an influential media institution, but it comments in the margins of these sources of authoritative discourse and intersects with all of them. These margins and intersections are just as essential to the picture as that which is portrayed as the center, contributing to the reconceptualization of marginality (Ferguson 2006, Furniss and Gunner 2008).

Finally, this dissertation constitutes an important contribution to scholarship on contemporary popular literature and performance. While rap and hip-hop are finally being recognized in academia as legitimate research topics (Morgan 2002, 2008; Perry 2004; Pough 2004; Alim 2006; Osumare 2007; Alim et al. 2009), slam and spoken word have remained largely unexamined in the academic sphere, with the exception of Susan B.A. Somers-Willett's work (2005, 2009) on the cultural and racial politics of slam in the U.S., Urayoán Noel's chapter on Nuyorican (New York-Puerto Rican) slam poetry (2014), and Javon Johnson's recent book (2017) on Blackness and slam/spoken word communities in the U.S. There have been a number of articles on slam as a pedagogical and/or therapeutic practice (Bruce and Davis 2000, Ellis et al. 2003, Fisher 2005, Rajaonarisoa 2013, Endsley 2014), on European slam (Engelschall 2008), and other topics (Brawley 1994, McLane 1994, Hoffman 2001, Gioia 2003, Somers-Willett 2005, Melo 2009, Bauridl 2010, Muhammad 2017), but thus far no published anthropological work on the topic. This dissertation analyzes slam as a transnational and mediatized form, theorizing it in relation to discussions of embodiment, dialogism, performance, and politics, via anthropological methods of multi-sited and digital ethnography in addition to interviews and textual analysis.

3. Paths

This multi-sited ethnography is in many ways a story about paths, the time it takes to travel them, and what happens along the way. It is a story about how paths link one place to another, enabling a certain kind of movement between them—of bodies, of words, of materials. It is also a story about the difficulty of maintaining these paths, and what gets lost during the journey.

My literal path to Madagascar began in 2008, when I conducted undergraduate thesis research with members of Madagaslam in Antananarivo and Toamasina. At the time of that first fieldwork project, there was a heated debate between Madagaslam and the academic circle of poets, the Havatsa-U.P.E.M. (the Union of Malagasy Poets and Writers), over the quality of slam poetry and whether it merited the name "poetry" at all. This debate was not so different from disagreements in the U.S.—sparked in large part by literary critic Harold Bloom's polemical (and rather crotchety) assertion in the *Paris Review* that slam consisted of "various young men and women in various late-spots […] declaiming rant and nonsense at each other," which to him spelled "the death of art" (Bloom 2000: 379). Poet and critic Dana Gioia responded to the critique in his article (and, later, book) on "Disappearing Ink," in which he asserted that slam and other forms of oral and performance poetry were in fact responsible for a resurgence of interest in verse, and that they were thus important to take seriously even if, in his view, "most of this work is undistinguished or worse" (Gioia 2003: 25). Gioia's dismissal of the aesthetic merits of "most" spoken word poetry is quite common: Urayoán Noel, who devotes a chapter to slam in his discussion of Nuyorican poetry, claims that there is "a loss of lyric transcendence in most slam poetry" (Noel 2014: 140), even while he acknowledges that this might also be true of contemporary poetry in print.

These sentiments were shared by Henri Rahaingoson, an eminent Malagasy writer and scholar who was, as the time of my undergraduate fieldwork, the president of Havatsa-U.P.E.M. Rahaingoson was curious about slam and invited me to present on my research at the organization's weekly meeting, but in the discussion that followed he seemed to dismiss it by likening it to poetry he wrote in his youth (he was then in his seventies), such as a poem entitled "Cacaphonie"—which, he gleefully (and needlessly) explained in between his characteristic boyish giggles, was a pun on "cacophony" and "caca." Although Rahaingoson ultimately seemed to make peace with Madagaslam by teaching workshops at the Alliance Française in Tana to slam poets about Malagasy oral literature, his presumption persisted that slam poets were, by and large, angsty and poorly educated teenagers seeking a place to vent—a presumption that is shared by many critics of slam, whether or not they know anything about the genre.

Rahaingoson and other members of Havatsa-U.P.E.M. had a further critique, however, that went beyond the thinly veiled racism and classism often at the heart of these criticisms, especially in the U.S. In slam poetry they saw a neocolonial form of cultural and aesthetic imposition, suspiciously backed by foreign cultural centers. Although this critique must be tempered by the fact that many members of Havatsa-U.P.E.M., including Rahaingoson himself, write in French in standard French lyrical

forms, they were undoubtedly correct to suggest that the foreign cultural center support of slam might not be entirely innocent.

My first fieldwork in Madagascar suggested that the kinds of oral literature Rahaingoson taught to slam poets (a history he presumed they didn't know) was a significant part of the cultural context that made slam poetry so successful there. While poets and others do not necessarily locate slam's origin in Malagasy verbal art genres such as these (although one poet did tell me that the "original" slam was invented in Southern Madagascar), these genres create the conditions of possibility for slam's flourishing in Madagascar. Slam poets rarely directly reference Malagasy genres of oral literature, but most of them grow up in a society in which the appreciation of verbal art is trained and expected. They may not take part in these forms as speakers, and they may not even particularly like them, but most Malagasy slam poets have seen and heard others perform verbal art publicly to a live audience—whether in the form of kabary (the genre of oratory I examine in Chapter One), *hira gasy* (popular theater), *jijy* (a type of song), *sôva* (sung poetry), *tafatogno* or *tapatogno* (an improvised verbal duel), or something else.

These verbal art genres have been central to analyses of performance, aesthetics, and politics in anthropology and folklore. Forms such as *ohabolana* (proverbs) and *hainteny* (poetic duels, often including *ohabolana*) have been collected and analyzed by scholars both in and outside of Madagascar (Paulhan 1908 [1982], 1913 [2007]; Rakotonaivo 1970a [2012],1970b [2012]; Domenichini-Ramiarimanana 1983; Rahajarizafy 1988; Fox 1990). *Ohabolana* and occasionally *hainteny* are important elements of other genres, such as *hira gasy*, a form of popular theater that contains moral and social lessons and political commentary, and is often performed in rural and lower-income areas (Edkvist 1997). *Ohabolana* are also crucial elements of kabary, the form of oratory that was formative for linguistic anthropological discussions of aesthetics, performance, and politics (Bloch 1971, 1975; Ochs 1973, 1974). More recently, Jennifer Jackon's (2013) analysis of kabary and of political cartooning showed how both forms—as modes of dialogue, critique, political thought, and the formation of publics—interact in contemporary political and public spheres. These theoretical paths traced by scholars before me have forged the landscape in which I make my current contributions, which I hope will continue the path in new directions—towards understanding how contemporary youth artistic movements, primarily in urban areas, both draw from and depart from long-standing modes of public authoritative address to radically reshape public speech.

The paths in this dissertation are also insistently literal. The scope of this multi-sited work is impossible to grasp without taking into account how I moved between sites over the course of sixteen months of dissertation fieldwork from September 2014 to December 2015, as I made my way from Tana to nearly every other major city and back again. This involved interminable journeys in *taxi-brousse*, vans packed with as many people as physically feasible, along two-lane roads (the only "highways" in the country) pocked with potholes twice the size of the vehicle, which have been there so long the driver has them memorized and swerves around them without a moment's hesitation.

Mapping paths also means taking the politics of infrastructure seriously. At the time of my fieldwork in 2015 the highest denomination of Malagasy currency was 10,000 Ariary, equivalent to about $3.50, and featured a deep black strip on the back: a freshly tarred road, curving towards a bright yellow rising sun. The bill was introduced during Marc Ravalomanana's presidency, around 2003, and is commonly referred to as a "Tim" for Tiako i Madagasikara (I Love Madagascar), Ravalomanana's political party. In 2017—six years after he was deposed in a coup, and three years after he snuck back into the country from exile in South Africa—new banknotes were introduced, including a 20,000 Ariary denomination. The new 10,000 bill sports, on one side, an array of wooden objects (a stool, a musical instrument) hand-carved in the Zafimaniry tradition of the Southern Highlands; on the other side, the port of Taolagnaro, a Southeastern city. Ravalomanana's legacy of infrastructure has been erased from the currency, just as the roads themselves are slowly being erased from the landscape through deterioration, eroded by rain and over-laden vehicles.

This deterioration is equal parts symbolic and practical, and its impacts cannot be overstated. It means that travel across an island about the size of California is arduous, prohibitively expensive for most of the population, and exceedingly dangerous given the increasing numbers of *dahalo* (highway robbers) who rule the roads at night. It means that in less than two years of fieldwork I saw more of the country than most Malagasy people see in their lifetimes. It is part of the reason why some dialects of Malagasy are so divergent as to be nearly mutually incomprehensible, even though Madagascar is unique among postcolonial countries in having one single "native" language spoken across the country. It means that, as we will see in Chapter Three, the National Slam is only ever held in the capital, because it is in the center of the island: all roads literally lead to Tana.

The symbolism of paths is also threaded through language ideologies. We see them in the proverbs that are central features of oral literature, particularly kabary. A kabary is understood to follow the speaker's path of thought, but also to follow the tracks of the ancestors who have spoken before. *Tsiny*, the ancestral dishonor that befalls anyone who speaks or behaves improperly, is referred to as an obstacle in the path of speech, or a deep ravine alongside that one can tumble into unawares, if one fails to take the proper precautions by metaphorically and metapragmatically sidestepping *tsiny* or hurling it far away. By contrast, slam poets chart their own paths—or so they say. They don't seem to pay much attention to *tsiny*, but they nonetheless tend to follow certain tracks. *Tsiny* aside, forging an entirely new path can get you stuck knee-deep in mud or in a thorny thicket you'll never make your way out of.

In Malagasy, a "path" (làlana) is distinguished from a "law" (lalàna) only by context and lexical stress. The similarity between the words reminds us that both paths and laws (or rules, or norms) can be planned out beforehand or spontaneously created through a convergence of multiple individual tracks. But once a path (or norm) is there, it is often easier to follow it than to diverge from it. Imagine that you are walking barefoot from your house to your rice paddy. You are likely to follow paths that have been beaten down already—you know it's safe to walk there because others have before, making it easy to see what's on the ground there. But perhaps too many people have walked

there, and now when it rains the ground turns to slippery mud with no plants to hold it firm. So then you start to walk alongside—not quite striking out on your own, but tracing the edge where not so many people have trampled but still nothing is growing that could trip you up. Similarly, laws and norms can arise from an agreement on a particular goal (e.g. if we want a community where individual belongings are respected, we should create a law against theft), just as a path can arise from multiple tracks toward a common destination (the market, the rice paddies, the river). But sometimes we realize that the path that is already there is not the best way to get to our destination. Or perhaps we are trying to get somewhere else. Poetry is no different: some poets follow others. Some walk alongside. Some start trekking through the brush, headed to some unknown destination, sometimes getting stuck in the mud and sometimes charting a course that others, in turn, will follow, because they have a similar destination or because they like the landscape along the way.

4. Chapters

Chapter One argues that the authority of kabary, an oratorical genre central to many ceremonial events and to politics, is dialogic and intertextual, contrary to Bloch's (1971, 1975) portrayal. I argue that authority in kabary is conceived as innate to the genre itself, as it is linked to the ancestors, and that any speaker who can master the rules of this genre is considered an authoritative speaker. Access to the role of speaker, however, has traditionally been limited to powerful elder men and has only recently been extended to younger people and women. This chapter analyzes a kabary by Harisoa Ravony, to show how contemporary kabary speakers dialogically blend the "words of the ancestors" (*tenindrazana*) with other authoritative discourses—in this case, international development discourse. This discussion of "dialogic authority" (Dubuisson 2014, 2017) shows that authority can be understood as an interpersonal achievement that endures across major societal transformations.

In Chapter Two, I show how slam poets are defining a new kind of authority, which balances the dialogism of kabary with liberal democratic notions of free expression. I argue that the boundaries of slam poetry as a genre are defined by its relative lack of formal properties, its spatiotemporal demarcation of the event, and its insistence on the dialogic co-production of authority between performer and audience. Slam poetry can be understood in two ways: as a format and as an aesthetic. In both cases, it emphasizes the production of authority in speaking, and the role of the audience in co-producing this authority. This chapter sets out an analytical framework for thinking through the "management" of free expression, and the ways that speakers manage the responsibility for and the consequences of speech. Here, I examine two cases of the embodied co-production of authority: "Mamadou," a poem by Barry Benson, and "What the poem says" ("Ce que dit le poème") by Gad Bensalem.

Chapter Three takes the concept of "managing" freedom further, as poets seek to speak authoritatively on taboo subjects. I analyze how Madagaslam attempts to cohere a national community around slam, and how this project articulates with regional, ethnic,

linguistic, and class divides that remain largely taboo in the capital but are readily discussed in other regions. This chapter takes up the phenomenological notion of "orientation" in relation to language, to understand communicative practices both as a means of orienting ourselves in time and space, and as something we orient ourselves towards or away from. Through an analysis of "plurilingualism" as a major debate in Malagasy politics and education, where the dialect of the capital is often taken as the national standard, and where French is an official language despite being fluently spoken by only around five percent of the population, I show how the project of constructing a "national" slam identity uncovers deep historical and ethnic tensions that underlie contemporary language politics and orientations. These tensions are explored further in two poems: "I am a Malagasified Malagasy" ("Je suis un malgache malgachisé") by Lonaky and "The Long-Suffering People" ("Jalim-bahoaka") by Makwa Joma.

Chapter Four considers the processes of translation at work in the circulation of slam between Madagascar and *andafy* (abroad), and the "intension" of Malagasy poets—in a phenomenological sense of reaching towards—as they engage in forms of commensuration for *vazaha*[7] audiences. I argue here that circulation frequently involves interpretation, translation, and/or commensuration, each of which is a distinct process although they bleed into and impact each other in multiple ways. When poets imagine and perform for *vazaha* audiences, they engage in these processes of translation, interpretation, and commensuration that can have socioeconomic as well as aesthetic consequences beyond "reaching" the immediate audience. In this chapter, I ask what happens to a speaker's authority as the poem moves circulates between scales and scalar hierarchies. These processes are illuminated in a poem by Baly, "Hat of the Forest" ("Satrok'ala") and a poem and video by Caylah, "Madagascar."

The Fifth Chapter argues that slam is increasingly mediated by digital technologies that impact not only the circulation and scale of the format of slam itself but also its grounding in embodied co-presence. Through an analysis of slam performers' analog (radio) and digital media practices and engagements, I show that these forms of mediation are not isolated from the linguistic and embodied mediation of "live" slam performance. Rather, these forms of mediation and mediatization through analog and digital technologies *orient* audiences in particular ways to some of the concerns we have seen throughout the dissertation—to embodiment, to temporality, and to authority. This chapter examines a poem by Ranala, "I have the horror of declaring war on you" ("J'ai l'horreur de vous déclarer la guerre").

5. Preliminary Notes

On Malagasy

As we will see in Chapter Three, Malagasy is spoken across Madagascar but with extreme dialectal variation. "Official Malagasy," *malagasy ofisialy*, is largely based on the Merina dialect spoken in the Central Highlands around the capital, Antananarivo.

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[7] The term *vazaha* is used exclusively for white and white-passing foreigners.

This is the dialect I learned, and I use Merina/*ofisialy* spelling for common terms and expressions cited throughout the dissertation because this is the spelling most commonly used in print. Malagasy speakers will note that I use other spellings when citing texts and expressions from other dialects. Although many Malagasy speakers use French names for some cities, I use the Malagasy names throughout (although I do shorten Antananarivo to "Tana").

There are a number of Malagasy words that are central to the dissertation, which I translate in the beginning but not throughout. I include a short list here for reference, with an approximate pronunciation guide based on Merina/*ofisialy* pronuncation. Note that "o" is generally pronounced "oo" (except in loan words like "ofisialy"), "r" is slightly rolled or tapped, and "a" is pronounced as in "father." The last vowel is not strongly pronounced.

andafy (an-*daf*): abroad, international(ly)

fehin-teny (fé-in-*tén*): "knotting/knotted words," the closing section of kabary

hainteny (a-een-*tén*): "knowledge of words," short poem traditionally performed as part of a poetic duel or lover's dialogue, sometimes used in kabary

hira gasy (ee-ra *gas*): "Malagasy song," a theatrical performance (often a competition) involving music, kabary, and dancing

kabary (ka-*bar*): oratory

Merina (mérn): the ethnic group of the Central Highlands, around the capital

mpikabary (mpee-ka-*bar*): a trained kabary performer

ofisialy (o-fi-*syal*): "Official" Malagasy

ohabolana (oo-a-*boo*-la-na): "verbal example," a proverb or pithy saying, often used in kabary

sarinteny (sa-reen-*tén*): "word picture," a metaphorical and imagistic example used in kabary

tsiny (tseen): blame/reproach from ancestors and society for improper conduct

vazaha (va-*za*): white (or white-passing) foreigner

voha varavarana (*voo*-a vara-*vara*-na): "opening the door," the opening section of kabary

On names

Given the public nature of most of the performances I describe here, I use people's real names and/or stage names instead of pseudonyms when I cite their performances/texts and when I describe conversations or events that do not, to my knowledge, involve controversial or sensitive issues or, if they do, are already publicly known. I have used pseudonyms or omitted names when discussing topics that are

patently sensitive and not publicly known; this does not necessarily ensure anonymity, because some of these stories are well-known enough that those involved would know who I am discussing. I cannot always foresee what others will find controversial or sensitive, but I have used my best judgment based on my knowledge of the slam community and specific requests for anonymity or non-disclosure. While some may disagree with my portrayals of events and conversations, I hope that this will be an opportunity for further discussion.

On transcription and translation

Transcription and translation practices—whether in anthropology or literary translation—often involve smoothing over, even erasing the traces of, ambiguity and incommensurable difference. I examine this from a theoretical standpoint in Chapter Four, but I would like also to explain how I have approached these issues from a practical standpoint with my dissertation data included here. I want to avoid burdening the transcriptions and translations with so many annotations that the reader is lost, confused, or gives up entirely. But I also want to avoid the illusion that the transcriptions and translations are straightforward renderings of the "original"; such an illusion is antithetical to the theoretical claims I make in Chapter Four and to the ethical demands of this project, which involve being willing to transform the "target" language (here, English) and to acknowledge how much is lost in the movement between these languages, social worlds, and modes of transmission.

In this spirit, I have made the following decisions:

1. I include the source, not solely its translation, for all utterances, texts, and critical terms.

2. I note in nearly all instances who did the work of transcription and translation; if it is not noted explicitly, it is my own translation. For the most part, I transcribed and translated French on my own with occasional input from the speaker and/or from Fela Razafiarison-Josoa; Fela completed most of the transcriptions and translations from Malagasy, with input from myself. For English-language etymologies I have used the Oxford English Dictionary; for translation from French I have used the online resource www.wordreference.com, which includes invaluable discussion forums for difficult-to-translate expressions, slang, idioms, etc. For Malagasy, I have used the online resource www.mondemalgache.org, which collates entries from twenty-four print dictionaries (monolingual Malagasy, Malagasy-English, and Malagasy-French).

3. French speakers may notice that I have *not* highlighted grammar mistakes in the original with the annotation "[*sic*]." While this annotation is useful in distinguishing between "mistakes" made by myself versus by the speaker, it can have the effect of highlighting the speaker's deviations from certain linguistic norms. I have chosen not to correct these "mistakes" but also, given the contentious language politics in Madagascar around French fluency in particular, not to draw further attention to them.

4. I have attempted to register lexical ambiguity by providing all likely glosses of a word or phrase in the translation, separated by a slash or explained further in a footnote. Of course, my decisions of what constitutes a "likely" gloss are neither straightforward nor neutral.

On texts

        The poems and kabary I have included here are not intended to be representative of their respective genres; rather, I have selected them because of the insights they offer into the theoretical concerns of this dissertation. Those familiar with the Malagasy slam poetry scene will note, for example, that I have not included any love poems—these constitute a substantial portion of performances and deserve attention in their own right, but I have not found space for them here. Additionally, the poems I have selected were all performed in Tana (though not all by Tana-based poets). Although my research was multi-sited and I describe performances, events, and interviews in other places, the fact that the full-length texts I include here were all performed in Tana speaks volumes about the centralization of resources and power in the capital: these performances were among the most polished of those I recorded, in large part because they were part of major events, such as the National Slam, which most often take place in the capital. This is no excuse for failing to include full texts of performances from other places, only an acknowledgment and an apology that Tana is over-represented here.

Chapter One: Dialogic Authority in Kabary

1. Introduction

Kabary is a form of oratory that, in addition to gracing most ceremonial and significant life events in the Highlands, is also a site of public political negotiation that has fascinated Western and Malagasy scholars seeking to understand the link between aesthetics and sociopolitical processes (Bloch 1971, 1975; Ochs 1973, 1974; Bauman 1975; Domenichini-Ramiaramanana 1983; Hanson 2000, 2007; Jackson 2013). This formative scholarship has demonstrated the centrality of kabary in political deliberations on the local community level as well as the national level. To this discussion, I contribute a framework of "dialogic authority" in which a speaker's authority is created dialogically with the audience and the ancestors, and through the heteroglossic incorporation of other forms of authoritative discourse into the kabary itself. Drawing on Judith Irvine's (1979) foundational work on formality, I further argue—against Maurice Bloch's (1971, 1975) portrayal—that the formal constraints of kabary are *productive* constraints, providing a guiding structure that enables audience and speaker alike to draw on ancestral logics in order to confront contemporary concerns.

In order to understand how authority is produced and performed in slam poetry, which is the focus of subsequent chapters, it is necessary first to understand the discursive landscape in which slam intervenes. In the Highlands especially, that landscape is dominated by kabary, a genre bequeathed by the ancestors. Kabary is *the* authoritative speech genre par excellence, and in this chapter I argue that the authority of kabary as a genre, and of kabary speakers themselves, is produced dialogically in a tripartite relation between ancestors, speaker, and audience. By showing that kabary is not a monologic exercise of political coercion as Bloch (1971, 1975) has portrayed it, this chapter illuminates not only our understandings of kabary but also broader understandings of political discourse and the construction and maintenance of authority. Further, this chapter focalizes how participants conceive of and engage with the past through kabary, where speakers are understood to be continuing a path begun by those who have spoken before them. Indeed, as one slam poet told me, in kabary you are never alone on stage—you are surrounded by the ancestors.

Kabary appears in a vast range of contexts: in community councils (*fokonolona*) to debate topics involving community life, in official government address, in family ceremonies such as weddings and funerals, in the workplace (particularly when outside guests are involved), and at less structured gatherings of friends and family. The authority of kabary is a quiet and unassuming one, which refuses its authoritativeness at the same moment it performs it. The speaker's tone is subdued, melodic, conclusive, and firm yet supple. The speaker stands solidly without undue movement, hands clasped together. The audience responds with similar composure, often fixing their gaze on a neutral point rather than on the speaker, which emphasizes the focus on the voice and words rather than the embodied performance of the speaker.[8]

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[8] This is not solely a feature of kabary; in the Highlands, respectful listening in many genres requires deflected gaze.

This authority, manifested by the audience's respectful listening, is inherent in the genre itself, as bequeathed by the ancestors, such that it graces any speaker who follows the form and style of kabary in an appropriate context (we will examine kabary form and style in the next section, as well as what constitutes an appropriate context for kabary). The very fact of kabary, over and above questions of skill and competence, in itself commands respect—it is the role, not merely the person who happens to be filling it, that is prestigious. This is because the genre derives from the ancestors; to treat it lightly would mean to disrespect the ancestors, not solely the speaker. This does not mean, however, that the speaker's performance doesn't matter, or that anyone can fill that role: a speaker's authority is significantly shaped by their institutional and social power as well as their oratorical skill. These are not separate considerations, as people with more institutional and social power—male heads of family, business owners, politicians—are more likely to have been trained in kabary, and thus to be more skilled speakers.

Authority in kabary, then, derives not only from the speaker's adherence to the formal constraints established by the ancestors, but also from the audience's reception of the speech, which is related to social and institutional power. In kabary, audience participation in the construction of authority takes a very different form than in *hira gasy* or in slam: it is their quiet witnessing, rather than actively responding to, the speech that lends the speaker authority. Bloch, whose accounts of kabary (1971, 1975), along with Elinor Ochs' (1973, 1974), were foundational for linguistic anthropological discussions of aesthetics and political discourse, has interpreted this kind of audience reception as proof that kabary is a "coercive" and monologic spiel that leaves no room for dissent. However, Ochs' analyses from the same period (1973, 1974), in addition to more recent work (Hanson 2000, 2007; Jackson 2008, 2009, 2013; Raharinjanahary 2014, Somda 2014) and my own fieldwork data, show a number of ways in which kabary participants—speakers as well as audience members—are able to respond to what is said during the event. Far from monologic, kabary is dialogic both in the relationality between participants and in the heteroglossia of the speech itself, as speakers incorporate Christian sermonic styles, international development discourse, and references to contemporary life alongside the *tenindrazana*—the words of the ancestors. This chapter advances discussions of dialogism and political authority (Nader 1991; Beyer 2010; Beyer and Girke 2015; Dubuisson 2014, 2017) by leveraging two bodies of literature: linguistic anthropological work on formality (Irvine 1979) and insights from the anthropology of religious practice (Mahmood 2005, Asad 2006), to show how kabary participants "inhabit" authoritative discursive norms.

2. Kabary history and form

Kabary's precise origins are hazy: some linguists and historians have traced the etymology of the word to Swahili, Malaysian, and Indonesian, while others claim it as a uniquely Malagasy practice developed in the 15th century (Razafiarivony 2006: 139); Ruth Finnegan's work on African oral literatures shows that formal oratory is widespread in many cultures across the continent (Finnegan 1970: 444-456). Regardless of its

origins, kabary was an important form of political discourse in the Merina Kingdom, but it is unclear whether its practice in other regions can be traced solely to the expansion of this kingdom in the 1700s. Kabary's salience as a feature of social life among ethnic groups and regions outside of the Highlands has not been addressed in depth. However, because the seat of political power is in Imerina (the Merina region of Antananarivo and its surrounds), all regions of Madagascar are at the very least familiar with kabary as a form of national political address.

Although we should be wary of overstating the importance of kabary in all regions and among all ethnic groups, its role in national political life is largely undisputed, as is its role in social life in many ethnic groups, particularly those of the Highlands. While written accounts of kabary differ in their focus, it is understood by all to refer both to ritualized speeches that take place within or between families and villages, and to national events such as a monarch's or president's address to the nation—and to all sorts of speech events in between. In this sense it is similar to the English singular noun "speech" (as in "to give a speech") in that it designates a certain mode of speaking that is recognized as more formal than everyday speech, rather than designating a specific context in which this mode is used.

In 2015 I attended a series of workshops on kabary at the Alliance Française of Antananarivo, taught in French by the Director of the Alliance, Julien Rakotonaivo. Rakotonaivo taught us that there are three kinds of kabary: for happy occasions (*kabary ankafaliana*), unhappy occasions (*kabary ankaratsina*), and political kabary (*kabary politika*). Throughout this chapter I will distinguish simply between what I call circumstantial kabary (the first two categories) and political kabary.

Kabary is not only a feature of a wide range of events, it is essential to many of them, such that if there were no kabary the event cannot be said to have taken place. This is true for marriage requests (*kabary ampanambadiana*) and civil marriage ceremonies; circumcisions; funerals, wakes, and *famadihana* (re-wrapping of the dead); and political deliberations, meetings, and announcements from the local village level to the presidency.

The right to perform kabary has historically been restricted to elder high-status men, particularly in ceremonial events in rural areas. This continues to be true for ceremonies such as *famadihana*. Shorter and less formal kabary are common at all sorts of less ritualized social occasions, from birthday parties to office holiday parties to visiting a friend's house, and can be performed by women if men are not present or eligible to speak; thus, for example, a woman whose husband is ill or absent can speak on the family's behalf. These relatively informal kabary are used to mark important social events and to highlight the close relationship between the speaker and addressee(s). In both ceremonial occasions and less formal social events, the role of speaker is generally determined by status within the family or community, and this remains almost entirely restricted to elder men. For political or business-related kabary, on the other hand, the role of speaker falls to whoever has an official role as a politician or head of a business or organization. Thus, contrary to Western gendered hierarchies between "private" and "public" spheres, female speakers are more common in these types of kabary than in more community- or family-based events. And the demographic

of kabary speakers is clearly changing: kabary classes and contests are especially popular among women and young people. Notably, all of the participants of the kabary class I attended at the Alliance Française were women, as were the majority of the participants in the "World Francophonie Week" kabary contest that I detail later in this chapter.

Although the format of the speech varies by event and situation, all kabary share a distinctly recognizable formality and tone, such that their use can immediately turn a relaxed setting into a formal one. Bloch describes this formalization through kabary as "the way life at any time may freeze up and take on this formal aspect" (1975: 10). What makes an event "formal" is a highly complex issue comprising a number of factors, as Judith Irvine (1979) shows, and which I will return to. In short, kabary's formality stems from the composure required of speakers and audience, including the speaker's posture (standing still, with arms clasped in front of the body or at one's sides and gazing at a neutral point in space or at the ground) and vocal tone and prosody (clear enunciation, fluidity, rhythmic and melodic tone). Formality in kabary also derives from the stability of its form over time: despite significant changes to the length of kabary (such that marriage requests no longer take multiple days), the overall structure of kabary has remained constant. The structure I was taught, in both Rakotonaivo's class at the Alliance Française and at another kabary class I attended for employees of a bank in Tana, is nearly identical to what Jennifer Jackson (2013: 70) learned in her kabary lessons:

1. Opening, or *voha varavarana* ("opening the door"): The speaker begins with a phrase that indexes the start of kabary, usually including *tompokolahy sy tompokovavy* ("ladies and gentlemen")

2. Apology, or *fialan-tsiny* ("removal of reproach," also *ala-tsiny*): This was once, and often still is, the most protracted section of the entire kabary. The speaker must beg forgiveness for speaking, as a means of both humbling oneself in relation to the audience and of avoiding the *tsiny* (reproaches) of the ancestors for any potential errors or omissions in the speech.

3. Greetings, or *fiarahabana*: The speaker greets those in attendance in order of importance, beginning with "Andriamanitra sy ny razana": God and the ancestors (or just God, depending on religious beliefs) and ending with "ladies and gentlemen."

4. Body, or *ranjan-kabary* ("calves/legs of kabary"): The speaker expresses the main message, which—in the case of ritualized ceremonies—is generally limited to certain topics determined in advance.

5. Closing, or *fehin-teny* ("knotting/tying of words"): The speaker concludes the kabary and thanks the audience.[9]

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[9] This is one of the most detailed outlines I have seen of the general structure of kabary; in my kabary class at AFT, Rakotonaivo named three (Introduction, Essential Message, and Conclusion) and

In addition to this organizing structure, the *mpikabary* must weave in various registers: *ohabolana* (proverbs), *sarinteny* (metaphorical examples, literally "word pictures"), and—if they are particularly skilled—*hainteny* (longer poems that often include proverbs).[10] Increasingly, as Jackson (2013) shows, speakers may also quote scripture.

These allegorical references are in large part what the audience attends to in their assessments of the speaker's skill, which rests on a tension between accurately portraying the *tenindrazana* (words of the ancestors) and creatively incorporating them within the kabary. Less formal kabary may not necessarily contain all of these elements, and Jackson (2013) recounts notably drastic changes to kabary, such as former president Marc Ravalomanana's refusal to include an apology at all (Jackson 2013: 88-89). Yet ideally, the speaker respects the traditional structure, inclusion of ancestors' words, proper posture and tone, and grammatical particularities that set kabary apart from everyday speech.[11]

The difficulty of respecting all the rules of kabary is often used as a justification for the fact that only elder men were traditionally allowed to perform it—they were the only ones considered to have the knowledge and skill to perform adequately. The hierarchical nature of kabary, and the restriction of the speaker role primarily to elder men of high status, has been noted in most accounts on the subject. Bloch notes in his discussion of *fokonolona* (local village councils) that the right and responsibility to initiate kabary in this setting falls to the *ray aman-dreny* (literally "fathers and mothers" but, in practice, powerful elder men), ostensibly because they are the ones who know how to do kabary (Bloch 1971: 46). But of course, as Bloch points out, only high-status men are ever afforded the right to attempt kabary in local councils such as this, so they are the only ones who learn how to do it through training and practice (Bloch 1975: 22). Before gaining *ray aman-dreny* status a man might test the waters by attempting kabary, but this is a risky business since it can result in jokes and mockery from the listeners in lieu of the usual respectful silence—a clear sign that the community has not accepted his presumption to *ray aman-dreny* status. However, exceptional skill at kabary can outweigh lower social status, such that a man who is not as socially powerful

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Razafiarivony's discussion of Betsimisaraka kabary (2006: 145) also names only three: *Ala-tsiny sy Azafady* (Removal of reproach and Apology); *Arahaba, saotra, sy hasina* (Greetings, thanks, and honor); and *Antom-pivoriana* (Aim of the meeting). Bloch (1975: 7) has four: "Miala Tsiny" (fialantsiny), thanks, "the crucial proposal," and thanks/blessing/conclusion. Razanamalala and Ramandraivonona (2015: 7) have three: introduction, main message, and conclusion, but the introduction is broken down into more detailed sections: *Aika/Antso* (interpellation), *tari-dresaka* and *alasarona* (preamble), *azafady* (apology), *fialan-tsiny*, *Hasina sy arahaba ary firarian-tsoa* (Homage, greetings, and well-wishes).

[10] In Bakoly Domenichini-Ramiaramanana's exegesis on *ohabolana* and *hainteny* (1983), she details the complex history behind these forms and refutes the equation of *ohabolana* with (in French) *proverbe* and *hainteny* with *poème*, noting the historical and cultural specificity of each. For the sake of clarity and brevity I have glossed these simply as "proverb" and "poem," but I use the Malagasy terms to mark the specificity of these forms.

[11] Bloch, Ochs, and Jackson all note the predominance of the passive voice in kabary, though only Jackson provides a detailed explanation of how this is prevalent in everyday speech as well (as compared to English), such that kabary merely emphasizes what is already in many cases a grammatical norm.

may garner the respect of the community by virtue of his oratorical skill (Bloch 1971: 54). Similarly, professional kabary speakers—*mpikabary*[12]—may be hired for major events to speak on behalf of a family where no elder male is willing or capable of performing the kabary; this is especially common for marriage requests and civil wedding ceremonies, where the requirements for the kabary are notoriously difficult (Ochs 1974: 95).

Crucially, then, the role of speaker can be derived from social status—one may be required to do kabary because of one's social rank as the eldest and/or most powerful man present—but this role can also confer and augment status. Mpikabary in particular are expected to have proper comportment outside of the kabary event, as they do not fully shed this role once the event is over. In Jackson's kabary class, the students were told that as mpikabary they should properly conduct themselves outside of the classroom, and the practice of learning kabary itself was understood to train proper conduct (Jackson 2013: 85). The authority of kabary, then, is forged through multiple factors that include the genre itself; the social status, training, and skill of the speaker; and the social context and institutional frameworks in which the speech takes place.

3. A path of speech

One of the defining elements of kabary is the way that it formulates a particular relation to the past: through the maintenance—despite modifications—of the traditional kabary structure, and through verbatim citations of *hainteny* (short poems) and *ohabolana* (proverbs), the speaker emphasizes the connection between the current context and that of the ancestors. This is done through literal reference to the words or ways of the ancestors (*tenindrazana*, *fombandrazana*), but the use of proverbs in and of itself reinforces the notion that the way things were then is analogous to the way they are now.

An example of this can be seen in a kabary by Dera Ramandraivonona, President of the Fi.Mpi.Ma association in France and co-author, with his wife, of a Francophone book on kabary (Razanamalala & Ramandraivonona 2015: 43-48). In 2011, Dera spoke on behalf of the Fi.Mpi.Ma France on the occasion of an annual event called the JMU ("Journées de Madagascar à l'UNESCO," or "Madagascar Days at UNESCO"). After the *fialantsiny* and greetings, Dera moved on to the *ranjan-kabary*, or the main message:

Ny trafon'omby no soa doladola, hono, tsara kijana niraofana;	The cow whose hump is nice and plump, I've heard, has good pasture to eat;	1
ny hazo no soa fidoroboka, tsara vahatra mpamelona aina;	the tree whose foliage is nice and lush has good roots that support life;	2

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[12] To distinguish between professional kabary performers and those who perform kabary circumstantially due to their social status, I refer to the former as mpikabary and the latter simply as (kabary) speakers.

ny UNESCO no tsara mitoetra toy izao dia tsara fototra niaingana.	the UNESCO that is well-established like this has a good foundation that started it off.[13]	3

This example illustrates how proverbs and verse parallelism bring objects relevant to the ancestors—the cow, the tree—into a relation with the contemporary. Dera has no need to explicitly make the connection by saying something as obvious and pedestrian as "UNESCO's strong foundation is comparable to what our ancestors remarked about cows and trees." All he needs to do is reference proverbs that are immediately understood as the words of the ancestors, and to place the contemporary event into this established framework of verse parallelism: generally, two proverbial examples are given that follow a similar pattern, and a third is introduced which relates specifically to the situation at hand. This parallelism has the effect of showing that even objects and institutions that the ancestors never encountered, like UNESCO, can be understood within ancestral logics. This has long been one of the most crucial aspects of kabary authority: the way that it marks and solemnizes the present, not through a simple comparison to the past, but rather by fitting it into a logic formulated and reproduced by the ancestors.

This understanding of kabary as reproducing a pattern of thought established by the ancestors is illustrated in common metaphors used in kabary. For rhetorical impact, humor, and authority, kabary speakers rely on *ohabolana* (proverbs) and *sarinteny* (metaphorical and imagistic examples, literally "word pictures"). Both are understood to reflect the wisdom of the ancestors, and are used throughout the speech to support, illustrate, and reinforce the speaker's message. Kabary manuals, which are frequently sold at the market in cheap paperback versions and which constitute one of the few widely available and affordable genres of locally printed literature besides Bibles and dictionaries, always include suggestions of *ohabolana* to include in kabary for various situations.[14] Given that metaphor and allegory are essential in kabary, and that the format requires metapragmatic reflection on one's own speech, it is unsurprising that metalinguistic and metapragmatic metaphors for speech abound in kabary, generally in the form of *ohabolana*, but also in *sarinteny*. These metaphors refer specifically to the speech event of kabary, not to a generalized notion of speech, and so cannot be taken as expressing ideologies of language more broadly conceived. But they point to a sense of public speech as both a duty (for some) and as fraught with risk, which tells us something about understandings of the power of speech to impact social life.

Many of these phrases include references to speech and words as something one "carries" or "brings" (*mitondra ny fitenenana*) and that is "given" or "passed" by

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[13] This is my translation from the Malagasy, with line breaks to emphasize the parallelism and line numbers added. Dera's translation into French is looser (and thus sounds a bit more natural), but I have tried here to maintain the parallelism as much as possible.

[14] Ochs also noted, in 1975, that *kabary* "pamphlets" were sold in this way—perhaps their popularity led to more durably bound formats. They are generally printed by local secular presses, although the most widely available books are printed by a Malagasy Lutheran Press. The link between literacy, translation, and missionization is explored in Larson 2009 and Ranaivo 2013.

others (*teny nomena*, *misongona*)—as an object, then, that one has been given against one's will, but that cannot be refused. Part of what is at play is a show of humility: speakers must claim to have been forced to speak by others or because of their role, not because they selfishly want to claim the floor. Thus, the right to public speech is not a natural right held by all individuals, and even in its exercise it must be portrayed as having been conferred by an external authority: the community, the organizer of the event, etc.

This notion of conferral of the right and responsibility to speak can be linked to the movement and circulation of speech more broadly, where speech is not just an object to be passed from hand to hand but also something akin to a path or road. This is one of the most common metalinguistic metaphors in kabary and the most illuminating for what it tells us about language ideology. Most kabary include some idioms of this sort, such as references to "begging the path" to speech: *manao mbay lalaña*, *fangatahan-dalana raha hiteny* (to beg the road/path of speaking, i.e. to beg permission to speak). Where "begging the path" is a common phrase used at the end of *kabary* to ask permission to leave (for example after presenting condolences at a funeral), when linked with "speaking" it metaphorically implies that speech is itself a path, or something that moves along a path.

The phrase reminds me of a gesture that struck me when I spent time in the countryside outside of the capital:[15] when entering or leaving another person's house where others were already seated, and more generally in passing by someone who is seated, people of all ages, social status, and genders would stoop slightly—perhaps in an attempt to bring themselves closer to the height of those seated—and would indicate the path they were trying to take, with one arm angled down and slightly away from their body and with the palm to the side. This gesture seems to me a physical embodiment of "begging the path," where one seeks to create a space for oneself to move along without obstructing or offending anyone else. I see the phrase "begging the path of speech" (*fangatahan-dalana raha hiteny)*, as well as the apology (*fialantsiny*) I discuss in the next section, as the hand that precedes the body, the polite signal that both carves a path and indicates that something else will follow which may inadvertently inconvenience, disrupt, or offend those who are gathered. We see this path-maintenance at work in the first proverb Jackson (2013) learned in her kabary class:

> The songosongo [shrub-like trees] are used to border our paths, Amberivatry [thorny bush] are used to border our fields, but here I am, however, as fandrotrarana [common devil's grass that seeds, roots, and spreads quickly] at the border that is not here to trip you and make you fall, but who is here to keep you listening. (Jackson 2013: 71, her translation)

In this introduction, the speaker simultaneously characterizes theirself as unimportant (a common weed) and as structuring the event through their words. These words do not

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[15] Still in the Highlands, but in a different "ethnic region," that of the Bezanozano.

take the illustrious form of something as useful as the *songosongo* or *amberivatry*, but they do humbly delimit a path that will focus the audience's attention.

In the notion of speech as a path in and of itself, or of the path one makes when one takes up public speech, it is evident that there is a very different model of language at work here than something like the Saussurean talking heads model, where an individual speaker expresses ideational objects through linguistic signifiers, which are then heard by an interlocutor who reverses the process and translates them into the very same ideational object. By contrast, in language ideologies expressed in *ohabolana*, *hainteny*, and *kabary* more generally, words do not express the inner thoughts of an individual. In a series of Francophone workshops on kabary that I attended at the Alliance Française of Antananarivo, our instructor—Julien Rakotonaivo, the President of the Alliance—taught us that "one does not snatch speech for oneself" ("on ne s'arrache pas la parole")—though even here, in the illustration of what one should not do, speech is still portrayed as an external object that could be snatched up, rather than something dreamed up in the mind of the speaker. Crucially, words are objects in circulation, passed from one person to another,[16] and speakers who take them up in a formal public setting are in fact taking up a path that was begun before them, bringing the audience along, and where the speaker leaves off another will continue. It is not the speaker who has power over speech, but speech that has power over the speaker: if the speaker does not handle these words with proper care, or does not properly maintain the path's boundaries, they risk the *tsiny* (reproaches) not only of God and the ancestors but also of their family and community (Andriamanjato 1957 [2002]: 36, Rasamuel in Razafiarivony 2006: 146).

4. Blame (*tsiny*), apology (*fialantsiny*), and responsibility

For many speakers it is unthinkable to give a public speech without apologizing first. This apology takes two forms: *azafady* and *miala tsiny*. These are also two ways of saying "I'm sorry" or "Excuse me" in everyday speech. In everyday talk, *azafady*, literally "May it not be taboo," is both a future-oriented apology for what one is about to do and a retrospective apology for what one has done.[17] In the kabary context, the "*Azafady*" section comes first and does not involve an extended apology—in some cases, it may only be a line or two. It is addressed to the audience, but the speaker rarely speaks in the first-person singular. The meaning is something along the lines of "excuse me for speaking before you," but as in an example cited by Razafiarivony (2006), this is expressed without referring to a "me" or an "I": "For if one is going to speak before everyone, it is necessary to ask permission [beg the path], to excuse oneself" ("Ka raha

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[16] This is not only true in kabary—the Fianarant'slam poets often do informal improvisational sessions where they form a circle and each person in the circle must freestyle on their turn, with the group singing a refrain together in between each turn. One such refrain is "Aleo hihodina ilay teny": "Let the word(s) circle/go around."

[17] *Fady* has been studied at length in anthropological literature (Bloch 1986; Lambek 1993; Somda 2006).

hiteny anoloan'izany dia tsy maintsy manao mbay lalaña, manao azafady," in Razafiarivony 2006: 171, my translation)

The phrase *Miala tsiny*, even in everyday talk, is slightly more formal than *azafady* and is generally reserved for more serious offenses. In kabary, the corresponding concept of *fialantsiny* is an extended section unto itself. *Fialantsiny* can be glossed as "removal of reproach," but the concept of *tsiny* is rather more complex than "reproach" and is integral to Malagasy conceptions of community, relations to the ancestors, and proper conduct. It is in many ways the negative consequence of breaking *fady* (taboos). In Richard Andriamanjato's philosophical discussion of *tsiny*, he describes it thus:

> Essentially, *tsiny* traces the boundaries of the human condition and delimits each individual's living space. If you want to avoid *tsiny*, you must stay inside your allotted space. If you try to leave it, you wreak havoc in the entire system of the universe and you will suffer the consequences (Andriamanjato 1957 [2002]: 58; my translation). [18]

The relation of *tsiny* to space refers us again to the metaphors of speech-as-path, where we could imagine that stepping outside the boundaries of the path—one's "allotted space"—could result in reproach. As described earlier, *tsiny* can befall an individual who engages in reproachful behavior in the eyes of all sorts of entities: God, the Ntaolo (original inhabitants of Madagascar),[19] one's ancestors, the community, and the family. Its practical effects—particularly in the case of disgruntled ancestors—can be devastating: crop failure, illness, and even death of oneself or family members, among other calamities (Andriamanjato 1957 [2002]: 62). All action and speech is subject to *tsiny*, but public speech is particularly risky because it is understood as continuing a path the ancestors have begun, such that any misstep or error would be received by the ancestors as an insult and, given its public nature, would be seen and criticized by the audience and larger community.

One way to avoid *tsiny* is to metapragmatically move it out of the way by the performative pronunciation of the words "miala tsiny," and through metaphorical descriptions of *tsiny*'s ruinous effects. There are thousands of ways of describing *tsiny*, but I focus here on the ones that describe *tsiny* as an obstacle to one's path, which are also among the most commonly used:

Vato temerin-domotra mantsy ny tsiny ka mahasolafaka izay mandia azy, fa aleo manaraka ny lala-masaka falehan'ny	*Tsiny* is a moss-covered rock that trips whoever treads on it; better to follow the path forged by the Ntaolo, which is

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[18] "Au fond, le 'tsiny' trace les frontières de la condition humaine et délimite pour chaque individu son espace vital. Si vous voulez éviter le 'tsiny', il vous faut rester dans l'espace qui vous est dévolu. Si vous essayez d'en sortir, vous semez le désordre dans le système entier de l'univers et vous en subirez les conséquences."

[19] In contrast to *razana* (ancestors), *Ntaolo* does not designate an individual's or family's own ancestors but the first inhabitants of Madagascar, the forebears of all Malagasy people.

Ntaolo, dia ny fifanaja ho famatoram-pihavanana.	tolerance that binds together *fihavanana*. [20]
Ny tsiny sahala amin'ny vato amoron-dalaña, tsy hita-maso fa mahapeka. Ny tsiny sahala amin'ny tômabilina tsisy fire, midona vao mahatetra.	*Tsiny* is like a rock along the path, you don't see it but it trips you. *Tsiny* is like a car without brakes, it hits you by surprise. [21]
Ny tsiny mantsy tahaka ny vato, ka lehibe misakan-dalana, kely manafintohina.	Tsiny is like a rock: large, it blocks the path; small, it trips you. [22]
Ny tsiny mantsy tahaka ny tevan-dalina, itsiriha-mahafanina, ianjera-mahafaty.	*Tsiny* is like a deep ravine: looking into it makes you dizzy, falling into it kills you. [23]

In these examples and others, *tsiny* is portrayed as an obstacle to one's path that is as dangerous as it is camouflaged. Through the performative utterance of the *fialantsiny*, the speaker avoids the ravine, sidesteps the stone, and moves the rock out of the way. Some speakers go further, metaphorically throwing *tsiny* far away or burying it in places far from humans, where only animals strong enough to bear it (sharks, whales, and alligators) will encounter it (as cited in Razafiarivony 2005: 172, 183). If metaphors in kabary of speech as a path show us that the right to public speech is acknowledged only as passed on from others rather than as an ingrained individual right to the expression of one's own unique ideas, then metaphors of *tsiny* as an obstacle highlight the risks of public speech: all the ways it can trip us up, block our way forward, give us vertigo, and even lead to our demise. In these metaphors we see the contours of a language ideology in which actions are never the product of individual intention alone: the very words we use come to us from speakers before us, and publicly charting a new path forward is a risky endeavor, where any misstep is subject to the censure not only of those prior speakers but also of those immediately surrounding us: our family and community. Kabary's notions of the responsibility of speech, of the humility required of speakers to acknowledge that they are not the first to speak, of the recognition of the

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[20] From a kabary performed by Hanitra Andriamboavonjy, President of Fi.Mpi.Ma, cited in Razanamalala and Ramandraivonona (2015: 56). (My English translation, based partially on the authors' French translation). *Fihavanana* can be translated as solidarity, comradeship, blood relations, and kinship.

[21] From a Betsimisaraka kabary performed by Jean, collected and translated into French in Razafiarivony (2006: 171, my English translation). Incidentally, this is a nice example of a *sarinteny* that has been modified to relate to contemporary life.

[22] Cited as a proverb or common saying in Razanamalala and Ramandraivonona (2015: 24). This is my English translation, based partially on the authors' French translation.

[23] This is a very common *ohabolana*, recorded in various forms in Fox (1990: 358), Andriamanjato (1957 [2002]: 60), and Razafiarivony (2005: 171). This version is cited in Razanamalala and Ramandraivonona (2015: 91). (My English translation, based partially on the authors' French translation).

power words have to lead astray and to wound, might reconfigure prevailing understandings of free expression—which we turn to in the next chapter.

Yet the *fialantsiny* does not only tell us something about language ideologies; it is also a cunning rhetorical device that contributes to the speaker's authority. The *fialantsiny* section, often the most elaborate of the entire speech, enables speakers to fully display their skill: their knowledge of *ohabolana* and kabary form, their ability to invent beautiful and relevant *sarinteny*, and their dexterity at seamlessly interweaving the words of the ancestors with their own. Only once speakers have thus gained the audience's full attention—and, hopefully, approval—do they broach the "main message" of the speech. All of the opening sections (greeting, *fialantsiny*, etc.), laden with metaphor and proverbs, build up the speaker's authority bit by bit, such that the audience is much more likely to be receptive to the main message that follows. The *fialantsiny* prepares the speech that follows by metapragmatically removing reproach and by pragmatically performing the speaker's authority.

5. Analysis of a kabary by Harisoa Ravony

In this section, I analyze a kabary performance to show how authoritative speech is produced dialogically between ancestors, speaker, and audience. This dialogism includes the skilled use of ancestral proverbs, which, if performed correctly, frame the "main message" as authoritative. It also includes the heteroglossic use of distinctive elements from other authoritative genres, such as liberal discourses of international development. These Bakhtinian notions of dialogism and heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1928, 1935, 1979) have been taken up by Eva Dubuisson (2014, 2017) in her work on *aitys*, a form of poetry duel in Kazakhstan. Dubuisson describes how the genre itself is a dialogue between two competing poets who respond to each other's performances, and how this dialogism extends to the complex relations between poets, audience members, judges, ancestors, and the wealthy political leaders who sponsor *aitys* performances. In her discussion of the relation between poets and their sponsors in particular, where poets often voice complaints about sociopolitical issues on behalf of "the people," Dubuisson argues that "a successful collaboration between poets and sponsors results in the enactment and emergence of a particular dialogic form of authority, one of mutual respect and legitimacy where both parties are active and accountable to one another" (Dubuisson 2014: 73). The kind of dialogic authority I describe in the case of kabary does not usually involve individual sponsors, but it is similarly located in the embodied relations between speakers, audience, ancestors, and institutions.

During World Francophonie Week in March 2015, various government ministries and French cultural centers around the capital were abuzz with events honoring the French language, from theatrical productions to music concerts to book readings. Two of these events surprised me: a full day of *hira gasy* performances (a form of popular musical theater in the Highlands) and a kabary competition, both in Malagasy but on the theme of francophonie. It seemed an odd choice to honor the French language (and, by extension, France itself) through Malagasy-language performances unique to Madagascar that, moreover, were banned during the French colonial period. These two

events, hosted by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, respectively, seemed designed to appeal equally to those who look favorably on the ongoing French presence in Madagascar, to those who are suspicious of it, and to those who are ambivalent. The inclusion of these events in the capital, during a festival that celebrates the French language, sent the message that *hira gasy* and kabary are not relics of the past or of the countryside, but are integral parts of Malagasy culture that the French did not succeed in stamping out, and that they provide an opportunity to grapple with such modern issues as "post"colonial relations with France.

As is typical, the *hira gasy* performances were held on a stage outside, where one after the other different troupes competed for the audience's approval. What was not typical was the fact that the event was free—sponsored by the Ministry of Culture—and that the stage was set up on a busy street downtown rather than in a more impoverished suburb or rural area. As the day wore on, more and more passerby stopped to watch, and by the time the final troupe took the stage a diverse audience had gathered to watch: elderly folks, office workers, and young couples on their way somewhere else mixed with the street vendors and panhandlers who had paused their dealings along the well-trafficked avenue. The large staged adorned with banners, the band with their drums and violins, and the performers' colorful 19th century costumes marked this very clearly as an Event: something out of the ordinary.

The kabary contest, by contrast, was hidden away in a basement room in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, an imposing Socialist-era building that resembles an Eastern European opera house. I got lost in the maze of ministry buildings downtown, and by the time I found the right building and the right room, I was quite late. I opened the door to a small room packed with about sixty people, mostly secondary students in their school uniforms, with a handful of adults interspersed here and there. They were sitting in two columns of four seats each, facing the back of the room where a long table stood, laden with microphones and bottled water, in front of floor-to-ceiling windows with gauzy curtains. Three middle-aged judges sat clustered at one end of the table, taking notes: two men with red-and-black striped lamba (traditional scarf or cloth worn in the Highlands) and white button-downs and red ties, and a woman in between them in a dress and shawl. In my concern to find a seat as unobtrusively as possible, I didn't even notice, until I sat down, the young woman with a microphone standing to the left of the table, performing kabary. Kabary does not have the conspicuous fanfare of *hira gasy*, yet once it begins (or, in my case, once you notice it) it commands your attention.

The performance I analyze here was the winning performance of the contest. Not coincidentally, this speaker was also the eldest of the competitors, Harisoa Ravony, a stay-at-home mother who appeared to be in her thirties or forties; I later learned she is a member of Fi.Mpi.Ma.[24] Her speech was calm, confident, and clear throughout, with hardly any missteps or false starts. The kabary begins and ends with recognizable proverbial sayings, patterned similarly to the one we saw previously in Dera's UNESCO kabary; these are frequently indicated by the insertion of *hono*, "I've heard," which marks the utterance as indirect reported speech. These are not understood as direct

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[24] Harisoa was interviewed by Raharinjanahary (2014).

quotes from documented *ohabolana*, but rather as more general citations of ancestral wisdom and logics.

Harisoa begins with an extended *voha varavarana*, opening the door, expressing through a series of three parallel metaphors the happiness that comes from being together:[25]

| Ny rado sy ny ravaka, hono,
no soa miaraka samy kanto.

Ny kanto sy ny meva
no soa miaraka samy tsara.

Ny tsara sy ny raitra no soa
mifanatrika samy lafatra,
lafatra isika raha soa mifankahita
no samy faly. | Necklaces and jewelry, I've heard,
go well together as they are both beautiful.

The beautiful and the attractive
go well together as they are both good.

The good and the right go well together as
they are both perfect;
we are perfect when we gather together,
and we are all happy. |

Harisoa then moves directly to the *azafady* and *fialantsiny*, the apology and removal of reproach, expressing her own ineptitude as an apology for speaking before those assembled. She does this through two series of verse parallelism, each with three parts, in which she lists what she is *not* (special) before admitting to what she *is* (humble and ordinary). The irony, of course, is that her beautiful speech belies these claims and displays her oratorical skill. I include only one of the two series here; the full text follows this chapter.

| Tsy ny lava tanana hanakatra akory
na ny avo feo hiantso.

Tsy ny rantsana afa-manoratra
na ny maso afa-mitily.

Tsy ny lela tompon'ny tsiro
fa ny vava voatendry handahatra ihany. | I am not the hand that can reach high
or the voice that can call loudly.

I am not the fingers that can write
or the eyes that can spy.

I am not the tongue, the master of
taste, but only the mouth designated to
make a speech. |

Harisoa's expression of humility is followed by yet another three-part series of verse parallelism that illustrates the shamefulness of speaking without first apologizing. She then explicitly apologizes for speaking: "I beg your pardon to allow me to speak in front of your honor" ("Manao azafady aho ho hata-dalana raha hiteny manoloana ny voninahitrareo tsy ho santam-boninahitro"). Finally, she turns to *tsiny*:

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[25] See Text 1 for full text and translation. The text was transcribed by Fela Razafiarison-Josoa and translated into English by Fela and myself. The line breaks are to emphasize the parallelism.

Ny tsiny tokoa mantsy, hono, toy ny vato temerin-domotra ka mahasolafaka izay mandeha azy, ka aleo hanaraka ny lala-masaka falehan'ny Ntaolo, fa izany no fifanajana ho famatoram-pahendrena.	*Tsiny*, I've heard, is like a stone overgrown with moss, it will trip whoever steps on it; thus, it is better to take the path forged by the Ntaolo [ancestors of all Malagasy people], because that brings mutual respect and shows wisdom.

As we saw previously with the common metaphors for *tsiny*, Harisoa expresses it as an obstacle on the path of speech. At the same time, she explicitly references the ancestors as having already forged a path; this is the one that should be followed in order to avoid *tsiny*.

The *azafady* and *fialantsiny* are followed by the *fiarahaba*, the greetings, which are always addressed hierarchically first to God, then to political officials (starting with the President), the military, the general populace, and those currently assembled. In this first section, then, Harisoa's performance of authority derives from her ability to select appropriate sayings that express the sentiments required by the kabary format, at least as it currently stands: happiness at being gathered together, remorse and apprehension for speaking publicly, and gratitude for the guidance and protection of the government and military. Much of this authoritative performance, then, involves the denial of any authority whatsoever and the delineation of a strict hierarchy in which the speaker comes last.

The *ranjan-kabary*—the main message—is a different matter. Here, Harisoa shifts to language that clearly draws from liberal discourses of international development, without referencing herself at all. There are almost no *sarinteny* (metaphors) here, no metaphorical flourishes, no proverbs; the only exception is Harisoa's statement that Malagasy and French are "like rice and water" ("toy ny vary sy ny rano"), a common expression of mutual support and benefit. The rest of the speech, with the exception of the closing, focuses explicitly on the benefits of French for Madagascar's development. She insists especially on the economic benefits that might result from Madagascar hosting the 2016 Francophonie Summit, which brings together political leaders from Francophone countries. To do so, she poses and then answers her own rhetorical question:

Inona no tombontsoa? Hitombo ny tolotr'asa satria mety hisy ny fanatsarana ireo foto-drafitr'asa maro, ny fijerena ny fandriam-pahalemana, ny fampandrosoana ny vehivavy, ny reny sy ny zaza ary ny eny ambanivohitra, ny tontolo sy ny sehatra maro isankarazany, ny fanabeazana, ny kolontsaina, ny fanatanjahan-tena, voakasika ao anatin'izany [?] mety hahazo voka-tsoa izay avokoa.	What are the benefits? Job offers may increase because many infrastructures may be improved, [such as] security, the progress of women, mothers and children and rural areas, the environment and a lot of other areas, education, culture, sport, all of that can benefit from this.

What is remarkable about this shift between discursive modalities is that it occurs so abruptly: Harisoa switches from one authoritative discursive style (ancestral wisdom) to another (development discourse) without any warning. As I have argued, her ability to launch into a message about development is framed by her proper performance of the opening kabary sections; having humbled herself before the ancestors and her audience, her comments on francophonie are already set up as authoritative. It is not the case, however, that the opening sections of kabary are restrictive and that, having gotten through them, she is now "free" to say anything. Rather, she performs one authoritative discourse and then another in succession; liberal discourses of development, of course, have their own rules and restrictions. Harisoa does not depart from these in any way, producing a list of "benefits" that would satisfy any Western aid organization.

Beyond the restrictions of this discourse, too, Harisoa is beholden to the unspoken rules of the situation: this is a competition around the theme of francophonie in the context of the Francophonie Week, and delivering a performance that upholds rather than critiques the role of French in Madagascar is both expected and tacitly required in order to do well in the competition. The Fi.Mpi.Ma president, Hanitra Andriamboavonjy, was one of the judges, and all other judges were members of Fi.Mpi.Ma; thus performers could further expect that major changes to kabary format and style would not be welcome. Further, the contest was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—this institutional setting undoubtedly impacted what speakers felt able to say.

It is thus not the kabary format alone that "constrains" the speaker (and in any case, all languages "constrain" their speakers to a certain extent). The speaker's reference in the *ranjan-kabary* to such recognizable elements of Western development discourse as "developing countries," "rural women and children," and "public order" indicates that she is not solely fitting her speech to the requirements of kabary but also to Western liberal democratic discourses of development. The dialogic dimension here occurs within the speech itself, as the speaker brings together two separate discourses, each with their own rules, juxtaposing them rather than interweaving them.

Having finished the *ranjan-kabary*, Harisoa concludes with two brief metaphors: the first appears to be her own invented *sarinteny* (underlined below); the second is a proverb marked by the use of *hono* ("I've heard," which I have highlighted below in bold), verse parallelism, and end rhyme:

Ka lava ihany izay teniko izay. <u>Raha manendrika anao, ataovy toy ny lamba fitafy isampinana, fa raha tsy manendrika anao, avereno amiko tompony.</u>	Now, I have spoken a lot. <u>If what I said suits you, please consider it like a piece of cloth you can wear, and if it does not, give it back to me, its owner.</u>
Fa raha lava **hono** ny ketsa, very ny gisa, raha lava ny teny, mety ho lainga ny sisa.	If the grass is high, **I've heard**, you won't find the geese; if the talk is long, a lot can be a lie.
Mankasitraka eram-po tompokolahy	Thank you with all my heart, honorable

hajaina, mankatelina eram-panahy tompokovavy hajaina.	gentlemen, thank you with all my soul, honorable ladies.

As Harisoa shifts abruptly between these two authoritative discourses, we sense—as Jackson (2013) has shown with the inclusion of religious references and development discourse in kabary—the competing demands of two forms that relay rather different worldviews. It is not that the speaker is suddenly freer when she shifts to development discourse—rather, within the single frame of kabary, we see how she attempts to balance the demands of the form with the demands of the setting. Her authority here comes from her ability to bring the two into the same speech, framing the development discourse on both sides with the metaphorical flourishes of kabary. Her approach is a bit different from Dera's kabary, where he fit a reference to UNESCO directly into a proverb, but in both cases we see how the speakers attempt to balance a contemporary context and topic with ancestral wisdom, using the latter to make sense of the former.

6. Productive constraint

This section seeks to untangle formality from coercion from authority to show how the formal constraints of kabary are productive rather than coercive. To do so, I examine classic linguistic anthropological texts on kabary through the lens of an Asadian notion of authority as an "inner binding" (Asad 2006: 212), informed by Arendt. Asad argues that "an encounter, not a communication, lies at the heart of authority" (2006: 212), and considers authority, at least in part, as "*an inner binding*" (*idem*), where he "[refers] primarily to a *constitutive* process […] and secondarily to a *regulative* one" (Asad 2006: 211). That is to say, authority is in fact incompatible with coercion and force, as Hannah Arendt notes (1954), and is not necessarily or primarily the result of an order or command. Similarly, in linguistic anthropology, Judith Irvine's classic text on formality (1979) shows that it is not synonymous with restriction but is inflected by multiple factors, only one of which is adherence to norms.

In examining kabary constraints as productive, I seek not to recuperate kabary as a space of positive resistance to authority, but rather to present kabary as a format that is both rigid and permeable, restrictive and productive. My aim here is to provide a more nuanced account of the agency of kabary participants, where, as Saba Mahmood writes, "agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one *inhabits* norms" (Mahmood 2005: 15). As with Asad, authority is not a coercive force but rather an inner binding to a norm; in kabary, as well as in other genres in response to kabary, norms can be reinscribed *and* contested, and both processes are productive.

In Maurice Bloch's influential work on kabary (1975), he seeks to understand how "formalization can become a form of power or coercion" (1975: 12), drawing from his ethnographic work on *kabary* in the *fokonolona*—a community council—of a village in the Merina Highlands. Bloch determines that it is not merely the fokonolona as a local political body that exercises "social control," but kabary itself, and specifically the

process of formalization therein. In his analysis of kabary as a coercive force, he conflates what he understands as the coercion of the speaker, through adherence to form, and the coercion of the audience, through kabary's supposedly monologic and hierarchical format. I will examine each of these claims in turn.

Coercion of the speaker?

Bloch argues that the kind of formalized speech required in kabary is "an impoverished language: a language where many of the options at all levels are abandoned so that choice of form, of style, of words and of syntax, is less than in ordinary language" (1975: 13). Strikingly, Bloch's reference here is to sociologist Basil Bernstein (1964), and it is worth delving into what that reference connotes. Bernstein's influential and controversial continuum between "restricted code" and "elaborated code" categorizes working-class speech practices as predictable, concrete, and context-dependent, while middle-class speech practices are portrayed as more individualized, abstract, and portable from one context to another:

> In the case of an elaborated code, the speaker will select from a wide range of syntactic alternatives and so it will not be easy to make an accurate assessment of the organizing elements he uses at any one time. However, with a restricted code, the range of alternatives, syntactic alternatives, is considerably reduced and so it is much more likely that prediction is possible. […]
>
> If a speaker is oriented towards using an elaborated code, then the code through its planning procedures will facilitate the speaker in his attempt to put into words his purposes, his discrete intent, his unique experience in a verbally explicit form. If a speaker is moving towards a restricted code, then this code, through its planning procedures, will not facilitate the verbal expansion of the individual's discrete intent. (Bernstein 1964: 57)

This continuum was roundly critiqued at the time: in sociolinguist William Labov's (1969) analysis of African-American language practices, or what he termed "non-standard English," he seeks to invert the hierarchy[26] Bernstein imposes and to show instead how working-class African-American vernacular speech is in fact *more* logical than middle-class vernacular speech, which couches illogical thought in verbosity. Labov's argument is a pointed critique of the educational psychologists who have seized on Bernstein's

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[26] Bernstein, himself of working-class background, is at pains throughout the article to note that *he* is not suggesting that one code is superior to the other, but that *society* may do so, and that he is merely seeking to understand how working-class children may be disadvantaged due to the language environments they grow up in. But he instantiates a hierarchy in the very terms he chooses for these codes (would anyone say that "restricted" is preferable to "elaborated"?), in his description of them, and most strikingly in his suggestion that the "restricted code" may be linked to "culturally induced backwardness" (Bernstein 1964: 67).

hierarchy to label Black vernacular speech as evidence of "verbal deprivation" and as an obstacle to learning and intelligence, although it seems that Bernstein's model continues to be operationalized (and binarized) by middle-class (usually white) social workers and educators eager to "improve" what they see as the "impoverished" language environments and practices of working-class families (often families of color).[27]

Labov's argument, however, is not without its faults. Bourdieu (1991) saw in both Bernstein and Labov a failure to examine the broader relations of power in which speech practices are formed, shaped, and understood. He writes that

> The 'elaborated code' is thus constituted [by Bernstein] as the absolute norm of all linguistic practices which then can only be conceived in terms of the logic of *deprivation*. Conversely, ignorance of what popular and educated usage owe to their objective relations and to the structure of the relation of domination between classes, which they reproduce in their own logic, leads to the *canonization* as such [as in Labov] of the 'language' of the dominated classes. (Bourdieu 1991: 53, translated by G. Raymond and M. Adamson)

Bourdieu claims here that Labov merely inverts Bernstein's hierarchy, without accounting for the ways in which that hierarchy—though it should not be upheld or reinstantiated by the researcher—is nevertheless frequently reproduced among those who are represented as being at the bottom of this hierarchy. For Bourdieu, it is only by accounting for structures of domination that the researcher can make sense of this hierarchy in a way that does not reify it either as "true" or "false."

More recently, Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs (2003) have provided a comprehensive analysis of precisely the kind of binarized and hierarchical view of language that Bernstein and Bloch promote, tracking how social inequalities of race, gender, class, etc. have been built on and reproduced through language ideologies and understandings of tradition versus modernity. The link that Bernstein and Bloch draw between what they see as "impoverished" language use and sociocultural "backwardness" follow in the long European philosophical tradition that Bauman and Briggs (2003) delineate, dating back to such thinkers as Francis Bacon and John Locke, in which hierarchized categories of language use are associated with hierarchized categories of people.

This discussion, though it may seem removed from the context of kabary, is crucial for understanding how Bloch makes sense of kabary and thus how he has contributed to its portrayal in Western social scientific literature. His term "impoverished" in reference to kabary is a simplified version of Bernstein's description of the "restricted code," in which the speaker's lexical and syntactic choices are so restricted as to be nearly or entirely predictable. The richness and subtlety of *ohabolana* (proverbs) and *sarinteny* (metaphorical examples), and the speaker's skill in selecting from amongst

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[27] Elinor Ochs (2017) has discussed a disturbing rise in digitally-mediated and racialized interventions in the U.S. aimed at improving the "language gap" between "working-class" (often a euphemism for Black, Native, and Latinx) and "middle-class" (often a euphemism for white) children.

thousands of these and modifying them as appropriate, is reduced in Bloch's analysis to a kind of rote and robotic recitation in which the speaker has no choice whatsoever in what they can say and how they can say it.

There are two issues here: one is that Bloch either does not understand or does not acknowledge the sheer quantity and variety of *ohabolana* and *sarinteny* that a speaker may choose from, or the fact that these do not comprise the entirety of the kabary. Even if his claim is that *any* use of a proverb or common saying—no matter how many there might be to choose from—is equivalent to restriction and lack of choice, Bloch overlooks the fact that the entire main body of the kabary (the *ranjan-kabary*) contains the speaker's individual message and is either devoid of proverbs altogether or contains significantly fewer of these. While this message may follow particular thematic norms in ceremonies such as wedding and funerals, such is not the case in political kabary and the kabary of the community council.

The other key problem with Bloch's argument here is the conflation of the adherence to certain norms with a complete absence of choice or innovation, which Judith Irvine has examined in her influential article on formality (Irvine 1979). Adherence to norms—what Irvine calls "increased code structuring," is only one of four aspects of formality that she argues seem to apply cross-culturally, along with "code consistency," "invoking positional identities," and the "emergence of a central situational focus." All four of these aspects apply in kabary: speakers tend to maintain code consistency (they do not, for example, use slang or informal syntax), they directly invoke social hierarchies by greeting audience members in order of hierarchical social position, and the kabary is clearly the central focus as audience members maintain a respectful silence and corporeal position of attentiveness throughout. Yet, as Irvine stresses, code structuring is not analogous to a "restriction on creative potential. Instead, what is involved is a focusing of creativity onto a certain aspect of talk, which is highlighted because other aspects are redundant and predictable" (Irvine 1979: 776). To term the language of kabary "impoverished," as Bloch does, because it follows certain norms and a pre-established form, is akin to labeling a sonnet "impoverished" because it follows a particular structure. The fact of these norms in kabary, of this code structuring, is clear—though we might disagree on the extent to which these norms can be bent or broken—but Bloch's conclusion that code structuring is analogous to rote repetition is not borne out by the data that he and others have provided, as we shall see.

The role of individual thought and creation in kabary should not be overstated, but neither should it be underestimated. If kabary were a mere "mass of clichés" (Bloch 1975: 8), it would be a ritual recitation in which the entire utterance was determined in advance. Again, such is not the case, although circumstantial kabary is certainly more thematically structured than political kabary. The extent to which an individual speaker can introduce her own opinions varies enormously by the situation. Dera, the President of Fi.Mpi.Ma France, explained this to me through the example of a mpikabary who has been hired to represent a family at a marriage request kabary: the mpikabary is "really a spokesperson" and is there to transmit the message the family has hired them to transmit. But even in such a case, the mpikabary is expected to express this message

in a unique way, where the choice of proverbs and the way the message is presented reveals the mpikabary's individualized skill.[28]

Bloch's claims of impoverishment and restriction have a third implication: that just as variation between individual speakers is inhibited, so too is change over time inhibited or even impossible. In reference to one of kabary's key defining features, the allegorical parallelism (through *ohabolana* and references to the ancestors) of the present moment of speech with the past, Bloch argues that "The effect of always comparing particular events to the same general illustrations reduces the specificity of utterances so that all events are made to appear as though they were all alike" (1975: 15). The attempt to link the current moment with the past is indeed a significant aspect of kabary, and one that is enmeshed in broader metaphysical understandings of the continual impact of the ancestors on the present (Andriamanjato 1957 [2002], Feeley-Harnik 1991, Evers 2002, Lambek 2002), but Bloch reduces it here to a politically suspect practice whose underlying motivation is the rigidification of social hierarchies. One could certainly make the case that, in everyday speech for example, repeating sayings and clichés that have a clear link to structures of domination and oppression, such as stereotypes and slurs, have the effect of reproducing these structures in the present. But this is not Bloch's point. Rather, in the mere fact of linking present to past, Bloch sees a refusal of any sort of change, or at least the impossibility of admitting change over time. For Bloch, this restricts the possibility of imagining different social and political futures. This view of genre as intractable disregards what Briggs and Bauman (1992) identify as the gaps and links produced through intertextuality—the ways in which "a text can be linked to generic precedents in multiple ways" (Briggs and Bauman 1992: 163), open to renegotiation and contestation.

If kabary were entirely determined in advance and used solely to solidify traditional hierarchies, then we would expect very little historical variation. This is not borne out by the data. Ochs (1974) shows that differences between inhabitants of rural versus urban areas often results in friction because city dwellers tend to prefer shorter, more direct kabary, and in Jackson (2009, 2013) we see that recent developments in political kabary involve the inclusion of Christian scripture and registers of international development, as in Harisoa's speech in the previous section. These changes involve both the types of people who are allowed to do kabary and the form of kabary itself. As Raharinjanahary (2014) notes, female mpikabary have become more and more common over the past twenty or thirty years and have come to occupy important roles in Fi.Mpi.Ma; indeed, the current president of Fi.Mpi.Ma, Hanitra Andriamboavonjy, is a woman who was elected in 2006 when she was only thirty years old—an unthinkable occurrence in terms of both gender and age only a few decades ago. More and more women and young people are taking kabary classes and completing mpikabary training. At the Francophonie kabary contest I attended, for example, only two out of the seven contestants were male and all three winners were female.

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[28] This kind of performance involves complex processes of performative mediation; for more on mediation in performance see Judith Irvine's (1989) work on Senegalese *griot* performances and Richard Bauman's chapter on "Mediation, Tradition, Authority" (2004).

These changes in who is allowed to perform kabary have been accompanied by changes to the style and format: one mpikabary told me about how mpikabary come up with new *sarinteny* (imagistic examples) that involve modern life. Where they used to say, in a wedding kabary, that the groom is looking for a wife like a man looking for his cow, or a farmer looking for more rice to plant, they now say he is like someone looking for their lost cell phone. Further, the *fialantsiny* (apology), as many observers have noted, has grown progressively shorter—to the point of being cut out entirely in some contemporary political speeches (Jackson 2013: 200). As Dera (the president of Fi.Mpi.Ma France) told me during our interview, kabary not only *can* change but it *must*, or it will die out.[29] This concern for change, within reason, is expressed in the title of a Fi.Mpi.Ma conference during the 2014 "Kabary Week" in Antananarivo: "Creating but not repeating, creating but not damaging, creating but not changing/modifying" ("Mamorona fa tsy mamerina, mamorona fa tsy manimba, mamorona fa tsy manova," my translation). Here, "creation" (*mamorona*) is perceived as integral to kabary, but only within certain bounds, as long as it does not modify (*manova*) what distinguishes kabary as a genre.

Bloch's concern about the limitations on individual freedom of expression was echoed by a French participant of Rakotonaivo's kabary class at the Alliance Française, who asked Rakotonaivo the leading question of whether the rules and formulas of kabary inhibit creativity and the freedom to express one's personal thoughts. The underlying implication, in both Bloch's article and this participant's question, is that individuals should have the freedom to express themselves however they wish and that the restriction thereof is necessarily a form of social and/or political coercion. This assumption can be simplified as follows: *Kabary is formal, and therefore restrictive, and this restriction is part of an authoritarian mode of coercive social and political governance*. This argument fails to consider two critical points: firstly, as Irvine (1979) has shown, formality is not synonymous with restriction or with authority, though those may be elements of formality. Secondly, as Arendt (1954 [2006]) argues and Asad (2006) further elaborates, not only is authority not synonymous with coercion, it is antithetical to it.

As we have seen, Irvine does not see code structuring as, by itself, an indication of restriction or of social stasis. She writes that "if formality in speech events reflects, and in that sense supports, a traditional social system, it is the other aspects of formality that do so, not the structuring of discourse in itself" (Irvine 1979: 784). Here she would seem to agree with Bourdieu, that it is not enough to examine the code in and of itself in order to make a claim about the underlying hierarchy it supports and/or is supported by. So what of the other three aspects of formality? It is unlikely that either the consistency of code in kabary or the centrality of focus could be accountable for the "restriction" Bloch sees, because it is quite possible for a performance to be both code-consistent and the central focus of an event without thereby reproducing structures of dominance—think of any artistic production, from hip-hop to opera. Rather, if there is an element of kabary that reinforces existing hierarchies and is resistant to change, it is its

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[29] This theme of the threat of a "dying" culture or language has been critiqued, particularly in relation to Indigenous peoples (Dippie 1991, Tallbear 2017).

"invocation of positional identities," both through the limitations on who can speak and through the explicit marking of these identities in the hierarchized greetings. Yet Bloch hardly mentions these.

The second issue—the conflation of authority with coercion and the loss of freedom—is directly addressed by Arendt (1954 [2006]) in her essay on authority, where she argues that

> Generally speaking, it has been quite typical of liberal theories to start from the assumption that "the constancy of progress…in the direction of organized and assured freedom is the characteristic fact of modern history" [Lord Acton 1955] and to look upon each deviation from this course as a reactionary process leading in the opposite direction. This makes them overlook the differences in principle between the restriction of freedom in authoritarian regimes, the abolition of political freedom in tyrannies and dictatorships, and the total elimination of spontaneity itself, that is, of the most general and most elementary manifestation of human freedom, at which only totalitarian regimes aim by means of their various methods of conditioning. (Arendt 1954 [2006]: 96)

Bloch does indeed gloss over the critical distinctions between types of political regimes, and thus overemphasizes the role of kabary in controlling or limiting freedom. He does not note the historical change in kabary format and role through different political regimes, as others have examined (Jackson 2009, 2013; Raharinjanahary 2014), nor does he mention the fact that the model of government at the time of his writing is a socialist dictatorship, which may well have had an impact on the forms and uses of kabary.

Bloch is not alone in drawing a direct link from the form of kabary to undemocratic governance. In Jackson's ethnography, she quotes Vries, the "project lead for an international development program dedicated to 'building civil society'" (Jackson 2013: 193), who characterizes the indirectness of kabary as not transparent, and thus as an impediment to democracy:

> Kabary politika may be traditional ritual but it has no place in politics today. It is not direct and the way that politicians can hide behind all of those proverbs does nothing but perpetuate corruption, which is what the current president [Ravalomanana] and we are working against here in order to forward a more democratic government" (Jackson 2013: 194).

The winding metaphors of kabary are perceived here as indirect and therefore dissimulating, and this opacity is discursively linked to political corruption. Vries contrasts traditional kabary with the political speeches of Ravalomanana, the president at the time who was highly favored by Anglophone foreign powers and who was later overthrown in Andry Rajoelina's 2009 coup—in part because of a (shockingly non-transparent and dissimulating) deal he very nearly signed with Daewoo, a South Korean

conglomerate, to "lease" (for free) nearly half of Madagascar's arable land for 99 years (Jackson 2013: 216). But if Vries knew about this at the time, she doesn't discuss it; rather, she touts as "transparent" and "democratic" Ravalomanana's disavowal of traditional kabary forms in favor of a more direct message—a style of speech that, Jackson shows, is modeled on Christian sermonic registers and on international development discourse. In Vries' claim, by contrast to Bloch's, kabary is explicitly labeled as undemocratic and as therefore politically corrosive.

Yet Jackson notes that "most Malagasy [she] spoke with or just plain overheard perceived *kabary politika* structure and style as conducive to transparency. This transparency is brought about as an audience 'sees how the speaker thinks'" because the path of thought is traced (Jackson 2013: 196). Transparency is framed here not as the direct and unsubtle expression of individual thought, as Vries might have it, but as the illustration of the behind-the-scenes contours of one's train of thought: this is transparency as a "making-of" video rather than as unfiltered and unedited footage. This difference highlights the importance of relativizing the categories we use—if we assume that transparency can only look one way, we risk overlooking how others may have radically different conceptions of these categories, if they use them at all. And indeed, although Ravalomanana's direct and Westernized speech style may have seemed transparent and familiar to Westerners, it is undeniable now that he wielded it to obscure economic and political dealings that were anything but democratic.

Equating democracy with transparency and formality with coercion is a troubling reduction of the complexity of social life and politics to formal elements of speech genres. While kabary is clearly a formal genre and an authoritative one, Arendt would caution that this is does not equal coercion:

> Since authority always demands obedience, it is commonly mistaken for some form of power or violence. Yet authority precludes the use of external means of coercion; where force is used, authority itself has failed. Authority, on the other hand, is incompatible with persuasion, which presupposes equality and works through a process of argumentation. (Arendt 1954 [2006]: 92)

Kabary does indeed work through persuasion even though it is a form of authoritative discourse. Throughout the dissertation, I will also show how slam poetry seeks to fashion authority *without* obedience to strict norms or formal constraints. But I want to focus here on Arendt's point that coercion is not an element of authority. Perhaps Bloch would argue that the coercion he means is not one of external force but of internal submission to a norm, or instead that kabary is not a form of authority, and solely one of coercion: that it is totalitarian rather than authoritative. He seems to mean that listeners and speakers alike, willing or no, submit themselves to the restrictive force of kabary. In this sense they seem to participate in the construction of authority in the Asadian sense of an "internal binding," except that Bloch emphasizes their unwillingness to be bound, or the impropriety of that binding. In so doing—in his overemphasis on what kabary limits or proscribes, he ignores what that binding is productive of.

Coercion of the audience?

Bloch's claim about kabary as a coercive force is not limited to the question of the *speaker's* "freedom," but—crucially—the audience's. He perceives kabary as monologic, such that once a speaker begins a kabary they are not interrupted, thus limiting the possibility of response and forcing the audience into tacit agreement:

> In these formal interactions if you stay within the code you can only listen in silence and allow a pause to elapse afterwards which in fact means yes. The speaker and hearer have slipped into a highly structured situation which contains the hierarchical situation which only allows for a one way relationship. (Bloch 1975: 9)

For this reason, Bloch argues, people try to avoid being addressed through kabary (1975: 8)—though this contradicts his assertion that the exercise of power kabary enables is "totally unconscious and completely accepted" (1975: 3). Bloch sees in the formalization required in kabary a force of coercion and repression with no possibility of response beyond acquiescence or outright revolution. Further, because this form of totalizing power is far from equally available to all—due to its restriction to high-status individuals—it therefore rigidifies existing hierarchies (1975: 23). The picture Bloch paints here is one of a hierarchical structure in language that reflects that of society, and that is so rigid, intractable, and repressive that it is not productive of anything except the reinstatiation of norms. Although Bloch recognizes that kabary is not the only mode of speech possible and that it does not dominate all moments and spheres of life, it appears in his account to have the effect of generalized social control, particularly as it can rear its head at any moment and in any situation.

Yet Bloch himself acknowledges that in the kabary of the *fokonolona* (community council) there is often, in fact, some disagreement, even if this is phrased in exceedingly deferential and roundabout terms, and he gives examples of participants undermining a speaker's authority through mockery as well as through direct contestation (1971: 51). Most other scholars who have studied kabary have portrayed it as dialogic by definition (Ochs 1973, 1974; Haring 1992; Hanson 2000, 2007; Jackson 2013), both in the sense of one speech being followed by a response and in the sense that an individual speaker's utterance contains Bakhtinian dialogism—that is to say, references multiple voices and codes. Ochs, for example, notes that it is an insult not to reply to a kabary, and that "a kabary which permits no answer is, in the words of one speechmaker, the speech of a dictator" (1974 [1975]: 95). Similarly, Lee Haring (1992) has written that kabary is essentially dialogic, and that "Betsileo kabary must have two orators, who answer each other as if two groups were debating (Michel-Andrianarahinjanaka 1986: 274)." In Paul Hanson's work on kabary and National Park governance (2000, 2007), he shows how a woman's informal interjection during a *fokonolona* meeting brings about a discussion of the very topic the meeting was intended to address, but which had thus far been avoided.[30] Her own speech did not follow kabary form—which contradicts Bloch's

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[30] This is a nice contemporary example of one of the key points in Ochs (1974), that women are frequently the ones to accomplish necessary but socially delicate discursive labor.

assertion that kabary allows no response, let alone a non-formal response—yet was indirectly responded to in the sense that the council elders then debated, and ultimately resolved, the issue she had raised.

Jackson (2013) contends that kabary has largely served state power but that it is nonetheless dialogic: she notes that until Ravalomanana, *political* kabary was "almost always used to serve state power rather than turn against it" (2013: 87), but she does not extend this to all forms of kabary, nor does she conclude that political kabary does not permit dissent. She shows that kabary is not a platform for the direct transmission of an individual message, not because all individual difference is repressed, but because "it is more about an agreement that the process is dialogic, that the semiotic work is done by both the speaker and his auditors" (2013: 79). One mpikabary described it as a "contract" between speaker and audience: "[…] If a kabary does not arouse discussion, it is not successful. A kabary, you know, should touch the conscience and enliven the mind. That is how kabary becomes a contract between the speaker and the people" (*idem*). Thus, if the audience is beholden to the speaker, the speaker is equally beholden to—and vulnerable to—the audience; the speech event is understood by participants themselves as being co-produced.

While it is certainly true that an obvious response of disagreement or refusal on the audience's part is taken as disrespectful, and thus extremely rare, it is equally true that audiences relish both the kabary event and rehashing, dissecting, and appraising it afterwards—this metadiscursive "talk about talk" is just as important, if not more so, as the original "talk" itself. Direct critique and appraisal can take the form of informal discussions about kabary (Ochs 1973, 1974; Jackson 2009, 2013). To conclude, as Bloch does, that kabary permits no response, is to assume that a response only counts as such if it is made on the spot and within the same frame.

Finally, kabary is not the only or even necessarily the primary mode of communication, and thus far from the only communicative practice that has a part in shaping social and political life. The impact of face-to-face conversation on politics should not be minimized, given how many momentous decisions are the result of private tête-à-têtes. Public involvement in political discussions also occurs in everyday conversation and via media sources (radio, television, online, and print journalism), in addition to genres of artistic expression such as *hiragasy* (Edkvist 1997, Mauro and Raholiarisoa 2000), political cartooning (Jackson 2013), and of course slam poetry.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the formal constraints of kabary are productive of a dialogic relation between ancestors, speaker, and audience. Dialogism and intertextuality are key aesthetic components of kabary for many speakers, who combine the words of the ancestors (*tenindrazana*) in the form of proverbs (*ohabolana*) with other authoritative discourses; we have seen how Harisoa Ravony does this with international development discourse in the main message of her kabary (*ranjankabary*).

These forms of dialogism enable speakers and audiences to address contemporary issues through ancestral logics, producing a sense of continuity between past and present. This does not mean that the form of kabary, or kabary speakers themselves, do not allow change. On the contrary, we have seen numerous changes to kabary: in the form itself (shortening or doing away with the apology section and introducing other contemporary discursive forms), in speakers' aesthetic decisions (creating new *sarinteny*, imagistic examples, that illustrate contemporary objects and issues), and in the regulations surrounding who can occupy the role of speaker (a significant rise in young people and women performing kabary). Through its modifications *and* its continuity over time, kabary is a key site in which to examine understandings of traditionality, modernity, and language ideologies. In particular, this chapter shows how authority and formality can be dialogic and intertextual rather than monologic, dynamic rather than static, and subject to contestation and reformulation rather than repressive or coercive. Further, it provides a clear example of how linguistic norms are *constitutive* of speaking subjects rather than simply restrictive of individual freedoms.

In the next chapter, we will see how slam poets are fashioning novel forms of authoritative speech that depart significantly from kabary's formality and explicit hierarchization. Although some see slam as directly opposed to kabary and other genres of public speech and performance, many poets view the relation as one of kinship: the performance of aestheticized speech has always been important in Madagascar, and slam is just another genre. However, slam poetry is founded on a liberal understanding of free expression that diverges from kabary's emphasis on the skill required of speakers and the humility they must display. Yet in both genres, the relation between audience and performer is crucial in developing the speaker's authority. We will see how slam poets balance this relation, which entails the speaker's accountability to the audience, with a liberal ideology of free expression.

Text 1: Kabary by Harisoa Ravony, March 19, 2015, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Antananarivo[31]

Opening **(Voha varavarana)**	Tompokolahy sy tompokovavy. Ny rado sy ny ravaka, hono, no soa miaraka samy kanto. Ny kanto sy ny meva no soa miaraka samy tsara. Ny tsara sy ny raitra no soa mifanatrika samy lafatra, lafatra isika raha soa mifankahita no samy faly. Tsy ny lava tanana hanakatra akory na ny avo feo hiantso. Tsy ny rantsana afa-manoratra na ny maso afa-mitily, tsy ny lela tompon'ny tsiro fa ny vava voatendry handahatra ihany. Raha mijoro eto ny tenako dia mahatsiaro fa tsy mba toy ilay telonohorefy vadin'ny volana na ny fitarikandro vadin'ny masoandro fa toy ilay sarambaben'ny kintana eny amin'ny lanitra ka zara raha mahatanteraka hazavana. Tsy mahaleo ny iray toa zato fa ny ankamaroam-bahoaka.	Ladies and gentlemen. Necklaces and jewelry, I've heard, go well together as they are both beautiful. The beautiful and the attractive go well together as they are both good. The good and the right go well together as they are both perfect; we are perfect when we gather together, and we are all happy. I am not the hand that can reach high or the voice that can call loudly. I am not the fingers that can write or the eyes that can spy. I am not the tongue, the master of taste, but only the mouth designated to make a speech. Standing here, I realize that I am not like Orion's Belt, the companion of the moon, nor am I the morning star, the companion of the sun, but I am like the ordinary stars in the sky whose light is collective. It is not the special one in a hundred, but merely part of the majority.
Apology **(Azafady)**	Fa na izany aza anefa, ny [?] tsy mahamasaka, ny sakafo isan-jaza tsy mahavoky, ny miteny tsy misy azafady tsy mahamendrika. Manao azafady aho ho hata-dalana raha	But even so, [?] does not make food cooked, a child's meal does not make one full, and speaking without begging pardon does not make one dignified. I beg your

	hiteny manoloana ny voninahitrareo tsy ho santam-boninahitro.	pardon to allow me to speak in front of your honor.
Removal of Reproach (Fialan- tsiny)	Manonona ny fialan-tsiny ihany koa manembana ny voninahitrareo sy misalovana ny hasina hanananareo rehetra. Ny tsiny tokoa mantsy, hono, toy ny vato temerin-domotra ka mahasolafaka izay mandeha azy ka aleo hanaraka ny lala-masaka falehan'ny Ntaolo, fa izany no fifanajana ho famatoram- pahendrena.	I beg your pardon, too, for disturbing your honor and interfering with the *hasina* [sacred power/virtue] you all possess. *Tsiny* [ancestral blame], I have heard, is like a stone overgrown with moss, it will trip whoever steps on it; thus, it is better to take the path forged by the Ntaolo [ancestors of all Malagasy people], because that brings mutual respect and shows wisdom.
Greetings (Arahaba)	Ny hasina sy ny arahaba ary ny firarian-tsoa dia atolotro ho [?] avo tsy misy toa an'Andriamanitra. Ao koa ireo mpitondra fanjakana isan'ambaratongany. Tononina manokana izany ho an'ny Filohan'ny Repoblika, ka hatrany amin'ny filohan'ny fokontany. Izy ireo no vovonana iadian'ny lohany, sy varivary andrian'ny tafiny, fela- tana-mangaika ny rantsana. Ao koa ny Foloalindahy hampandry fahalemana ity tany ity, ho [?] fanjakana. Ary ny vahoaka valalabe mandry izay irina hahay hiara- monina hiadam-pinaritra ny isan- tokantrano. Ary isika rehetra izay tafahoana etoana. Mari-pifaliana ny arahaba amintsika Malagasy, ka hoy aho hoe: arahabaina toa an-dRavolana, Ravolana fanala haizin'ny alina, na tsinana na fenomanana dia miposaka [?] tahotra. Zary toa volafotsy Ravolana fa ny fifankatiavantsika ataontsika toy ny	I offer you *hasina* [sacred power/virtue], greetings, and best wishes [?], but there is nothing higher than God. Greetings to the authorities at all levels, from the President of the Republic to the president of the *fokontany* [local council]. They are like the pillar of the house, or the frame of the roof, or the palm of the hand that brings together the fingers. Greetings to the Army, which protects this land [?]. Greetings to the general populace, which I hope will someday live together in peace in every household. And greetings to all of us here today. Greetings are a mark of joy for us Malagasy, so I say: greetings to you like Mr. Moon, who illuminates the darkness of the night, appearing and [dispelling?] fear whether it is the new moon or the full moon. Mr. Moon seems made of silver, but may our love for each

	volamena mihaona tsy mifanery fa mifanakaiky tsy mifamasoka.	other be like gold: when we meet, we do not tighten; when we are close, we do not tarnish each other.
Main Message (Ranjan-kabary)	Izay no ela tompokolahy, izay no ela tompokovavy, ela nisaintsainana, ela nanginginana fa tonga ny fotoana hanambarana fohy izay faran'ny kely indrindra amin'ny hahafantarana ny frankofonia.	Now, ladies and gentlemen, I have considered for a long time, I have been quiet for a long time, but now is the time to briefly reveal the little I know about francophonie.
	Voalohany indrindra, firenena manana ny maha izy azy i Madagasikara, firenena manana ny fiandrianany. Tsy afaka hiolonolona samirery anefa amin'ny maha nosy azy izy fa tsy maintsy mivelatra amin'ny fiaraha-miasa iraisam-pirenena. Tombotsoa lehibe ho azy ny ahafahany mandray ny fihaonana an-tampony faha-enina ambin'ny folo ny frankofonia. Ary tombotsoa lehibe hitondra ainga vao sy ilo indray ho an'ny firenena malagasy sy ny fiainam-pirenena iray manontolo mihitsy.	First of all, Madagascar is a country that has its own distinctiveness, a country that has its own sovereignty. It cannot isolate itself as an island, but must be open to international cooperation. There are huge benefits for it to host the 16th francophonie summit. And it is a huge benefit that will bring new energy and new fuel to the Malagasy nation and particularly to the life of the entire country.
	Malagasy tokoa isika, manana ny tenindrazantsika. Tsy afaka misaraka amin'izany frankofonia izany anefa isika satria eto Madagasikara dia mampiasa hampahany betsaka amin'ny teny frantsay.	We are indeed Malagasy, we have our own mother tongue. Nevertheless, we cannot be separated from francophonie because here in Madagascar, we use the French language often.
	Tsy vao izao anefa i Madagasikara no nampiantrano hetsika raha ny frankofonia no lazaina. Tsiahivina ny nandraisany lalao faha-telo ny	However, this is not the first time for Madagascar to host an event related to francophonie.[32] We hosted the 3rd Francophonie

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[32] She is referring to the fact that Madagascar has been chosen to host the 2016 Francophonie Summit (Sommet de la Francophonie), a major international conference that brings together the heads of state of Francophone countries.

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Main Message **(Ranjan-kabary)** — **continued**	frankofonia tamin'ny 1997, ka nampanakoako ilay hiram-pirahalahiana hoe "'c'est l'amitié". Nanakoako ho an'i Madagasikara tokoa ny firahalahiana. Ao koa ny fandraisan'anjaran'ireo vehivavy izay anisan'ny andraisan'ny Madagasikara anjara amin'ny fampandrosoana ao amin'ny sehatry ny fandraharahana. Betsaka ny tombotsoa azon'ny Madagasikara amin'ny fampiantranoana izany fihaonana an-tampony izany.	Games in 1997, and the song of solidarity "C'est l'amitié" ["It's/That's Friendship"] has resonated here in Madagascar. Solidarity has resonated here in Madagascar. And there is also the participation of women who are contributing to development in Madagascar through entrepreneurship. There are many benefits that Madagascar gains from hosting this summit.
	Eo koa ny toe-karena malagasy indrindra amin'ny lafin'ny fizahan-tany izay isan'ny mampidi-bola betsaka tokoa ho an'i Madagasikara. Hery lehibe ho an'i Madagasikara tokoa izany.	There is also the Malagasy economy, especially tourism, which brings a lot of money into Madagascar. That is surely a big strength for Madagascar.
	Ambarako angamba fa toy ny vary sy rano i Madagasikara sy ny frankofonia. Satria mampiasa betsaka ny teny frantsay izy. Nefa manana ny tenintsika koa isika. Manana anjara raha samy nosy fa manana mponina mikolo sy [?] ka mba tsy manary tsy very [?] toy ny [?] fa tena tany lonaka hivelaran'ny fo sy ny saina ary ny fanahy tena maha Malagasy. Fa ny fahazoan'i Madagasikara hanatanteraka io fihaonana an-tampony faha-enina ambin'ny folo io dia hitarafana ny fisian'ny demokrasia aty amin'ny tany andalam-pandrosoana.	I think I can say that Madagascar and francophonie are like rice and water, because the French language is used often here. But we do have our own language. We are a very lucky island because we have citizens who care about [?] and do not throw away or lose [?] like [?], but who are like a fertile soil where that which truly makes us Malagasy can grow in the heart, in the mind, and in the soul. And the fact that Madagascar is hosting this summit reflects the existence of democracy here in a developing country.
	Mihatsara toerana sy mihamafy orina indray ny fifandraisana ara-diplomatika an'i Madagasikara sy ny OIF rehefa nandalo fotoan-tsarotra izany nohon'ny krizy	The diplomatic relationship between Madagascar and the OIF [International Organization of Francophonie] is improving and strengthening after some difficult

	nolalovan'ny firenena. Ka tsy tanteraka ho azy anefa izany fa mila ezaka sy fampandrosoana betsaka ary mila fiombonana amintsika mpiray firenena. Inona no tombontsoa? Hitombo ny tolotr'asa satria mety hisy ny fanatsarana ireo foto-drafitr'asa maro, ny fijerena ny fandriam-pahalemana, ny fampandrosoana ny vehivavy, ny reny sy ny zaza ary ny eny ambanivohitra, ny tontolo sy ny sehatra maro isankarazany, ny fanabeazana, ny kolontsaina, ny fanatanjahan-tena, voakasika ao anatin'izany [?] mety hahazo voka-tsoa izay avokoa.	times due to the crisis in the country. However, that is not possible by itself; it requires a lot of effort and development, and it requires solidarity from our entire population. What are the benefits? Job offers may increase because many infrastructures may be improved, [such as] security, the progress of women, mothers and children and rural areas, the environment, education, culture, sport, all of that can benefit from this.
Closing **(Fehin-teny)**	Ka lava ihany izay teniko izay. Raha manendrika anao, ataovy toy ny lamba fitafy isampinana, fa raha tsy manendrika anao, avereno amiko tompony. Fa raha lava hono ny ketsa, very ny gisa, raha lava ny teny, mety ho lainga ny sisa. Mankasitraka eram-po tompokolahy hajaina, mankatelina eram-panahy tompokovavy hajaina.	Now, I have spoken a lot. If what I said suits you, please consider it like a piece of cloth you can wear, and if it does not, give it back to me, its owner. If the grass [young rice plants] is high, I have heard, you won't find the geese; if the talk is long, a lot can be a lie. Thank you with all my heart, honorable gentlemen, thank you with all my soul, honorable ladies.

Chapter Two: Managing Freedom in Slam Poetry

1. Introduction

In November 2014, a month after starting my dissertation fieldwork, my partner Janice and I traveled from Tana to nearby Moramanga with Gad Bensalem, a prominent poet and former president of Madagaslam who has led slam and theater workshops across the country in addition to performing in Europe. I had met Gad in 2012 but did not yet know him well; he eventually became one of my closest interlocutors, in part thanks to the conversations we had over the course of this trip to Moramanga. It is a two- or three-hour bus ride from Tana, and on the way there we chatted about slam and music, alternating between French (which Gad speaks fluently but Janice does not) and English (vice versa). Gad was traveling as a Madagaslam representative to run three days of slam workshops at the Alliance Française of Moramanga; on the fourth day, he would host the regional bout to determine which three poets would represent Moramanga at the National Slam in December.

I had already watched Gad perform and knew that he was an exceptional poet and performer, but this trip was my first time witnessing his equally exceptional teaching skills. At that time he was a student at ENS in Tana, Madagascar's foremost teachers' college, studying to become a high school French teacher and writing a thesis on theater as a pedagogical tool. Many slam poets teach workshops, and they are often skilled at this because of their familiarity with public speaking; additionally, some of the most prominent poets in Tana have been ENS students and are thus trained teachers. During the National Slam, all thirty participating poets from around the country teach multiple workshops at schools around Tana and at NGOs that work with children. Teaching workshops, and thereby fostering future generations of poets, is an integral part of Madagaslam's mission.

This chapter draws on material from Gad's workshops in Moramanga, particularly his assertion that a poet's freedom of expression "has to be managed." I will argue that this "management" of the possibilities and limitations of public speech is essential to the production and performance of authority in Malagasy slam poetry. Slam, like the kabary examples we saw in the previous chapter, is necessarily dialogic: not only does it require an audience, as kabary does, it also requires an emcee and judges. Yet unlike kabary, the genre was built on a lilberal notion of individual rights, and the presumption that *everyone* has the right and the ability to express themselves regardless of skill or social status. The participant roles are much more malleable in slam than in kabary or other genres, as individuals shift from audience member to performer to judge to emcee within one event, or from one event to the next.

Slam insists, on the one hand, that every individual possesses the innate ability and the right to speak authoritatively about their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences. On the other hand, it also insists that this ability can be trained or taught, that it can be numerically evaluated in a competition format, and thus that it is not solely individual but insistently social, dialogic, and emergent in the embodied interactions between performer and audience. In this sense slam is a prime illustration of Bauman's

(1975) foundational analysis of the audience's co-construction or co-authorship of performance, particularly because an audience member can at any moment become a performer. However, Patricia Sawin (2002) has highlighted a number of lacunae in Bauman's approach: it neglects the role of emotion in performance, does not account for women's differential participation in performance, and "defines *art* as something apparently accessible to all, yet fundamentally opposed to the deepest bases of much female socialization" (Sawin 2002: 38). Her critique here could well be addressed to many male slam poets, who proclaim that anyone can go onstage yet fail to acknowledge the significant social barriers to female performance.

My approach seeks to advance our understandings of performance and co-production by addressing what Sawin calls a "concealed gap" in Bauman's analysis: namely, "the personal motivation for and cost of making that commitment [to performance], as well as the political history and cultural situation that make stepping into that frame and claiming esthetic competence more or less attractive, difficult, or even imaginable" (Sawin 2002: 36). Sawin tackles this gap from an angle of film theory on the male gaze and female subjectivity, in addition to a Butlerian approach to performativity. I come at these same questions from a different angle, from phenomenology and practice theory, in order to emphasize embodied experiences of performance and the ways in which the individual double horizon, in relation to performance, is socially shaped.

Further, Malagasy slam poets emphasize the accountability of poet to audience, and their responsibility for the consequences of their speech. Malagasy slam poetry thus balances an understanding of authority as both innate *and* socially conferred, and public speech as a responsibility as well as a right. This tension is not only illuminating for our understandings of slam poetry or of Madagascar; it also forges connections between discussions on free speech and the public sphere (Butler 1997, Asad 2009, Mahmood 2009, Tickoo 2010, Pupavac 2012) and the linguistic anthropological literature on responsibility in/for discourse (Hill and Irvine 1993, Fox 2001, Paz 2009, Shuman 2010, Peters 2016). Here again, my approach integrates insights from phenomenology and practice theory, showing how notions and practices of accountability emerge through embodied relations within institutional fields of practice.

"Freedom has to be managed"
Over the course of three or four hours every afternoon at the Alliance Française of Moramanga, Gad revealed his philosophy of slam bit by bit. It began on the day we arrived, when we entered the classroom where two local poets had already started the workshop. There were seven students, ranging in age from about ten to eighteen, seated at desks arranged in a horseshoe around a chalkboard on which was written a poem adapted from French poet Jacques Prévert's "I am like I am" ("Je suis comme je suis"). The poem included spaces for the students to add their own lines, and they were quietly copying the poem into their own notebooks and adding to it. After we had all greeted each student with a quick handshake, Gad immediately began to write down their names so he could call them up to the front to perform. Meanwhile, another

instructor went around to check on what they were writing, encouraging them and occasionally correcting what they had copied from the board: "*Je suis comme je suis* (I am like I am), not *Je suis comme Jésus!* "

Once they had had a few more minutes to finish their poems, Gad asked them in French whether they understood French (there was a noncommittal murmur), and then asked a few questions in French about what they had already learned about slam. Then he began to call the students up to "the stage": the space between desks in the middle of the room, in front of the chalkboard. The first to perform was a young girl, maybe 12 or 13, who started to read while standing at her desk. Gad asked her to go to the front of the room, where he was, and she obliged. She read from her paper very timidly, hardly looking up. At the end she started to return to her desk, but Gad asked her to come back. He explained:

He takes the girl's paper and imitates her timid reading. Then he does his own theatrical, confident reading of the same poem, all the way through—in a loud, clear voice, enunciating each word, making eye contact with the audience.	Le slam on le dit pas pour soi.	Slam isn't said for oneself.
	On n'écrit pas un texte pour soi… Quelquefois on écrit un texte pour soi, mais quand on monte sur scène c'est pour partager.	You don't write a text for yourself… Sometimes you write a text for yourself, but when you go onstage it's to share.
The girl nods and returns to her desk.	Il y a pas de bon poète, de mauvais poète… dès que tu dis quelque chose du fond du coeur, ça marche.	There are no good poets or bad poets… as long as you say something from the bottom of your heart, that works.

It is significant that Gad's first interaction with the students did not involve lecturing them, explaining the history or rules of slam. This may have been in part because the workshop had already begun before we arrived and he didn't know how much had already been covered by the other instructors. But it also signals that slam doesn't need much of an introduction—even a total novice can go onstage and say something. Because the first student happened to be shy, it gave Gad the opportunity to

segue into his first lesson about slam: that it is simultaneously about sharing with others and about "say[ing] something from the bottom of your heart." In this framing, Gad had already hinted at the balance of "individual" expression and sociality that is at the core of slam.

The next afternoon, the workshop was a bit different: we were in a larger classroom, and none of the younger kids were there. Some of the older kids from the previous day had returned, along with a few new teenagers and a young French woman who was interning at a local NGO. This time, Gad began with a description of slam, including an overview of the "mantra" rules that I outlined in the Introduction (no props, no music, etc.). He then explained in a mix of French and Malagasy that slam is "accessible to everyone" ("accessible à tous") and can be performed in any language; you can even say "hurtful things" ("zavatra mankarary fo"). He went on:

Libre expression, ça ne veut pas dire que t'as toute la liberté du monde non plus. Tu n'as pas le droit d'insulter le public, là n'est pas le but. Ok? Si t'as de la haine tu peux dire tout ce que tu veux, dans la limite du respect, mais surtout dans la limite de la liberté. *Parce que la liberté, ça se gère. Et justement: t'as une scène, tu dois gérer la scène.* Ok? Et c'est surtout dans la limite du partage. Tu peux partager tout ce que tu veux. [my emphasis]	Free expression doesn't mean that you have all the freedom in the world, either. You don't have the right to insult the audience, that's not the point. Ok? If you are furious you can say whatever you want, within the limits of respect, but especially within the limits of freedom. *Because freedom has to be managed. And that's just it: you have a stage, you have to manage the stage.* Ok? And it's especially within the limits of sharing. You can share whatever you want. [my emphasis]

Gad's choice of the word "gérer" here ("to manage") is apt. In a standard register it takes a direct object (here, "freedom" and "stage") and can be translated as "to deal with, to handle, to manage." But in an informal register, without an object, it means to have something under control, to be capable of handling something. This is often used in the slam community to applaud a poet's performance: "T'as géré" means that you did a good job, you commanded the stage and the audience. The notion of "management" here is thus not only about the management of self, but also about the management of the relation between oneself and the audience, mediated by the presence of the stage (which may simply be a designated place on the floor).

The etymology of "gérer" is illuminating too: the French word "gérer" derives from the Latin "gerere": to bear, to produce, to conduct, to represent, to lead. All of these meanings resonate with "gérer," but of particular interest is the relation between leading or conducting and bearing, as one bears a child ("gestation" in English comes from the same root). In this light, "management" is not merely about directing others but about the burden of carrying the weight of responsibility for others. While the slam audience has a certain responsibility to the poet—to listen and respond respectfully, for instance—the emphasis in Gad's framing is on the responsibility the *poet* bears for

sharing something with the audience "from the bottom of [their] heart" yet still "within the limits of respect" for that audience.

While part of what Gad was discussing in this instance was the issue of vulgarity, and thus a particular kind of limitation on free expression, he outlines here his philosophy of slam, highlighting one of the genre's central contradictions: the way that it brings together liberal discourses on the rights of the individual subject and an emphasis on the *social* production of authority through embodied co-presence. This is not to overstate the prevalence of the expression "managing freedom" or "freedom has to be managed": I never heard anyone else use the exact phrase Gad used, nor did I hear Gad repeat it later. I have highlighted it not because it is common, but because it succinctly captures the relation between two concepts that are, on their own, very common in the slam community: "free expression" ("expression libre") and "managing" the stage and the context of performance ("gérer la scène").

Later during that same workshop, the French NGO worker asked Gad if you can really say anything in slam, given that those who have written critically about politics have been censored.[33] Gad's reply is worth quoting at length:

Il y a un poème qui dit "Ce que dit le po-ème n'engage que le po-ète et nulle autre personne; Celui qui sème le vent récolte la tempête ou pire, un cyclone."	There's a poem that says "What the po-em says is the sole responsibility of the po-et and no other person; He who sows the wind reaps the whirlwind, or worse, a cyclone."
Ça veut tout simplement dire que t'as le droit de dire tout ce que tu veux, mais en tant que poète, en tant qu'humain, tu dois savoir à qui s'adresse le message, où est-ce que je vais faire passer le message?	That just means that you have the right to say anything you want, but as a poet, as a human, you have to know who the message is aimed at, where am I going to convey the message?
En fait, il ne suffit pas de se dire "Ah j'ai toute la liberté du monde, je vais tout dire ici!" Il suffit de calculer aussi un bon stratège. Un poète engagé sait toujours faire ce qu'il a à faire au bon moment, au bon endroit.	Actually, it's not enough to say "Oh I have all the freedom in the world, I'm going to say everything here!" You just have to calculate a good strategy. A [politically/ socially] engaged poet always knows how to do what he has to do at the right moment, in the right place.

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[33] It was unclear if she was referring to censorship in general or in Madagascar specifically. Malagasy journalists are undoubtedly careful with what they write about politicians, and even more so following the 2014 passage of the "cybercriminality" law with its severe penalties for "slander and defamation" of government officials. Slam poets have more latitude in what they can say in part because they are speaking as private citizens, not professionals, and generally do not have as large an audience as journalists do.

Sauf si le but est justement de déranger et de créer [des] polémiques. Ça peut être un très bon but aussi. "Je sais effectivement que la personne est là, et je sais pourquoi je le fais," ok? Mais si *tu* dis quelque chose, faut juste que tu sois lucide. Ok?	Unless the goal is precisely to unsettle and to spark controversy. That can be a good goal too. "I know that the person is there, I know why I'm doing it," ok? But if *you* say something, you just need to be clear/realistic. Ok?

In this elaboration on his previous comments about "managing" freedom and the stage/performance, Gad clarifies that generating controversy and being deliberately provocative is perfectly fine—*deliberately* being the key word. This is part of the responsibility the poet bears: considering the possible consequences of one's speech, and being prepared to remain accountable for them. This notion of accountability is also expressed in the poem he cites at the beginning of his reply, which is in fact his own poem and one of the most well-known in Tana: "What the poet says is the sole responsibility of the poet, and no one else" ("Ce que dit le poème n'engage que le poète et nulle autre personne"). We will return to this poem and to the notion of accountability at the end of this chapter. In the intervening sections, it will be useful to remember Gad's insistence here on social context. The poet is sensitive to where they are and to who is around them; they are able to "do what [they have] to do," but they do so "at the right moment, in the right place." The following section provides historical background on the development of slam as a genre and an entry into understanding how Malagasy poets position their practices vis-à-vis this history.

2. "Slam is dead; long live slam!": a history of slam poetry

Both Somers-Willett (2009) and Johnson (2017) trace slam's roots back to the Black Arts movement of the 1960s and 70s and to Beat poetry, which had its heyday in the 1950s; Johnson goes back even further, to the Harlem Renaissance of the 20s and 30s. Both scholars note slam's close association with hip-hop even though, Somers-Willett writes, "its first venue was the Get Me High Lounge—a white, working-class Chicago barroom—and […] its initial performances were rooted in the Anglo and European traditions of cabaret and Dadaist performance art rather than New York street culture" (Somers-Willett 2009: 97). Johnson disputes this characterization, arguing that it misrepresents the history of slam,

> as if Marc Smith had never admitted he got the idea of competition poetry from the poetic boxing matches that were taking place in Southside Chicago in the early 1980s; as if Patricia Smith (a critically acclaimed black woman poet from the same neighborhood who got her start in the early days of slam) along with a number of nonwhite, working-class men were not helping to form the phenomenon since its beginning. (Johnson 2017: 23).

The erasure of the contributions of poets of color (Patricia Smith and the unnamed "nonwhite, working-class men) from "official" slam history is as upsetting as it is unsurprising; unfortunately, Johnson's source for some of these insights, spoken word artist Carlos Andrés Gomez, does not elaborate on what these "poetic boxing matches" entailed or how Marc Smith encountered them—were they proto-rap battles? The Dozens (an African-American genre of rhyming insult battle)? Did Marc Smith participate or merely witness them?

This kind of disagreement over origins and beginnings is not unique to slam, but it highlights two strains of thinking about slam history. In one, the "official" account that every poet knows by heart ("Marc Smith founded the poetry slam in the 1980s in Chicago…"), its origins are located in a single (white, straight, cisgender male) founder. While no one has thus far disputed that Marc Smith invented the rules of slam, gave it that name, and organized the first poetry slams under that name and those rules, other histories are not so much interested in the founder but in the foundations. Both Johnson and Somers-Willett (despite, as Johnson notes, her omission of the contributions of poets of color in the early days of slam) emphasize the broader sociocultural, literary, and performative contexts in which slam emerged and has continued to flourish. This "rhizomatic" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980) perspective emphasizes not direct lineages (there is no evidence, for example, that anyone associated with Beat poetry later became central to the foundation of slam) but resonances and networks of associations: slam's conditions of possibility.

Thus, although slam is commonly associated with both Beat poetry and hip-hop, the relation between them has more to do with an aesthetic kinship than with similar origins or overlapping performers/audiences. Aging Beat poets did not flock en masse to slam, although some early slam poets may have been influenced by Beat poetry. Similarly, slam audiences and hip-hop audiences were not one and the same, although slam did originate in a lower-income urban neighborhood (and potentially, as Johnson notes, in a context of "poetic boxing matches"), and some hip-hop artists have performed slam poetry and vice versa. If slam reached a mainstream U.S. audience, it was largely due to the success of Russell Simmons' *Def Poetry Jam* on HBO, which brought hip-hop artists as well as lesser-known slam and spoken word performers to mainstream television between 2002 and 2007. Slam shares with both the Beat and hip-hop movements, and with the Black Arts movement, a strong strain of resistance to normative (white) culture; the difference is that the Black Arts movement largely reached a Black audience while slam and Beat audiences have tended to be majority white. Consider these lines by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, one of the more famous Beat poets, in his 1976 "Populist Manifesto No. 1" (my italics):

Poets, descend
to the street of the world once more
And open your minds & eyes
with the old visual delight,
Clear your throat and speak up,
Poetry is dead, long live poetry

with terrible eyes and buffalo strength.
Don't wait for the Revolution
or it'll happen without you,
Stop mumbling and speak out
with a new wide-open poetry
with a new commonsensual 'public surface'
with other subjective levels
or other subversive levels,
a tuning fork in the inner ear
to strike below the surface.

This theme of making poetry publicly accessible ("once more"), alive to the social worlds around it, descending from its high horse back to "the street of the world" that it is imagined to have sprung from, parallels the discourse around slam. Ferlinghetti uses terms of resistance that would later become some of the favorite buzzwords of slam: "speak up," "speak out," "Revolution," "subversive," calling for a "commonsensual" recognition of everyday life and for its subversion. As Somers-Willett notes, this subversive impulse must be understood in the context of American racial politics: "many Beat hipsters expressed this resistance to mainstream culture through projections of blackness," in which "the performance of black signifiers became a way to negate and distance oneself from dominant white culture even as the artists were white themselves" (Somers-Willett 2009: 55). Thus, Black resistance was appropriated by Beat poets for white middle- and upper-class entertainment. This kind of "resistance" is rather different from something like the Black Arts movement, in which "normative culture" was explicitly recognized as white culture, and "what […] practitioners hoped to gain by their polemical stance against the white-dominated academy was not only autonomy from white institutions but also autonomy from Anglo-European aesthetics and power" (Somers-Willett 2009: 59). In hip-hop as well, racism and structures of white oppression are explicitly named and critiqued.

I discovered Ferlinghetti's poem, with its line "Poetry is dead, long live poetry," in my efforts to track the genealogy of the phrase "Slam is dead, long live slam!" ("Le slam est mort, vive le slam!"), a common refrain initiated by emcees across Madagascar, where they shout the first line and the audience responds with the second. This kind of call-and-response interaction is frequent in slam, and has connections to African-American performance genres (hip-hop and rap, gospel music, Black sermonic style) and literature, with roots in African music and oral literature (cf. Floyd Jr 1996, Hill et al. 1997). I was never able to find any traces online of this particular phrase, but its "origin" is the ceremonial pronouncement "The king is dead, long live the king" ("Le roi est mort, vive le roi") during the coronation of French monarchs. The seeming contradiction is explained by the fact that there are two kings: the one who has died, and the one who now takes his place on the throne: in effect, "the (former) king is dead, long live the (new) king." The phrase has been recycled for all sorts of purposes, no doubt due in part to its pleasingly confusing inversion, which applies particularly well to anything that seemed to have died out before being resurrected.

I have not found any evidence to suggest that Malagasy poets' pronouncements that "Le slam est mort, vive le slam!" can be traced directly back to Ferlinghetti's "Poetry is dead, long live poetry," but the association is there, however coincidental. The fascination with continual renewal, and a tongue-in-cheek refusal of outdated approaches, is at the heart of both Beat poetry and slam poetry. Johnson's (2017) analysis of metaphors and discourses of death in slam and spoken word communities is useful here, where he argues that these communities "seek the help of the dead to disturb and reject existing boundaries and borders and to imagine new possibilities in the current modes of living" (2017: 18). This resembles in some respects the appeal to ancestral logics in kabary, but here the ancestors assist in *transforming* the present and future, rather than serving as models for continuing the past into the present and future.

The relation between living and dead in Johnson's analysis also recalls Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics—the "subjugation of life to the power of death" (2003: 39)—and in particular Mbembe's reading of Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*. Mbembe writes that "death in the present is the mediator of redemption. Far from being an encounter with a limit, boundary, or barrier, it is experienced as 'a release from terror and bondage.'" (*idem*). Mbembe and Gilroy are referring in this case to death as a form of agency wielded by enslaved people who committed suicide and thereby obtained freedom from bondage. Yet the argument is relevant even in less brutal scenarios: death becomes a mediator rather than a limit. In the pronouncement "slam is dead; long live slam," there is a similar recognition of continuity through and by virtue of death, where death offers the possibility of a freedom that is unthinkable in the present. The relation to history here is quite different from kabary's emphasis on ancestral forms and logics, but in slam, too, even as it heralds change or resurrection through the death of slam, there is a conceptualization of continuity with the past. In the next section, we will see contemporary slam practices in Madagascar continue this history while radically reshaping what slam looks, feels, and sounds like.

3. Fields of bodily and linguistic practice

In my very last days of fieldwork, during the 2015 National Slam Festival, Madagaslam invited me to give a talk about my research to poets and other festivalgoers. As I prepared to conclude my year-and-a-half of dissertation fieldwork in a fifteen-minute talk before my interlocutors in this research, I was apprehensive. I wanted to be critical but also appreciative, to speak frankly but kindly about my incipient analysis of what I had learned so far. It was unthinkable to gloss over the tensions I had been witness to, especially since I was about to go off and expose those tensions to others, but it was equally unthinkable to give a talk that did not acknowledge my profound gratitude to them and respect for their work, or—what might be worse—to bore them with social theory jargon. I did my best to balance all of this in one PowerPoint, and was slightly relieved when only a handful of people showed up. I began.

It would have been entirely unremarkable in the history of talks I have given, if more people hadn't slowly started to trickle in. Some were friends, some I only

recognized, but as the seats began to fill with poets, my academic talk became something else entirely. Someone snapped their fingers in appreciation when I emphasized an important point. Someone else cheered when I posed a rhetorical question. I made a joke and instead of polite chuckles I heard open-throated laughter. What I began (and had intended to finish) in one discourse genre, the academic talk, had somehow morphed into something resembling a slam performance, entirely due to the audience's engagement with my talk.

Slam poetry places audience evaluation of the performer's competence at the heart of the communicative event, signaling that not only can anyone perform, *anyone can judge*—by assigning a numerical score in a competition, and by vocally and physically expressing one's assessment of the performer both during and after the performance. The emcee regularly reminds the audience to cheer, clap, stomp their feet, and *make some noise*; this live, in-the-moment feedback in turn impacts the performance, as anyone can attest who has had the misfortune to perform before a disapproving or bored audience. The embodied and dynamic interplay between performer and audience, speaker and listener, is a crucial element in their co-production of the performance event, and it is a defining feature of slam as a genre. This is true, too, of African-American performance genres such as hip-hop (Morgan 2002, 2008), and of many performance genres in Africa (Finnegan 1970, Okpewho 1992, Barber et al. 1997).

The development of a critical vocabulary for thinking about verbal art performance and about genres of discourse was an important part of the "performative turn" in the social sciences and humanities, initiated in the 1950s and 60s by John Austin's speech act theory (1955), Erving Goffman's study of facework (1956, 1967), and, later, Victor Turner's work on rituals and performance (1968, 1969, 1975, 1982). Drawing from this epistemological turn towards speech, performance, and context, and building on Bakhtin's (1979) "sociology of genre," linguistic anthropologists and folklorists formulated an analytical framework for the study of genres of verbal art performance and discourse more broadly. Bakhtin, arguing against a formalist conception of genre based solely on formal properties of a text, posited that genres are instead defined by two "orientations": an orientation *toward* the listener/reader and the context of performance or reception, and an orientation through its thematic content *within* a broader sociohistorical context (Bakhtin 1928: 131). This interactional and contextual notion of genre as situated in social life, paired with Dell Hymes' (1962, 1974) development of the "ethnography of speaking" and ethnopoetics, was central to Richard Bauman's work on verbal art performance (1975, 1986, 1992) and, with Charles Briggs, on poetics, genre, and intertextuality (1990, 1992). William Hanks (1987) further showed how these insights—in conjunction with Bourdieu's theory of practice, with its attention to embodied practice as shaped by particular social and institutional fields— could further illuminate how discourse is framed and categorized. These discussions have been advanced by Asif Agha's conception of register and enregisterment (2003, 2005), which has shown how "a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms" (Agha 2003: 231) that is understood to index particular social identities. Other linguistic anthropologists have considered these issues

through the lens of multilingual performance, race, indigeneity, and gender (Hill 1986, 2008; Hall and Bucholtz 1995; Livia and Hall 1997; Mendoza-Denton 2008; Peters 2016).

In sociocultural anthropology as well as in performance studies, scholars have attended to issues of embodiment, sociality, and temporality in theater and other forms of artistic practice and performance (Barber et al. 1997; Jackson 2000, 2004, 2011; C. Cole 2001; Ebron 2002; Johnson 2003; Madison 2005, 2010; Conquergood 2013; Cox 2015; Jackson and Bryan-Wilson 2016). Like these theorists and others who have been concerned with genres of speaking and performance, I view genres as porous and dynamic, "consist[ing] of orienting frameworks, interpretive procedures, and sets of expectations that are not part of discourse structure, but of the ways actors relate to and use language (Bauman 1986)" (Hanks 1987). I am not interested in a stable, formal definition of slam (as if such a thing were possible) but in a Bakhtinian notion of genre as heterogeneous and dialogic—genre not as form, but as social orientation. I focus on the question of genre in relation to slam because it is a topic of immense confusion, debate, and contestation among slam poets and audiences around the world. Part of the reason that this is so is that genre boundaries—as all boundary-making processes—have ramifications in the social world and illuminate social concerns beyond the form itself. While formal elements are central to any definition of a genre, formal approaches alone cannot account for the social conditions of a genre's creation, formulation, and reception, and thus its social power.

Most—perhaps all—discourse genres involve boundary-making along social lines in addition to formal ones, but slam poetry is a particularly unusual case because, although most slam poems are at least partially written before they are performed, there are no formal, stylistic, or thematic properties that define a slam poem *as a written text*. Many poets see performance under particular conditions as a defining element of slam such that the written text of a slam poem is not a slam at all.[34] The rules governing slam *as a performance* are repeated by the emcee before nearly all competitions and workshops for first-time poets, and constitute a kind of mantra that any frequent slam poet could recite in their sleep—the mantra conditions discussed in the Introduction:

> The performance must be under 3 minutes and 10 seconds and cannot include props, costumes, or musical accompaniment. Everything that follows these rules and is performed here on this stage during this competition is a slam poem.

The radical disavowal of formal definitions of poetry is not unique to slam—spoken word, for example, is even freer in that it places no limitations on musical

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[34] As a noun, "slam" (in English, Malagasy, and French) may refer, in Bauman's (1977: 27) terms, to an act and a genre—in this case, to the "event" (as in, "I went to the slam yesterday") as well as to individual utterances both within and outside the event [as in, "Her slams (in English, usually "slam poems") always make the audience laugh"; "Her slam (poem) was published in the newspaper."]. As a verb, it always refers to the act of performing ("He wears black when he slams"). In French and Malagasy, it has also been transformed into an occupation or role: a slam poet in Malagasy is a *mpanao slam* (a doer of slam), and in French *slameuse* [female] or *slameur* [male].

accompaniment, props, and costumes.[35] Yet slam is unique in its *performance* of this disavowal as a constitutive element of the genre: through this mantra, poets insist that slam *is* a genre—this is not an open mic where you can do anything you want—but one defined first by its relative lack of formal properties, second by its spatial and temporal limits, and third by its relative simplicity as a performance (no props, costumes, or music).

This metalinguistic framing of slam as a genre almost completely open to any kind of expression is complicated by other metalinguistic framings and nonverbal reactions by poets, emcees, and audience members both during and outside of slam events, which evaluate utterances on the basis of formal, stylistic, and thematic properties. Thus, slam poets and audience members themselves maintain dual definitions of slam as a genre, one in the Formalist tradition of textual properties and the other in the performance tradition of a situated practice co-produced with an audience. Some poems are appraised on an aesthetic basis as "counting" as slam poems despite not fulfilling the mantra conditions, while other poems that do fulfill these conditions are not seen to fully count as slam. It is as if there were two genres: the performance defined by the mantra conditions, and a more opaque category that may include utterances written and/or performed outside of the slam event. The purists who insist that "anything goes" as long as the mantra conditions are fulfilled would nonetheless most likely be disappointed by a slam event in which every single poet simply went onstage, stood there for five seconds, and then left the stage without saying anything. Even those who insist that slam is more about the spirit of the thing, and who see the mantra conditions as somewhat arbitrary rules, have their own definitions of what counts as being "in the slam spirit" ("dans l'esprit du slam"), which may or may not include a poem set to music or performed without a stage or with props, etc.

In Madagascar, a primary source of confusion about slam is the term itself, and this confusion says as much about Malagasy religious politics as it does about poetry: due to Malagasy vowel elision, the noun and adjective for "Muslim," *silamo*, sounds nearly identical to "slam." Stories of the resulting confusion and prejudice abound, from children who tell workshop leaders their parents won't let them attend because they're Protestant, to workshop leaders themselves who jokingly "reassure" their attendees "We're not jihadists, we only do the jihad of poetry."[36] In one city, a nun showed up at a

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[35] While spoken word has become just as prominent—if not more so—as slam in many English-speaking contexts (see Somers-Willett 2009), the term remains little-used in Madagascar, as in most Francophone or French-influenced contexts. The relation between slam and spoken word is relevant in some contexts, but this is not the case in Madagascar and this dissertation will not cover the complex relation between the two genres. Nevertheless, it is important to make the distinction: slam poetry, though it may take the form of a workshop or open mic, is generally understood as an oral poetry competition with particular rules, while spoken word is more often a kind of open mic event (thus not a competition, and without formal rules) at which any kind of verbal art is allowed, with or without musical accompaniment, props, etc. In practice the two may be nearly indistinguishable from each other.

[36] Although Muslims in Madagascar do not face the level of stigma they do in many Western countries, negative stereotypes about the relation between Islam and terrorism are not uncommon, especially as Western anti-Muslim prejudice is spread through media, diplomatic relations, and other circuits. The last completed census in Madagascar was in 1993 (there is one currently ongoing in 2018) and there are no

slam workshop expecting a debate on religion; when the workshop leaders explained that this was not the case, she decided to stay and perform a poem about God.

Knowing the difference between slam and *silamo* does not, however, seem to make things much clearer. Slam in Madagascar is widely associated with rap, due in large part to the influence of Grand Corps Malade and Abd al Malik, both French performers who reached global fame in the Francophone world through multiple spoken word albums, which blur the lines between rap, hip-hop, spoken word, and slam. Malagasy slam workshops with groups who have never encountered slam before nearly always include a lengthy explanation of how slam is different from rap, usually focusing on the fact that rap is music while slam is not, leaving out the very different histories of each.

Rap and hip-hop emerged in the 1970s and 80s in impoverished and predominantly African-African urban neighborhoods as a form of entertainment and self-expression in the face of severe race and class discrimination; these musical forms have largely retained an aura of struggle against oppression despite the emergence of non-Black rappers and hip-hop artists in the U.S. as well as internationally. Scholars and artists alike trace rap and hip-hop's roots to various African oral traditions such as the West African griot, and thus Tope Ominiyi's (2009) "Boomerang Hypothesis" (after Senegalese hip-hop group Daara J's album of the same name) suggests that rap and hip-hop have returned to their source as they have circulated (back) to Sub-Saharan Africa. In the contemporary world order, where Africa is often depicted as being on the margins of "progress" and "development," this leads to a complex interplay of narratives of belonging, appropriation, and origin. Thus, Ominiyi writes, "under a regime of oppositions, African Hip Hop artists can simultaneously be discursively other-constructed on the periphery of a global mainstream while they are self-constructing themselves as the essential core from which the dominant culture flow derived" (2009: 121).

In Madagascar, with its own complex racial and ethnic history that I detail in Chapter Three, rap and slam both are often perceived by educated Merina elites as vulgar forms of expression from *bas-quartiers*—poor and predominantly Black urban neighborhoods. Much like in the U.S., rap (and to a lesser extent, slam) is associated with Blackness, and is thereby devalued by elites.

Although slam has always been a racially diverse movement in the U.S., racial justice was not initially a core concern—at least for Marc Smith, who is widely recognized as the founder of the movement in Chicago, and Bob Holman, who popularized it in New York. Rather, the aim for Smith and Holman—both white men—was to shake up the poetry "establishment": academic poets, publishers, and critics who held boring poetry readings and promoted an esoteric and elitist style of poetry

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updated official statistics on religious affiliation. The 1993 census counted 52% "indigenous beliefs," 41% Christian (divided almost equally between Catholic and Protestant), and 7% Muslim. The 2015 International Religious Freedom Report, published by the U.S. Government Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, puts this number at closer to 20–25%, according to "Muslim leaders" and "local scholars." The notion of doing a "jihad of poetry," however, also connects to a recurring theme in many poems about substituting words for physical violence, with images of a pen representing a weapon or fist. It is not always clear what the fight is about or who the opponent is.

(Somers-Willett 2009: 3). In the U.S., slam has come to be perceived as a "democratic" urban art form where struggles against discrimination along lines of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc. can be vocalized and heard. In France, this antiestablishment vein is stronger than that of politics or identity, and racial justice is not at all central to the slam poetry scene. It is no coincidence that the two major figures of slam poetry in France, Grand Corps Malade and Pilote le Hot, are both white men who tend to write on themes of social marginalization rather than institutionalized discrimination. In Madagascar, although it remains uncommon for poets to explicitly foreground their own personal identities (as we will see in Chapter Three), the slam stage is frequently a platform for strongly worded critiques of the government, globalization, neo-imperialism, and other social issues that impact the Malagasy population.

Since 2014 the debate over the definition of slam in Madagascar has been further complicated by the rise to fame of Gangstabab, a mpikabary-turned-musician whose songs—much like Grand Corps Malade's—are essentially poems set to a hip-hop or other popular music beat. Gangstabab has angered many in the slam community by claiming an affiliation with slam that they argue does not exist since he has never performed in a slam event.[37] The controversy surrounding Gangstabab highlights a broader concern in the slam community, which has also plagued slam in the U.S. (Somers-Willett 2009) and in France: when poets achieve a certain amount of popular success and fame outside of the slam community, they are often accused of selfishly prioritizing commercialization over community—in other words, of selling out. This is a common refrain in many art forms: as Daniel Fisher illustrates in his discussion of the fine line between "speaking for or selling out," Aboriginal Australian musicians are often caught between their communities and a broader public in what he calls, after Eric Wolf (1956), a "'Janus-faced' brokerage" (Fisher 2016: 220). This kind of brokerage in Australia is enmeshed in complex histories of colonization and cultural appropriation, which are also issues (albeit with a very different history) in the slam poetry scene, but are not so readily acknowledged.[38]

The line between community and commercialism is also quite different in slam than in musical performance, because the slam event par excellence (and some would say the *only* kind of slam event) is necessarily a communal rather than individual performance, and does not generally involve any sort of monetary gain. Those who have been more involved in the slam community than, say, Gangstabab, but later branched out to record songs or do solo performances, have also been criticized for this, especially if they are perceived as abandoning the open mics and workshops and only participating in major competitions such as the National Slam. These debates over "commercialism" versus community underscore the very real lack of financial support for slam poetry and the near-impossibility of earning a living as a slam poet in Madagascar. When I shared my observations about slam in the U.S., people were often surprised to

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[37] In our interview, he said that he had attended slams but didn't perform because most poets performed in French, which he felt he lacked the ability to do. I cover the issue of plurilingualism and French linguistic dominance in Chapter Three.

[38] See Somers-Willett's chapter on "Spoken Word Poetry, Hip-Hop, and the Racial Politics of Going Mainstream" (2009: 96-133).

hear that there is also very little funding for slam, and that it is similarly almost impossible to earn a living as a full-time slam poet there.

In these discussions of commercialization, we can see that much of what is at stake in debates over the definition of slam has much more to do with, in Bakhtin's terms, genre-as-social-orientation than with genre-as-form. Those who are perceived as having the wrong social orientation—too focused on individual gain rather than on the advancement of slam as a collective endeavor—can be ostracized and even essentially denied membership within the slam community. In Chapter Four, we will see how these questions can have extremely unequal and racialized consequences for slam poets on the international scene.

In one sense, slam poets insist that "whatever I say is poetry, is poetry," which can be read as a refusal of genre boundaries to such an extreme as to render the definition meaningless. But the message is in fact a crucial one for an understanding of poetics more broadly. It suggests that whatever is evaluated and judged to be poetry *within a given social context*, counts as poetry. It brings the audience/addressee/ receiver/listener and broader social field squarely back into the equation, such that we cannot understand the poem or poetic utterance as the production of a single speaker but always as the co-production between speakers, addressees, and their sociohistorical contexts. As such, slam is in some ways a prime example of a performance genre in Bauman's (1975) terms, as it involves

> responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence. This competence rests on the knowledge and ability to speak in socially appropriate ways. Performance involves on the part of the performer an assumption of accountability to an audience for the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content. From the point of view of the audience, the act of expression on the part of the performer is thus marked as subject to evaluation for the way it is done, for the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer's display of competence. Additionally, it is marked as available for the enhancement of experience, through the present enjoyment of the intrinsic qualities of the act of expression itself. (Bauman 1975: 11)

Performance in this sense is a heightened form of verbal interaction, not reducible to a static text, and emphatically not, in Austin's (1955) unfortunate term, "parasitic" on some other realm of "normal" (which is to say "purely referential") speech. Yet, as we saw earlier with Sawin's (2002) critique, this perspective on performance fails to account for barriers to women's performance, as women may be socialized to disavow "skill" and "competence," and female performance that "is marked as available for the enhancement of experience" may be categorized as indecent. Although Malagasy slam poets profess very similar understandings of performance, and proclaim slam to be open to all, they are much quicker to address the barriers to performance faced by young people than by women or other marginalized groups.

Slam is also a "discourse genre in a field of practice," as Hanks (1987: 677) defines it, where "genres become part of the organization of habitus. They are the relatively lasting, transposable, resources according to which linguistic practice is constituted. At the same time, they are produced in the course of linguistic practice and subject to innovation, manipulation, and change." As a linguistic practice that emphasizes embodied co-presence (although, as we will see in Chapter Five, it also circulates in virtual formats), the development of a "slam habitus" requires training not only in poetics and embodied verbal performance but also in non-verbal bodily practices of performing, watching, listening, and *making some noise*. In the following section, I delineate practices of training, developing, and refining a slam habitus, which involve training perceptions of the acceptability of performance in various contexts. I also outline the social and institutional fields in which this training occurs.

Habitus, corporeal schemas, and the double horizon

A good place to start is with Dell Hymes' (1975) investigation of the "breakthrough into performance," where he describes four dimensions of verbal interaction (the first two taken from William Labov 1972). These dimensions are not fixed, either/or abilities or actions, but spectrums that, much like Roman Jakobson's functions of language (1960), may be more or less emphasized in a particular utterance but cannot be said to fully illustrate any one individual's competence or what is going on in any one utterance. In the case of slam, these spectrums cannot be seen as defining individual competence since, unlike the storytelling and poetic traditions Hymes describes, slam is not reserved for "competent" performers even though an assessment of the performer's competence is a key element of the slam event. The fourth dimension Hymes describes, "acceptability," involves "the relation between the possible and the contextually doable" (Hymes 1975: 16). While Hymes' emphasis here is on how a performer determines that performance is acceptable in a given situation, this is an apt description of the relation I want to tease out between phenomenology and practice theory: how is an individual's double horizon shaped in a particular moment by the context in which they find themselves?

In this section, I will examine how habitus and the double horizon are shaped by fields of practice, which include institutional fields. In all cases, I will argue, there is a complex interplay between what Maurice Merleau-Ponty defines as a *schéma corporel* (involving perceptions of what is "possible") and what Bourdieu (1972) describes as a *habitus* developed within particular fields of practice (involving perceptions of what is "contextually doable"). Merleau-Ponty's *schéma corporel* is described by Hanks (1996: 138) as "(1) the actual current state of posture and motion (cf. the body as part of the world), (2) the actor's awareness of his or her current posture and of the whole bodily field as a synthetic unity (cf. the body as an origin point of perspective), and (3) the actor's unreflective grasp of the infinity of other potential postures and motions that could be engaged but are not." This corporeal schema is thus both unified and dynamic, where my postures and movements respond to the world around me but are never dissociated from my sense of my body as a unified whole.

Alfred Schutz's phenomenological discussion of sedimentation (1970 [1999]) is useful regard for thinking through how perceptions of and decisions about potential postures and movements are more than just decisions about what one's body is *physically* capable of doing in a given situation. Sedimentation is the process of the layering of meanings and experiences that results in a community's and an individual's stock of knowledge, and it is through this stock of knowledge that I have a sense not only of what my body can and cannot do in a given situation but also of what other bodies have and have not done in similar situations. Schutz's theory is one of action in the world: we are able to act and speak because those before us have collectively built up, or sedimented, what Schutz alternately terms "stock of knowledge," "schemes of reference," and "recipes." In order to act and speak we rely on the stock of knowledge we have inherited, which provides schemes of reference, or recipes, that order how we interpret social and physical worlds as well as how we respond to them.

With Merleau-Ponty and Schutz, then, we have a perceiving body in a particular society who can sense what is physically possible and whether it is contextually doable given her stock of knowledge, which includes her own lived experiences as well as the sedimented knowledge of her community. This in turn provides her with a scheme of reference that may help her categorize the situation at hand and determine whether a poetic performance would be appropriate. But we still do not know how exactly the community's sedimented knowledge made its way to her, nor why she has to follow these "recipes."

This is where Bourdieu's theory of habitus within a social field is necessary. Despite his trenchant critiques of phenomenology, Bourdieu's practice theory owes much to that philosophical tradition. Bourdieu was strongly opposed to the subjective bent of some phenomenology, and to what he saw as phenomenology's neglect of the role of institutional power in shaping these practices, but his theory of habitus relies on a phenomenological understanding of bodily dispositions as shaped by prior practices (one's own and those of others) yet dynamic and capable of training, modification, and innovation. In Bourdieu's privileging of the body as the site of habitus par excellence, the generative motor of practice, he has also clearly retained something of phenomenology, especially of the Merleau-Pontian variety. Bourdieu goes further, however, to show that habitus is developed through observation and imitation (rather than a quasi-mystical "sedimentation"), and that this occurs within particular social and institutional fields such as homes, schools, and workplaces. These fields are partially *structured by practice* and, in turn, *structure practice.* That is to say that part of what lends fields their cohesion is embodied practice, and that distinct fields have distinct ways of training and inculcating particular embodied practices. Further, these fields cannot be understood outside of relations of power and capital.

Integrating the corporeal schema and double horizon, on the one hand, with habitus and fields of practice, on the other, allows us to mediate between the individual behaviors of phenomenology and the sociological focus of practice theory. William Hanks (2005) has shown the value of this sort of mediation between scales in his work on deixis: expressions such as "here," "now," or "we" whose precise meaning relies on the context of the utterance. Attending to what he calls the "deictic field," Hanks argues

that the meaning of a deictic term is determined in part by relevance, and "there are two primary sources of relevance: what is going on in the present actuality of the utterance and what comes with the social embedding of the deictic field" (Hanks 2005: 197). This is to say that meaning is construed in part on the basis of the immediate situation and in part on the basis of social fields and relations of power. Neither on its own is sufficient for a full picture of how deictic terms are used and understood. The same can be said for slam poetry: both the immediate context of a performance and the institutional fields of slam are necessary for understanding what poets do and say through their performances. To that end, I will first delineate the primary institutional fields in which slam events take place, before moving to a description of the kinds of practices that fall under the umbrella term of "slam poetry."

Institutional fields

　　Malagasy slam poetry has developed within and through institutional structures since the beginning, when Pilote le Hot and Stefan Hart de Keating led their first workshops across the island through the auspices of French cultural centers. These institutional relations have impacted virtually every aspect of slam, from the language poets perform in and the way the genre is perceived by others to the possibilities for infrastructural and technical support. Subsequent chapters will examine how slam continues to be shaped and re-shaped as it circulates across various fields, but an overview of these institutions is necessary in order to understand that process.

　　Madagaslam's primary institutional partners are the Institut Français de Madagascar (IFM), located in Tana, and the Alliances Françaises de Madagascar, a network of cultural centers across the island. Both of these are part of global networks with ties to the French government: the 96 French Institutes worldwide are overseen by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture, and the more than 800 Alliances Françaises receive partial funding from the French government although they operate more independently than the Institutes. Both are part of a mission of "cultural diplomacy," aiming to expand French language and culture worldwide through French classes as well as cultural and musical events. Although the IFM in Tana is more centrally located, on the Avenue de l'Indépendance downtown, the AFT (Alliance Française de Tana) actually predates the Institut—the first Alliance in Madagascar (of a total of 29 today) was inaugurated in 1947. The Institut, on the other hand, wasn't inaugurated until after decolonization, in 1964, originally as the Centre Culturel Albert Camus and then, in 2011, as the Institut Français de Madagascar.

　　The IFM is Madagaslam's primary source of funding and support for the National Slam, and hosts a monthly slam "scène ouverte" ("open mic") on the terrace of the Media Center (library and computer lab). For many years, the only other regular slam events were held at the CGM, the German cultural center ("Centre Germano-Malgache"). Similar to the French model, German cultural centers are financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and divided into two types: the CGM in Tana is a Goethe Zentrum, a smaller center similar to the Alliance, but larger cities such as Johannesburg have a Goethe Institut.

In my interview with then-Director of the CGM, Ecke Olszowski, he noted that although the German cultural centers have "very friendly relations" ("des relations très amicales") with the German Embassy, they differ from the French centers because "the Embassy can't decide our politics" ("l'ambassade ne peut pas décider notre politique"). He emphasized the differences throughout our interview, noting that the CGM primarily employs Malagasy people and that, while the center does have German classes, they are not there "to sell German culture" ("pour vendre la culture allemande"): 80 percent of their activities have nothing to do with German or Germany but are rather devoted to supporting cultural activities already present in Madagascar. This was clearly juxtaposed, in his view, to the French model: "there is no germanophony like there is francophonie" ("il n'y a pas de germanophonie comme il y a la francophonie") and that there is "an entire ideology" ("toute une idéologie") behind French cultural politics that is somewhat colonialist.

Whatever we may think of the German-French rivalry here, Ecke's comments ring true on many levels. The CGM occupies two floors of a multi-story building in downtown Tana, entirely accessible to the public: you simply walk through a set of doors, one of which is open whenever the center is, and walk up the stairs. The IFM and AFT, on the other hand, both have security guards, and the guards at the IFM ask all visitors what their business is there. The IFM also has a receptionist who checks that anyone going up the stairs to the Media Center has a membership card. Thus, while slam events are technically free and open to the public, attendees must confront not one but two official-looking people demanding their business there. For many, just the idea of going into a foreign cultural center—perceived to be "for *vazaha*" (foreigners)—is enough of a barrier. For others, one glimpse of the unsmiling uniformed guard outside the IFM door may send them in the other direction.

The AFT hosts a number of National Slam events but no regular slam events during the year; in all other cities, the Alliance is the primary (and in some cases the only) site for slam events. In many of these other cities, however, the slam community is much smaller and closer-knit than in Tana, and poets frequently meet elsewhere—at a bar or someone's house—to hang out, slam, and improvise. None of the Alliances outside Tana have guards, as far as I know, but of course there is still the invisible barrier, for many, of these spaces being commonly perceived as oriented towards *vazaha* and French people in particular. In one city, however—Mahajanga, on the Northwest coast—slam events are sometimes held outside on an open-air stage, separated from the street only by a low cement wall. This is the only case I know of where regular slam events are readily audible and visible to passerby on the street. When I attended a regional bout for the National Slam there, people lingered as they passed by—particularly children, who poked their heads over the wall, transfixed by the free live entertainment.

These institutional settings of slam events, then, are not generally accessible to just anyone, at least if we understand "accessible" in a broad sense. For many, going into a foreign cultural center is simply not within their double horizon. Others, like the musician Gangstabab we encountered earlier in this chapter, may not be fully at ease in a relatively Francophone setting like the IFM or AFT. Most slam events, regardless of

which cultural center hosts them, are about half in French and half in Malagasy. As a number of poets have pointed out to me, there is pressure to perform in French at least some of the time in order to display one's proficiency and, thereby, one's cultural capital.

There are other settings for slam, however: a number of NGOs, primarily those that work with disadvantaged youth have partnered with Madagaslam to hold slam workshops—with youth in prison, teenage mothers, disabled children, and children who live on the street. In these cases, as in the quite common case of slam workshops at public and private schools, participants may be more at ease if they encounter slam in an environment that is already familiar to them. In most of these cases, the workshops are held primarily, if not entirely, in Malagasy rather than in French.

Slam is often confused with and compared to rap, but the fields within which it is most often encountered, at least in Madagascar, are much more institutional. While Malagasy youth may encounter rap music on the radio, online, or at casual hangouts with their friends, they are much more likely to encounter slam at school, at a cultural center, or at an NGO. These institutions rarely impose explicit rules about how workshops and performances must be run, or what themes participants can address, but their authority is no less palpable, often taking the form of an admonishment about noise, or a comment to one of the organizers afterwards about the use of vulgar language. This is partly what Gad conveyed in his workshop in Moramanga: that poets should not be fooled by the term "free expression," because it does not dismantle the authority of the institutional contexts in which poets perform.

Bodily and linguistic practices

What, then, of the actual activities that take place in these institutions? Slam as a genre is developed through embodied practices that are solidified through repeated events, most of which, like workshops and open mics, do not count as slams as defined in the mantra conditions because they are not competitions with judges selected from the audience. Regardless of whether one deems these other events as "counting" as slam, they are contexts that train the practices necessary to formal slams: writing, performing, listening, watching, cheering/applauding, emceeing, and judging/evaluating. Because slam is primarily understood as a staged format or platform of performance, a true Hymesian "breakthrough into performance" is rare, in the sense of an unexpected performance or one that emerges in the course of another activity. Other than brief citations of slam poems in everyday conversation, the only situation in which a poet might launch into a full performance of a poem without a verbal introduction or disclaimer is after another person has already started beatboxing. These introductions or disclaimers are a means of what Richard Bauman (1977:15), after Erving Goffman, terms "keying" performance: "the process by which frames are invoked and shifted (Goffman 1974)." A breakthrough into music (beatboxing or guitar, but not singing) is possible with little to no keying, but verbal performance (including singing) is always preceded either by music (eg. someone starts beatboxing, then another person starts to freestyle) or by some sort of verbal introduction or disclaimer. Perhaps this is to mark the verbal performance as a break from the regular flow of conversation or interaction;

where music does this immediately by virtue of its dissimilarity from speech, verbal performance must be more or less explicitly marked as a performance rather than "everyday speech," even if it is preceded by silence.

There is a continuum of "depth" of performance, meaning the extent to which the performance itself constitutes the main focus of attention and action for an extended period of time such that most participants would be present with the intention of attending that performance—in other words, where performance is the central focus of the event. Generally, the deeper the performance the more extensive the framing or keying on either side (introduction and closing). The following diagram lists the main face-to-face contexts in which someone might perform a slam poem, in order of increasing depth of performance. Each context is more fully explicated following the diagram:

beatboxing/freestyling/rapping → slamming → workshop → open mic → competition

depth of performance ---------------------------------→
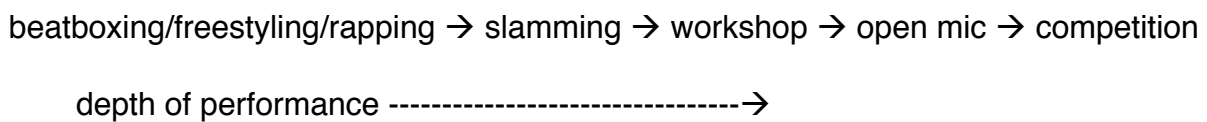
1: Within the slam community, music accompanied by rhythmic speech or song—such as **beatboxing, freestyling, and rapping**—can start spontaneously and end just as abruptly, and usually occurs before or after some other event (such as a slam) as a way to spend time that would otherwise be spent waiting for something else. For example, one very talented beatboxer in Tana often starts to beatbox outside of the venue before or after a slam event, while people are standing around chatting with their friends and waiting to go in, or hanging out before parting ways or going somewhere else. He does not announce his "breakthrough into beatboxing"; he starts spontaneously and a group quickly forms around him, where poets take turns freestyling or performing memorized poems/raps along with the beat—what is known in rap and hip-hop as a cipher (Morgan 2017). In this case, the determination of acceptability of "breakthrough into slam" is contingent upon a prior "breakthrough into music," as well as an embodied sense of one's inclusion within the group and one's ability to freestyle or perform a memorized poem to the beat supplied by singers and/or beatboxers. I have never seen a female poet perform in an impromptu cypher like this. Most slam poets would not consider this kind of performance a slam, though some might qualify the poem as a slam poem.

2: What I have called "**slamming**" in the diagram above is a relatively loose, informal slam performance that is not explicitly the main reason for a gathering but which constitutes a more extended and focused activity than freestyling. In these situations, people have already congregated for some other purpose (hanging out at a bar or at a friend's house); even if they expect some kind of slam performance to happen during the evening, this is not given as the main reason for congregating. This kind of performance is marked as separate from the flow of conversation by an announcement or introduction by someone with a leadership role in the group, and in some cases by the ceremonial pouring of beer or *toka gasy*, local rum, for the ancestors. In small

gatherings, it is expected that everyone present will participate in the slam. The person who has announced or introduced the beginning of the slam performance will either be the emcee (*slam master*) or will designate someone else for this role; the emcee's job is to animate/enliven/lead the event (*animer la scène*) and to call on particular people to perform. The most minimal elements of a slam performance, then, are an emcee, multiple performers, and an introduction and closing of the event. Very often there is also a physical reorientation within the space that marks it as a space of performance: if everyone else is sitting they may move to one side or form a semi-circle, and the emcee and poets may stand whenever they are performing. If possible, chairs may be moved or turned to face the same way, creating a kind of stage. The acceptability of performance in this case is determined by a "leader" of the group (who may or may not be officially recognized as such), who is also then responsible for keying the performance. S/he must judge whether the setting is acceptable for a slam performance, taking into consideration whether there is enough time for a slam and whether the gathering is in a public space (and if so, how disruptive a performance would be to others as well as how likely it is that the performance would be disrupted).

The three following categories—workshops, open mics, and competitions—all constitute events that are explicitly "the point" of a particular gathering, or in Irvine's terms "a central situational focus" (1979: 779), one of four factors she identifies as contributing to the formality of a speech event. Most often, these take place in an institutional setting such as those listed in the previous section. Even in cases where poets lead slam workshops in schools or NGOs, and thus where participants would be present anyway with the aim of attending class rather than slamming, the time and space are set aside institutionally as dedicated to a slam workshop, through conversations and contracts with teachers, principals, NGO directors, etc.

3: During **workshops** (*ateliers*), the workshop leader explains what slam is, answers questions, and generally gives a performance or shows a video to show participants what slam looks and sounds like. The participants are most often the same age or younger than the workshop leader/s, and there is rarely a stage or microphone. There is usually time for participants to write their own poems or to come up with improvised ones, and the workshop ends with a *scène ouverte*/open mic (even if there is no stage and no mic). Because these workshops are generally held in institutions, spatial reconfiguration to "set the stage" is not always necessary—in a classroom, for example, the students are already seated facing the front of the room, and that is where the leader/emcee will stand and where participants will perform. The "breakthrough" into the actual performance, from just discussing or explaining slam, is always keyed (introduced and closed) by the leader/emcee.

4: **Open mics** (*scènes ouvertes*) do not only occur within workshops. They can take place in bars, restaurants, schools, and cultural centers. I have distinguished them from category 2, "slamming," by virtue of their designation by participants as a particular type of event rather than an activity that may or may not take place within a looser frame of

"hanging out." These are official open mics (*scènes ouvertes*) that are labeled and broadcast as such in Facebook announcements, for example; they are usually organized in advance and hosted by a third party like a cultural center or a bar, and thus are more likely to include a designated stage, microphones, and a sound system. In these events, one or two emcees have been chosen in advance to host the event, and they are tasked with going through the crowd before the performance to gather names of people who want to perform. Often this means wheedling people into performing, especially female poets/audience members; the emcee is almost always male.[39] Although open mics lack the competition aspect that defines slam as a genre, they generally follow the same rules governing time onstage and absence of musical accompaniment and props. They are also subject to the same keying procedures— introduction and closing, generally by the emcee.

5: **Competitions**, or *tournois*, are the "deepest" form of slam performance and can have major consequences for performers—the winner of the National Slam, for example, is automatically designated as Madagascar's representative for the Slam World Cup in France. The higher the stakes, the longer and more elaborate the keying procedures, and the more structured the format. Regular weekly or monthly competitions do not involve the same level of planning and financial investment, but are still more structured than an open mic and generally follow the mantra conditions closely.

In all five of these settings, performers and emcees make judgments about whether slam performance *in general* and/or a *particular* performance is physically possible, and whether it is "contextually doable" or possible. The double horizon can be expanded or contracted in particular contexts, sometimes unexpectedly. In my case, I had never freestyled or improvised an entire text prior to fieldwork, and did not consider myself capable of doing so in any language—it was not on my phenomenological double horizon, in part due to the fact that I have never seen a white woman freestyle. My brief experience improvising one word during my first performance at the CGM did not lead me to believe that I was capable of improvising an entire verse. But two years later, during a slam session with poets from Fianarant'slam, a particularly cohesive social group with a repertoire of songs they often sing and improvise on together, I realized with dread that the song we were singing was just a chorus, and that we were going around the circle with each person improvising a spoken verse while the others continued the beat. In this situation, refusing to perform would have been more socially unacceptable than even a terrible performance. I was helped by the fact that the chorus

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[39] This dynamic, where a male slam poet and/or emcee strongly urges a female poet to perform, is very common. While many male poets express their support for female poets and their desire for more female poets to join the community and to perform, there are multiple reasons why girls and women might not feel comfortable going onstage in front of a mostly male audience, as Sawin (2002) has pointed out. Some would point to a certain notion of Malagasy "tradition" whereby only men are accorded the right to public speech; I would also highlight the catcalling that most female poets must contend with whenever they set foot onstage, unless they are already well-known and respected in the community. At the same time, many female poets, myself included, started performing thanks to the encouragement of a male poet.

was in English, providing me with some inspiration, and I was at the end of the circle so I had a fair amount of time to prepare. In this case, the social unacceptability of refusing performance pushed me to expand the double horizon of my corporeal schema.

The reverse can also happen: a performer may sense that a performance is *physically* possible, but for some reason performance in general, or the particular poem they had in mind, does not seem *contextually* possible. The setting might be such that any slam performance would be strange or unacceptable, such as during a soccer game; the person in question may not be considered an appropriate performer in any number of ways, such as during a slam competition when the emcee has just called up someone else; the poem the performer has in mind may be the wrong poem for the setting and/or the audience, such as one involving sexual innuendo when their grandmother is in the audience. These concerns involve bodily perceptions that may or may not rise to the level of consciousness, and can be summarized as follows:

1) Setting: My perceptions of the setting will most likely involve both a physical component and a latent sense of what sort of situation I am in, based on my "stock of knowledge" and "schemes of reference"

2) Role: My perceptions of my role in the situation will impact what kinds of performance I deem possible in this setting.

3) Audience: Likewise, my appraisals of others present will impact my judgment of acceptability.

4) Text: Considerations such as the appropriateness of a particular poem or type of performance, and my mastery of the poem or skill at improvising (my own competence).

As we have seen, these embodied perceptions are a complex mix of factors that are not solely individual, but are socially shaped through the sedimentation of experiences and practices. As poets perform across a range of contexts—in different institutional and non-institutional settings, with different audiences, performing different texts—their habitus is shaped in particular ways that further inform what they understand to be within their double horizon. In the next section, we will see how habitus also involves experiences of privilege and/or discrimination, and how this impacts the authoritative performance of social identities.

4. Language ideologies and the "we" of discourse

Anyone who is familiar with slam poetry in the U.S. might be surprised that most of the poems I cite in this dissertation do not revolve around a first-person singular

narrative presumed to be an "authentic" portrayal of the speaker's experience.[40] In the U.S., this approach has come to dominate slam events, and Somers-Willett (2009) devotes much of her book to analyzing the "authentic" expression of marginalized identities in U.S. slam, and how this type of expression is understood as a hallmark of "political" poetry. She writes that, due to the official rules of slam, which require that the performer be the author of the text they perform (except in rare, non-competition cases), as well as the fact of the embodied presence of performer and audience, "audiences are encouraged to see slam performances as confessional moments in which the 'I' of the poem is also the 'I' of the author-performer" (2009: 33). She adds that this effect is maximized by the fact that the vast majority of slam poems are written in the first-person singular.

By contrast, it is exceedingly rare for Malagasy poets to speak extensively in the first-person singular.[41] This has to do, in part, with Malagasy syntax and with language ideologies, which tend to favor the use of the passive voice over the active voice and the first-person inclusive plural over the first-person singular.[42] This is often the case even in poems that could conceivably be about the poet's own personal experience. Greg Urban (1989) has theorized a continuum of referents for the first-person singular pronoun (in English, "I"), from the "indexical-referential" use that indexes the speaker's "everyday self" to the "theatrical" and even "projective" uses in which the "I" is not understood as referring to the speaker's everyday self at all (Urban 1989: 43). I want to argue here that, rather than the "'I' of Discourse" that Urban examines, it is the "we" of discourse that is most salient in Malagasy slam poetry. There are, of course, indexical-referential instances of the first-person singular in some poems that seem to index the poet's "everyday self," as well as "theatrical" and "projective" uses. But it is much more common to see poems in the third-person and the first-person inclusive plural ("we," inclusive of addressee). This is not simply a grammatical nicety; it is related to language ideologies that prioritize inclusive and indirect speech styles over what is characterized as "directness" and over-individualizing.

Despite a tendency to avoid the first-person singular, slam poets have the reputation in Madagascar of being outspoken and overly direct. In some language ideologies this can be characterized negatively, as we saw in the Introduction where a number of people in the Union of Malagasy Poets and Writers (Havatra U.P.E.M.) criticized slam poets for spouting nonsense. Slam poets themselves might agree, but frame this in a positive light, as Gad did as the emcee of one monthly slam competition at the CGM. At the beginning of this competition, just after the first calibration poet performed, Gad voiced common perceptions of slam:

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[40] Thank you to Liliane Koziol for pointing out that the expectation of authenticity is not a universal one, particularly in Madagascar.

[41] For a counter-example, see Baly's "Satrok'ala" poem in Chapter Four. This poem is an anomaly, and I argue that its first-person narrative voice is part of what marks it as aimed toward a foreign audience.

[42] See Bloch's (1971, 1975) and Ochs' (1973) discussion of this in relation to kabary. Note that this is a dialect-specific ideology; the active voice is more common in some non-*ofisialy* dialects, as well as informal registers in *ofisialy*.

Dia hoe 'Fa maninona laisany [ialahy isany] no mitatasika, fa maninona laisany no miteny mafy, fa maninona laisany no tsy mikombom-bava mihitsy?' …ilaina izany indraindray. Herinandro izahay mangina, ny asabotsy ihany ange izahay no mba miteny ohatran'ny 'zao e. Tompokolahy sy tompokovavy, ilaina ihany koa ny maneho hevitra.	Like… 'Why are you guys always jabbering, why do you guys all speak loudly, why do you guys never shut your mouths?' … it's necessary sometimes. During the week we're [excl.] quiet; it's only on Saturday that we can talk like this. Ladies and gentlemen, it's also necessary to express yourself [show your thoughts].[43]

The concept of slam as a form of self-expression is common, and it is frequently portrayed by poets in Madagascar as an outlet for young people who are otherwise discouraged from expressing their views publicly. This was evident in my interview with Paulah, one of the original participants of Pilote's workshops and the founder of the Fianarantsoa-based organization Fianarant'slam. He told me that

[…] nous autres enfants malgaches dans la culture, nous ne sommes pas encouragés à nous exprimer, tu vois, donc quelque part, déjà, j'avais ça en moi, alors que j'étais poète: comment je pouvais faire pour exprimer…	[…] us Malagasy kids, in the culture, we're not encouraged to express ourselves, you know, so somehow, I already had that in me, even though I was a poet: how could I express…
et en plus, j'ai été très sensible au… à la vie politique, sociale, du pays quoi, tu vois, et j'avais tout plein de choses à dire par rapport à ça, mais ici c'était 'Ouais, parle pas trop, ça va, t'es jeune, laisse faire les vieux [d'abord?], laisse faire les vieux, tu te calmes.'	and plus I was always very sensitive to… to the political and social life of the country, you know, and I had lots of things to say about that, but here it was 'Yeah, don't talk too much, that's enough, you're young, let the elders go first, let the elders do it, calm down.'
Donc moi tu vois, c'est… j'ai trouvé dans le slam tout ce qu'il me fallait. C'est-à-dire une scène, un moyen, un endroit d'exprimer tout ça à haute voix.	So you know for me it's… I found everything I needed in slam. In other words a stage, a way, a place to express all that out loud.

I do not wish to reinscribe a binary here of tradition vs. modernity or Malagasy vs. Western modes of speaking, but rather to recognize the ways that poets understand the language ideologies of "tradition" or "Malagasy culture" versus in those of slam. Although young people may openly express their opinions with their peers, authoritative public expression has historically been reserved for elder males—as we saw in the case of kabary in the previous chapter. In many cases, the actual audience of a poet's

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[43] Ranala helped me translate this into French; I later referred to the French translation in further translating to English.

expression may not differ much, if at all, between the slam stage and informal spaces of peer "hanging out." That is to say, there often are no "elders" in the audience at slam events and thus in a practical sense slam does not always or even frequently involve authoritative address to the wider community or society. What is significant about slam is the format that it provides, which lends authority to the speaker. Expressing one's opinions in a casual peer group setting as part of a conversation, where typical turn-taking norms are at play, is quite different from standing in front of an audience—even if they are the very same peers in the very same space—and being allocated a full three minutes to hold the floor.

The body of "I"

"It matters because of whose mouth you're sitting in." This is what Vuyelwa Maluleke, a South African spoken word poet and actor, said to me over Skype when I told her that I had been thinking and writing about embodied identity in slam and the free speech debates raging in the U.S., fueled in part by recent events on my university campus. Frustrated by abstract universal claims to free speech, we both agreed that the speaker's embodied identities matter. Vuyelwa's point, characteristically poetic, underscores what slam and spoken word have to offer these debates. Slam might seem to be a forum for radically "free" speech, because of the absence of rules on style, topic, etc. Yet it also emphasizes the embodied identity of the poet. As Somers-Willett (2009) argues, even when poets choose to voice other characters in their poems, and/or to avoid the first-person singular, "the act of live performance still hinges on the author's body and its visible markers. The author's physical presence ensures that certain aspects of his or her identity are rendered visible as they are performed in and through the body" (Somers-Willett 2009: 69-70). In Vuyelwa's terms, it is not just your voice that "sits in" your mouth when you speak. It is your entire body sitting there, with all of its experiences and traumas and privileges.

This is poignantly illustrated in Somers-Willett's example of a performance by Patricia Smith, a well-known Black female poet who, you may recall, Johnson (2017) credits with being integral to the founding of slam. Smith explained that in her poem "Skinhead," where she speaks in the first-person singular as a white male skinhead, she "wanted to understand a man who unconditionally hated who [she] was" (Somers-Willett 2009: 93). To return to Urban's (1989) discussion of the "'I' of Discourse," this is clearly a "theatrical" use of "I." Because the audience can see what kind of body is "sitting in" Smith's mouth when she speaks—that of a Black woman—the effect is jarring, but "this clash can create a space for identity's critique and play" (*idem*).

A radically different effect was produced when a white male poet, Taylor Mali, performed this same poem at a tribute reading for Patricia Smith, which she attended. Somers-Willett writes that some audience members may have thought the character's views were Mali's own, and that even "those who recognized the voice as a persona still felt the performance was socially inappropriate. In short, the audience balked" (Somers-Willett 2009: 93). Mali is known for his deliberately provocative and often "socially inappropriate" performances, and his decision to perform "Skinhead"—in front of its

author, no less—can be read as a claim to universal free speech: that anyone should be "allowed" to perform as a skinhead, regardless of one's race. However, there is no "critique and play" happening when Mali performs the poem, just another repetition of hate speech, because his embodied identities do not subvert the voice of the poem's character. It matters that the body sitting in his mouth is that of a white male, the kind of body that has always been glorified and protected by white supremacist discourses and practices. This kind of body has never experienced the trauma of a racial slur with all of its baggage and history, and the very real violence that lies within and behind the threat.[44]

While some of these concerns are particular to the racial politics of the United States, the question of the poet's body's relations to the text and to the audience is similarly critical in Malagasy slam. These relations are not reducible to the social identities Somers-Willett lists: "particularly race and gender but extending to class, sexuality, and even regionality" (2009: 70). While these identities are certainly part of the equation, my analysis of embodied relations does not end with these markers of social identity, but encompasses other aspects of the body that people frequently assess when considering someone else's body: health, age, size, fitness, cleanliness/hygiene, "attractiveness" (in the eye of the beholder), etc. One of the paramount questions here is the complex one of familiarity—whether members of the audience have seen this person before, in what contexts, for how long, etc. In the case of Taylor Mali, this means the difference between people thinking an actual skinhead was onstage (a terrifying, confusing, and deeply upsetting prospect), that a random white male poet had made the presumptuous and tone-deaf decision to perform Smith's poem, or that Taylor Mali—a poet known for his tone-deafness—had decided to do so. Considered in this way, it is not only whose mouth the poet is sitting in that matters—it is also whose ears and eyes the audience members are sitting in. It also matters whether "we," the listeners/viewers, are the targets of neo-Nazi hate speech.

In a phenomenological mode, we might say that the "double horizon" matters to the meaning and force of the pronoun: what prior experiences has a person had by virtue of their embodied social identities? What prior experiences have particular audience members had with the poet? What future actions and orientations are thinkable based on prior ones? In such a stark example as "Skinhead," it is clear that Smith's double horizon contains the fact that she is part of a group that has been targeted by skinheads in the past and will likely continue to be targeted in the future. The same is not true for Mali. We see here the limitations of considering the double horizon solely on an individual scale: Smith herself may not have had direct experiences with self-professed skinheads (though she certainly has with white supremacist

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[44] A number of scholars have written on the issue of free speech, hate speech, and slurs: Matsuda et al. 1993; Butler 1997; Tickoo 2010; Fleming and Lempert 2011; Irvine 2011; Croom 2013, 2014, 2015; Bianchi 2014. At stake in Smith's poem is not merely the voicing of slurs—though it contains a few, and Mali's voicing of them was undoubtedly vexing for many in the audience—but the entire worldview expressed throughout the poem. For this reason, the incident also calls to mind debates over cultural appropriation (Root 1996, Johnson 2003, Bucholtz 2011): when (if ever) is it appropriate for "outsiders" to engage in (rather than merely witness) community-specific performances and cultural forms? And how is outsider status determined?

discourses and institutions), but her ancestors may have, as have other African-Americans she is not related to. In this sense, the phenomenological concept of sedimentation is also at play. We recognize objects (and people, ideas, etc.) either because we personally have encountered them before, or because they have been sedimented and catalogued in the stock of knowledge of our community.[45] While Schutz never directly discusses embodied social identities such as gender and race, we can productively bring sedimentation into the discussion to understand how it is that a speaker's double horizon is shaped not only by her lived experiences but also by those of her community more broadly, and how this fits in to the performance and production of authority.

5. Analysis of "Mamadou" by Barry Benson

In the poem that follows, "Mamadou" by Benson, I show how Benson navigates embodied perceptions of social context, particularly considerations of race and Malagasy identity. This example shows how social evaluation and perception can be thematically foregrounded in a poem, allowing the performer to play with and exert authority over social identities in complex ways.

Benson is a well-known poet in the capital, who—along with his younger brother Conan—has been slamming for over ten years. He has been on the winning National Slam team two years in a row—he was on the Antananarivo slam team in 2014, and in 2015 competed on the Moramanga team. He won the 2017 National Slam individual competition, and represented Madagascar at the 2018 Slam World Cup in Paris.

Benson has performed "Mamadou"[46] at a number of events, and in the performance I analyze here many people in the audience had already heard a version of the poem before, although it is always at least partly improvised. The audience's familiarity with Benson, and with this poem in particular, is a major factor in its success. This performance took place in September 2014 during the finals of a city-wide competition called the SPIT-SPIC, held in a large auditorium-style classroom at the University of Antananarivo with fixed seats facing a raised stage. The competition was sponsored in part by CRAAM ("Resource Center for Contemporary Arts in Madagascar"—"Centre des Ressources des Arts Actuels de Madagascar"), an arts organization based at the university, which had supplied a sound system in addition to decorating the stage with a mish-mash of graffiti-style paintings and collages, including images of a "Black Power" fist, a person's head with dreads turning into baobabs and FIER D'ETRE MALAGASY ("PROUD TO BE MALAGASY") written underneath, and

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[45] The field of epigenetics, which examines changes in gene expression as opposed to genetic code, has been revolutionized by studies on the transgenerational inheritance of trauma, which have found that experiences of trauma may be passed down genetically—altering gene expression but not the genetic code itself. This seems to be a kind of sedimentation in genetic form, and provides an important counter-example to Berger and Luckmann's reading of sedimentation as occurring solely within a sign system, primarily a linguistic one (1966: 68).

[46] See Text 2 for full text and translation.

silhouettes of various figures (pulling a pousse-pousse, skateboarding, carrying something on their head). There was also a large African drum on the stage. Off to one side was the sound system with a laptop playing French and Malagasy rap as well as reggae in English. Someone—probably associated with CRAAM—was filming with a professional camera and tripod.

The audience, mostly students and slam regulars, filled the seats at the back while many of the performers sat closer to the stage. They were clearly familiar with most of the poets, and very vocal and energetic throughout the event. Benson went on to win the individual prize in large part thanks to this poem—it was one of the highest-scoring poems of the event, with a 9.5, a 9.9, and three 10s.

Benson began the poem from the audience as he walked up the aisle to the stage. Crouching over and muttering to some imaginary entity behind/below him that he seemed to be pulling on an imaginary leash, his mannerisms were quickly recognizable as those of someone speaking to a dog. As he arrived onstage he cemented this illusion by saying "Sit sit sit Mamadou, sit," followed by "Go fetch, Mamadou," as he threw an imaginary ball. This characterization of another person as a dog is extremely insulting and thus, as evidenced by the audience's raucous laughter, very funny.

"Mamadou" is a common West African name, and as Benson launches into the poem we quickly recognize his accent as a stereotyped "African" accent in French, with exaggeratedly rolled "r"s and singsong intonation. The audience was familiar with Benson's usual accent and his mastery of French (at the time, he—and a number of other slam poets, including Gad—was studying at ENS, the teachers college, to become a French high school teacher); they recognized this as a caricature and laughed. Benson allows the audience to cheer and laugh for a few lines as he performs this caricature—complete with references to democracy, food for the Sudan, and the misuse of funds for personal luxury items—before pausing, erasing his smile, and solemnly delivering the punchline: "Mamadou is… you."

Benson's poem relies for comic effect on stereotyped images of Africa and Africans, while simultaneously critiquing them. The poem is essentially a list of who or what Mamadou is, and Benson shifts our perspective on Mamadou with nearly every line. Throughout the poem, Mamadou is described as the following (in this order, not including repeats): the representative image of Africa, money, a dog, treated like an African, the grace of the tiger, the greatness of the elephant, you (informal singular), treated like a child, there, here, you (formal/plural), us, the representative image of prostitution, rich, the Chihuahua breed, the bulldog breed, a poodle, with dyed hair, with nappy hair, from a poor neighborhood, a doll, not Balotelli (a Ghanaian-Italian soccer player), Italy, with a shaved head, not white, not having pink balls, crazy, intelligence personified, and suffering personified.

One way we might interpret this barrage of referents is that Benson is defining the terms of these stereotypes and thereby exerting authority over them. The opening does precisely that: Benson enacts the stereotype by treating Mamadou like a dog (l. 1-4).[47]

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[47] This is my transcription and translation from my audio and video recordings, with input from Fela Razafiarison-Josoa.

walking down aisle towards stage, crouched as if calling to a dog he is pulling on a leash	Ôtôtôtôtô	Oh oh oh oh oh
arrives onstage, crouches at the mic that is set too low for him	Assis assis assis assis Mamadou, assis. Couché couché couché.	Sit sit sit sit Mamadou, sit. Down down down.
throws imaginary ball, then flicks hands in "go away" gesture	Va chercher, Mamadou.	Go fetch, Mamadou.

Yet at the very end of the poem (l. 49-50), he refuses the label "Mamadou":

T'as beau rire de ce texte, mais Mamadou c'est toi. Papadou, c'est moi.	You can laugh all you want at this text, but Mamadou is you. Papadou is me.

In proclaiming himself "Papadou," Benson suggests that, as a jokingly masculinized version of "Mamadou," he is endowed with greater authority. Whatever we might think of the gender politics here, it is significant that the poem opens with a dehumanizing attitude towards Mamadou but ends with a refusal of that label through an act of self-naming.

There is clearly an element of subversion at work in this poem: Benson wields a common stereotype in order to clearly subvert its meaning and its power. As we are jostled from one position to another relative to Mamadou, and from one characterization to another, we experience the instability of the caricature itself, the dizzying absurdity of all stereotypes of "Africa." Mamadou, and by extension all Africans, are caricatured as being simultaneously the ultra-rich politician who is partly responsible for poverty, the development worker trying to solve poverty with "foodstuffs" (l. 34-35) and poverty itself: "suffering personified" (l. 48). In pointing to and expanding on the instability of "Mamadou's" referents, Benson manipulates his audience so that they laugh *at* Mamadou and recognize themselves *in* him as the target of someone else's jokes and pity. Many Malagasy people, particularly in the Merina region of the the capital, do not consider themselves African, and commonly deploy negative stereotypes about "Africans."[48] But as Benson points out, this does not prevent them from being the targets of other people's stereotypes.

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[48] Benson's choice of the name "Mamadou" might also be a deliberate reference to Senegal (where the name is quite common), given that many negative Malagasy stereotypes of Africa are directed at Senegal in particular. This is thanks to the French, who conscripted predominantly Senegalese soldiers to violently suppress the Malagasy anti-colonial uprising of 1947 (J. Cole 2001: 323).

Subversion, however, is only half of the process. In order to subvert audience expectations, Benson must *anticipate* them.[49] He knows that most poets start their poems onstage, so he grabs our attention by beginning his performance from the aisle as he's walking up. He knows, too, that the audience will laugh when he fakes an "African" accent, because he knows that they know that this is not his usual accent. He then subverts the audience's reaction by turning the joke back on them and reminding them that they are, in fact, laughing at themselves.

Crucially, Benson also anticipates his audience's embodied social identities—not just their familiarity with the poem, but the fact that they are all (with the exception of myself) Malagasy. The poem's punchline—"Mamadou is you, Mamadou is me"—is only successful if Benson himself and the majority of his audience could conceivably be stereotyped as Mamadou; otherwise, the poem would simply be a racist caricature or, like Taylor Mali's performance of Patricia Smith's poem "Skinhead," a failed joke. Unlike with "Skinhead," however, it is not just the racial identity of the performer but also that of the audience that is foregrounded here and forms the basis on which the poem "works." Those of us who could not conceivably be stereotyped as "Mamadou" are not the poem's anticipated audience, and are thus perpetually "outside" Mamadou even when Benson tells us we are all Mamadou.

What Benson anticipates here—and what all performers anticipate to a certain extent—is not merely the visible bodies of his audience, but their entire embodied experiences—their "stock of knowledge," in the Schutzian idiom. For example, he presumes the audience's familiarity with Malagasy politics when, in a final allegory at the end involving a swimming pool, he refers to former Malagasy presidents through nicknames (l. 47):

| Y avait le professeur qui nous a construit une piscine, y avait l'amiral qui l'a rempli de merde, […] y avait aussi le laitier qui nous a emmenés au bord de la piscine, le DJ qui nous a fait plonger dans la piscine; avec le président actuel nous sommes ennoyés dans la merde de la piscine. | There was the professor who built us a pool, there was the admiral who filled it with shit, […] there was also the milkman who brought us to the edge of the pool, the DJ who made us dive into the pool; with the current president we are submerged/drowning in the shit of the pool.[50] |

Some references are even more context-specific: when Benson says that Mamadou could be a doll (l. 21), and that "you say that this text is more commercial

[49] My interest in the concept of anticipation was sparked by Sarah Osterhoudt's (2017) discussion of twin processes of anticipation and anxiety in Malagasy vanilla production.

[50] Benson refers here to former presidents by their occupations prior to the presidency: Madagascar's first president Philibert Tsiranana (professor of Mathematics and French), socialist dictator Didier Ratsiraka (a Lieutenant Commander who became known as the "Red Admiral"), Marc Ravalomanana (milkman and later CEO of the nation's largest dairy company), Andry Rajoelina (radio DJ and media mogul who overthrew Ravalomanana in a military-backed coup in 2009), and current president Hery Rajaonarimampianina, elected in 2014.

than poetic" (l. 29) he is referencing his brother Conan, who performed two poems before Benson—one about dolls and one criticizing other poets for being too commercial. This kind of extremely precise inside joke generally can only work in an improvised poem, because it references aspects of the immediate context of the event itself that are not known beforehand. Anticipation isn't necessarily thought out in advance: it can occur in the moment of performance.

Benson's anticipation is also not limited to the audience, but also involves his own performative capacities—his sense of his own double horizon, of what is possible for him based on what he has done before. In his decision to improvise, Benson is anticipating that the benefits of improvising—impressing the audience if it goes well, a certain live quality to the performance, the ability to make highly context-specific inside jokes—will outweigh the potential downfalls: taking too long to think of a line, drawing a blank or losing his train of thought, etc. Improvising at all requires an enormous amount of confidence and skill, and improvising a text during a competition is rare. By pulling off the improvisation, Benson performs mastery of his own text as well as of the much more difficult performative capacity to think on his feet while maintaining his composure and continuing to use rhyme and wordplay.

What Benson's performance indicates is that the physical and the social are not two separate realms—they inform each other, and in turn inform the performance of authority. Concerns about setting, audience, role, and text are not unique to slam, but slam's format as a face-to-face co-production, and its foregrounding of evaluation, make the embodied perception of physical and social possibility a requisite skill for any slam poet. This skill is developed and sedimented through slam workshops and through repetition over many years; the attunement to audience and setting that Benson displays is, in part, the product of repeated performances in different settings and in front of different audiences. As poets build a slam habitus, they are not building a static set of rules or gestures or forms; rather, they are learning to "manage" their "freedom," to judge the acceptability of different performances in different contexts, and to remember that authority is never created by the performer alone—it is always co-produced with the audience, and it is created by virtue of, not in spite of, their embodied identities.

6. Analysis of "What the poem says" ("Ce que dit le poème") by Gad Bensalem

I have argued thus far that slam focalizes the embodied relation between performer and audience, and that anticipating and/or subverting audience expectations is part of the performer's process of creating and maintaining authority over their speech. I have also shown how performers' habitus and double horizon are shaped by practice, institutional fields, and immediate contexts, impacting not only what the performer feels they are *generally* able to do, but also what they feel is "contextually doable." Here, we return to Gad's poem "What the poem says" ("Ce que dit le poème"), which he referenced in his workshop in Moramanga, to understand the role of responsibility and accountability for public speech.

During Gad's workshop in Moramanga, he referenced his own poem in his response to the workshop attendee's question about censorship. This is a piece so well-known that any slam regular in Tana (and even in other cities) knows the refrain by heart: "What the poem says is the sole responsibility of the poet, and no other person/ He who sows the wind reaps the whirlwind, or worse, a cyclone" ("Ce que dit le poème n'engage que le poète et nulle autre personne/ Celui qui sème le vent récolte la tempête ou pire, un cyclone").[51] The first line is difficult to translate; the English word "responsibility" fails to capture the multiple layers of meaning in the original, which also gives the sense that the poem is just the author's opinion, and their opinion alone, for which they are accountable.

Slam poems about slam poetry are quite common, but they tend to be platitudes about the power of poetry. Gad's is unique in its portrayal of the complex relationship between speaking on behalf of oneself and sharing a message with the audience—that delicate balance he described during the workshops he led in Moramanga. In many ways the figure of the poet in this poem is a tragic and lonely one: he is a cyclops (l. 5), an alien whose words are killed by "detractors" (l. 13), a heterosexual in a gay relationship with the audience (l. 14). He "speaks in the emptiness" (l. 28), and nobody answers. In one performance of this poem (see Text 3), during an intense period of flooding in the rainy season that had destroyed many homes and lives, Gad improvised an ending that does not appear in the text version (l. 33-47):

large sweeping gestures in front of his legs with both arms.	Et comme on est dans les temps des inondations le poète inonde le monde de ses lettres,	And since this is flood season, the poet floods the world with his letters/words,
decreased tempo and volume. *holds arms above head until "he dies"*	le poète s'ennuie donc il se plonge, il se plonge dans lui-même, car lui-même il ne s'aime pas.	the poet is bored so he dives, he dives into himself, because he doesn't love himself.
quiet audience laughter	Et il meurt.	And he dies.
quiet audience laughter	Et quand il meurt, il est enterré. Mais comme personne ne l'aimait comme lui ne s'aimait pas,	And when he dies, he is buried. But since nobody loved him the way he didn't love himself,
arms drop to stomach height, spread-eagled.	il reste, carcasse. Squelette.	he remains, carcass. Skeleton.

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[51] See Text 3 for the full text and translation, based on a performance of the poem at the IFM and on Gad's written text. This is my translation.

arms drop to waist height, spread-eagled.		
arms drop fully to his sides	Zone inondable.	Flood zone.
	Comme Madagascar, puisque le poète est une île. Le poète est une île. Merci.	Like Madagascar, because the poet is an island. The poet is an island. Thank you.

This ending gives added weight to the "cyclone" that the poet's words might stir up: the accountability of the poet for the consequences of his words is now even more charged, because his words are liable to cause the very tempest that might flood the barriers of his self, a perpetual "flood zone" (l. 44). Gad highlights here the dangers of speech, the ways that it renders one's self and one's body fragile and permeable, but the poet doesn't seem to have any other choice. He is stuck in this queer relationship with the audience, fraught with collateral damage, but they don't want to leave each other even though they can't quite give each other what they need. Clearly, freedom here is a relative term. It is not an individual right, but a responsibility that must be managed.

The final image of the poet as an island echoes his earlier descriptions of the lone poet as alien, speaking "in the emptiness" (l. 28). But this very claim is disproved mere seconds later, when the audience breaks into laughter at Gad's highly contextual reference to Dayvide and Marion, two Malagasy singers. He is not speaking in the emptiness at all, but to an audience who responds to him and whose reactions, moreover, he has anticipated in his choice of references. If the poet is an island, he is one whose borders are permeable, sensitive, and shaped by the world around him—the audience, the context in which he speaks, the social world he inhabits.

Indeed, the audience's reactions to Gad's performance helped shape the event and, most likely, the lines that he improvised. As a text, the poem is rather sad; as a performance it was poignant and moving but also silly, as the audience laughter attests. Gad's recounting of the death of the poet who doesn't love himself is melodramatic, a caricature, and as the audience responded his lines and actions became even more dramatic. Through this dialogism, as the audience responded to Gad and vice versa, Gad performed a kind of authority that was not dogmatic or rigid, but malleable and sensitive to context. He spoke of his own experience, perhaps, but without ever speaking in the first-person singular. The poet's experience that he describes, then, is his-and-not-his: not quite universal, yet expanding beyond the boundaries of self. A double horizon at the edge of the stage, where performer and audience meet.

7. Conclusion

Unlike the abstract notion of freedom of speech, conceived in many ways as speech in a vacuum, Gad's notion of "managed freedom" places the responsibility for

anticipating the audience on the speaker. "Managing" one's freedom of expression does not mean never using vulgar language, never saying anything controversial, and never upsetting anyone. On the contrary, it can mean doing precisely those things—but it is up to the speaker to "calculate" whether they are willing to be answerable for that vulgar language or for that controversial statement. This demands a "lucid"—meaning both clear and realistic—perception of the context, which requires understanding and being sensitive to one's audience. If your audience is primarily ten year-olds at a school event, perhaps a poem about sex is not appropriate. If you and your audience are Malagasy, performing "Mamadou" makes sense; if not, it doesn't. Part of the calculation involves remembering whose mouth you're sitting in—in a phenomenogical idiom, it involves the double horizon of past experiences that shape our sense of what is possible. This horizon is different for every individual, but it is shaped by social interaction and socially salient categories such as gender and race.

Gad's approach to "free expression" through the "management" of that freedom does not quite take into account the fact that the future is unforeseeable, and the aleatory nature of slam events in particular, in which one cannot plan beforehand precisely when one will speak and who will be in the audience at that time. Benson's poem "Mamadou," however, in which he adds references to his brother's poems, is an example of the kinds of recalibration that can be done in an improvised poem to take advantage of such contingencies.

Another example is Benson's poem "Tant va la cruche": when he performs it for a typical slam audience, the refrain is "So goes the [water] pitcher, when it winds up breaking; if you don't pay a whore she winds up leaving" ("Tant va la cruche, qu'à la fin elle se casse; si on paie pas une pute à la fin elle se casse").[52] When he performs the same poem at schools or in more public arenas, he changes "whore" ("pute") to "taxi." To believe some proponents of an absolute and limitless individual right to free speech, this would indicate that Benson's right to express himself has been curtailed, or that this is a form of self-censorship. What the idiom of "managed freedom" allows us to see, however, is that the emphasis is not on the ways that the context (audience, institutional setting, etc.) controls or censors speech, but on the ways that poets can control and remain accountable for the consequences of their words. While, again, those consequences are never fully foreseeable, this concept emphasizes anticipation as central to the poet's authority over their own speech. Whether or not to subvert anticipated audience expectations—through vulgar language, controversial statements, or something else—is a decision the poet must make for themselves, and only after considering what might result from that decision.

In the next chapter, we will examine these issues of the poet's relation to their audience through discourses of national belonging and unity versus ethnic division and discrimination during the National Slam.

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[52] The first line is a common saying in French that essentially means "you can only take so much" or "don't push it." The poem plays on the dual meaning of "se casser": to break and, informally, to leave.

Text 2: "Mamadou" by Barry Benson, September 2014, University of Antananarivo[53]

Benson starts line 1 as he is walking down the aisle towards the stage, crouched low as if calling to a dog he is pulling on a leash. He begins line 2 once he has arrived onstage, where he stoops to the mic that is set too low for him. On line 4, he throws an imaginary ball, then flicks his hands in a "go away" gesture. On line 5 he is bent over the mic with his hands on his knees, making a rhythmic scolding gesture with his right arm in time with his speech. This, as the rest of the poem, is spoken in an exaggerated "African" accent throughout, with rolled "r"s, usually while smiling. As he starts this line there is raucous laughter and applause from the audience.

Ôtôtôtôtô	Oh oh oh oh oh	1
Assis assis assis assis Mamadou, assis. Couché couché couché.	Sit sit sit sit Mamadou, sit. Down down down.	
Va chercher, Mamadou.	Go fetch, Mamadou.	
[?], je t'ai dit d'aller chercher démocratie, aliments pour le Soudan, quelque chose comme ça, et tu t'amènes avec beaucoup de Galaxy, [?] Mamadou!	[?], I told you to go fetch democracy, food for the Sudan, something like that, and you show up with a lot of Galaxy [cell phones] [?] Mamadou!	5
Mamadou c'est l'image représentatif de l'Afrique, question de genre, Mamadou c'est le fric.	Mamadou is the representative image of Africa, something like, Mamadou is money.	
Mamadou est un chien. On traite Mamadou comme un africain.	Mamadou is a dog. They[54] treat Mamadou like an African.	10
Mamadou c'est la grâce du tigre et aussi la grandeur de l'éléphant,	Mamadou is the grace of the tiger and also the greatness of the elephant,	
Mamadou c'est… toi	Mamadou is… you.	
On te traite comme un enfant, toi,	They treat you like a child, you,	

[53] This is my transcription and translation from my audio and video recordings, with input from Fela Razafiarison-Josoa. Question marks indicate inaudible/indeterminate utterances. Malagasy words are underlined. Line breaks and numbers are my own, based on phrasing, breaths, and thematic grouping.

[54] "On" is an abstract third person pronoun, roughly equivalent in some contexts to the English third person singular "one" or, in spoken English "they." "On" is also informally used instead of "nous" ("we"), but given the context here I have opted for "they."

Mamadou c'est là, Mamadou c'est ici, Mamadou c'est toi, Mamadou c'est nous, Mamadou c'est vous, mais putain je suis fou.	Mamadou is there, Mamadou is here, Mamadou is you, Mamadou is us, Mamadou is you all, fuck, I am crazy.	15
Mamadou c'est l'image représentatif de la prostitution parce que Mamadou est riche.	Mamadou is the representative image of prostitution because Mamadou is rich.	
Mamadou c'est la race chihuahua, bulldogy, peu importe, Mamadou… c'est une caniche.	Mamadou is the chihuahua breed, bulldog, whatever, Mamadou… is a poodle.	
Mamadou a les cheveux teints, les cheveux holiholy, Mamadou vient des bas-quartiers, Mamadou peut être un saribakoly.	Mamadou has dyed hair, nappy hair, Mamadou is from poor neighborhoods, Mamadou could be a doll.	20
Mamadou c'est toi, question de genre, Mamadou c'est l'Afrique, Mamadou c'est le fric, Mamadou c'est pas Balotelli mais c'est l'Italie, il a la crâne rasé.	Mamadou is you, something like, Mamadou is Africa, Mamadou is money, Mamadou isn't Balotelli[55] but Italy, he has a shaved head.	25
Mamadou est pas blanc, donc il ne peut pas être couille rose.	Mamadou isn't white, so he can't have pink balls.	
Mamadou c'est… tout, c'est l'intelligence personnifiée, Mamadou c'est fou, mais putain j'suis fou.	Mamadou is… everything, it's intelligence personified, Mamadou it's crazy, fuck I am crazy.	
Mamadou c'est toi, tu dis que ce texte est plus commercial que poétique, mais toi et moi nous savons que t'as cessé d'être un africain authentique.	Mamadou is you, you say that this text is more commercial than poetic, but you and I both know you've ceased to be an authentic African.[56]	30

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[55] A reference to Ghanaian-Italian soccer player Mario Balotelli, who has a shaved head and competed in the 2014 World Cup.

[56] This seems to be addressed, in part, to Benson's brother, who by this point in the event had performed twice. Benson's earlier use of the word "saribakoly" or "doll," which he says in gesturing to his brother, is a reference to the poem his brother performed just prior to this. When he says "you say that this text is

Car Mamadou c'est toi. Mamadou, va chercher! J'interdis de t'amener avec la démocratie, la belle vie dans la misère, la crise, pourquoi tu t'amènes encore avec tes denrées alimentaires, Mamadou Mamadou pas de denrées alimentaires!	Because Mamadou is you. Mamadou, go fetch! I forbid [you] to show up with democracy, the good life despite poverty, the crisis, why are you still showing up with your foodstuffs, Mamadou Mamadou, no foodstuffs!	35
Mamadou c'est la nourriture de l'UNICEF, de l'Union Européenne, et même de la SADC. Nous savons tous que ce monde est sadique.	Mamadou is food from UNICEF, from the European Union, and even from the SADC.[57] We all know this world is sadistic.	
Parce que Mamadou c'est toi. T'as beau rire de ce putain de bon performance, mais Mamadou c'est toi.	Because Mamadou is you. You can laugh all you want at this fucking good performance, but Mamadou is you.	40
Toi et moi nous savons que Mamadou c'est toi. Mamadou c'est moi. Mamadou c'est l'image représentatif de l'Afrique, question de genre, Mamadou c'est le fric.	You and I both know that Mamadou is you. Mamadou is me. Mamadou is the representative image of Africa, something like, Mamadou is money.	45
En alimentaire, Mamadou, [?] que c'est [?] la politique, il a dit "Y avait le professeur qui nous a construit une piscine, y avait l'amiral qui l'a rempli de merde, y avait, y avait, y avait aussi le laitier qui nous a emmenés au bord de la piscine, le DJ qui nous a fait plonger dans la piscine; avec le président actuel nous sommes ennoyés dans la merde de la piscine."	In food, Mamadou, [?] that politics is [?], he said "There was the professor who built us a pool, there was the admiral who filled it with shit, there was, there was, there was also the milkman who brought us to the edge of the pool, the DJ who made us dive into the pool; with the current president we are submerged/drowning in the shit of the pool."	
Parce qu'en fait Mamadou c'est la	Because actually Mamadou is	

more commercial…" he is referencing his brother's first poem, which critiques poets who prioritize mass appeal over quality.

[57] Southern African Development Community, pronounced in French "sadec."

souffrance personnifiée. T'as beau rire de ce texte, mais Mamadou c'est toi. Papadou, c'est moi.	suffering personified. You can laugh all you want at this text, but Mamadou is you. Papadou is me.	50

Text 3: "What the poem says" ("Ce que dit le poème") by Gad Bensalem, February 2015, Institut Français de Madagascar (Antananarivo)[58]

After the emcee calls his name a few times, Gad nonchalantly comes down the spiral staircase behind the audience (this was at the library of the Alliance Française and there are computers on the second floor). He walks onstage calmly and confidently, nothing in his hands, but he has white earbuds around his neck. Throughout the poem he makes emphatic co-speech gestures with his hands.

	Ce que dit le poème n'engage que le poète Et nulle autre personne Celui qui sème le vent récolte la tempête Ou pire un cyclone…	What the poem says is the sole responsibility of the poet[59] And no other person He who sows the wind reaps the whirlwind[60] Or worse, a cyclone…	1
	Le poète est un cyclope, il a six clown, et au bout de six clopes	The poet is a cyclops, he has six clowns, and after six smokes	5
draws hands across, designating a sky *shapes a "hole" with both hands each time he says "trou"* *"picks" a word from the air; "lets go" of it ; gestures in the air above his head.*	il peut te dessiner des ci-els dans l'univers, il peut te dessiner des étoiles dans le néant, il peut te trouer un trou noir dans le trou noir, Mesdames et messieurs, le poète est un extra-terrestre qui met des lettres partout, qui en [retire?] les mots, qui les relâche, qui les fait s'envoler comme des aiglons des aiglons qui sont tués par les détracteurs.	he can draw you skies in the universe, he can draw you stars in the void, he can tear you a black hole in the black hole, Ladies and gentlemen, the poet is an alien who puts letters everywhere, who [extracts?] words from them, who lets them go, who makes them fly like eaglets, eaglets that are killed by the detractors.	10

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[58] This is my transcription and translation from video that I recorded and from a text version of the poem that Gad sent me, although the text version was not identical to what he performed. I have not altered the text as Gad sent it to me (I have kept his line breaks, punctuation, etc.), except to modify it according to what he performed live and to add hyphens indicating words that he deliberately broke up to emphasize rhyme and rhythm (ci-els, Tuc-son, per-son, ré-pond). I have also underlined Malagasy words.

[59] Or, "The poet alone is accountable for the poem"

[60] This is a reference to a Bible verse, Hosea 8:7, "For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind." In translating Gad's poem from French to English I would prefer "He who sows wind harvests the storm," but I have maintained the phrasing of the King James English-language translation of the Bible, because Gad's line is as it appears in many standard French translations of the Bible.

quiet audience laughter *tempo and volume increase*	Le poète est hétéro mais le publique, lui, est gai. Il y a des dommages collatéraux mais ils ne veulent pas se larguer, car l'art guète le micro au milieu de la scène jusqu'à ce qu'il y ait des larsens ou que l'art saigne…	The poet is hetero but the audience, on the other hand, is gay. There is collateral damage but they don't want to break up, because art eyes the mic in the middle of the stage until there is feedback or until art bleeds…	15
indicates a large head with both hands, then a large marquee above him. *traces a line going down one side, then the bottom, creating a box*	Mais justement, le saignement donne un enseignement à celui qui essaie d'aimer l'art sainement… Mais seulement … Le poète à la grosse tête tâte et enquête les mots Le poème à la grosse lettre relate et en traite les maux, Ce que dit le poème n'engage que le poète Et nulle autre personne Celui qui sème le vent récolte la tempête	But actually, the bleeding instructs he who tries to imitate art cleanly/properly But only/ Except that… The big-headed poet touches/feels and investigates words The big-lettered poem recounts and treats their pains, What the poem says is the sole responsibility of the poet And no other person He who sows the wind reaps the whirlwind	20
audience joins in on "cyclone"	Ou pire un *[slight pause for breath]* cyclone…	Or worse, a *[slight pause for breath]* cyclone…	25
audience joins in on "son" and "pond." *designates a circular cage*	Mes mots à vos oreilles comme des claques sonnent, <u>mampitapy saonina</u> Et comme le mec au volant de sa [voiture] Tuc-son, je claque sonne, mais per-son ne ré-pond car le poète parle dans le vide, échevelé livide, on dirait David dans la cage aux lions	My words in your ears like slaps resound, <u>they drive [you] crazy</u> And like the guy at the wheel of his Tucson [SUV], I honk [hit peal/resound], but nobody responds because the poet speaks in the emptiness [speaks to a brick wall], disheveled, livid, he's like	

with both hands. quiet audience laughter	on dirait Dayvide en concert avec Marion, mais	David in the lions' cage he's like Dayvide in concert with Marion,[61] but	
	Ce que dit le poème n'engage que le poète Et nulle autre personne Celui qui sème le vent récolte la tempête	What the poem says is the sole responsibility of the poet And no other person He who sows the wind reaps the whirlwind	30
audience joins in on "cyclone"; he continues without a breath.	Ou pire un cyclone…	Or worse, a cyclone…	
large sweeping gestures in front of his legs with both arms. decreased tempo and volume; holds arms above head until "he dies"	Et comme on est dans les temps des inondations, le poète inonde le monde de ses lettres, le poète s'ennuie donc il se plonge, il se plonge dans lui-même, car lui-même il ne s'aime pas. Et il meurt.	And since this is flood season, the poet floods the world with his letters/words, the poet is bored so he dives, he dives into himself, because he doesn't love himself. And he dies.	35
quiet audience laughter	Et quand il meurt, il est enterré. Mais comme personne ne	And when he dies, he is buried. But since nobody loved him the	40
quiet audience laughter.	l'aimait comme lui ne s'aimait pas, il reste, carcasse.	way he didn't love himself, he remains, carcass.	
arms drop to stomach height, spread-eagled.	Squelette.	Skeleton.	
arms drop to waist height, spread-eagled. arms drop fully to his sides	Zone inondable.	Flood zone.	
	Comme Madagascar, puisque le poète est une île. Le poète est une île. Merci.	Like Madagascar, because the poet is an island. The poet is an island. Thank you.	45

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[61] Two contemporary Malagasy singers with very different styles (Dayvide sings Christian songs and ballads, Marion is an R&B singer).

Chapter Three: Speaking History and Identity at the National Slam

1. Introduction

At the opening ceremony of the sixth annual National Slam, Dadilahy—then-President of Madagaslam—took the stage at the Institut Français in Tana to welcome the participants: thirty Malagasy poets, three poets per team representing ten cities across the island, as well as a handful of international guest poets from Africa, Europe, and North America. Jumping onto the small stage of the IFM's library amid a roar of applause, Dadilahy took the mic offered to him by the emcee who had introduced him. He shouted "Salama tompoko!" ("Hello!") and the audience cheered even louder. He smiled out at the audience, standing along the edges of the room or seated in chairs arranged haphazardly near the stage, and continued:[62]

	Tompokolahy, tompokovavy, [?]	**Ladies, gentlemen**, [?]
audience laughter	honorables invités, <u>esteemed guests</u>,	honorable guests, <u>esteemed guests</u>,
audience laughter	le slam est mort,	slam is dead,
"Vive le slam!"	vive le slam!	long live slam!
	L'association Madagaslam, ainsi que les comités d'organisation de ce festival du slam national 2015 et du dixième année de slam à Madagascar, sont très heureux de votre présence à cet après-midi festival.	The Madagaslam association, as well as the organizing committees of this 2015 National Slam festival and of the tenth year of slam in Madagascar, are very glad you are able to join us for this afternoon festival.
	Cette année le festival a grandi, grossi, et cet art qui nous unit aujourd'hui est l'élément unique, fort, et fédérateur. Pendant ces huit jours de festivités, la poésie prendra pleinement sa place au coeur de notre capitale. En	This year the festival has grown, swelled, and this art that unites us today is the unique, strong, federating factor. During these eight days of festivities, poetry will fully take its place at the heart of our capital. In one

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[62] This is my translation based on audio and video recordings. Most of the speech was in French; I have put the Malagasy in bold text and underlined the English. Audience responses are in italics on the left side; I have added line breaks to highlight particular utterances and thematic groupings.

	une seule ville sont réunies la diversité et l'interculturalité.	single city, diversity and interculturality are brought together.
snaps in audience		
	Le slam est un mouvement artistique porteur de valeurs telles que l'ouverture d'esprit, le partage, la liberté d'expression, et le dépassement des barrières sociales et culturelles.	Slam is an artistic movement that conveys values such as open-mindedness, sharing, freedom of expression, and overcoming social and cultural barriers.
applause		
	Nous déclarons donc officiellement ouverte cette sixième édition du slam national.	We thus officially declare the opening of this sixth edition of the National Slam.

The very first words out of Dadilahy's mouth are already an attempt to appeal to a diverse audience: addressing the crowd first in Malagasy, he uses the greeting "Salama tompoko," which blends a greeting common all across the island, *Salama*, with an honorific specific to the Merina dialect, *tompoko*. *Tompoko* literally means "my master(s)" and dates back to the period of internal slavery. Dadilahy himself is originally from the North but lives in Tana; here he strikes a middle ground between a distinctly "coastal" greeting, "Salama iaby" (which was used by another Madagaslam organizer, also from the North, earlier in the event) and a distinctly Merina one, "Manahoana tompoko."

Following this greeting, Dadilahy addresses the audience as "tompokolahy, tompokovavy." This is usually translated as "ladies and gentlemen," but is literally "my master, my mistress," the formula used in the Highlands at the beginning of *kabary*; note that men are named first, as greetings are delivered in hierarchical order. He then code-switches, presumably addressing the international guest poets, all of whom spoke French and/or English: first he greets, in French, the "honorables invités" ("honorable guests"), and then in English the "esteemed guests"; his use of English leads to laughter and cheers in the audience. The bulk of the speech is in French, though the majority of the audience is Malagasy.

Dadilahy's speech manages, in under one minute, to index some of the most salient elements of language politics in Madagascar: from the fact of addressing a Malagasy audience primarily in French, to the perception of English as impressive and/or humorous, to the ways that the Merina dialect can remind non-Merina listeners not only of Merina linguistic difference but also of the history of Merina conquest, domination, and enslavement of people in other regions—and how this history survives and continues to influence the present. There are still places and occasions across the country where speaking Merina is *fady*—taboo. It will anger the ancestors, and for good

reason: the Merina were their sworn enemies, the invaders who stole their land and subjugated their people.

In the previous chapter, we saw how slam poets "manage" their apparent artistic freedoms according to the audience and setting of their performance, mediating between scales of individual expression, relational co-presence, and institutional fields. This chapter draws on anthropological approaches to scale (Tsing 2000, 2004, 2015; Carr and Lempert 2016) to argue that what gets portrayed as an even broader scale—that of the "national" community of slam poets—is nonetheless inextricably tied to local, particular contexts; indeed, these are hierarchized categories of scale that are discursively mediated. The National Slam does not take place in some ethereal, abstract space of "the nation," but in Antananarivo, at the heart of the former Merina kingdom that is still the contemporary seat of power. While Madagaslam organizers such as Dadilahy insist on the unity of the "slam family" that extends across the nation, poets from other cities point to disjuncture, hierarchization, inequality, and discrimination both in their poems and in their off-stage critiques of the festival. This is more than solely a critique of the imbalance in power within the slam community: it requires speaking about a taboo national history and proclaiming an ethnic or regional identity that is marked as different from the "national" (Merina) norm. These practices of speaking history and identity imagine scale differently, and are at odds with the approaches to unity-through-difference in prevailing discourses of "plurilingualism" and "interculturality" which, as we will see, pervade the institutional fields of politics and education.

This chapter, a contribution to the literature on discursive constructions of "the nation," advances this literature by showing how speakers navigate scalar projects and spatiotemporal configurations as they attempt to bridge divergent experiences of history, space, and power. This analysis has much to offer contemporary discussions of pluri- or multilingualism and interculturality, where "difference" becomes a focal point for a range of pedagogical, aesthetic, political, and social projects.

At the end of this section I will outline the theoretical framework of linguistic phenomenology that I will be using throughout the chapter. But first, a history lesson:

A brief history of ethnic division
In June 2009, a few months after Andry Rajoelina, the mayor of Antananarivo, overthrew then-President Marc Ravalomanana in a military-backed coup, a major national French-language newspaper ran an editorial titled "Merina et côtiers…." ("Merina and Coastal [People]….")[63] by one of its staff journalists, Ndimby A., known for his provocative and politically-oriented editorials. The article touches on the role of ethnic affiliation in the political crisis that was rocking the country at the time, but its main point is more general: that ethnic conflict in Madagascar is a pernicious obstacle to the nation's economic development and political stability. The extent to which racism and discrimination are taboo topics in "polite" discussion is evident from the comments in the online forum, regardless of whether the commenters agreed with Ndimby: one

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[63] http://www.madagascar-tribune.com/Merina-et-cotiers,12174.html

person thanked him for the "salutary kick to the anthill" ("coup de pied salvateur dans la fourmilière"), while another admonished him for throwing "oil on the fire. For that matter, there wasn't a fire but you're the one who lit it" ("de l'huile sur le feu. D'ailleurs il n'y avait pas de feu mais c'est vous qui l'aviez allumé"). While commenters disagreed on the extent to which ethnic discrimination is real and negatively impacts contemporary society and politics, they agreed on one thing: it is difficult, if not impossible, to talk about.

The Madagascar Tribune, which ran the article, is not just any newspaper—it is a French-language newspaper, and thus its readership is likely to be well-educated "elites" in Madagascar and the Malagasy diaspora, who are majority Merina. Nearly eighty percent of the comments on this particular article were in French. No one, including Ndimby, self-identified as a particular ethnicity or gave personal examples of discrimination, but it is likely that the majority of the commenters were Merina. In my first trips to Madagascar, when I mostly stayed in the Highlands, I thought that the history of internal slavery, and enduring issues of discrimination and racism, were taboo everywhere. It wasn't until I traveled to the South that people I spoke with voluntarily raised the topic of Merina oppression and regional/ethnic discrimination. Indeed, it was the first time I heard a Malagasy person use the term Merina in reference to the contemporary population rather than as a historical reference to the Merina Kingdom. As in the United States, where white people rarely refer to themselves or others as white but freely use racial and ethnic categories (Latino, Black, African-American, Asian, etc.) to describe others, Merina people rarely call themselves Merina but freely describe others as Sakalava, Antandroy, etc.[64]

By way of euphemism, and perhaps also as shorthand, these distinctions are frequently reduced—as in the title of Ndimby's article—to the binary Merina (or, more commonly, "Highlands," "centre" or "capitale") versus côtier (coastal), much in the way that the various racial categories in the U.S. are reduced to the binary white/of color. This grouping together of all those who experience discrimination, though in some ways it may obscure differences between disparate marginalized groups, is also an important source of political and social solidarity. In the case of Madagascar, this took on a concrete form in the creation in 1946 of the political party PADESM, the Party of the Disinherited of Madagascar (Parti des Déshérités de Madagascar). The PADESM consolidated anti-Merina efforts along the coasts (though primarily on the East coast) in response to the creation of the anti-colonial group MDRM, or Democratic Movement of Malagasy Renewal (Mouvement démocratique de la rénovation malgache), which was primarily constituted by Merina elites.[65] There is ample evidence that the French exploited this coastal solidarity in order to weaken the MDRM, by supporting the

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[64] I give this example, and another in the next paragraph, in order to draw certain limited parallels between contemporary racial politics in the U.S. and Madagascar that may help the reader better understand—not to imply that these contexts are broadly analogous.

[65] The Malagasy Uprising of 1947, an anti-colonial revolutionary movement, was started by the MDRM in the Highlands between Tana and the coast, and targeted not only the French but also PADESM supporters. See Jennifer Cole's ethnography of the after-effects of this rebellion (2001).

PADESM and others on the coast who believed that French colonization was preferable to Merina domination.

The role of European interventions in Madagascar, and of French colonization in particular, in rigidifying and exacerbating ethnic divisions is well-documented (Cole 2001, Larson 2009, Jackson 2013). In Ndimby's article, he cites sociologist and anthropologist Janine Ramamonjisoa, who describes the Highlands/Coastal opposition as "carefully maintained under colonization and adopted by all those who have internalized colonial mindsets" ("soigneusement entretenue par la colonisation et adoptée par tous ceux qui ont intériorisé les schémas mentaux coloniaux"). Elsewhere, Ramamonjisoa has argued that the term "ethnies" ("ethnic groups") is a misnomer, and that "What we now call *foko*, or *karaza*, terms referring to social organization and improperly translated as 'ethnic groups,' are the descendants of peoples of different political entities that once formed the political organization of the country in the different parts of its territory" (Ramamonjisoa 2002: 5, my translation).[66]

Ramamonjisoa's point, that colonizers misinterpreted sociocultural differences and institutionalized them in order to profit from the entrenchment of socioeconomic hierarchies, fits a familiar pattern of European colonial tactics of sowing internal distrust and discord, sometimes by outright inventing ethnic categories (Asad 1992, Mudimbe 1988, Mamdani 1996, Gourevitch 1998). Indeed, the "ethnies" Ramamonjisoa refers to are the 18 ethnic groups initially described by French explorer and naturalist Alfred Grandidier (1908), which became the reference point for the delimitation of provinces under the colonial government. Thus, colonial perceptions of ethnic difference were cemented into administrative regions, which lasted long after decolonization and are still evident in the contemporary administrative divisions.

Yet, as one commenter on Ndimby's article points out, European colonizers did not create these divisions and tensions from nothing, and an anti-colonial stance is still compatible with a recognition of the Merina monarchy's oppression of other groups. In a 19-point refresher course on Malagasy history, another commenter emphasizes that laying all the blame for ethnic tensions at the feet of colonizers may tend in the direction of exonerating the Merina, who by 1827 had claimed most of the island through violent conquest and the enslavement of many of those they conquered. While elites of other ethnic groups also enslaved other Malagasy people, the practice was most widespread and noxious among the Merina (Larson 2000). The Merina also profited from the external slave trade, capturing and selling Malagasy people to the British and French in addition to importing enslaved people from mainland Africa (Ade Ajayi 1998: 174) until 1896, shortly after the French colonized Madagascar. These internal and external slave trades in Madagascar were built on and further contributed to racial hierarchies (inspired no doubt by European ones) that assumed the Merina to be lighter-skinned, of Asian descent, and thus superior to the darker-skinned people of the coasts who were presumed to be of primarily East African descent. Colorism and anti-African racism are

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[66] "Ce que l'on appelle aujourd'hui *foko*, ou *karaza*, termes renvoyant à l'organisation sociale et traduits de façon abusive par ethnies ce sont les descendants des peuples des différentes entités politiques qui formèrent autrefois l'organisation politique du pays dans les différentes parties de son territoire" (Ramamonjisoa 2002: 5).

not limited to the Merina, however. Many ethnic groups had/have their own racial hierarchies, such that the distinction fotsy/mainty (white/Black) is not equivalent to the Merina/côtier binary nor to the Merina caste distinctions between andriana (noble), hova (bourgeois), and andevo (enslaved people).[67]

Contemporary racial/ethnic relations in Madagascar are thus the product of a long and complex history of internal oppression by the Merina Kingdom, internal and external slavery, and the strategic rigidification of the resulting tensions by European missionaries and colonizers—all of which is hinted at but also obscured by the common binary of center/Highlands/capital vs. coast/provinces. This binary is a part of popular discourse, whether the topic is music, political economy, education, or—as we will see in this chapter—language. It is also inscribed in the geography of Madagascar, where the Highlands are topographically distinct from the Coast. Racial and caste divisions, too, are inscribed in the spatial organization and geography of Tana itself, where—as geographer Catherine Fournet-Guérin (2008: 5) has shown—the "ville haute" ("high city"), where the Rova or Queen's Palace is located, still remains the domain of the noble *andriana* class while the "ville basse" ("low city"), the floodplains, are primarily occupied by the *andevo* class (those whose ancestors were enslaved). These geographic divisions are also in accordance with Malagasy spatial cosmology, whereby the *andevo* occupy the South, a negative direction, while the *hova* (bourgeoisie) are to the West and the *andriana* lay claim to the auspicious North and Northeast (*idem*). While Fournet-Guérin also points out that racial, ethnic, and caste diversity can now be found within any neighborhood in Tana, such that these divisions are no longer clear-cut, the stereotypes associated with the "bas quartiers" ("low neighborhoods," i.e. slums or poor neighborhoods) persist—as we saw with the Havatsa-UPEM members' negative perceptions of slam as originating in these neighborhoods.

While the full history of ethnic relations in Madagascar is too vast to detail here, and has already been amply discussed elsewhere (Larson 2000, Razafindralambo 2005, Graeber 2007), this chapter examines how regional and ethnic divides are lived, reproduced, and re-examined in the context of Madagaslam's attempts to create a national community around slam poetry. I argue that slam's emphasis on language and the body brings interethnic politics to the fore, especially during the National Slam, which is held annually in the capital. Through an analysis of debates surrounding regional affiliation, discrimination, and plurilingualism during the Natonal Slam, I show how slam poets "manage" their freedom of expression across ethnic, regional, and linguistic divides. In so doing, they push us to ask: who has the authority and freedom to speak about history and identity? Whose history and identity?

Linguistic phenomenology: language as oriented and orienting

In this chapter I advance a theoretical framework of linguistic phenomenology to attend to how bodies become oriented by how they engage with language. For this I draw on Merleau-Ponty and on Sara Ahmed's phenomenological investigations in

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[67] As discussed in Jackson 2013 and Razafindralambo 2005, many of these terms—particularly *andevo*—are still taboo or socially risky in "polite" discourse, even if they are used amongst youth.

Queer Phenomenology, where she examines "how bodies become orientated by how they take up time and space" (2006: 5). Extending that model to include language, I ask how we might think of communicative practices both as a means of orienting ourselves in time and space, and as something we orient ourselves towards or away from. To take the example I introduced at the beginning of this chapter, Dadilahy's use of "Salama tompoko" in his opening statement situates us: it interpellates us as an audience, fixing our attention on the speaker, and locates us in a particular place—a place where one might say "Salama tompoko" rather than "Salama iaby" or "Hello everyone" or "Bonjour à tous." We may also orient ourselves in a particular way vis-à-vis this greeting: perhaps we feel welcomed by it, or suspicious of it, or ignored by it (if, for example, we don't speak Malagasy). While this phenomenological emphasis on orientation may seem to be on a small-scale, individual level, I will argue that it mediates *between* scales: that of the individual, the interaction between participants in the communicative event, the institutional setting in which it takes place, and—central to our concerns here—the scale of the nation-state.

In one sense, the notion of language as oriented and orienting is closely related to the metapragmatic function of language (Silverstein 1976, Lucy 1993), and of metalinguistics more generally: these concepts have established that language may be used not only to do or say something, but also to comment on itself and the ways that language is used. The notion of orientation, however, does two things that metalinguistics does not: first, it allows us to consider language use as a physical act, one that involves entire bodies rather than just, classically, the talking heads of Saussure's linguistic model. We can then take seriously how language is imbricated with gestures, postures, and movements, how it can impact the body and produce tears or shivers, the crimson flush of embarrassment or its related shade of fury, and how these embodied responses may "comment" on language use in a similar way as metalinguistic comments. This mode of questioning also leads us to take seriously the affective dimensions of language—for example, the ways that "tompoko," or the use of the Merina dialect more generally, might *strike* someone a particular way, and not just metaphorically.

Secondly, the notion of orientation allows us to consider listening and reception as central to communicative practice. The listener has long played a side part to the starring role of the speaker in the study of language, despite notable exceptions: Erving Goffman, for example, accounted for various participation roles and frameworks in communicative practice that involve, among other things, the orientation of bodies in space—take the "bystander" who politely orients her body away from speakers who are not addressing her in order to give the appearance that she is not listening (Goffman 1979 [1981]: 132). While there has been a wealth of research on listening in anthropological studies of media and music (Schwarz 1997, Spitulnik 2002, Becker 2004, Hirschkind 2006, Bessire and Fisher 2012, Feld 2015, Fisher 2015), the listener remains an elusive figure in linguistic research—perhaps because it seems more intuitive to pay attention to the person ostensibly producing speech rather than the person ostensibly receiving it. This has remained true despite the problematization of this binary of production-reception, and the retheorization of the coproduction of

communicative practices. In this sense, Xochitl Marsilli-Vargas' delineation of "listening genres" (2014, 2015) productively shows how "types of listening differentially tune or guide the ear to attend to some aspects of an utterance—or sound—while not attending to others. Genres create context and frameworks of relevance that shape the listener's orientation at the moment of reception" (Marsilli-Vargas 2014: 44).

Of course, the study of listening presents difficulties: one cannot gain access to the mind of the listener. Yet attending to orientation enables us to consider both how various communicative practices physically orient co-participants/listeners *in* time and space and *vis-à-vis* certain objects, as well as how co-participants/listeners might express an embodied orientation *vis-à-vis* a particular speech act—whether by silently turning away, applauding, or verbally commenting either during or afterwards.

Drawing on the intertwining of phenomenology and practice theory that I set out in the previous chapter, I consider the phenomenological orientation/orientating of language as an element of habitus: just as we are trained to sit and stand in particular ways, so too are we trained to listen and speak in particular ways. In my examination of "plurilingualism" later in this chapter, I will show how the complexities of language politics in Madagascar are bound up in divergent linguistic habitus and orientations to certain linguistic practices. Where some people have been trained in code-switching between French and Malagasy, for example, or have been sufficiently trained in both languages that code-switching comes to feel natural, others maybe perceive the insertion of French in a Malagasy sentence as alienating, disempowering, or indicative of the speaker's insufficient mastery of the Malagasy language.

In the following section I examine the discourse surrounding "plurilingualism" that has become central in the fields of education and politics in Madagascar. I then return to Dadilahy's opening remarks at the National Slam, and in particular to his claims about the "place" of poetry and language in the capital. Juxtaposing his remarks with the poems and off-stage comments of poets who travel to Tana from elsewhere and experience various forms of discrimination in the capital, I show how this conflict, between Madagaslam's official "federation" of poetry and the rifts exposed in the National Slam, illuminates the stakes of discourses on national unity.

2. A plurilingual and intercultural nation

The question of ethnic and regional affiliation in Madagascar cannot be divorced from national politics, or from language and dialect. The first written records of Malagasy were in Arabic script, now called *sorabe*, dating from the 1400s among the Antemoro in Southern Madagascar. Writing was an esoteric, highly guarded skill available only to diviners and healers and, later, to Merina royalty who used it for administrative purposes (Jackson 2013: 22-23). Malagasy literacy did not expand outside these restricted spheres until the Anglican/Protestant London Missionary Society established a school in Fianarantsoa, a city in the Highlands south of the capital. These missionaries quickly began learning Malagasy so that they could translate the Bible, which became the first book printed for public use in Madagascar. The missionaries' focus on printing and

schooling as a means of evangelization made a lasting impact on literacy: they wrote Malagasy in the Roman script that is still used today, and established a nationwide program of education that later served as a model for French colonizers (Ranaivo 2011). The British were eager to forge an alliance with the Merina Kingdom, which in turn was eager to further its control over the rest of the island. As Velomihanta Ranaivo's (2011) history and analysis of language politics shows, the British support of the Merina Kingdom in developing formal education was structured to train the children of elites in the Highlands. She writes that

> the emergence of Malagasy as a codified language based on the variety used in the Highlands fits into this logic of subtle domination. It establishes the development of the monarchy via church, school, and press—the favored channels of communication and the diffusion of ideas. This domination is systematically worked from the inside using the existing machinery, which had been progressively transformed within a kingdom in full expansion since 1787, long before missionary incursion. (Ranaivo 2011: 72, my translation)[68]

In 1835, the Merina Kingdom's reigning monarch, Queen Ranavalona I, began a violent campaign of repressing Malagasy Christians, prompting most missionaries to leave the island and bringing an end to the U.K.-Madagascar alliance forged by her predecessor and husband, King Radama I, and to the evangelization of the country. It also likely enabled the French colonization of Madagascar in 1894: with the British gone, France saw an opportunity to invade. They struck a deal with the British in 1890, in which they ceded Zanzibar in exchange for Madagascar. From a less-than-equal partnership with a foreign power, in which Britain had the military and economic advantage over Madagascar yet recognized the sovereignty of the Malagasy Kingdom, the nation was thrust into more than 70 years of forced labor, extreme poverty and famine, massacres, violent repression, racialized debasement, and cultural and linguistic subjugation.

To speak of the linguistic context of Madagascar today, we must remember that "Malagasy," while technically one single language, is in practice a catch-all term for a wide variety of dialects. One study found that Bara children in the South do not understand the Merina dialect (Bouwer in Larson 2009: 34), yet Larson nevertheless concludes that dialectal differences are "weak" and "never a hindrance to mutual comprehension" (*idem*). Larson does not provide evidence for this claim, nor does he expound on what constitutes "comprehension," a concept I address in Chapter 3. From my fieldwork, although I did not conduct a rigorous evaluation of comprehension between dialects, the notion of mutual unintelligibility and even antagonism between

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[68] "l'émergence du malgache comme langue codifiée à partir de la variété en usage sur les Hautes-Terres s'intègre dans cette logique de subtile domination. Elle assoit le développement de la monarchie grâce aux supports privilégiés de la communication et de la diffusion des idées que sont l'église, l'école et la presse. Domination systématiquement travaillée de l'intérieur et qui s'appuie sur les rouages existants, progressivement transformés au sein d'un royaume en pleine extension depuis 1787, bien avant la pénétration missionaire" (Ranaivo 2011: 72).

dialects came up frequently and in a number of contexts. Many Merina people in Antananarivo told me that they could not understand "Coastal" dialects at all, or Southern dialects at all; people in the South told me it was easier to speak French with people in the North because their Malagasy dialects were too different. There is an area on the Northwest coast where, I was told, it is *fady* (taboo) to speak Merina; Merina people who visit are instructed not to speak while traveling by boat, lest the boat capsize. Spirit mediums in this region are often possessed by Sakalava royalty (the kingdom in place when the Merina attacked), and it is often *fady* for Merina people to witness this spirit possession or to visit Sakalava tombs (Sharp 1993: 77).

This is the linguistic history that undergirds the centralization of power in the capital and the Highlands more broadly. The Merina dialect is rarely referred to as a dialect (*tenim-paritra*, regional speech), just as the Merina region is rarely referred to as a region or province—it is the center, the norm against which everything else compared. Thus "standard/official Malagasy" (*malagasy ofisialy*), as taught in schools across the country and as used in official government business, is so closely based on Merina that the two are nearly synonymous. As Larson (2009) and Ranaivo (2011) have convincingly shown, the standardization of Malagasy has been a centuries-long (and ongoing) process that has involved foreign powers from the beginning, and that has always been closely tied to religion, education, and politics. Although religious affiliation and practices are outside the scope of this work, they are nonetheless key features of this landscape. Here, however, I focus on the ways in which the decision to speak publicly is underpinned by political and social considerations, where no language or dialect is neutral.

This picture of the intertwining of language, power, education, and racial/ethnic classifications is incomplete without also taking religion into account. The French, who were predominantly Catholic (although there were some French Protestant missionaries as well), expended most of their energy on charitable work with the poor. The British relied on the opposite tactic, training the children of royalty and the elite class in Malagasy, English, and administration. Today, it is still the case that most elite families attend Protestant churches while middle and lower-income families are more likely to be Catholic. Church affiliation has long been, and continues to be, a primary source of power and political organizing. Former president Marc Ravalomanana, for example, was elected Vice-President of the FJKM ("Fiangonan'i Jesoa Kristy eto Madagasikara," "The Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar"), the major Protestant denomination of which current president Hery Rajaonarimampianina is also a member. Ravalomanana was deposed in a coup in 2009 by Andry Rajoelina, a Catholic with significant ties to France.

From the above history, it might seem that French and English are the only relevant languages in Madagascar other than, of course, Malagasy. This has been true in debates over the official national language(s) and of the language(s) of instruction in public schools (Randriamarotsimba 2012), which frequently center on the low rates of French fluency despite its status as an official language. These discussions of Madagascar's "plurilingual" yet hardly bilingual landscape, while important, often neglect to acknowledge the numerous Chinese and South Asian languages present across the island. Chinese and South Asian traders have lived in and traded with Madagascar for

centuries, and although many families who have been there for generations have maintained social groups distinct from ethnic Malagasy people, there has also been significant cultural mixing in the form of interracial marriages and sexual relationships. Many of these families speak proficient if not fully fluent Malagasy in addition to French, and sometimes English. Generally of a higher economic status than the average Malagasy person, Chinese and South Asian groups are frequently disparaged by ethnic Malagasy through stereotypes of greed, self-interest, and deceit.[69] Many of the major corporations in Madagascar are owned by South Asian families, many of whom also have powerful economic and political ties to France; it is commonly thought that Rajoelina's 2009 coup was backed by wealthy South Asian families who feared that their economic ties to France would be (or had already been) damaged by Ravalomanana's pro-Anglophone stance.

The period of colonization entailed the restriction and outright banning of Malagasy in the public sphere, whether written or spoken (Jackson 2013: 40), and after colonization, during the First Republic of President Philibert Tsiranana, French continued to dominate as the language of power as well as the language of instruction, where the school system and curricula were modeled on the French. A largely student-led uprising in 1972, focused partially on the devastating economic impacts of Tsiranana's oligarchical regime, was also a reaction against the dominance of French in education. It led to Tsiranana's resignation, which was followed by a military government and then, in 1975, by a referendum that made the socialist Didier Ratsiraka president.[70] Ratsiraka's regime is well-known for its institution of a policy of *Fanagasiana* or "Malagasization," a response to the student movement's concerns, which made official Malagasy—*malagasy ofisialy*, based predominantly on the Merina dialect—the language of instruction in public schools nationwide. Ratsiraka also charged the Malagasy Academy with creating and promoting Malagasy translations for French loan words, including those that had become part of everyday language for monolingual Malagasy speakers. What was intended as a project of national unification around the Malagasy language, however, largely backfired: because *Fanagasiana* was mostly based on *ofisialy*, which itself is nearly synonymous with Merina, people in other regions saw the project as yet another attempt at Merina domination (despite the fact that Ratsiraka himself was from the East coast, near Toamasina).

After the fall of Ratsiraka's socialist regime in the early 1990s, President Albert Zafy tried to repair the ties with France that Ratsiraka had largely severed, which involved the "Gallicization" of administration and education (Randriamarotsimba 2012: 42) as a direct response to the failed "Malagasization." This linguistic policy remained in

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[69] For example, the extremely broad term for people of South Asian and/or Middle Eastern descent, *karana* (ostensibly based on "Koran"), also means sly or cunning.

[70] Jackson (2013: 51) provides further details on the events following Tsiranana's resignation, including the assassination of interim President Richard Ratsimandrava six days after his inauguration. Jackson also notes that the referendum on Ratsiraka "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?"

place even after Ratsiraka's brief return to power from 1997 to 2002, but shifted abruptly with the presidency of Marc Ravalomanana. Under Ravalomanana (2002-2009), English joined French and Malagasy as the official national languages of Madagascar, despite the fact that the number of fluent English speakers in Madagascar was infinitesimal (and remains so, though this is changing). This decision was clearly a political ploy to forge relationships with Anglophone powers, primarily South Africa and the U.S., but after Ravalomanana's deposition by Rajoelina, Madagascar saw a return, once again, to the perennial bilingual Malagasy-French policy.

Everyday decisions about what language or dialect to use, in which contexts, is thus imbricated in a long history of national language politics. Patrick Eisenlohr (2007) has shown how vital questions of language and linguistic difference can be in fashioning national belonging and ideals of national unity on the nearby island of Mauritius. He proposes that, "instead of identifying the creation of a national public with the standardization of a vernacular language," as Benedict Anderson (1983) does, and as Ratsiraka attempted to do in Madagascar, he examines instead how "linguistic ideologies affect and condition the global spread of the nation form as they shape the decontextualization and recontextualization of nation discourse in new settings" (Eisenlohr 2007: 970). Similarly, in Madagascar, understandings of "the nation" and national belonging are refracted through language ideologies that are never solely "national" but always linked in complex ways to the colonial past and to *andafy*, abroad. Discourses of national belonging confront ethnic divisions that are also linguistic ones, and where the issue of understanding is far from straightforward.

Increasingly, these questions are being framed in Madagascar as issues of "plurilingualism," a term that is itself from *andafy* (abroad), in which "plurilingualism" and "interculturality" are understood as keys to national unity. In recent years, Madagascar's linguistic landscape has come to be aspirationally characterized by many educators and politicians as "plurilingual," a term that, along with its counterpart "intercultural," is framed as more inclusive than "multilingual" and "multicultural."

Plurilingualism as a term and concept originated in European Union debates over linguistic diversity and democracy. A 2014 Council of Europe webpage on the topic[71] contrasts plurilingualism with multilingualism, where the latter is characterized as "divisive, reinforcing separatism and blocking the integration of immigrants and encouraging ghetto formation." Multilingualism, the linguistic counterpart to multiculturalism, is portrayed in this document as an outdated static "purism" that can quickly devolve into suspicion of outsiders. It is an empty diversity of distinct cultural-linguistic bubbles that are never in dialogue with each other even if they coexist in the same space. This characterization largely fits with Sara Ahmed's discussion of discourses of multiculturalism in Australia, where she argues that "the role of difference in allowing or even establishing a national imaginary presupposes the proximity of those who are already recognisable as strangers as well as the permanence of their presence: living together is here simply a matter of being aware of cultural diversity" (Ahmed 2000: 95).

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[71] Conseil de l'Europe, "Éducation et Langues, Politique linguistique," pub. 2014 accessed 5/8/2017, www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Division_FR.asp

The Council of Europe's critique of multilingualism might seem to agree with Ahmed's in the sense that the term has been politically operationalized to suggest that the mere presence of difference constitutes the "multicultural" nation. But Ahmed's point is more nuanced: the problem is not solely in the static quality of this landscape—the fact that the mere coexistence of differences is taken as a positive sign of "multiculturalism"—but rather in the positing of a certain kind of difference ("those who are already recognisable as strangers") as a redemptive source of unity for the multicultural nation that allows these strangers to become proximal. Here, the multicultural imaginary is premised on a homogenous "we" who can coexist with these "strangers," who are already familiar to "us" as being those who embody difference.

Plurilingualism, and its cousin "interculturality," do not quite get us out of this bind. The Council of Europe lauds plurilingualism as "dynamic, since the components from the experience of different languages and cultures interpenetrate and interact, forming something new, enriched and in continual development." This language policy makes clear the political and social stakes of such a stance on language and education—this is never "just" about language, but more importantly about the political possibilities of various stances towards language. Within a liberal democratic model based on the rights of citizenship, the policy aims to "strengthen linguistic diversity and language rights, deepen mutual understanding, consolidate democratic citizenship and sustain social cohesion." This stance on language, then, is presumed to have wide-ranging impacts on social-political climate and community. In particular, it is linked to a model of national community in which citizenship confers legal rights, which include citizens' rights to "develop a degree of communicative ability in a number of languages over their lifetime in accordance with their needs." In the context of the European Union, this framing takes on particular significance around two highly politicized issues: the rights of both indigenous European communities *and* of immigrant groups to Europe to maintain and promote their "cultural heritage," which includes language.

In this framing, then, plurilingualism represents development and a future of dynamic interaction between languages and cultures, which responds to the issue of mere tolerance or coexistence (the "divisiveness" of multilingualism and multiculturalism) but does not address what is at stake in presuming difference to be the generative motor of "democratic citizenship." Although this discussion centers on strengthening relations *between* nation-states within the European Union, rather than on national unity as in the Australian discourse on multiculturalism that Ahmed examines, there is nonetheless a similar presumption that finding the "right" way of managing difference is at the heart of contemporary intra- and inter-national politics. This requires the ability to distinguish between manageable and unmanageable difference—an issue we will revisit in Chapter Four.

Plurilingualism has become a central concern in academic circles in Madagascar to such an extent that it is offered as a concentration in the Master's program at the French Department of the University of Antananarivo. In 2015 a professor in the department invited me to teach an intensive course in this program, on "Plurilingualism, interculturality, and identity construction." The advanced Master's students used the course as an opportunity to continue their thesis projects, while first-year Master's

students developed novel mini-research projects around the theme of the course. Most of the students were in the French department, although some were from History and Sociology. Out of 13 projects, the majority looked at some form of Malagasy/French bilingualism—from perceptions of bilingualism among mixed French/Malagasy couples with children, to code-switching between Malagasy and French in downtown open-air markets. Only a handful of projects examined other languages or variations of Malagasy, and only one project concerned non-Merina dialects of Malagasy.

For the most part, my students approached plurilingualism as a positive aspect of contemporary urban life, and the students in the French department in particular had positive attitudes towards bilingualism. One day, a student expressed negative views of code-switching between Malagasy and French, taking the practice as evidence of non-fluency in Malagasy. Most of the others—particularly those in the French department—strongly disagreed. The student later changed his mind after conducting research on code-switching and finding that it did not correlate with insufficient Malagasy language abilities.

These classroom discussions, even at their most heated, had nothing of the divisive atmosphere and entrenched ideological and political stakes I witnessed during a conference on "L'éducation bi/plurilingue" at the French Institute in 2015. Already in the title there was a hesitation—is it bilingualism or plurilingualism? Which is to say, is it just about Malagasy and French, or is English in there too? What about Chinese and South Asian languages that are often left out of discussions of language in Madagascar, despite being spoken by large diasporic communities? The conference brought together prominent scholars and educators from across Madagascar, and one panel in particular illuminated the extent to which these conversations about language have been and continue to be extremely contentious.

This panel had two presentations by two professors, one who spoke about the use of French and Malagasy in colonial-era literature, and the other who spoke about the difficulties currently faced by Malagasy public school students who don't speak French. The latter speaker cited a Madagascar-based French researcher, Guy Belloncle, who describes in his book "Seven Priorities for Developing Madagascar" (Sept priorités pour développer Madagascar," 2004) the case of his young Malagasy nephew, Solofo, who does not speak French and experiences extreme distress when he attempts to engage in class and is reprimanded by his teacher for speaking Malagasy in the classroom. In 2001, Solofo is a third grader in public school who has gone from all-Malagasy instruction in 2nd grade, with 4 hours of French per week, to all-French instruction in 3rd grade, with 4 hours of Malagasy per week, with no transition whatsoever between the two. The presenter spoke movingly of Solofo's affective experience, and what happens when the "feeling of security, belonging, and self-esteem" ("sentiment de sécurité, d'appartenance, et d'amour-propre") students derive from their native language is threatened by the forced use of French before they have acquired the skills to feel comfortable in that language. She added that this is not only an issue of French proficiency but of educational attainment more broadly: when the majority of subjects are taught in a language most public school students are not

proficient in, these students are "doomed to academic failure, repeating grades, and dropping out" ("voués à l'échec scolaire, au redoublement, et à l'abandon scolaire").

The two presentations were followed by a Q&A. Three audience members, all professors, questioned whether this is even a discussion we should still be having—aren't these issues part of the past, and shouldn't we be moving forward? They were especially consternated about two terms the speakers had used: linguistic imperialism and language conflict, respectively. One professor noted that her own research on young musicians has shown that they codeswitch easily, and wondered whether perceptions of conflict are not simply adult preoccupations that the younger generation is indifferent to. Another professor took issue with the first speaker's portrayal of codeswitching, or *variaminanana*,[72] as an indication of incomplete knowledge or fluency in both languages.

The extremes of the debate at this conference appeared to be, on the one hand, a desire among some in the audience to let go of the political and emotional resonances, the historical baggage, of various languages and dialects in order to embrace a contemporary linguistic environment characterized by codeswitching and overlapping linguistic spheres. This attitude bears a striking resemblance to the European Council document. On the other hand, the two aforementioned presenters wanted to acknowledge language hierarchies and inequalities, the lasting impacts of various forms of linguistic imperialism, and the ways that linguistic resources are embedded in networks of power. But these two professors are fluent in French—one is a professor of French and the other has published novels in French—and are thus far from antagonistic towards the use of French in Madagascar. The extreme position in this debate would be an all-Malagasy, no-French policy or orientation, which is politically unthinkable in the contemporary moment.

This example illuminates the impasse that a concept like plurilingualism obscures. In the current linguistic/political climate of Madagascar, one cannot speak of the difficult emotional resonances that French or English may have on various speakers, or the diverse linguistic habitus and orientations that exist vis-à-vis these languages, without being accused of being stuck in the past and blind to the importance of these languages for the nation's development. Conversely, one cannot speak of the vibrancy of the linguistic context of Madagascar—the powerful and surprising ways in which people of all ages and backgrounds make use of various linguistic resources, the malleability and diversity of linguistic habitus—without being labeled "the children of Galliéni," the infamous colonial administrator responsible for abolishing the Merina monarchy. The unresolved and often unasked questions that hang in the balance are whether, how, and to what extent one must grapple with the past in order to move forward. To some, "plurilingualism" masks the sharp discrepancies between the affective, practical, historical nuances of each language and dialect—the different orientations we have towards them, the ways that some feel familiar and others fancy,

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[72] Literally "rice and greens," a term that can sometimes be slightly pejorative—especially compared with something like the Harisoa's portrayal, in Chapter One, of Malagasy and French as "rice and water"—in the latter case, the two are seen to thrive together. See hooks (1992) and Ahmed (2000: 117-118) for illuminating discussions of food, consumption, and otherness.

some lead to a job and others to losing a job, some dredge up resentment and others honor a venerable past.

The rosy picture of plurilingualism espoused by some at the conference was visually expressed on the cover of the conference program, which depicted falling puzzle pieces, each with a different national flag. The French and Malagasy puzzle pieces were larger than all the others and were featured front and center in the image. They were also the exact same shape. This visual representation of Madagascar's linguistic landscape seems a fitting image for the notion of "plurilingualism," at least as it has been promoted in the E.U. and in Madagascar: each language is a distinct piece of the puzzle, represented by the flag of its nation (in a Herderian fashion—one language, one nation), and all of these pieces interlock perfectly. But as we have seen, there is no single puzzle piece that can capture all the disparate dialects of Malagasy, and the ways that languages interact and the people interact with different languages on the island are, more often than not, instances of partial comprehension (if not utter incomprehension) rather than a "perfect fit." Languages—the general fact of a language, its broad contours, not just its specificities—can be experienced as exclusion, as violence, as meaningless chatter, as ridiculous nonsense. They can be mimicked, parodied, disparaged, forgotten. They can invite on to the stage, or they can present a barrier to stepping up to the mic. They can bore an audience to tears or move them to wild applause. Our orientations to them are learned over time, but just as with any other habitus they are also infinitely adaptable.

3. Difference and the nation: issues at the National Slam

Comprehension

At a slam workshop in Toliara, a city on the Southwestern coast, a group of poets told me they had a recording of oral poetry for me to listen to, but that we had to wait for another poet, Baly, to arrive because the poem was in his dialect (Antandroy), which they couldn't understand. When Baly arrived and they played the first poem, the rest of the poets listened quietly and Baly translated at the end. Then they played the second poem, and everyone chuckled throughout. Confused, I asked whether they had understood the second one but not the first. No, one poet replied, they understood both but the first one wasn't funny.

Comprehension, of course, is far from an either/or matter, and understanding a poem well enough to find it funny is not the same as understanding it well enough to translate it. But I was struck throughout my fieldwork in multiple cities by these kinds of definitive statements of incomprehension. In many cases, these statements were made about "Southern" dialects, and sometimes—as in the case of the recordings in Toliara—specifically about Antandroy. In Tana, people often told me they could not understand other dialects "at all," and even that they could not differentiate between them. As with the political and ethnic binary of "Coastal"/Highlands, disparate non-Tana dialects are often lumped together as "coastal" and/or referred to as *tenim-paritra*, regional dialects, in opposition to *ofisialy*, which is portrayed, particularly in Tana, as national.

For poets at the National Slam who perform in a dialect other than *ofisialy*, the question of comprehension looms large. In my interviews with poets from around the country both prior to and following the National Slam, not all non-Tana poets voiced concern about the impact of incomprehension on their performance at the competition, but they all anticipated that Tana audiences might not understand them. In my interview with Makwa, who had just made the team in Toamasina and had never been to the National Slam, said that people would still understand because of her gestures and the rhythm of the poem; she seemed to be correct, as I discuss in an analysis of her National Slam finals performance at the end of this chapter. This was a version of something I'd heard from Tana poets in reference to poets performing in English: that you could still grasp the feeling of the poem even if you didn't understand the words. This was often belied by audience responses to these performances: embodied orientations that indicated they were bored or did not understand, such as talking amongst themselves, not watching the performance, and/or turning away. If the performer was a Malagasy poet they knew well who happened to be performing in English,[73] some audience members were occasionally very vocal, even performative in their incomprehension, shouting comments such as "Meaning what?" ("Izany hoe?") and "I don't understand anything he's saying but… yes yes!" ("Je pige rien de ce qu'il dit, mais… oui oui!"). This kind of theatrics of incomprehension indexes an orientation of refusal, but I only ever heard these comments in relation to English, never when the speech in question was a non-Merina dialect. This indicates that, while it is socially acceptable to publicly perform incomprehension of English, the same may not be true of Malagasy dialects.

One poet in the Southwest told me that she usually writes in French, but that when she performed at the 2010 National Slam the Tana poets told her they liked seeing her slam in the Vezo dialect of the Southwest. So when she competed again in 2014 she decided to do a poem in Vezo. She went on:

En fait, pour le slam national il faut faire beaucoup attention. Tout d'abord, notre dialecte c'est un peu difficile pour eux de la comprendre, et… mais dans mon… pour mon cas, quand j'étais là-bas [au slam national] l'année dernière, mon texte était… parlait de Tananarive quoi, et là même s'ils ont presque rien compris ils ont aimé… d'avoir entendu "Tananarive" et tout ça et tout ça donc…	So, for the National Slam you have to really be careful. First of all, our dialect is kind of hard for them to understand, and… in my case, when I was there [at the National Slam] last year, my text was… it, like, talked about Antananarivo, and so even if they hardly understood anything, they liked it… hearing "Antananarivo," you know, so…
Mais par contre j'ai pas toujours eu la meilleure note venant des jury. Et c'est pour cela que les slameurs préfèrent	But on the other hand I haven't always had the best scores from the judges. And that's why slam poets prefer to

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[73] There are only a handful of Malagasy poets I know of who perform entire poems (or large sections) in English; the vast majority live in Tana and are fluent in English.

slammer en français plutôt qu'en malgache, surtout ceux qui viennent de la côte.	slam in French instead of Malagasy, especially those who come from the coast.
Et aussi, si les slameurs préfèrent slammer en français, c'est parce que, on slamme à l'Alliance Française quoi et donc faut tout faire en français, sinon on va croire que t'es incapable de parler français ou genre comme ça. Bon c'est difficile de vivre dans la société quoi [laughs].	And also, if slam poets prefer to slam in French it's because we're slamming at, like, the Alliance Française, so you have to do everything in French, otherwise people will think you're incapable of speaking French or something like that. Living in society is, like, really hard [laughs].

For this poet, the decision to perform in Vezo rather than French was prompted by Tana poets, perhaps in an effort to encourage dialectal diversity at the National Slam. She decided to temper this, however—anticipating incomprehension—by writing about Antananarivo, and thus providing the audience with a familiar and recognizable topic. The complexity of linguistic/dialectal choice is evident here, as certain audience members could find reason to object to literally any decision: performing in French may prompt some Tana poets to encourage a more "representative" regional dialect, but *not* performing in French might lead some people to think that you are not fluent, which is negatively viewed in this community or at least in Tana. And yet performing in a non-*ofisialy* dialect may lead to incomprehension and potential discrimination.

The perceived/feared incomprehension of the audience is thus a potential barrier to the festival's explicit mission of "federating" a national community: although there is one "official" national language, it does not encapsulate all the dialects and is overwhelmingly based on the dialect spoken in the capital. Similarly, although there is one "official" national slam organization, it does not encapsulate the views and concerns of all the regional organizations and is overwhelmingly centered on the views and concerns of poets in the capital. The only "non-Tana" poets on the national organization committee, at least when I was part of it in 2015, were poets who are originally from elsewhere but live in Tana.

The question of language, then, cannot be divorced from the issue of regional preferentialism and discrimination. For the poet quoted above, linguistic incomprehension was simply an excuse that obscured a more insidious and strategic discrimination:

C'est pas que les tananariviens ne comprennent pas notre dialecte mais ils veulent juste faire semblant de ne pas comprendre pour ne pas donner des points quoi. Parce que la langue malgache… tout le monde comprend la langue malgache bien qu'il y a les différentes sortes de	It's not that the Tananarivians don't understand our dialect, but they just want to pretend not to understand in order to not give points. Because the Malagasy language… everyone understands the Malagasy language even though there are different kinds of

| dialecte. | dialects. |

Here, she points to the social effects of incomprehension, which persist regardless of whether that incomprehension is "real." There is no way to know how much the audience understands, or how much of what they don't understand is the result of an expectation of incomprehension and a refusal to make an effort. For this poet, the incomprehension is "performed" in the sense of being fake—Antananarivians really do understand but pretend not to. Either way, poets writing in a non-*ofisialy* dialect are considered to be at a disadvantage when they perform in Tana.

Whether the incomprehension of non-Tana dialects is strategic or unconscious or somewhere in between, it can be understood as a particular orientation towards language that is essentially a refusal of engagement. In some cases, a stated incomprehension is belied by one's reaction, as we saw with the poets in Toliara who first professed their inability to understand either poem but then laughed at the "funny" one. In other cases, particularly with English, which does not have such weighty historical baggage, incomprehension can be theatrical and humorous. These orientations of incomprehension, regardless of how they are performed or enacted, reinscribe difference not as a barrier to engagement but rather as an invitation to engage in a particular way, by highlighting the divisions that constitute the contemporary linguistic landscape.

Federation and competition

In Dadilahy's opening remarks at the National Slam, his "plurilingual" code-switching and his reference to "diversity and interculturality" frame his speech within an international discourse of diversity and difference at the same time that he insists on the local scale of this diversity: it is to be found right *here*, in Tana, thanks to the National Slam. But as in Ahmed's discussion of the figure of the stranger (2000), difference is understood to be that which the "stranger" brings with them: it is the non-Tana poets, both Malagasy and foreign, who make the event "intercultural." Further, the plurilingualism of the first few lines turns out to be a mere gesture towards difference: in his choice to make most of the speech in French, Dadilahy reinscribes an orientation towards French as a language that, despite its colonial history, might overcome national divisions of dialect and ethnic difference.

In his assertion that "poetry will fully take its place at the heart of our capital," Dadilahy frames poetry as the central node, the focal point around which the poets, and by extension the rest of the capital, are united. His reference to "our capital" suggests a vision of concentric circles radiating across the island from this "heart" that is poetry, located at the "center" of the entire nation. Slam poetry is the overarching, large-scale force that "federates" and assembles these poets from various small-scale locations, and this spirit of "federation" is part of a discourse of community that circulates across the island, particularly among workshop/event leaders, emcees, and organizers.

Throughout my fieldwork I frequently heard "fédérer" and "fédérateur" ("to federate" and "federating") used in reference to slam, and it seems likely that this idiom

of federation has its origins in the first slam workshops held in Madagascar: those who use the term today are members of the Madagaslam organizing committee and/or original attendees of Pilote le Hot's workshops. In Dadilahy's speech, he expresses both the centripetal or unifying force of slam—its ability to federate—and the heterogeneity or dialogism of the resulting federation, its "diversity and interculturality." These buzzwords are part of the same liberal discourse as the terms he cites at the end of the speech: "Slam is an artistic movement that conveys values such as open-mindedness, sharing, freedom of expression, and overcoming social and cultural barriers." This last line can be found on the French-language Wikipedia page on slam as well as a multitude of other websites and blogs giving a definition of slam. This is, then, a founding principle of the movement such that it has become—similar to the "mantra conditions" of the slam format—part of a cannon of sorts, for emcees and event organizers.

The desire to "overcome social and cultural barriers," a founding impulse of slam, takes on a sharp edge in the context of Dadilahy's speech at the National Slam, when we consider that many in the audience were already anticipating social and cultural (and linguistic) barriers in between them and the championship trophy. In nearly every city I visited outside of Tana, at least one poet expressed to me some degree of annoyance, apprehension, or uncertainty about how their performance would be received in the capital if/when they performed at the National Slam. Although this concern often grew out of a personal puzzle about what and how to perform in Tana, it was always discussed as a broader issue as well, of the way that the National Slam is organized and how it is viewed by poets from different regions. Multiple poets from multiple cities complained to me about the ways they thought Tana poets—including the National Slam organizers—strategized to put other cities at a disadvantage.

Regardless of whether the charge is that Tana poets do this out of a pure desire to win, or that this desire is compounded or even propelled by a prior sense of ethnic/regional superiority, the social effects are the same. The issue of racism, colorism, and/or ethnic discrimination must be considered given that persistent stereotyping and discrimination of people from other regions is normalized in Tana. Charges of racism are rarely explicit, although one poet did say "I wouldn't say that people from Tana are racist, but…" ("je dirais pas que les gens de Tana sont racistes, mais…") as a preamble to a story about a poet from the South who received shockingly low scores at one National Slam because he performed in a dialect that the judges protested they could not understand. This story was later corroborated by that poet himself and by others who were present at that National Slam.

What many non-Tana poets did express in great detail were the great lengths to which they thought Tana poets would go to improve their odds of winning: from having two or even three teams while other cities could only have one (this policy was later changed), to inventing "rules" on the spot that had not been announced in advance in order to dock points from other teams. One poet from Fianarantsoa expressed this as a spirit of competitiveness that goes against what he saw as the "true" spirit of the

National Slam, of connecting or "federating" people and "getting messages across" ("faire passer des messages").[74]

What emerges from these complaints and concerns is that organizing and hosting the National Slam has the effect of improving Tana's likelihood of winning. It does not ensure a win by any means—poets from Toamasina and Mahajanga have won the individual prize in various years, and the team prize has been awarded to Fianarantsoa, Mahajanga, and Moramanga[75] in addition to Tana. But the advantages that make Tana the "obvious" choice to host the festival in the first place are further strengthened with every new competition.

A failed attempt to hold the National Slam in Mahajanga in 2015 provides a revealing glimpse into the behind-the-scenes organization of the festival, and into these charges of favoritism and discrimination. One non-Tana poet speculated that the only reason Madagaslam even considered holding the festival elsewhere was because Dadilahy, the President of the organization at the time, is not from Tana. In January 2015 Madagaslam sent an official letter via Facebook to the various slam organizations around the country, inviting them to apply to host the festival. For some organizations, one glance at the proposed budget was enough to discourage them: a sponsoring document posted on the National Slam organizing committee's private Facebook group in March 2015 (later sent to regional slam organizations) lists the budget as nearly 40,000,000 Ariary—almost $12,500—the entirety of which would need to come from funding partners/sponsors given that admission to all festival events is free. Ultimately, although Mahajanga offered to host and had already begun fundraising, they had to pull out in June due to fundraising/sponsorship leads falling through.

At the heart of this issue is the centralization of resources in the capital, a political and economic problem that extends far beyond the slam community. Most roads—at least the passable ones—lead more or less straight to Tana, so the majority of the competing teams would have to travel through Tana to get to another city. Given Tana's location near the center of the island, it is an ostensibly fair meeting point for poets from around the country. There is also the access to material resources via social networks, primarily the IFM: as the largest French cultural center on the island, it has the largest budget. The IFM has partnered with Madagaslam every year to cover the transportation costs for all non-Tana poets to travel to Tana and back. But this is not a purely benevolent offer: the IFM refuses to pay these costs if the festival is not held at the IFM. The IFM benefits from the prestige and attention resulting from the festival, particularly the final competition, which is the only event they regularly host that consistently fills the auditorium to capacity.

The Toamasina poets decided not to even attempt to host the 2015 festival because, as one put it, "Event organization is about habit and knowledge/skills and

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[74] This perceived tension between competing for fun or for the love of poetry versus competing to win is not unique to Madagascar or to slam poetry. For a discussion of similar issues in the U.S. National Slam, see Johnson 2017.

[75] The Moramanga team, however, often has one or two poets from Tana who make the two or three-hour bus trip simply to compete in the regional bout, knowing that they can easily win because Moramanga doesn't have much of a slam scene.

relations and especially savoir-faire" ("l'organisation d'un évènement relève déjà d'une habitude et des connaissances et des relations et surtout du savoir-faire"). Without the infrastructural clout of the IFM and the Alliance Française of Tana, he noted, it is much more difficult to find additional sponsors—a group of slam poets going around asking for money at businesses and organizations in Toamasina would not have been successful. He said that if Madagaslam is serious about having the festival elsewhere, they need to provide the "savoir-faire" and explain how they go about fundraising. It is thus not merely a question of material/financial resources, but also about informational resources: how to put together a press kit, how to locate and negotiate with sponsors, etc. These are skills that Madagaslam organizers have learned over the years and passed on to younger Tana poets—for them it is a habit, an *habitude*, but one that poets from other cities do not have the opportunity to witness and learn from. They are processes that begin an entire year before the festival, and that continue throughout the festival but generally out of sight of other participants.

Ultimately the National Slam was again held in Tana in 2015, and there were at least a few people in the audience who did not believe this was purely by accident. The official line on diversity and overcoming social barriers coexists with the bitterness of some non-Tana poets, over the organization of the festival and the inequalities and discrimination that impact how these poets are perceived. For some, their sense of the unfairness of the judging and scoring leads them to give up on trying to win—they say they just go to have fun, to party, and don't take it seriously. But the unspoken follow-up is that they would take it seriously if they thought they had a fair shot—and many of them did think so, or still do, up until they realized how the odds were stacked against them. This was echoed by a non-Tana poet who told me her team had been warned by an older poet from their city: "don't think you'll take the prize, because it's certain that it will always be Tana that will take it" ("ne pensez pas remporter le prix parce que c'est sûr que ce sera toujours Tana qui va le remporter"). The point of attending, for many non-Tana poets, is simply to travel, to have fun, and to meet poets from other cities to learn from and enjoy how they perform. But this return to the "spirit" of slam, away from competition, seems in some cases to be a forced one, primarily prompted by the frustration of feeling one doesn't have the option of taking it more seriously.

Ultimately, this discrimination and perception of discrimination doesn't merely impact the scores the poets receive. I was surprised to see that whenever I brought up the issue of Tana judges, the conversation inevitably turned to Tana *audiences*. One side of this is that the audience's reactions impact the judge's scores, and that the judges—supposedly picked randomly from the audience—often have similar attitudes as the audience overall. At issue here is the co-production of the performance and the centrality of audience involvement to the success of the performance. Even before a non-Tana poet opens their mouth, the applause that meets the announcement of their name is unlikely to be as raucous as at home. In Tana, no one knows them and no one is familiar with the poem they are about to perform. I often found myself at the National Slam trying to applaud enough to make up for the lack of applause from the rest of the audience. My own applause was often predicated on recognition: on having met these poets previously, knowing them and appreciating them as people and as performers.

Feeble applause can throw off the entire performance for a poet who is used to a warmer reception, making even the most seasoned poet nervous and hesitant from the beginning. This may then be compounded if the audience does not or pretends not to understand the poem, and/or if the jokes and references are not understood or acknowledged by the audience. In this way, an excellent poem in Toamasina may indeed become a poor poem in Tana, because of the centrality of the audience in the success of the performance. This is not to blame non-Tana poets for the low scores they might receive, but to acknowledge how unfamiliarity and incomprehension can build on each other and ultimately destabilize the performance.

While nobody I spoke with raised this issue, familiarity with a particular space—not solely the audience—can significantly impact a poet's performance. Tana poets have the additional advantage of having already performed numerous times at most if not all of the event spaces used in the National Slam. For them, these are comfortable, familiar spaces where they know the layout—indeed, their corporeal schema and habitus, as they relate to slam, have often been shaped primarily in these spaces.

A complicating factor in this argument of the "Tana advantage," however, is the popularity of Mahajanga poets, who won the individual competition two years in a row and the team competition in 2016. In both years I attended the festival, 2014 and 2015, a Mahajanga poet won the individual competition and there was a sizeable section of the audience rooting them on. It was unclear where they were from and/or where they lived, but this kind of friend/fan support is unusual for non-Tana poets and may well have been a factor in the scores those poets obtained. In this way, regions that are represented among the audience as well as the performers may have a greater chance of winning.

But Mahajanga's success is emblematic of a larger issue: just because regions outside of Tana are commonly conflated under the banner of "coastal" does not mean that there aren't significant differences and hierarchies between these various regions. Mahajanga and Toamasina have been the most successful cities at the National Slam besides Tana; both are relatively wealthy port cities known for their massively popular music and dance styles, and the Mahajanga accent and slang has become fashionable among youth in the capital.[76] This is in direct contrast to Toliara, in the South, which is one of the poorest major cities and has never won a National Slam. While there may not be a direct correlation between a city's wealth and its success at the National Slam, economic resources matter both in terms of the kinds of support available to poets throughout the year (the Alliance Française in Toamasina, for example, has a very different budget from its counterpart in Toliara), and in terms of the cultural, linguistic, and financial resources individual poets may have—to learn French and be comfortable in a Francophone environment, to "fit in" with a young crowd where fashion and cultural references are always a factor in acceptance, etc.

At stake here are perceptions and orientations towards difference. In Ahmed's (2000) argument against the singularity of the figure of the Other—that constant of the Western philosophical tradition—she advocates instead an understanding of otherness as multiple and differentiated:

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[76] Seth Palmer, personal communication, December 7, 2017

there is no generalizable other that serves to establish the illusion of bodily integrity; rather, the body becomes imagined through being related to, and separated from, particular bodily others. Difference is not simply found in the body, but is established as a relation between bodies: *this suggests that the particular body carries traces of the differences that are registered in the bodies of others*. (Ahmed 2000: 44)

Similarly, it is not that all bodies are marked as equally different from the "norm" of the Merina poet and thus that all forms of ethnic and regional difference from Merina/Tana are perceived the same way. Theories of intersectionality (Crenshaw-Williams 1989, 1991; Collins 2012, 2015) have shown this in the sense that the differences "registered in the bodies of others" are multiple: we do not perceive just a female poet, for example, but a young, dark-skinned, female poet with a Southern dialect. And these identities are part of a relation between bodies, which often involves a process of orienting towards or away from other bodies, in which the identities of the perceiving person are just as much a part of the relation as the identities of the perceived person.

This is what the discussions of discrimination at the National Slam involve: a recognition that Tana poets and the *ofisialy* dialect are perceived as the norm by Tana audiences and judges, and thus that the embodied identities of the audience and judges matter. Dadilahy's framing of the event as one that "federates"—that coheres a large-scale community from disparate small-scale parts—points simultaneously to the stated role of Madagaslam as cohering a national community around slam, and to the fact of fragmentation within that community. It is not competition per se that threatens unity, but the fact that competition is perceived to advantage certain performers over others, precisely because of the perceived embodied relations between audience, judges, and poets. Perhaps similar charges of discrimination would be leveled at any host city, but the centralization of power in the capital is so strong that no other city has been able to host.

We have seen thus far how non-Tana poets respond to the discourse of national unity and interculturality by pointing to the ways in which deviation from the norm (Merina dialect, familiarity with Tana audiences, etc.) can be an impediment to performers from other regions. In the following two sections, we will see how poets address these issues in their poetry at the National Slam, performing history and identity on the Tana stage.

4. Analysis of "A Malagasified Malagasy" ("Un Malgache Malgachisé") by Lonaky

After Dadilahy's speech, the opening ceremony of the 2015 National Slam continued with Barhone, an actor and comedian from Tana, emceeing. We moved outside to the open-air terrace where the "stage" was the center of the terrace, with no microphone. Barhone called up each team so they could present themselves (most chose to perform a short group poem), and then continued to cycle through the teams to perform again—this time, most teams sent just one poet. It started to rain and we

moved back inside, where the "stage" became not the actual raised stage where Dadilahy had given his speech, but just below and in front of it, in a small space between the audience seats.

Towards the end of the event, Barhone called up the Morondava team three times to no response. Finally Lonaky appeared, slowly shuffling towards the "stage" while looking down at his cellphone with a serious expression. He made a joke to Barhone as he passed him—it wasn't picked up by my camera mic, but Lonaky laughed at his own joke and then, in an instant, his body settled into performance mode: his smile gone, legs slightly apart, still gazing down at his phone held with both hands at chest height.

Then he looks up. With his teeth clenched, lips drawn back, and eyes wide, he makes a buzzing "zzzz" sound, then pauses as he breathes, lowers his head again, and begins a hissing "ssss" sound. He looks up at the ceiling, then at the audience as he shifts his weight forward on his right foot, gestures forward with his right hand, palm open, and says "I am…" ("Ze suis…") in a confident voice with rising intonation.

On the next line, "a Malagasy" ("zun malgache"), his right hand moves back to join his left holding the phone, and he nods slightly after he speaks.

He gestures forward again with his right hand, palm open, as he says "Malagasified" ("malgachisé"), with a rhythmic intonation that emphasizes the second syllable, "gache."

Picking up speed and volume, he gestures with his right hand, punctuating his speech: "Of course, I speak Malagasy, but/ the best is/ French" ("Bien sûr, je parle le malgache, mais/ le mieux c'est/ le français"). He decreases in volume and speed to end almost on a whisper at "le français." Someone in the audience chuckles.

He picks up speed and volume again in the next lines, spoken rapidly and confidently as he makes gestures recognizably drawn from hip-hop and rap performance: both arms gesturing out as his neck pushes forward and he shifts his balance, a three-finger tap with his right hand on his left chest, punctuating his speech: "If you want to know/ why I am like this well I will tell you story" ("Si vous voulez savoir/ pourquoi ze suis comme ça/ eh ben je vais vous raconter l'histoire").

Speed and volume decrease significantly on the last line, as a cocky smile breaks across his face and he instructs the audience: "So follow this tournament closely" ("Alors suivez bien/ ce tournoi").

Here is the text on its own:[77]

Je suis un malgache malgachisé.	I am a Malagasified Malagasy.	A
Bien sûr je parle le malgache, mais	Of course I speak Malagasy, but	A
le mieux c'est	the best is	A
le français.	French.	A
Si vous voulez savoir	If you want to know	B
pourquoi je suis comme ça	why I am like this,	C
eh ben je vais vous raconter l'histoire,	well, I'll tell you the story/history,	B

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[77] This is my translation. I have diverged from the text Lonaky sent me, to include line breaks that highlight the rhyme scheme in the original French. I have also annotated the rhyme scheme.

| alors suivez bien ce tournoi. | so follow this tournament closely. | C |

The buzzing and hissing sounds Lonaky makes at the beginning are odd, unexplained. In returning to them on the recording, I realize that they are the first two consonants of the poem: the "z" from "je" ("ze"), and the "s" from "suis." In this way he foregrounds a pronunciation that is replete with significance: the pronunciation of the French "j" (ʒ) as "z" is fairly common among Malagasy speakers, who often pronounce both "j" and "z" in French as "z" since Malagasy does not have a comparable (ʒ) sound. The pronunciation of "j" (ʒ) as "z" when speaking French is thus often equated with an inability to speak proper French, and mocked as such by some Francophone Malagasy people. It should be noted, too, that this pronunciation frequently figures in racist French "imitations" of African speakers. By highlighting this sound as a means of foretelling and thus foregrounding his later pronunciation of "ze," Lonaky seems to offer it more as a significant element of the story than as the butt of a joke.[78] In the next line, he pronounces the "liaison" (the link between the last consonant of "suis" and the first vowel of "un") as dictated by French grammar, thus indicating some knowledge of "proper" diction. In the following pronunciations of "j," he switches between "z" and "ʒ": clearly, it's not that he's incapable of pronouncing "ʒ."

The overall effect produced by Lonaky's pronunciation aligns with the content of the poem: the speaker's abilities and sympathies are complex, at times contradictory, and anything but straightforward. In this way they belie the simplicity of other parts of the poem: the rhyme scheme (AAAA, BCBC), the syntax, the vocabulary, and Lonaky's clear, declamatory delivery of the first line. As he indicates at the end of the poem, suggestively alluding to a future point in the festival when our questions may be answered, there is a "story" or "history" here that requires some explanation.

If we take the content of the poem at face value it is apparently contradictory: the speaker states that he is Malagasified, referring to Ratsiraka's socialist project of Malagasization (*Fanagasiana*) in the 1970s and 80s, which decreed that all public education must be in "official Malagasy" rather than French. Yet in the next line he says French is better. Does this mean the speaker was educated a certain way but now believes differently? In Urban's (1989) terms, is this an "indexical-referential" use of "I" ("je"), referring to Lonaky himself, or is it a "theatrical" use where is he performing some other character? Is the "I" almost a "we," intended as a comment on all Malagasy people? If it is Lonaky himself, why is he talking about being Malagasified? He would have been educated *after* Malagasification, when schools were bilingual. And then there are his gestures in the last four lines. If he is "Malagasified," why is he making hand gestures that are recognizably drawn from hip-hop and rap performances?

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[78] Lonaky's foregrounding of a "mispronunciation" can be considered alongside Benson's satire of racist portrayals of Africans discussed in Chapter One. Benson highlights a different "mispronunciation" than Lonaky—a rolled "r" (instead of the gutteral "ʀ") rather than a "z" (instead of "ʒ"), but in both cases the "mispronunciation" is exaggerated and is not the performer's usual pronunciation (indeed, later in the poem Lonaky "properly" pronounces "je"). In Benson's case, his exaggerated "African" accent is clearly meant to elicit laughter from the audience, which it does; Lonaky's performance is more subdued and did not elicit a similar reaction.

Knowing what I did about Lonaky, from our interactions over the course of many years, did not make interpretation much easier. He lives in Tana but is originally from the South and rarely performs in French, preferring Malagasy or English, which he speaks fluently. He is openly critical of the centralization of power in Tana, and is outspoken about the discrimination people from other regions, particularly the South, face in the capital. Given what I already knew about him, and his sarcastic tone throughout the poem, I heard it as an indictment of the very discourse Dadilahy had used, of a facile approach to diversity that disregards the power associated with French, which, as we've seen, around five percent of the population speaks fluently.

This interpretation was corroborated when Lonaky sent me the full poem on Facebook. The sense of contradiction alluded to in these brief lines, of a complex stance that seems to recognize both the power of Malagasy identity and the power of foreign influence, is borne out in the longer poem (see Text 4). In the longer poem, the full complexity of Malagasy identity is laid out, layer upon layer. Here is how I understand the structure; I have chosen one significant line from the poem to represent each section:

1. **Introduction** (2 stanzas): "I will tell you the story/history"
    ("Je vais vous raconter l'histoire")

2. **Question** (1 stanza): "Why I am Malagasy???"
    ("Pourquoi je suis Malgache???")

3. **Problem 1** (3 stanzas): "I refuse to be Malagasy/ Because I want to be civilized"
    ("Je refuse d'être Malgache/ Car je veux être civilisé")

4. **Problem 2** (6 stanzas): "the Malagasy are no longer Unified/United!!!"
    ("les Malgaches ne sont plus Unis!!!")

5. **Answer** (1 stanza): "To be and at the same time to know"
    ("Être et à la fois connaître")

6. **Conclusion** (2 stanzas): " 'to be Malagasy'/ That is a choice!!!"
    (" 'être Malgache'/ Ça, c'est un choix!!!")

The two central conundrums of Malagasy identity Lonaky explores in this poem are the preference for that which is foreign over that which is Malagasy ("Problem 1" in Section 3) and the divisions between ethnic groups ("Problem 2" in Section 4). These problems are bookended by, in the beginning, an introduction and a framing question, and at the end, an answer to the framing question and a conclusion.

The cohesion of each "problem" section is reinforced by the homogeneity of the rhyme scheme: in Section 3, a repetition of "th/f" end rhymes (the English "th" or ð at the end of a word is frequently pronounced "f" by Francophone speakers), and in Section 4 a repetition of "i" and "é" end rhymes. The resulting aural cohesion thus belies the

divisions referenced in the content of the poem, a fitting aural representation of the way in which the oft-repeated ideal of "*Fihavanana*" (l. 71: social harmony, brotherly solidarity) belies a "shattered social cohesion" (l. 69).

After two stanzas that only slightly diverge from the version Lonaky performed at the opening ceremony, the speaker asserts that he is "very very Malagasy/ by nature" (l. 9-10) but that he does not know why he is Malagasy. We might interpret this "why" in a number of ways: how he came to be Malagasy, for what reason or purpose he is Malagasy, and/or what it is about him that can be identified as Malagasy.

In the next stanza, the speaker reveals that he "loves" French and American history (l. 20) and "honor[s]" foreigners (l. 22), but that he doesn't know about Malagasy history or care about other Malagasy people (l. 16-25). The "I am a Malagasified Malagasy" refrain is repeated, but with a twist this time: the speaker now "refuses" to be Malagasy because he wants to be "civilized" (l. 28-29). This is followed by a list of foreign objects and people the speaker enjoys or imitates, whose homogeneity is reinforced by the repetition of the end rhyme "th/f." We should note here that, although the line breaks Lonaky has chosen for the typed version do not indicate the same end rhyme on every line, it could easily be performed such that each line or phrase ended with the "th/f" sound. Performing it in this way would highlight the end of that rhyme scheme, creating a clearly audible break between the list of the foreign culture/objects/people and "my country's culture" (l. 39).

At the moment of performance, having uttered only the first two stanzas, Lonaky left us with a pile of questions and only the promise of a story: an "histoire." But "histoire" in French means both story and history. And so, when Lonaky asked us to follow the tournament closely, he was orienting us to more than just his own story that he wanted to unfold over the course of the festival: he oriented us towards a history of violence and discrimination that is often elided or avoided altogether. This elision and avoidance is often justified on the grounds that to speak of it is to threaten *fihavanana* (solidarity). But in Lonaky's view, *fihavanana* no longer exists anyway: "We refuse to accept/ That solidarity is weakened/ We refuse to accept/ That social cohesion is shattered/ We refuse to accept/ That the renowned *"Fihavanana"*/ No longer exists, *man!*" (l. 66-72). Lonaky's solution is to admit, accept, and proclaim this fact, but he does not advocate simply giving up. Rather, he concludes that a national Malagasy identity is "a choice" (l. 88), implying that only once one has owned up to Madagascar's history and the current lack of social cohesion can one opt to claim Malagasy identity. It is not a default birthright, but a considered choice predicated on full acknowledgment of the complexities of that identity.

Lonaky never performed this longer version, because he had planned to do it during the finals but did not make it past the first selection round. While that was the result of multiple factors we could never fully know, it is not insignificant that one of the few poets to directly address issues of interethnic tensions and discrimination has consistently made it onto a National Slam team but never progressed past the first round, and that no teams or poets from the South (Morondava, Toliara, or Taolagnaro) ever made it to the final round in the two years I attended (2014 and 2015). The barriers to national cohesion that Lonaky identifies in the longer poem are also the ones that

may have had a part in inhibiting his success at the National Slam, and which thwart Madagaslam's intentions of federating a national slam community: an excessive reverence for foreign influences, and a refusal to acknowledge ethnic and regional rifts. In his brief performance at the opening event, Lonaky could merely orient us towards these elements of Malagasy identity without fully explicating them.

5. Analysis of "The Long-suffering People" ("Jalim-bahoaka") by Makwa Joma

National dis-unity was also thematized in a poem by Makwa Joma, a poet from Toamasina, later that same week. In her performance during the 2015 National Slam finals, she similarly used the platform to address the rifts in national cohesion while avoiding explicit references to her own individual experiences. Instead, her dialect and physical appearance were markers of her "difference" from the "norms" of the capital.

I first saw Makwa perform when I traveled to Toamasina in August 2015, and was blown away by her stage presence despite being able to understand relatively little of the semantic content of her poems, which she performs in the Betsimisaraka dialect. I was not at all surprised when she went on to make the regional team for the National Slam in November. In my interview with her and the other two poets who had qualified, she told me that she was not concerned about the Tana audience understanding her, because they would at least understand her body language. As it turned out, the National Slam audience did seem to understand, or at the very least to appreciate, her performances: she came in 7th out of 30 poets, and garnered loud cheers and applause from the audience during and after each one of her poems.

It is not only Makwa's dialect that marks her as "different" on the Tana stage, it is also her pseudonym, an alternate spelling of Makoa: the term for Malagasy people of African heritage, believed to have come primarily from Mozambique (this origin is evident in an alternate term for the same group/ethnicity, Masombika). While the term, like "mainty" ("Black"), can be used pejoratively, Makwa proudly reclaims it as part of her identity. Her performances do not address ethnic divisions as explicitly as Lonaky's poem does, but she is unapologetic about her differences from Merina elite culture in Tana.

During the final bout of the National Slam in 2015, Makwa performed "Jalim-bahoaka" ("The Long-suffering People")[79] to immense applause and shouts of "Ten!" ("Dix e!") Her percussive and rhythmic delivery led the audience to clap and cheer at various points throughout the poem—an impressive feat for a total newcomer to the Tana stage. Makwa does not take up much space, either through her small stature or through movement across the stage, but the poem's urgency and significance are relayed through the tension in her body and the intensity of her voice, as she modulates volume, speed, and tone from rapid-fire invective to somber reverence.

The title of the poem itself is rich with significance. "Jaly" can be translated as suffering but also as the impatience caused by having to wait; "vahoaka" refers to "the people" or populace. I have attempted to render *jaly*'s dual meaning by translating

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[79] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EypZk5RCWg

"Jalim-bahoaka" as "The Long-suffering People," but it could also be translated as "The Suffering and Impatience of the People." The "vahoaka" are a common figure in Malagasy slam, likely in part due to the prominence of the figure of "the people" or "le peuple" in Francophone and Anglophone rap, hip-hop, and slam. The term belongs, in a sense, to an international language of resistance, where opposition to the government or the ruling power is a common trope—through Black and postcolonial solidarity against various forms of oppression, but also through class solidarity with resonances of Marxist revolution, of the oppressed classes against those in power. Poets who use "le peuple" or "vahoaka" are usually pitting "the people" against those in power, and are tapping into this discourse of resistance.

In Malagasy slam, the "vahoaka" or "le peuple" are nearly always a group of people who are suffering, in contrast to those who have made them suffer. This group is sometimes explicitly identified as a national community, but more often this national aspect is merely implied. We sense from the context of the poem that "vahoaka" refers to any Malagasy person living anywhere on the island—but not, perhaps, to Malagasy people living abroad, or to a French person living in Madagascar. In Makwa's poem, the question of who counts as the "vahoaka" is a bit more complex. Consider the refrain, which recurs three times (see Text 5 for full text and translation):

Fa ny vahoaka no mitaraigny maregny ny rariny.	For the people are crying for help, waiting for justice.
Ny fagnandevozagna, ny fagnagedragna, mafy aton'ireo mpitondra fanjakagna efa tsy rariny.	Slavery, imprisonment, forcefully done by the rulers of the country, are not just.
Ka asa amin'ny taonjato faha firy, asa oviagna zegny zaivo ahariny.	In which century, when exactly, will it be straightened out?
Kara olo tsisy fo mitempo, angamba fa efa sheitoane mihintsy ningoarigny natony ho zagnahariny.	Like people without a beating heart, perhaps they have chosen Satan as their God.

The "rulers" here are those who govern the entire country, and thus those who suffer from this rule—"the people," *ny vahoaka*—could be understood as any Malagasy person who is not in the government and/or profiting from the improper governance of these rulers. But the reference to slavery (*fagnandevozagna*) in the refrain is suggestive of something else: in referring to (presumably metaphorical) slavery as something contemporary rulers are guilty of, she alludes also to the practice of internal slavery in Madagascar's past. This practice primarily (though not exclusively) consisted primarily of Merina enslavement of people they conquered during the expansion of their kingdom, but also of people of African descent—such as the people now called Makoa or Masombika. For a poet named Makwa to speak of slavery on the stage in Tana suggests that she is not merely angry on behalf of all Malagasy people who suffer from the contemporary political regime, but also on behalf of *her* people, *her* ancestors, who suffered from the Merina regime.

Judith Butler (2015) has written about the figure of "the people" as defined in opposition to whoever is *not* part of "the people." She writes that "'the people' are not a given population, but are rather constituted by the lines of demarcation we implicitly or explicitly establish" (Butler 2015: 3). In most poems, references to "the people," whether in Malagasy (*ny vahoaka*) or French (*le peuple*), draw these lines of demarcation starkly: there are the politicians, and there is the entire rest of the population of Madagascar that suffers from the actions and inactions of these politicians. Belonging to "the people" requires merely that one *suffers* from rather than benefits from the political and economic situation. It is certainly not the case that poets only talk about a national community in terms of suffering, or that they only talk about suffering in the context of nationhood. But any time the words *peuple* or *vahoaka* in a slam poem generally indicate that the rest of the poem will in some way address the suffering populace, which is often also the angry populace, versus the greedy and callous politicians. This reference to "the people" usually does not designate a particular region, city, or ethnic group; thus suffering, as well as anger or resentment, is one crucial way in which national identity and unity is imagined.

Makwa's poem, however, is a bit more complex. The figure of the suffering populace does seem to be a united figure in some ways, and the audience's cheers suggested that they, too, felt that they belonged in this group or at least supported the claims made on behalf of the suffering people. Yet Makwa also makes pointed references to ethnic difference and discrimination: in the first few lines, she references "discrimination on the basis of hair and skin" (*fagnavakavam-bolo-koditra*, l. 5) as a contemporary social problem that contributes to suffering. Then, in the refrain, she references slavery (*fagnandevozagna*)—a topic that, as I have discussed throughout the chapter, is especially taboo in Tana. Makwa's denunciation of the government, then, is not just on the basis of greed and improper governance, but also on ethnic discrimination and the history of slavery that continues to limit opportunities for those who are descended from formerly enslaved people.

6. Conclusion

The kinds of issues raised by Lonaky and Makwa—about fractions and fissures between ethnic groups and the threat this poses, along with corrupt leaders, to national unity—are almost never raised by Merina themselves. Instead, they are primarily voiced and embodied by poets like Lonaky and Makwa who are not Merina and have undoubtedly experienced the discrimination they describe in their poems. Similarly, non-Tana poets' concerns about the discrimination and claims of incomprehension they face when performing at the National Slam in Tana have never been openly discussed, to my knowledge, among the festival organizers. Many of these poets argue that this puts them at a disadvantage in competition, contravening the "spirit of slam" and belying organizers' claims about the unity of the national slam family.

We have seen in this chapter how issues of national unity are inextricably bound up in questions of language and scale. In Lonaky's poem, his decision to perform in

French creates a productive dissonance with his assertion that he is a "Malagasified Malagasy," and this dissonance becomes clearer in the full poem as one that is central to Malagasy national identity itself. This dissonance is the product of an excessive reverence for foreign culture and the discord caused by "certain topics" ("quelques sujets"), which remain slightly implicit but are alluded to in the reference to "Côtier" ("Coastal") and "Hautes Terre" ("Highlands"). Makwa goes further, to name two sources of this discord: slavery and discrimination. Although like Lonaky she does not explicitly implicate herself in this portrayal, her dialect, pseudonym, and physical appearance already do so.

It is not that these poets repudiate solidarity and national cohesion altogether, or that they portray these as unattainable or unimportant goals. Rather, they orient the audience—through their choices of pronunciation, dialect, rhythm, and embodied performance just as much as through the semantic content and choice of pronouns in their poems—to the fissures in the picture of unity painted by discourses of plurilingualism and interculturality. Through performances that highlight difference yet nonetheless still aspire towards unity, they manage to assert authority over these discourses that are often used to minimize tensions and difficult histories, as we saw in the case of the plurilingualism conference. The message is clear: these histories and identities must be spoken and performed, and the difficulty of managing difference on a national scale must be acknowledged rather than hidden behind a façade of *fihavanana* (solidarity).

This chapter contributes to understandings of the interrelation between national, linguistic, and ethnic identities and boundaries, through a phenomenological attention to language as a focal point of orientation as well as an orienting device in itself. I have shown how discursive and aesthetic constructions of difference and identity cannot be divorced from embodied experiences, perceptions, and attitudes, and how all of these are bound up in temporospatial configurations and negotiations.

In the next chapter, we will see how difference, and the relation between poet and audience, is managed on an international scale, as poets seek to translate and circulate their work and commensurate between radically different worlds.

Text 4: "A Malagasified Malagasy" ("Un Malgache Malgachisé") by Lonaky, National Slam, November 2015, Institut Français de Madagascar (Antananarivo)[80]

		1.	
Je suis un Malgache Malgachisé	I am a Malagasified Malagasy	A	1
Bien sûr, je parle le Malgache, mais	Of course, I speak Malagasy, but	A	
le mieux, c'est	the best is	A	
le Français	French	A	
Si vous voulez savoir	If you want to know	B	5
Pourquoi Je suis comme Ça	Why I am like this	C	
Je vais vous raconter l'histoire	I will tell you the [hi]story	B	
Alors, suivez bien moi…	So follow me closely…	C	
		2.	
Je suis Malgache,	I am Malagasy,	A	
Très très Malgache	Very very Malagasy	A	10
Par nature, c'est tout à fait vrai	By nature, it's absolutely true	B	
Mais si on me demande	But if I am asked	C	
Pourquoi je suis Malgache?	Why I am Malagasy?	A	
Moi-meme, je me demande	Myself, I ask myself	C	
Pourquoi je suis Malgache???	Why am I Malagasy???	A	15
		3.	
L'histoire de mon pays	The history of my country	A	
Ça, je l'ignore	That, I don't know	B	
Mais l'histoire de la France	But the history of France	C	
Et celle des Etats Unis	And that of the United States	A	
Ça, j'aime bien, je l'adore	That, I like, I love it	B	20
Les étrangers qui viennent ici,	The foreigners who come here,	A	
Je les respecte, je les honore	I respect them, I honor them	B	
Mais quand il s'agit	But when it comes	A	
de mes compatriotes,	to my compatriots,	D	
Je les oublient	I forget them	A	25
puisqu'ils ne sont pas forts!	because they aren't strong!	B	
Je suis un Malgache Malgachisé	I am a Malagasified Malagasy	E	

Je refuse d'etre Malgache	I refuse to be Malagasy	F
Car je veux etre civilisé	Because I want to be civilized	E
J'ecoute la chanson d'Adèle	I listen to Adele's song	G 30
Et de Sam Smith	And Sam Smith's	H
J'applique le modèle	I apply the model	G
Et la Théorie d'Adam Smith	And the Theory of Adam Smith	H
Je porte comme chaussure	The shoes I wear	I
Le «Stan Smith»	Are "Stan Smith"	H 35
Et pour que les meufs me quiffent	And to get chicks to dig me	H
J'essaie d'imiter l'Afro de «Jim Cliff»	I try to imitate the afro of "Jim Cliff"	H
Puis j'utilise le «Black Berry» et l'«Orange Clif»	Then I use the "Black Berry" and the "Orange Clif" [smartphone]	H
Mais quand il s'agit de la culture de mon pays,	But when it comes to the culture of my country,	J
Je la jette dans la poubelle,	I throw it in the trash,	K 40
Heveriko ho toy ny tsy misy!!!	*I act like it doesn't exist!!!*	/H[82]
		4.
Je suis un Malgache Malgachisé	I am a Malagasified Malagasy	A
Pour qu'il n'y aurait pas de l'impasse	In order for there not to be an impass/stalemate	B
J'evite d'aborder quelques sujets	I avoid addressing/approaching some topics	A
Dans la capitale de mon pays,	In the capital of my country,	C 45
Les gens m'appellent «Côtier»	People call me "Coastal"	A
Et dans les côtes, on me nomme	And on the coasts, I am called	D
«Les gens des hautes terre»	"People from the Highlands"	E
Et pour qu'il n'y aurait pas de la guerre,	And in order for there not to be a fight/war,	E
Moi, je prefère toujours de me taire!!!	Me, I always prefer to keep quiet!!!	E 50
Mais non, mais si….	But no, but yes…	C
Mais non, mais si…	But no, but yes…	C
Cristiano Ronaldo ou Lionel Messi?	Cristiano Ronaldo or Lionel Messi?[81]	C
Beaucoup se justifient	Many justify themselves	C

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[81] Non-Malagasy soccer players.

[82] I use the forward slash to indicate a slant rhyme.

Mais presque [tous] les coins du monde	But nearly [all] the corners of the world	F	55
Savent aujourd'hui	Know nowadays	C	
Que les Malgaches ne sont plus Unis!!!	That the Malagasy are no longer unified/united!!!	C	
C'est pourquoi,	That's why,	G	
Je suis	I am	C	
Tu es	You are	A	60
Il est	He is	A	
Elle est	She is	A	
Nous sommes tous des Malgaches Malgachisés	We are all Malagasified Malagasy	A	
Pour qu'il n'y aurait pas de l'impasse	In order for there not to be an impass/stalemate	B	
Nous evitons d'aborder quelques sujets	We avoid addressing/approaching some topics	A	65
Nous refusons d'accepter	We refuse to accept	A	
Que la solidarité est fragilisée	That solidarity is weakened	A	
Nous refusons d'accepter	We refuse to accept	A	
Que la cohésion sociale est fracassée	That social cohesion is shattered	A	
Nous refusons d'accepter	We refuse to accept	A	70
Que le fameux *«Fihavanana»*	That the renowned *"Fihavanana"*	H	
N'existe plus *ry seh!*	No longer exists, *man!*	A	
Nous refusons d'accepter	We refuse to accept	A	
Qu'ici, C'est l'intérêt personnel	That here, it's personal interest	I	
Qui est avant tout priorisé!!!	That is prioritized above all!!!	A	75
		5.	
Être ou ne pas être?	To be or not to be?	A	
Être et à la fois connaître	To be and at the same time to know	A	
Accepter puis admettre	To accept, then admit	A	
Telle est la condition	That is the condition	B	
Qui nous en manque	That we are missing	C	80
Pour qu'on devienne une vraie Nation!	In order to become a true Nation!	D	
		6.	
Je suis un Malgache Malgachisé	I am a Malagasified Malagasy	A	
Chaque jour, je lutte d'être Malgache	Every day, I struggle to be Malagasy	B	
Mais je reste toujours mal integré	But I always remain poorly	A	

	integrated/included/adapted		
Vous pourriez dire	You could/might say	C	85
Que je dise n'importe quoi	That I'm saying nonsense	D	
Mais «etre Malgache»	But "to be Malagasy"	E	
Ça, c'est un choix!!!	That is a choice!!!	D	

Text 5: "The Long-suffering People" ("Jalim–bahoaka") by Makwa Joma, National Slam Finals, December 2015, Institut Français de Madagascar (Antananarivo)[83]

Ery Dadilahy taloha izay nahery fo, Namoy fo hoan'ny Tanindrazagna	Those old men with brave hearts,[84] they gave their lives for the land of the ancestors	1
Avahizo zare efa tsy eto amin'ny tany ty koza fa efa nody mandry, mandry am-piadanagna agny am-pasan-drazagna	They are no longer on earth, they have already gone to rest, to rest in peace in the tomb of the ancestors	
Aminjo antsika afaka tagnatin'ny fanjanahantany ke nahazo ny Faleovantegna	Now, we have been freed from colonization and obtained Independence	
Fa ra nijerevagna ndreky, indre mpitondra nifandimby tsisy nitsinjo ny vahoaka fa indre nampanjaka ny fitiavan-tegna	But when you look closer, the successive rulers didn't take care of the people and let selfishness grow stronger	
Ndre salafoaka, ny fagnavakavam-bolo-koditra sy fagnodikodignam-bola no tegna mafoaka.	Like crazy people, discrimination [on the basis of hair and skin] and misuse of money are so powerful.	5
Tsisy olo mendri-patokisagna	No one can be trusted	
Ny mahantra tsy jeregna, fa ny voky fogna no vokisagna.	The poor are disregarded, but those who have plenty are always full.	
Ke tsy mahagaga izy koa zay tonga ake indre mahazo aigna	No wonder that those who obtain power grow stronger	
Fotony, na topi-maso tsisy, atonjare sary tsy hita ny jalim-bahoaka izay voatsindry ny hazo legna.	They do not look, not even a glance, pretending not to see that the long-suffering people are being crushed.	
Ny vahoaka no mitaraigny maregny ny rariny.	For the people are crying for help, waiting for justice.	10

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[83] This text was supplied by Makwa and translated by Fela Razafiarison-Josoa with input from myself. I have kept Makwa's line breaks.

[84] A common term for those who fought for independence against the French colonizers (see also Caylah's poem in Chapter Four).

Ny fagnandevozagna, ny fagnagedragna, mafy aton'ireo mpitondra fanjakagna efa tsy rariny.	Slavery, imprisonment, enforced by the rulers of the country, are not just.	
Ka asa amin'ny taonjato faha firy, asa oviagna zaivo ahariny.	In which century, when exactly, will it be straightened out?	
Kara olo tsisy fo mitempo, angamba fa efa sheitoane mihintsy ningoarigny natony ho zagnahariny.	Like people without a beating heart, perhaps they have chosen Satan as their God.	
Ireo fanja, ireo mpitandrim-pilaminagna	The government, the security forces	
Magnano fody lahy mandrara homagna, mody sary mandrarandrara nefa izy mihintsy no tegna minagna.	Act like the male cardinal who forbids others to eat, while he himself eats the most.	15
Tsentrigna tsy mahalala Oka, ny gadra no natahoragna de nibogna lasagna	Like a crazy person who cannot stop, frightened by a prisoner and gets away.	
Nefa tsy fantany fa tsy vaha-olagna mihintsy ny filefasagna	But he does not know that running away is not a solution	
Fa ny firaisan-kina hampandroso ananjy zo no sisa andrasagna	But solidarity is all that is hoped for in order to move forward.	
De nagnino koa mô izy koa nifohezagna ny tetezagna, izy koa fantatra fa hitondra amin'ny fahaverezagna, agnisan' ny zegny ireo fahaizagna	Why did people use the bridge if they knew it was going to collapse?	
Efa tsy azo hianteheragna ho tolan-tahezagna	No longer trusted as a mate.	20
Ke maro ny magnita-tsaigny, hivaro-tegny, hirogna amin'ny fahaverezagna	Many have let their minds go, have prostituted themselves, are on the road to ruin.	
Ke aiza mô hiafaranjare amin-jegny, hafa tsy miafara an-tragno maizigna	Where will they end up, besides in prison?	

Takeke ny vidim-piainagna nahay lafo	These days, the cost of living has become expensive	
Tsy hay ny ambadiky zegny, asa azovy no tegna rangoro fototry ny afo	No one knows what is behind it all, which twig caused the fire	
Ny fampenaragna tsy vita, nakatra silôgno	Education isn't completed	25
Ireo taxe sy ny hetra koa mbola aton'ireo Mpitondra fanjakagna makatra isan-togno.	The taxes imposed by the government rulers are increasing every year.	
Ny adidy tsy nato hoan'olon-dratsy ke managna saigny amin'ny maha lalahy	Responsibility is not reserved for bad people, so be a real man.	
Fa ny tsy fahafantaragna mandiniky maka ny place misy ny ologno no matonga antsika olom-belogno ho ratsy fagnahy.	Misunderstanding and incapacity for empathy are the reasons why human beings are so bad.	
Ninanjy tsisy ra agnaty lohany afa tsy ny risoriso sy ny lokany	They have nothing in their heads besides corruption and their own stakes.	
Fa ny tegna [??] amin-jegny, zare ambony magnano ny ataony fa vahoaka madinika ambany [??] vokany.	But what is really [??] is that those up there do whatever they want, while the little people at the bottom suffer the consequences.	30
Ny vahoaka no mitaraigny maregny ny rariny	The people are crying for help, waiting for justice	
Ny fagnandevozagna, ny fagnagedragna, mafy aton'ireo mpitondra fanjakagna efa tsy rariny	Slavery, imprisonment, enforced by the rulers of the country, are not just	
Ka asa amin'ny taonjato faha firy, asa oviagna zaivo ahariny	In which century, when exactly, will it be straightened out?	
Kara olo tsisy fo mitempo, angamba fa efa sheitoane mihintsy ningoarigny	Like people without a beating heart, perhaps they have chosen Satan as	

natony ho zagnahariny (x2)	their God (x2)	

Chapter Four:
Translation, Circulation, and the Aesthetics of Difference

1. Introduction

Every year, the winner of the National Slam has had the honor of representing Madagascar at the Slam World Cup in Paris the following year—with a few exceptions due to Malagasy political crises and financial difficulties. This annual competition and festival was started in 2007 by the non-profit organization FFDSP (French Federation of Slam Poetry, or Fédération Française de Slam Poésie), founded by Pilote le Hot—the French poet who held the first slam workshops in Madagascar via the French Institute and Alliance Française. Although it is not the only international slam competition, and there is no governing body to determine that this is the "official" World Cup, it is the largest international slam competition.

At the 2014 National Slam finals in Tana, a poet from the Northwest city of Mahajanga narrowly squeaked into first place, taking many of us by surprise. His name was Devine Qui ("Guess Who"), and in May 2015 I accompanied him to Paris for the Slam World Cup. That year there were 23 poets competing, each having—in theory— won the national slam in their respective countries. For the World Cup, unlike most slam events, competing poets are required to send their poems to the FFDSP in advance so that they can be translated into French and English—if they aren't already in one of these languages—and made into PowerPoints to be projected behind the poet during their performance. These PowerPoints are also projected onto a smaller screen facing the poet as they perform.

Devine Qui had changed some of his poems and written new ones since the National Slam, but at the World Cup he again performed a poem that had won him high scores in Tana. The poem begins in French, and in his performance at the National Slam he had been relaxed and comfortable—no doubt buoyed by the roaring applause that had greeted him as soon as he took the stage.[85] He later shifts into Malagasy, and the poem ends with him singing the refrain of a popular Malagasy song from the 1990s, "Mozole" ("Mausoleum"); his audience at the National Slam knew it, and sang and clapped along boisterously.

Now at the World Cup, without the same wild cheering to carry him onstage, Devine Qui was visibly nervous and clearly reading some of the lines off of the PowerPoint, stumbling over the words as if seeing them for the first time. Once he got to the section in Malagasy, he seemed to relax. He took the mic off its stand and moved closer to the audience, no longer looking up at the screen to read the text. His words finally seemed to flow *from* him, to be his own creation. But when he started to sing the lines from "Mozole," the audience of course couldn't follow along as had been the case in Tana. He sang alone for a line or two, then started to snap. A few people in the audience caught on and started to snap or clap in rhythm. He climbed off the stage and

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[85] You may remember from Chapter Three that poets from Mahajanga enjoy vociferous audience support at the National Slam.

walked into the aisle, trying to connect to the audience as the Brazilian poet had done on his turn, but Devine Qui was too tentative: he couldn't pull it off in the same way. There wasn't enough enthusiasm in the audience and he didn't seem to have the energy to generate it himself. Devine Qui did not make it past that round.

Having seen in the previous chapter how Malagasy slam poets approach ethnic difference at a national scale, in this chapter we examine processes of translation on an international scale while attending to the discursive construction of scalar hierarchies.[86] We will examine processes of translation, commensuration, and iteration at work in the Slam World Cup in Paris, in *vazaha* (foreigner) reactions to a poem at the National Slam in Tana, and in a slam video that brought international acclaim to a Malagasy poet.

My argument in this chapter is that, vis-à-vis a foreign audience, Malagasy poets' management of free expression and their ability to perform authority are caught up in processes of translation and the aestheticization of difference. By this I mean both that difference is aestheticized (performed in a way designed to appeal to the audience) and that it is managed through aesthetic decisions about performance style, form, and content. When the audience is primarily non-Malagasy, difference—linguistic, cultural, economic, etc.—becomes a key factor in the poet's management of their artistic freedoms. It can lend them greater authority, but it can also undermine that authority.

This chapter is also about circulation. The circulation of poets and poems frequently involves interpretation, translation, and/or commensuration, each of which is a distinct process although they often bleed into and impact each other in such a way that it is impossible to disentangle them. In the context of Malagasy slam poetry, circulation *andafy* (across the seas, on the other side of the water, i.e. abroad) and among *vazaha* (foreigner) spaces is frequently seen to imbue poems and poets with heightened significance. Mobility on an international scale is one way—though certainly not the only way—that value may accrue to poems and poets. Slam poetry itself, of course, is a genre from *andafy* brought to Madagascar by a *vazaha*, although many poets in Madagascar and elsewhere locate the "true" origin of slam in oral traditions such as those still practiced in Madagascar. When poets imagine and perform for *vazaha* audiences, they engage in processes of translation, interpretation, and commensuration that can have socioeconomic as well as aesthetic consequences beyond "reaching" the immediate audience.

While I use these terms circulation and iteration interchangeably at times, they have different implications: with circulation, the emphasis is on a spatial movement across or between spaces. Whenever we speak of circulation we must be careful, then, not to take movement for granted or conceive of it as some motorless propulsion

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[86] This division of chapters is not intended to reify to reify a clear division between national and international (even if, particularly on an island nation, there is a certain fixity to this division), or to imply that regional differences within Madagascar are necessarily on a smaller scale than differences between Madagascar and other countries. It is entirely possible that, for some poets, certain differences between Antananarivo and Paris are not as great as certain differences between Antananarivo and Toliara. My decision to divide these chapters in this way is intended to reflect how poets themselves, and many Malagasy people in general, distinguish between national and international spaces of circulation, where anything perceived as flowing from, to, or within *andafy* (international) circuits takes on a heightened significance regardless of the value attached to it.

towards an obvious destination. We must ask ourselves what fuels or propels this movement, how fast or slow it is, what networks and grooves (institutions, power differentials) enable it and/or are carved by it. What does it leave in its wake? What spaces, objects, or forms do not circulate, or are perceived not to circulate, or circulate more slowly, haphazardly, or with more difficulty? What are the different scales that this circulation bridges or mediates? These are some of the questions I examine in this chapter, alongside the questions that iteration, as analytically distinct from circulation, requires us to ask: what counts as an original or source? What networks, institutions, etc. are involved in that designation or definition? How different can an iteration be and still be considered an iteration, somehow related to an original? In contrast to circulation, iteration emphasizes temporal movement and difference—in a word, différance: Derrida's term for a difference that is also a deferral, temporally dislocated from an original source, whose endpoint is also a vanishing point, endlessly on the horizon. To think iteration with circulation, then, is to think spatial movement in différance and différance in spatial movement. Or, to put it another way, to think about difference in movement across spatiotemporal configurations.

2. Translation, interpretation, commensuration

As Susan Gal has argued, "translation" is often used as a catch-all term for a wide range of distinct processes and phenomena (Gal 2015). Before turning to the ethnographic examples, I first want to distinguish between three processes that are frequently collapsed analytically: translation, interpretation, and commensuration. I see these as distinct modes of managing difference, with distinct implications for the aestheticization of difference.

Translation

I consider translation a *linguistic* operation of finding words in a new code to re-present something that has already been said in a different code, for an audience that cannot understand the first code. Insofar as language is a system that is substantially different from other modes of communication, I use the term "translation" solely in the case of different linguistic codes and different audiences. Thus, re-phrasing within the same code is generally understood as precisely that, and/or as correcting or modifying one's own or someone's language use, but not as translation. We do not, for example, consider that a translation has occurred when a child tells a shop owner "Give me a Hershey's bar" and then, remembering their manners (perhaps in response to raised eyebrows), rephrases this as "Could I please have a Hershey's bar?" This is because both utterances are in the same code despite belonging to different registers, and because the speaker presumes that the audience (the shop owner) has already understood the first utterance.

But does a change of codes on its own imply that a translation has occurred? To take another example, in a conversation between two friends who both speak French

and English, if one says "I was really angry. J'étais vraiment fâchée," we would be more likely to refer to this as code-switching and emphasis rather than translation. Despite the fact that "J'étais vraiment fâchée" is a re-presentation in a second code of what was said in the first code, "I was really angry," we would be unlikely to consider this a translation because the speaker presumes that her audience (the friend) has already understood her first utterance. Thus, *both* a change in code and an audience (real or imagined) that does not understand the first code are necessary conditions for translation. They are also the boundaries of translation: when the re-presentation involves these two conditions as well as a further operation of explanation or analysis, this further operation cannot be collapsed into "translation."

Talal Asad's critique of the trope of "cultural translation" as it has been used to characterize ethnographic work (1986) is useful in re-centering the audience—and power—as central to the process of translation. Asad directs us to take seriously the fact that the audience of anthropological writing is not the same as the "audience" (or rather, the participants/actors) of the practices described in anthropological writing. To take this seriously requires that we consider the role of power differentials and inequalities in these processes of translation and of analysis, explication, etc.

Asad thus provides a powerful antithesis to Walter Benjamin, who begins his iconic essay "The Task of the Translator" (1921 [2007]) with a categorical refutation of any consideration of audience in both good art and good (literary) translations. For Benjamin, "no poem is intended for the reader" (1921 [2007]: 69) and therefore the same applies for the translation of literature: "any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information—hence, something inessential. This is the hallmark of bad translations" (*idem*). For our purposes we can assume Benjamin refers solely to literary translations here, though perhaps he would regard the transmission of information in furniture assembly instructions as equally inessential. In any case, this Formalist dismissal of the audience has been heavily critiqued in postmodern, postcolonial, feminist, and critical race theory in regards to art and literature, and Chapter Two provides an extensive examination of how slam poetry has recentered the role of the audience in shaping literature and artistic performance. What is interesting for us here is the implausibility of Benjamin's proposition particularly in regards to translation. For Benjamin, translation—more so than literature itself—is able, in the best of cases, to transcend linguistic divisions and thus to approach (though never to reach) the essential unity of "true" or "pure" language, a vision that derives from a Biblical interpretation of the singular Word of God and the pure language available to humans prior to their ill-fated construction of the Tower of Babel. Thus it is the "potential translation" contained "between the lines" of great literature that contains elements of this "pure language," and it is the translation of great literature that brings us ever so slightly closer to that totality.

This is a step further than the common claim that great literature disregards the audience in order to express something essential within the writer: for Benjamin, that essential purity is not located within the writer but within Language itself, conceived of as the unified whole beyond divisions of linguistic code. It is a compelling vision, which he first sketched out in his early essay "On Language as Such and On the Language of

Man" (1916 [1979]), but it drains all the power out of language as a communicative practice and of the slippages, fractures, and gaps that make language practices so fascinating. Whatever our attitudes may be towards a spiritual conception of Language, Benjamin's emphasis on Language as a unified whole, rather than on its instantiations through embodied encounters between speakers, minimizes the social and relational aspects of language use. Nowhere is the loneliness of Benjamin's vision more evident than in this captivating metaphor of the difference between poetry and translation:

> The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect *[Intention]* upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original. This is a feature of translation which basically differentiates it from the poet's work, because the effort of the latter is never directed at the language as such, at its totality, but solely and immediately at specific linguistic contextual aspects. Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one. (Benjamin 1916 [1979]: 76)

What is striking here is that Benjamin locates the essence or totality of Language *outside* the language forest; in fact, he locates it on a distant horizon far beyond the singular point at which translation touches, calls into, and receives the echo of the original—a horizon where "all information, all sense, and all intention finally encounter a stratum in which they are destined to be extinguished" (Benjamin 1916 [1979]: 79-80). I imagine a horizon in outer space where some invisible force crushes meaning into nothingness. If there were such a thing as an ineffable totality of Language, would it not be more likely to be found in a view that no human could have—perhaps, indeed, from outer space—that takes in at once each branch and pine needle in the forest, the densely vibrant networks of that ecosystem, the multitude of forests and the edges where they overlap, and the points all along the wooded ridge where translation occurs? Is it not precisely in the "specific linguistic contextual aspects," as well as in their translation, that us mere mortals might glimpse some kind of totality? A World in a Grain of Sand, as William Blake would have it?

This is what William Hanks offers in *Converting Words* (2010), where his meticulous documentation and analysis of *reducción*—the social, linguistic, and religious transformations wrought by the Spanish colonization of the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico—shows that it was a process of "bringing to order" (Hanks 2010: 4) in multiple spheres, "a total project aimed at coordinated transformations of space, conduct, and language" (Hanks 2010: xiv). In showing these transformations to be interconnected, Hanks illuminates how texts are not mere pieces of writing that can be wrested from their social and historical contexts and from their particular relations between author and audience. It is in the close examination of these relations and contexts that we are able to grasp the import of practices of writing, speaking, and translation.

Ultimately, the version of the Maya language that resulted from the process of reducción, *maya reducido*, also became a source of resistance to colonial oppression (Hanks 2010). As with Asad, relations of power are central to understanding the production of texts and the circumstances of their translation: "because the languages of the Third World societies […] are 'weaker' in relation to Western languages (and today, especially to English), they are more likely to submit to forcible transformation in the translation process than the other way around (Asad 1986: 157-158). This is not only about the relative power and transformability of each, but also about the frequency of translation into and out of a particular language: consider that only about 3 percent of books published in the U.S. are translations.[87] In what follows, then, I consider that translations are primarily intended for audiences who don't understand the "source" code, and are thus frequently portrayed as circulating texts at a larger or wider scale. A theory of translation must therefore take the immediate audience into account as well as the networks and scales of power in which audience, speaker/author/performer, and languages are enmeshed.

Interpretation

In a number of theoretical frameworks of translation, interpretation has been understood as a component of or prerequisite for translation. In Thomas Kuhn's (1962) critique of analytic philosopher Willard Van Orman Quine's (1960) gavagai/rabbit thought experiment, he makes the point that translation is not equivalent to interpretation, and that what Quine says is a problem of the *translation* from "gavagai" (a signifier in a hypothetical language that a hypothetical researcher is trying to gloss) to "rabbit" is actually a problem of the *interpretation* of "gavagai." Here, interpretation is understood to be a process that takes place primarily within, and can take place entirely within, the source language. It does not necessarily involve another language at all. For Kuhn, Quine's point about the inscrutability of reference—that we cannot precisely determine what any one word refers to—entails the indeterminacy of interpretation within one language. The indeterminacy of translation, then, is a separate—though related—consideration, compounding the indeterminacy of interpretation within the source language.

There are echoes of Kuhn's distinction between interpretation and translation in Hanks' *Converting Words* (2010), where he presents a schematization of the principles that guided the process of translation of Spanish into Maya by colonial missionaries. Hanks develops this schematization further in his article "The space of translation" (2014), and first in the list is interpretance—we hear echoes here not only of Kuhn but also of Peirce, and we see that interpretation may be a requirement *for* translation: there can be no gloss in the target language without an interpretation of the source. But Hanks never states that this is a stepwise process, and we might ask to what extent interpreters/translators bring *all* of their "ressources langagières"[88] (Tirvassen 2010) in

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[87] http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepercent/index.php?s=about

[88] This term emphasizes the totality of Language-related resources—rather than distinct codes or language systems— that speakers have at their disposal, particularly in multi/plurilingual contexts. It is

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multiple codes to bear on their interpretation of a text or utterance, even when the latter occurs in a single code. To what extent does the intention to translate impact interpretation? This would mean that the work of written translation and verbal interpretation might involve a complex process that cannot be separated into two separate steps, of an interpretation in the source language *followed by* an entirely separate operation of translation into the target language. This is partly a question for neurolinguists working on multilingualism, but what we can say here is that further investigation is required before we can assume that interpreters or translators do the work of interpretation without drawing on the entirety of their *ressources langagières* in multiple codes.

These questions become particularly interesting when we consider that in common English usage, "translation" is often distinguished from "interpretation," where the former is understood as a process of rendering the meaning of a written text from one language to another (from the "source" language to the "target" language), while interpretation is understood as more or less the same process but for spoken language.[89] Thus, a translator works with the written word while an interpreter works with spoken, immediate verbal interaction. The etymology of each is illuminating: "to translate" is "to transport, transfer"; a translation is a "removal or conveyance from one person, place, or condition to another." The centrality of movement, of transporting words from one place to another, is also apparent in the French "traduire," from the Latin roots *trans* (traversing, transport, exchange) and *ductio* (from *ducere*, to lead, bring). In Malagasy, too, we have the active verb *mandika* ("to translate," but also "to overstep, to transgress, to go over a mark or limit" and the passive verb *adika* ("translated," but also "used to overstep, copied, passé par dessus [passed over/above"]).

To interpret, on the other hand, comes from the roots *inter* (between) and *prath* (Sanskrit for "to spread abroad")—still a movement, but one that is not unidirectional. How might we then understand interpretation not as the directional movement from source to target but as the space between these, as they coexist in the moment of (verbal) interpretation or even in (written) translation? That is to say, perhaps live interpreters do not *first* decode the meaning of the original utterance and *then* translate it, but instead perform these simultaneously. And if this is the case, might not written translation also involve a similar collapsing or blurring of steps? Although I distinguish them formally here, for the purposes of analysis, they may in practice be intertwined.

If we consider that the interpreter/translator may listen to or read an utterance/text differently when they intend to translate it, then the audience may well play a role not only in the translation process but also in the (presumed intralingual) interpretation process. Benjamin's refusal to consider the audience of translation is overly hasty: all language use, of course, involves some anticipation of an audience even if this is unconscious, the audience is imagined to be the speaker alone, etc.

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based on the distinction in French between *langage*—Language broadly speaking, as a mode of communication—and *langue*—a particular code or language system such as French or Malagasy.

[89] The use of the term "interpretation" to refer to understandings of sacred texts is another layer, but one that is outside the scope of this analysis.

Translation in particular requires serious consideration of the audience's expectations, and their tolerance for transformations and modifications to their own language. While some of these concerns will have already been addressed in the original text, such as the author's anticipation of the audience's age and literacy level, others are engendered from the process of translation: a translator translating into English, for example, must determine whether the target audience speaks Nigerian English, Singapore English, etc., whether they would be familiar with certain proper names or if those should be explained in a footnote, etc. Although the broad-scale power differentials between languages that Asad references are crucial here, there are also smaller-scale issues of institutional relations and frameworks. While some institutional contexts and some types of texts/utterances may significantly constrain the translation in particular ways (we might think of U.N. interpreters here), other contexts and utterances may be less restrictive, or at least less obviously so.

Part of what is at stake here is the *intended* audience of the source and of the translation. To speak of intention is to wander into dangerous territory, which Alessandro Duranti (2015) has explored at length. Like Duranti, I propose that we reclaim intention—emphatically *not* in its cognitivist, prescriptivist, universalist associations with Searle (1983, 1990), but in its phenomenological meaning as stretching toward—intension—to understand translation as a double-stretching, a double intension: a stretching toward the "source," straining to *understand* it (*entendre*, from the same root as intend). This interpretation, as both Duranti (2015) and Ahmed (2006) have noted, belongs to a Husserlian tradition in which *intention* is closely linked to *attention*, as a mode of foregrounding an object.

In the case of translation, we can say that translators bring a particular kind of attention to bear on language that is not the same as metapragmatic attention within the same code. This is because, at the same time that the translator stretches towards the "source," or perhaps intermittently with that stretch, she also stretches towards another language: an intension towards the not-yet-formulated, which entails an intension towards the second audience. This is the call-and-response of Benjamin's echo at the edge of the language forest: translation as a movement *between, back-and-forth* rather than the more common unilinear metaphor of translation as "a passage, a crossing, a route from one point to another, from one language to another ("un passage, une traversée, un itinéraire d'un point à un autre, d'une langue à une autre," Vialon 2001: 8, my translation). Even the use of terms like "source" and "target" imply that the process of translation is akin to letting loose an arrow from the spot of one language towards another, where a good translation hits the target right in the middle and a poor one misses it, but nonetheless ends up somewhere else than where it started. This metaphor assumes a straightforward movement that leaves behind the source, never looking back, while I see interpretation and translation as Janus-faced processes, always indeterminate, always in an in-between state. As in the case of *maya reducido*, and the cases I examine in this chapter, what we end up with is not a perfect mirror image of the "source" rendered in the "target"; it is a different object altogether, belonging neither solely to the first code nor solely to the second. On this point Benjamin is absolutely correct: "Translation is so far removed from being the sterile

equation of two dead languages that of all literary forms it is the one charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own" [Benjamin 2007 (1921): 73].

Commensuration

In Kuhn's seminal article on incommensurability of scientific theories, he draws from the etymology of commensurate as "having the same measure" to state that "lack of a common measure does not make comparison impossible" (Kuhn 1962: 670). Without a common measure, however, Kuhn believes *translation* to be impossible: "The claim that two [scientific] theories are incommensurable is then the claim that there is no language, neutral or otherwise, into which both theories, conceived as sets of sentences, can be translated *without residue or loss*" (*idem*, my italics). If we take a slightly less optimistic view and understand commensurability as the possibility for translation even with some "residue or loss," it is still distinct from translation because it can occur on its own, without translation, as in the commensuration of two social worlds that both use the same linguistic code. It is a prerequisite for translation but is not synonymous with it.

Another critical approach to commensurability is Elizabeth Povinelli's (2001) discussion of incommensurability in late liberalism, where she reviews approaches to commensuration—including Kuhn's—and goes on to argue that

> If the message addressing the liberal public might be "begin with the doable," the message addressing radical worlds is "be other so that we will not ossify, but be in such a way that we are not undone, that is, make yourself doable for us." And the message conveys the stakes of refusing to be doable, and, thereby, the stakes of forcing liberal subjects to experience the intractable impasse of reason as the borders of the repugnant— actual legal, economic, and social repression. It is in this way that the late liberal diaspora shifts the burden for social commensuration from the place it is generated (liberalism) to the place it operates on. (Povinelli 2001: 329-330)

Here, rather than bracketing the social world and power relations that inform process of commensuration, Povinelli highlights the impossible demands on social worlds, actors, and—we might add—languages deemed "incommensurable" with late liberal capitalism. It is not that both "source" and "target" are to be equally transformed, but that the "source" must transform itself so as to be intelligible within the "target" world. The consequences of unintelligibility in this case are not merely bad translations that result in incomprehension or immobility, but "actual legal, economic, and social repression."

This notion of acceptable difference, which is imagined to infuse the "we" with a manageable dynamism, resonates with Ahmed's (2000) discussion of the place of difference in the national imaginary, which we saw in Chapter Three in relation to discourses of multi- and plurilingualism. As the late liberal and multicultural/multilingual

state begins to center identity around the difference that strangers or outsiders bring, the burden of being palatably different falls on those strangers or outsiders. While the social worlds I consider here are not located near "the borders of the repugnant" and thus do not face such extreme consequences for incommensurability as those that Povinelli describes, and while discourses of multi- or plurilingualism and interculturality in Madagascar circulate in a very different historical and political context than that of Australia, the following cases show precisely this "impasse of reason" as late liberal/Western/neoliberal spheres—*andafy*, in a word—both demand and reward palatable performances of "authentic" difference from Malagasy slam poets.

3. Translating difference at the World Cup

In Devine Qui's performance at the World Cup, the text translation of the Mozole song on the PowerPoint was not enough to make up for the audience's unfamiliarity with it. There was one Malagasy person in the audience, and he sang along, but to the rest of us it was just a tune. We could clap along, but there was no spark of recognition. What in Devine Qui's National Slam performance had been a moment of strong connection with the audience, at the World Cup was an unbridgeable gulf. He could perform the song for us, but we couldn't participate.

In the months and weeks leading up to the World Cup, Devine Qui had been coached by other Madagaslam members and myself. The coaching involved refinements of Devine Qui's gestures and delivery, which were discussed on their own without relating to the fact that he would face a different audience in Paris. But the coaching also involved fixing French grammar and diction mistakes, which might be minor details for a Malagasy audience but would be conspicuous to a French one. Devine Qui also wrote an entirely new poem about Madagascar, in the style of a tourist brochure, that was clearly geared towards a foreign audience. In his preparations, the audience's difference from any he had faced before was a salient factor. Over and above the kinds of assessment and anticipation of the audience that he must have undertaken to prepare for the National Slam (or any performance, for that matter), he was now "managing" his artistic freedoms with a keen sense of his difference from his audience, and of his audience's difference from other audiences he had encountered before.

A month before the competition, I wrote to the World Cup organizers—the FFDSP in Paris—to let them know I would be accompanying Devine Qui during the competition as an anthropologist documenting his trip, and to offer my services as a volunteer for the festival. With a few weeks to go before the festival, they asked if I could help translate some of the poems—I later found out that the translator(s) they hired to do this was not able to complete the work. Based solely on my French fluency in our e-mail correspondence, they asked me translate not only from French (by the Algerian poet) into English, but mostly *into* French *from* English translations of other languages (Dutch, Finnish, Danish, and Japanese, in most if not all cases translated by the poets themselves). Many of the English translations were confusing or downright unintelligible,

and I had neither the time nor the resources to ask native Finnish, Japanese, or Danish speakers for help (with Dutch I was lucky—our neighbors in Tana at the time were Dutch). I asked the FFDSP to look over my translations into French for mistakes—as a non-native speaker, I am sure there were unnatural turns of phrase—but during the competition I noticed that none of my translations had been changed.

Despite the FFDSP's assurances that the poems would be translated and projected on a screen in PowerPoint form during the performance—which would lead most poets to believe that this would be done professionally—a look behind the scenes revealed a haphazard and lackadaisical process that involved rushed translations by nonprofessional translators such as myself (often without access to or comprehension of the source poems), PowerPoints where the different languages (source, English translation, French translation) were formatted in the same font with no space between them and thus extremely difficult to read, and organizers charged with clicking through the PowerPoints during the performance who did not understand the source language and thus were unable to click to the next slide at the correct moment. This resulted in a compounding of the "home advantage" that Francophone poets enjoyed, where the French translations that were ostensibly intended to level the playing field were in some cases so poorly executed as to be unintelligible. Poets who performed in French and English—languages that much of the audience understood—had a distinct advantage.

Of the eleven World Cup champions since the festival's inception in 2007, there has only been one who did not perform primarily in French or English: a poet from Norway won in 2017. In fact, the single region with the most champions (3) is Québec. And if we count Québec as Canada (they compete separately, which is itself a potentially controversial advantage), then Canada has won a total of five times. No other country comes close: the U.S. has won twice, the other countries (France, Gabon, U.K., Norway) only once. Asad's charge that relations of power are central to the process of translation is clearly borne out here. As we saw in Chapter Three with the National Slam, the overrepresentation of certain regions/languages among the winners is due to a complex ensemble of factors, but one of those factors is the audience's familiarity with the language of the performance. Despite many slam poets' assurances to the contrary, body language only goes so far. And when the FFDSP fails to take the translation of the poems seriously, the result is nearly guaranteed to be lower scores for the non-Francophone/Anglophone poets. Thus, poets speaking in other languages can circulate *to* the World Cup—indeed they must, otherwise the FFDSP would be accused of not holding a truly international competition—but, once there, they rarely even make it into the top three, let alone to first place.

It is not only the translation of poems that is at stake in the World Cup. It is also the iterability of the slam format, and the different shapes slam poetry takes as it moves across communities of artistic practice, languages, and geographic distances. In addition to linguistic differences, there are different modes of performance, aesthetic values, and interpretations of/ attitudes toward the format of slam. This would likely be true at an international competition of any number of activities, but these differences become potential liabilities at the Slam World Cup because of the strict parameters set by Pilote le Hot. The FFDSP covers lodging and meals for all poets during the festival

and, as Pilote noted in his interview with me, also covers airfare for a substantial number of these poets. Madagascar used to be one of those countries, and now it is not. In fact, Pilote rather gleefully told me that they cover airfaire for the U.S., Canada, and most European countries, and explained to me at length why they no longer do so for Madagascar. As we talked, his reasons shifted, and the shift went as follows:

He began with the argument that Madagascar and other African countries don't follow the rules of slam poetry: they "generate confusion" ("ils génèrent de la confusion") by calling certain events "slam" that aren't actually slam. Many major cities in Madagascar have open mic events that they do refer to as slam, and for Pilote this is unacceptable because the term "slam" can *only* refer to the competition format described in Chapter Two. However, as he himself later noted, this is a broader issue of Anglophone versus Francophone contexts: "slam" is often a catchall term in Francophone contexts, while in Anglophone ones the term "spoken word" is used to differentiate open mic performances from slam competitions. For Pilote, an open mic ("scène ouverte") cannot properly be called "slam." Pilote seemed to find the indeterminacy around the term "slam" so threatening because he took it as a sign that poets are self-centered and motivated by fame and fortune rather than forming a community. Though some would argue that open mics are more community-driven because they don't center around competition, for Pilote this is an unacceptable blurring of boundaries, an unruly iteration of the format and the term "slam poetry," that is motivated by what he calls "showbiz." For Pilote, poets from African countries are expected to circulate without any conscious effort, without any anticipation of audience reception, and without any hopes of forging connections that might lead to future opportunities for performance and collaboration.

Pilote begrudgingly allows Madagascar to participate in the World Cup despite his belief that, rather than holding a National Slam, Malagasy poets literally play eenie meenie miny mo to pick the poet who will go to France. When I explained that there is in fact a very well-organized National Slam that plays by all the rules and is documented on Facebook as well as in the local press, Pilote said it was just as well that Madagascar pay their own ticket because they are autonomous and can take care of themselves. This paternalistic logic of self-sufficiency was only applied to certain countries—it is apparently not important for North American or European countries to be self-sufficient in this way. Nor does Pilote seem to monitor National Slams in North American and European countries to determine if they are blurring the boundaries of slam, but he noted with grave disapproval that he saw Madagaslam's Facebook posts announcing "slam open mics" ("scènes ouvertes de slam"): for him, an unforgivable misnomer.

Clearly, Pilote's logic here draws from something much deeper than simply "if you follow the rules, you get a plane ticket." He bends a number of official rules himself: he nominates judges for the competitions in advance rather than picking them "randomly" from the audience just prior to the performance, and he announced onstage during one of the bouts that he had intentionally put three Anglophone poets in the same round (rather than "randomly" assigning them to a round) so that some of them would be out of the running by the final, because Anglophone poets win too often (he

did not do the same for Francophone poets, who win just as frequently). Clearly, "the rules" are open to interpretation. Nor is Pilote's logic that *all* countries should be self-sufficient and pay their own way—this burden applies only to African countries, presumably those most in need of financial assistance. The deeper undercurrent of his logic appears to rest on two tropes: that of "corrupt African politics," and that of "Africa as providing linguistic diversity."

Following a long diatribe about how poets from Madagascar, Gabon, Congo, and Mali don't have a real slam community, are overly invested in "showbiz," and leverage slam to forge advantageous connections with French cultural centers, Pilote told me that slam is

une action culturelle de démocratie représentative. […] On montre l'exemple aux autres, au système économique, au système artistique, au système culturel, tu vois, d'une vraie démocratie. […] Surtout dans ces pays-là, dans les pays d'Afrique, où t'as plein d'escrocs qui parlent de la démocratie, qui disent 'ouais on va faire de la démocratie, on va donner le droit au vote au peuple,' et ils le font mais dès qu'ils peuvent, tu vois, ils [endorment?] tout quoi. Surtout dans ces pays-là c'est intéressant.	a cultural act of representative democracy [...] We are an example to others, to the economic system, the artistic system, the cultural system, of a real democracy [...] Especially in those countries, in African countries, where you have tons of crooks talking about democracy, who say 'yeah we're gonna do/make democracy, we're gonna give the people the right to vote,' and they do it but as soon as they can they [lull everyone/everything to sleep?]. It's especially interesting in those countries.

Pilote does not explicitly say that African *slam poets* are undemocratic or crooked like their political leaders—his statement here in fact seems to imply that African slam poets could improve their allegedly corrupt governments by showing an example of representative democracy. But, keeping in mind Pilot's position as the poet who "brought" slam to Madagascar, on closer examination his argument here seems to imply that the "we" who are an example to others is in fact a North American/European "we": the creators of slam, those who do it properly, have brought a shining example of representative democracy to Africa. This interpretation is supported by the fact that, after this reference to crooked politicians, Pilote begins to use the same term, "crook" ("escroc"), to refer to Malagasy slam poets as well. There are also clear parallels between his portrayal of Malagasy slam poets as fame-obsessed and the figure of the African dictator who is motivated by self-interest and greed.

The second piece of the deeper undercurrent behind Pilote's refusal to accept Malagasy slam poetry as legitimate is the question of language politics, diversity, and authenticity, which came at the very end of the interview. Commenting on Devine Qui's performance at the World Cup the previous week, which had mostly been in French with a few passages in Malagasy, Pilote said that "it's a good thing that they're paying for their own plane ticket, because otherwise the point is for them to do poems in Malagasy,

not in French. [...] We don't give a shit about guys who want an international career."[90] Here, he conflates performance in French with an inappropriate and selfish desire for further circulation abroad—an ideologically suspect attempt to "go upscale" (Irvine 2016). In this conception, poets are supposed to "intend" toward the audience enough so that slam poetry becomes about the community rather than the individual poet, but not so much that they modify their performance in order to gain a wider and/or more enthusiastic reception.

In a particularly revealing moment, Pilote said that maybe at one point they will tell the Malagasy poets "not only will you pay the [plane] ticket, but also if you say a word in French you're *out*. [laughing] That's the law. Fuck the law!" ("non seulement vous payez le billet d'avion, mais en plus, tu dis un mot de français, t'es *out*. [laughing] C'est la loi. Nique la loi!"). Our entire interview was in French, and although he used some terms like "showbiz" that are of English origin, his utterance of the word "out" in English was the first time that he used an English term that is not commonly used in French. In the very same breath that he argues for monolingualism, he code-switches. It is unclear whether he picked up on this irony himself, but the next two sentences are intriguing: having asserted an authoritative stance on language ("that's the law"), he catches himself in the act and retorts, to himself, "fuck the law." This is a call-and-response that he often repeats during slam performances: after he reads the rules of slam, he shouts "That's the law" ("C'est la loi") and the audience—at least those in the know—shout back "Fuck the law!" ("Nique la loi!"). There is thus a tension within the slam community and, it seems, for Pilote himself, between being anti-authoritarian and nonetheless expressing an authoritative stance on what slam is or should be.

Despite Pilote's moment of self-irony, it is clear that for him only certain people have the right to code-switch. The brand of linguistic diversity that is being invoked here is quite specific: it is acceptable for French people to code-switch, but poets from Madagascar, Algeria, Mali, Gabon, and Congo must perform in their "native" languages—they must *perform these languages*. The requirement then, as we saw in Ahmed's (2000) and Povinelli's (2001) discussions of difference and diversity, is that *certain* racialized "strangers" perform their difference in a way that is both recognizable as different from "our" practices and non-threatening to those practices. Pilote is soliciting a performance of racialized linguistic authenticity that would bring diversity to the French slam stage, while disregarding the linguistic diversity of the contexts many of the poets are coming from. There is no acknowledgment of the added labor and burden that this constitutes, including but not limited to the disadvantage poets face when they perform in a language other than English and French—an "away game" disadvantage in the best of cases, compounded by the FFDSP's noncommittal attitude towards the translations.

Pilote also identifies performing in French as a self-serving attempt by African poets to launch an international career, despite the fact that many (if not all) of the African poets who performed in French at the World Cup already do so in their

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[90] "[…] heureusement que c'est eux qui se paient le billet d'avion, parce qu'autrement le but c'est qu'ils fassent des poèmes en malgache, pas en français. […] On en a rien à branler des mecs qui veulent faire carrière internationale."

respective countries—they may be as comfortable in French, or more so, than in their "native" language(s). In Devine Qui's case, although he did seem more at ease in Malagasy during his World Cup performances, he is fully fluent in French and was very comfortable performing in French at the National Slam. Pilote does not seek to understand the complex motivations and historical underpinnings behind the linguistic choices poets make, which may or may not include a desire for their poems to circulate beyond their countries of origin but which are, at least in the case of Madagascar, also bound up in a multitude of other considerations about audience and accessibility that have little to do with commercialism. Pilote demands that the poets not care about winning or further circulating their work, even though their participation in an international festival likely means they have put at least some thought into their audience.

Pilote's remarks on circulation evidence an ideology of fear as well as an attempt to control the iterability and scalability of slam as a format and as a community endeavor. While it is to be hoped that there were few in the audience who shared his views, it is clear that certain kinds of difference can undermine a poet's authority: linguistic differences that remain unintelligible despite efforts at translation, differences in performance style and audience recognition of certain references, and differences in understandings of slam as a genre. The poet's authority is further undermined when those with the institutional power to enable or foreclose circulation harbor animosity towards differences they perceive as unruly or inadmissible. In such cases, even sincere efforts to aesthetically manage difference so as to reach new audiences are read as proof of opportunism.

This forces poets into what Povinelli terms an "intractable impasse of reason" (2001: 329). While Pilote does not quite go so far as to situate Malagasy slam on the "borders of the repugnant," and his refusal to pay the plane ticket for African poets may not constitute full-blown "legal, economic, and social repression," the logic operating in Pilote's decision is nevertheless also at work in these more deleterious clashes between social worlds. The burden for social commensuration—in this case for producing a legitimate iteration of slam—is shifted onto Malagasy poets. And not only that: they are asked to "be other" enough to bring linguistic diversity to the festival, but not so other as to tear the delicate chain of acceptable difference. The force of institutional power—the power to invite poets to this festival and to cover their travel expenses—is tied to a discursive logic in which certain kinds of iterability and scalability, certain modifications of an original prototype, are acceptable—such as performing a slam poem in Malagasy even though the very first slam poems were performed in English—while others are unacceptable, such as blurring the boundary between slam and spoken word. Not only are some iterations unacceptable, that is, seen as not counting as slam, they are deemed a threat to slam because they blur its boundaries. This logic operates through a (mis)understanding of politics and history that elides the ongoing impact of colonization, linguistic repression, and racism on contemporary global inequities. So that Pilote le Hot—or, for example, the director of the IMF or the World Bank—can say "they're not following the rules," when the underpinning of that logic, and those rules themselves, rest on a contemporary racialized imaginary of "the other" which draws from the very

same origins that enabled these global inequities. The burden of "following the rules" is thus shifted from the place where those rules are generated onto those who suffer most from their uneven and self-serving application.

4. Interpreting difference: an analysis of "Hat of the Forest" ("Satrok'ala") by Baly

These global inequities and attempts to manage scale and circulation are not only visible when Malagasy poets perform abroad. Interpretation, translation, and commensuration with *andafy* and *vazaha* are also at work within Madagascar, and perceptions and anticipations of foreign audiences can impact performances even before a primarily Malagasy audience in Madagascar. In order to see this, we will fastforward in time from the 2015 World Cup in Paris in June to the 2015 National Slam in Tana that November.

The festival that year inaugurated a new event: the Slam Media competition, in which poets sent in videos of slam performances ahead of time to be judged live. We were assembled in an outbuilding of the Alliance Française in Tana, a classroom with rows of uncomfortable wooden chairs facing the front of the room where a projection screen was set up for the competition. The audience, mostly made up of National Slam participants, was restless—perhaps because of the sterile feel of the classroom set-up, or perhaps because none of them had sent in videos and were only there to perform during the open mic that preceded the competition.

Baly steps up to the front of the room. He is a poet originally from Tsihombe, in the Antandroy region of the South, now living and studying in Toliara. I know him well, having traveled with him and another poet to Tsihombe. I am ill at ease throughout his performance, sensitive to the audience's noise and to what I imagine they may be thinking about his erratic hand gestures and this strange, uncomfortable poem in French, a language that I know to be uncomfortable for him. I think at first that it might be a parody, but quickly realize that it is not:[91]

Moi, je m'appelle Satrok'ala, Chapeau de la Forêt	Me, my name is Satrok'ala, Hat of the Forest	1
Je suis le vingtième fils de mon père	I am my father's 20th child	
C'est dur d'être vingtième fils	It's hard to be the 20th child	
Mon père a dix filles et dix fils	My father has ten daughters and ten sons	
J'ai la chance d'être son vingtième fils	I am lucky to be his 20th child	5
Mon père est un homme	My father is a man	
A des yeux, a des oreilles, a une bouche, et a un nez	Has eyes, has ears, has a mouth, and has a nose	
Je crois que c'est Dieu-donné	I think it's God-given	
Et vous me demandez "Comment est-il	And you ask me "How is it	10

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[91] See Text 6 for full text and translation; this is my transcription and translation from the video recording, with input from Fela Razafiarison-Josoa.

possible?”	possible?”	
C'est pas possible avec une femme, deux femmes…	It's not possible with one wife, two wives…	
Et ben, mon père a quatre femmes	Well, my father has four wives	
Il travaille alors avec quatre femmes	So, he works with four wives	
C'est pas interdit, chez nous on appelle ça la polygamie	It's not forbidden, where I'm from we call that polygamy	
[.....]	[…]	…
S'il y a des hommes qui veulent détruire notre forêt, je suis un lion	If there are men who want to destroy our forest, I am a lion	31
S'il y a des hommes qui veulent voler notre poisson, je suis un crocodile	If there are men who want to steal our fish, I am a crocodile	
S'il y a des hommes qui veulent faire la déforestation, je suis un loup, faites attention	If there are men who want to do deforestation, I am a wolf, watch out	
Si vous êtes un *malaso* [bandit] je serai votre gendarme	If you are a *bandit* I will be your police	
Si vous êtes un touriste je serai votre guide	If you are a tourist I will be your guide	35
Si vous êtes un journaliste, vous pouvez m'interviewer	If you are a journalist, you can interview me	
Parce que moi je lutte contre ceux qui n'aiment pas la forêt	Because me, I fight against those who don't like the forest	
Et moi je m'appelle Satrok'ala, chapeau de la forêt	And me, my name is Satrok'ala, Hat of the Forest	

Baly had told me he was concerned about what language to perform in at the National Slam, given that he usually performs in Antandroy, considered by many to be the most divergent dialect from *ofisialy*. I interpret his choice to perform here in French as orienting the poem towards a Merina audience and towards *vazaha*—the international guest poets who were participating in the festival. It felt to me like a self-exoticizing poem, fashioned to mirror what *vazaha* and people in Tana might imagine, expect, and desire to hear about people in the South: the 20th child of a polygamous family, who must guard his family's cattle alone in addition to protecting the forest from deforestation.

There is the fact that the poem is in French—likely an attempt to reach towards and be understood by the Tana audience, as well as the *vazaha*, and there are the anticipated questions of the audience, also in French, seemingly from someone unfamiliar with the cultural context, one of which references the Bible and the audience's own society: "And you also think it's forbidden in the Bible/ And your society never practices that" ("Et vous pensez aussi que c'est interdit dans la Bible/ Et votre société ne pratique jamais ça," l. 15-16). There is the "translation" of the practice of polygamy in the line "where I'm from, we call that polygamy" ("chez nous, on appelle ça la polygamie," l. 14), when "polygamie" is the French word for the practice and not the

Antandroy or even the *ofisialy* term (*fampirafesana*, *mampirafy*). There are the references to lions and wolves,[92] which don't live in Madagascar but are commonly associated with "the wild" in Western imaginaries. There is the assumption of the audience's outsider status, whether Malagasy or vazaha: "If you are a *bandit* I will be your police/ If you are a tourist I will be your guide/ If you are a journalist, you can interview me" ("Si vous êtes un *malaso* je serai votre gendarme/ Si vous êtes un touriste je serai votre guide/ Si vous êtes un journaliste, vous pouvez m'interviewer," l. 34-36). There is the aesthetic decision of first-person singular address—and not merely statements in the first-person, but a kind of self-presentation and description that is extremely uncommon even in French-language Malagasy slam. This is the style that, as Somers-Willett (2005, 2009, 2014) argues, is nearly ubiquitous in U.S. slam. It is also popular in French slam and rap, such as Grand Corps Malade's well-known song "I'm from there" ("Je viens de là").

Months earlier I had stayed with Baly's family in his hometown, Tsihombe. His parents, who are divorced, are both middle-class and live in relatively large and comfortable brick houses in the center of town. I am not sure if he ever herded cattle, and the only forest around Tsihombe is the spiny forest—not something anyone would bother "deforesting." While none of the issues Baly raises are untruthful, especially for the Southern region—there is massive deforestation all across Madagascar, and polygamy is relatively common in the South—I nonetheless know that most, if not all, of the poem is not autobiographical. What bothered me, I realized later, was not that he told an "unauthentic" story. His desire to represent and call attention to the issues of his region seems to be perfectly understandable, even laudable, and it is common for poets to speak as characters who are not themselves—more so, perhaps, in Malagasy slam than in the U.S. The expectation of authenticity, of an autobiographical match between the performer and the person who speaks in the poem, may well be a Western and/or American norm. What set me on edge was rather the way that the poem seemed to anticipate a Tana and *vazaha* audience.

While I'm sure my own discomfort impacted how I perceived the audience's reaction, it is clear from the recording that they were not very engaged—there is a significant amount of background noise throughout his performance, compared to others, as well as what sounds like snickering. Given the serious tone of the poem, and Baly's earnest demeanor, it is likely that the laughter was not a reaction that Baly had anticipated but was rather directed *at* the poem. I am not sure whether Malagasy poets who did not know Baly perceived this poem to be "truthful"—that is to say, an accurate representation of his own life. This seems unlikely, given that the vast majority of poets are from urban areas and it would be extremely unusual for a cattle herder from the South to speak fluent French. In any case, the poem met with lukewarm applause.

As it turned out, the poem was a hit with two *vazaha* in particular, both Francophone international guest poets from North America/Europe. One of them told me later that they had been moved to tears by Baly's performance. The other, who I will call Marc, asked Baly for copies of the Satrok'ala poem and another poem. On the last day of the festival, I was chatting with Baly and he showed me the two handwritten

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[92] Many thanks to Martha Saavedra and Liliane Koziol for pointing these out.

poems he was giving to Marc, explaining that Marc had asked for them. Shortly afterwards, Marc arrived and Baly gave him the texts. Marc was surprised that they were handwritten—"I thought you had them on a computer or something" ("je croyais que tu l'avais sur ordinateur ou quelque chose"). He asked Baly to write out his full name at the end, and when Baly did so Marc looked confused. He asked about "Satrok'ala" and Baly explained it's a person's name—not anyone he knows, but there are people with that name in Madagascar. Marc was baffled. He thought the poem was about Baly himself.

Marc seemed embarrassed and started to explain, "[Where I'm from] we don't really know… I just came here and I thought that…" ("[Chez nous] on sait pas trop… je suis juste venu ici et j'ai cru que…"). I sensed what he was getting at: something like how he didn't know enough about Malagasy society—about social, ethnic, economic, linguistic politics in Madagascar—to be able to place Baly in relation to his poem. Baly just patiently reiterated that no, he was not Satrok'ala, but he didn't elaborate. I added that I had visited Baly's hometown, and Baly and I joked—I said his dad didn't really have four wives; Baly said he had 10 siblings (or some similarly large number) and that his dad did have multiple wives but not all at once—I am not sure if this part is true, but it is certainly plausible. In any case we laughed. I couldn't tell how Baly felt about the misunderstanding, but he wasn't visibly bothered by it.

The work of commensuration that Baly undertook in this poem shows the extent to which the consideration of the audience can impact the poem. Commensuration of social worlds enmeshed in networks of power nearly always precludes a straightforward translation into a "common measure," but in cases such as this one the anticipation of a more powerful, globally connected audience seems to have shaped the "source" even before commensuration was attempted. Indeed, this anticipation seems to be present even in Baly's interpretation of realities such as deforestation and polygamy. The commensuration here is so complete, so integral to the poem itself, that even "polygamy" is kept in French rather than carried over as proof of authenticity.

Ultimately, this commensuration was successful insofar as it was appreciated by *vazaha* audience members, who were "touched," "moved" by the poet's intension. Pilote, of course, would say that Baly overstretched in his performance of authenticity—not because he performed his culture in a way that could be understood *andafy* (which is what Pilote essentially demanded of Malagasy poets), but because Baly translated too much, was too conscious of his foreign audience (synonymous in Pilote's mind with harboring hopes of international fame and fortune) even in his *interpretation* of life in the South. The division in reactions to the poem—indifference and perhaps derision on the part of some Malagasy audience members, versus emotional resonance on the part of some *vazaha*—illustrates the extent to which authority is never unilaterally defined. For some of us, the perception that Baly's aestheticization of difference was central to the conception of the poem made it seem less authoritative; for others, that process of aestheticization may have been invisible, and Baly's performance appeared unmediated and thus authoritative.

5. Commensurating difference: an analysis of "Madagascar" by Caylah

Thus far we have examined cases of the aestheticization of difference that fail to fully reach the audience, as in Devine Qui's performance at the World Cup, or that move some audience members and not others, as in Baly's poem at the National Slam. In this section I consider a case of circulation *andafy* that is by many definitions "successful" in moving from what is perceived as a "local" scale to an international one. I examine the modifications a Malagasy poem undergoes when it is translated and transformed into a multi-modal video object to circulate *andafy* on social media. In this case, the poet's authority both in Madagascar and abroad would seem to have been bolstered by her successful aestheticization of difference.

The video features a slam poem, "Madagascar,"[93] performed by a poet named Caylah. Caylah has been involved in slam since 2010, and even before this video went viral she was already quite well-known in the slam community in Madagascar: she has competed in the national slam twice, and in 2015 she started performing and touring nationally with a music group. "Madagascar" is a poem that Caylah has performed at various slam events in Antananarivo, so its first audiences were primarily Malagasy. But Caylah is fluent in French and often performs partly or entirely in French. She has family connections to France and has also built a network with artists and musicians from abroad through slam and through her music. So I was not particularly surprised when I was on Facebook in January 2016 and saw a video of "Madagascar," filmed by two French filmmakers as part of a longer documentary on "underground" Malagasy artists. From the quality and design of the video and the fact that it included a French text translation, I predicted that it would circulate faster and further than any other Malagasy slam video, but I am still somewhat astonished by just how fast and how far it *continues* to circulate. As of July 2018 it had over 22,000 views on YouTube, nearly 21,000 views on Vimeo, and over 60,000 views on Blog de Madagascar, a Francophone website on Malagasy news and culture. It has also been translated into English and posted on Vimeo, with nearly 200 views. A number of Francophone media outlets published interviews with Caylah online, such as Radio France Internationale and Le Point Afrique. She was also interviewed along with a Belgian poet on the major French news channel TV5 Monde, when they both performed for presidents and dignitaries from around the world at the Sommet de la Francophonie, held in Antananarivo. The buzz has led to numerous interviews and opportunities since then; mostly recently, a short clip of the documentary was posted on Al Jazeera as part of their "Witness" program, and Caylah was invited to perform in France and Canada in 2018.[94]

The video opens with Caylah looking out a window on a rainy day, smoking and humming. Thunder rumbles in the background. "CAYLAH" appears in block letters next to her head. Then the frame shifts to the view she was looking at: a row of buildings on the left, a rooftop and trees below and to the right. "MADAGASCAR" appears in the

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[93] See Text 7 for full text and translation, transcribed and translated by Fela Razafiarison-Josoa and myself.

[94] See the Bibliography for links to all of these videos (under Caylah, D. Sneg, and P. Chevallier 2016) and interviews (under the name of the media institution).

middle of the shot. We shift back to Caylah, smoking and singing at the window, and then suddenly we are on the street, walking in the rain as Caylah begins the poem. The camera seems to be from her point-of-view, strolling past vegetable sellers in the market as passerby look warily back at her/us. As she speaks, the text translation of the poem appears in white capital letters on the screen, but not in the way subtitles usually do—it is dynamic, fading in and out, often in time with the rhythm of her speech, at different points on the screen. The camera starts to move around her—we see the back of her head, then her profile, and finally we are facing her. Everything in the shot—Caylah's hair and sweatshirt, the street, the passerby, the market wares—is thoroughly soaked. Everything is grey, gloomy, chaotic, but we don't hear any of the street noise. Just Caylah performing her poem, accompanied by ominous droning chords in the background.

The video is a multi-modal transformation from "source" to "target": there is the translation of spoken Malagasy into written French (or English, depending on which video you watch), where the visual aesthetics of the text are nearly as important as the words themselves. There is the visual adaptation of a live oral performance to a video. Finally, there is the acoustic adaptation of a poem to a soundscape. The video is thus a new and different object from Caylah's live performance of the poem in Malagasy on a stage in Tana. Benjamin's point on the relation of the translation to the "original" resonates well here, that the relation is not one of similarity but of kinship, as they share a common origin. For Benjamin that origin is the pure totality of Language; for our purposes we might merely consider it the impulse behind the source text.

There are two key concerns that seem to have guided the translation and transformation of Caylah's text into the video: aesthetics—an attention to the style of the source, which is paramount in any translation but especially of literature—and cultural commensuration, an attention to the divergences between the social worlds of both source and target. This management of the aesthetics of difference occurs on the level of the text, the visual images, and the soundscape.

In terms of visual and aural aesthetics, the mood of the film is quite depressing. If we are not familiar with the location all we know is that this is Madagascar, and Madagascar appears to be very dreary. It is rainy, grey, chaotic, and full of people and cars; there is thunder and ominous melancholy chords droning in the background, people are staring at us, nobody is smiling. It looks different from a French city, but it is a familiar difference: this is urban poverty, the miserable third-world country drenched in rain. While the images of the market may not look like markets in France or Canada, these images *are* commensurate with mainstream images and perspectives in the West *about* places like Madagascar. This gloomy mood is at odds with Caylah's own performance of the text, which is percussive and full of energy. That contrast is visible in the video, where Caylah's dynamism stands out against the dreariness of the street and the passerby.

The visual appearance of the text translation also manages difference aesthetically: it is more engaging than a standard subtitle format, visually replicating the vitality and punchiness of Caylah's poem. But it also marks the video as belonging to a certain sphere of carefully designed high-quality video production that is not the case in

most Malagasy slam videos, even those with subtitles.

There are two moments of the translation that illustrate how the attention to aesthetics and the attention to cultural commensuration are at times working in tandem and at times at odds with each other, ultimately producing a very different object from the source text. The translation of the refrain "Madagasikara, nosy an-drazako, Madagasikara, tandindrazako" as "Madagascar, mon pays, Madagascar, terre de mes ancêtres" (l. 54-55) is fairly straightforward, even if it doesn't replicate the rhyme scheme of the source text. "Nosy an-drazako," which is translated here as "mon pays / my country," would more accurately be "island of my ancestors," which would be a parallel construction to "land of my ancestors," as it is in the source. Instead we see a choice in favor of simplicity, which erases this parallelism: just "my country."

In the next line, "lova tsy mifindra" is translated as "mon héritage / my heritage," with a second line added: "mon patrimoine génétique / my genetic inheritance." The standard translation of lova is indeed heritage or inheritance, but "lova tsy mifindra" is literally "heritage/inheritance that doesn't move," a phrase with two important connotations. It designates the practice of endogamous marriage, preferably between cross cousins, that was common especially among the ruling classes. By extension it is a concept that promotes marriage within one's ethnic group and social class. Caylah has other poems that directly confront racism and ethnic stereotyping, so it's unlikely that she's promoting the prohibition of interethnic marriage here; rather, she seems to be pointing to a *national* heritage shared by all Malagasy, a national bond that cannot be sundered or moved. This concept of national heritage would be quite familiar to French audiences, and by translating it as "my heritage" the translators could be seen as choosing simplicity over something that would be impractical to translate directly or to explain at length—although the reference to genetics is an embellishment that is absent in the source. What the translation fails to capture, and therefore obscures, is the fact that Caylah is co-opting a concept that has been used to justify classist and anti-Black discrimination, and she is using it instead to refer to national unity. Ironically, she is exactly right that in this case heritage really does not travel, when we consider that this national heritage—which includes the Malagasy language and proverbs such as this one—cannot move across spatial distance to other cultural contexts. As the proverb instructs, *lova* can only be passed down temporally between generations.

We can contrast the decision to translate "lova tsy mifindra" as "my heritage/ my genetic inheritance" with the way another popular saying is treated later on in the poem, when Caylah is critiquing the loss of Malagasy values such as unity and solidarity. She characterizes the current way of thinking with the phrase "samy mandeha, samy mitady" (l. 69), a refrain from a popular song from the 1980s that could be glossed most closely as "each goes, each searches." It is translated here as "chacun pour soi / every man for himself." The decision in this case is to diverge from literal meaning in favor of a translation that captures more of the spirit of the source text, and to replicate in the target text the use of a popular saying, even if the literal meaning is dissimilar. Unlike in the case of "lova tsy mifindra," with "samy mandeha, samy mitady" there is a roughly equivalent saying in both French and English.

We could look at this example from the perspective of the "residue or loss" that

Kuhn (1962) wanted to avoid—what the translation fails to accurately render (even if we can't fault the translators for this), and what part of the "original" is thus unable to circulate in a Francophone context. But we could also look at it from the perspective of what the translation creates, what kind of "original" the translation is. This is just one example from a much longer text, but many of the translation choices are not made solely in the service of simplicity or accuracy, but rather, as with the video, with a concern for scalability and cultural commensurability: the terms must be intelligible to Western audiences. Thus the target text that is created—this new "original"—probably seems familiar to Western audiences. If you look at the translation of the text and replace "Madagascar" with the name of nearly any country, most of the poem still works. Many of the phrases and images in the translation are familiar: "every man for himself" (l. 69), "truth can now be bought" (l. 84), themes of political corruption and the decline of social values. In the original, however, we see many more culturally specific references, such as "lova tsy mifindra" or "samy mandeha, samy mitady." As Asad might have predicted, there is no transformation of French occurring via the translation of Malagasy, no introduction of new terms or concepts like "lova tsy mifindra." This is a bit different from the kind of commensuration going on in the video, which seeks to highlight difference, albeit a familiar difference, through the trope of the downtrodden city in the Global South.

In both cases, however—the translation of "lova tsy mifindra" as "my heritage/ my genetic inheritance" and of "samy mandeha, samy mitady" as "every man for himself"—the concern is to gloss in a way that is commensurate not only with the target language but also with the imagined target culture—to minimize difference. In Hanks' article "The space of translation" (2014), he argues that it is the target language rather than the source language that "constrains the process" of translation. Similarly, I want to argue here that it is the imagined target audience rather than the imagined source audience that "constrains the process" of commensuration and scaling, where networks of power participate in shaping both those audiences and the performer's and translator's imaginations thereof. It is impossible to know the demographics of the video's viewers, but the majority of the YouTube comments are either in Malagasy or a mix of French and Malagasy, and the video's overwhelming popularity on the Blog de Madagascar site is also revealing—this is a news and culture website about Madagascar, written entirely in French, and is thus popular among the Malagasy diaspora in France and Québec as well as the Francophone elite in Madagascar. Clearly, the video reaches towards—intends—an international audience, but that audience is partly made up of people with some knowledge of Madagascar, who may or may not be of Malagasy descent and may or may not speak Malagasy. This is precisely the kind of "showbiz" Pilote despises, and the kind of attention to the audience that Benjamin would say is the hallmark of a bad translation.

We might also conjure here Benjamin's image of translation as the piecing back together of a broken vessel, where "instead of resembling the meaning of the original, [the translation] must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel" (Benjamin 1921

[2007]: 78). Language is conceived here as the total vessel, and the translation must match the jagged edges of the piece next to it—the source text—in order to bring the vessel closer to its original integrity. In the translations of Caylah's poem, there is no such loving and careful attention to detail, no fitting of the translation around the contours of the source, but rather a sanding-off of the source's sharp edges in order to force an approximate fit. Such an approach ensures that, rather than fitting closely together, these pieces will be surrounded by gaps.

What I want to highlight here is that cultural commensuration—both in the video and in the text translation—is also about a kind of aesthetics, in this case an aesthetics of difference that seeks in some cases to highlight difference, as with the video, or to minimize it, as with the text, but in all instances to manage and regulate iterability. But this work, as with many forms of translation and commensuration, is concealed and may even be invisible to someone who doesn't understand Malagasy. While this work of concealment may be par for the course in translation, it has disproportionate impacts on the source language versus the target. As Asad (1986) reminds us, this of course has everything to do with power, global inequalities, and hierarchies of scale, where some phrases like "every man for himself" circulate widely while others, like "lova tsy mifindra," do not. In this case, it means that a text that speaks so eloquently about the power and pride in being Malagasy is illustrated by French filmmakers in a video that shows only gloom. We might also ask what kinds of difference are highlighted here, and in the service of what kinds of imaginaries of "other" lives. These concerns are engendered by the translation; they are in part what the translation brings into the world as a source in and of itself, in that in-between space as poet and filmmaker reach for rather different things.

6. Conclusion: kinship, diaspora, echoes

In this chapter I have examined difference in movement across spatiotemporal distances and scales, involving translation, interpretation, and commensuration. I have argued for an analytical distinction between these three processes, advancing understandings of translation by distentangling it from interpretation and commensuration and arguing for a closer attention to discursive constructions of audiences and scales in processes of translation and commensuration.

As we moved through the texts and cases, we encountered new vocabularies for these dislocations and relations: with Benjamin, we saw how a relation between a translation and its source might not be one of similarity but of kinship—of a common root or origin. This is a useful metaphor for the variations in slam poetry as it is practiced in disparate locations: as kin, more or less distant, in diasporic connection across spans of time, language, culture, and geographic space. What Pilote wishes were an absolute similarity—that each iteration of slam be a twin of the "original"—is instead a common thread that is expressed in a different way each time. This is Derridean différance at work: never the same thing twice, and meaning forever deferred.

The notion of kinship is at work, too, in the proverb "lova tsy mifindra" that Caylah includes in her poem. Here, too, there is a common root—*lova*, or heritage—that is passed from the *razana* (ancestors) to their offspring, generation to generation, down through time. The proverb warns us that *lova* cannot move across geographical distance (what happens to *lova* in diaspora?), but the overriding concern is not so much space or scale as *type*: differences between ethnic groups and social classes are understood to be too vast to span, an uncrossable gulf. In Caylah's poem, however, it seems to mean something else: that *lova* is within her and within all Malagasy people, as it was within their *razana*, and cannot be moved from them or from Madagascar. It is a root that cannot be ripped out, that indeed has survived numerous attempts by foreign powers to do just that. This video, which has crossed oceans to circulate *andafy*, has been especially popular among the Malagasy diaspora in France. In its location between source and target, stretching towards both, it has resonated with many who may feel similarly in between.

Baly's and Caylah's poems, and the mishaps surrounding the translation of non-French/English poems at the World Cup, are a reminder of the ways that difference can be concealed, nearly invisible to certain audiences. I have argued that bringing the audience back into the frame is necessary to understand how differences are managed—aesthetically, socially, and otherwise—in translation and commensuration. We see this in Devine Qui's performance, where the audience could not connect across the gulf of difference and unfamiliarity. One strategy for minimizing the discomfort of difference is to rely on previous representations: through Baly's repetition of familiar tropes, like the polygamous rural family, the dangerous "wild" animals, and the deforestation of impoverished areas, he fashions an image of recognizable difference that is commensurable with Western perceptions and representations of places like Madagascar. What the foreign audience does not see, however, is the work involved in constructing these commensurable images, and all of the pieces that must be cut out to make the image fit. Similarly, in the translation of Caylah's poem, the foreign audience doesn't see the process of rounding off and packaging a complex concept like "lova tsy mifindra" into "my heritage." Here, too, I have shown how the "target" is not transformed but rather taken as a mold that the source must be fitted into.

In a similar way, the audience at the World Cup—and even the poets themselves—were often unaware of the modifications the poems went through in translation from the source to English to (non-native) French. The poets may even have been unaware of how much was lost in the movement from text to PowerPoint translations, displayed behind the poet as they performed, in some cases as a mess of illegible text, too quickly for the audience to read, or out of sync with the spoken performance. Benjamin's vision of the translation at the forest ridge, calling into the darkness and hearing the echo of the original, seems worlds away from the process of translation here. In these cases, we never hear the echo to confirm that the call into the forest has been heard.

Text 6: "Satrok'ala" by Baly, Slam National Slamédia, December 5, 2015, Alliance Française de Tana[95]

Moi, je m'appelle Satrok'ala, Chapeau de la Forêt	Me, my name is Satrok'ala, Hat of the Forest	1
Je suis le vingtième fils de mon père	I am my father's 20th child	
C'est dur d'être vingtième fils	It's hard to be the 20th child	
Mon père a dix filles et dix fils	My father has ten daughters and ten sons	
J'ai la chance d'être son vingtième fils	I am lucky to be his 20th child	5
Mon père est un homme	My father is a man	
A des yeux, a des oreilles, a une bouche, et a un nez	Has eyes, has ears, has a mouth, and has a nose	
Je crois que c'est Dieu-donné	I think it's God-given	
Et vous me demandez "Comment est-il possible?"	And you ask me "How is it possible?"	10
C'est pas possible avec une femme, deux femmes…	It's not possible with one wife, two wives…	
Et ben, mon père a quatre femmes	Well, my father has four wives	
Il travaille alors avec quatre femmes	So, he works with four wives	
C'est pas interdit, chez nous on appelle ça la polygamie	It's not forbidden, where I'm from we call that polygamy	
Et vous pensez aussi que c'est interdit dans la Bible	And you also think it's forbidden in the Bible	15
Et votre société ne pratique jamais ça	And your society never practices that	
Mais chez nous on a pas la Bible, on a juste notre forêt là-bas	But where I'm from we don't have the Bible, we just have our forest over there	
Et je suis le chapeau de cette forêt-la	And I am the hat of that forest	
Et vous me demandez aussi "Pourquoi 'Chapeau de la Forêt'?"	And you also ask me "Why 'Hat of the Forest'?"	
Parce que mon père m'a donné ce nom-là	Because my father gave me that name	20
Moi je suis un gardien de zébus	Me, I'm a cattle herder	
Je garde notre zébus, le matin, le midi, le soir, même la nuit	I guard our cattle morning, noon, evening, even at night	
C'est dur. En plus, c'est centaines de zébus	It's hard. Plus, it's hundreds of cattle	
Mes confrères travaillent juste dans le	But my brothers just work in the field	

champs		
Les autres travaillent juste dans notre village	The others just work in our village	25
Mon papa les laisse pas garder nos troupeaux, c'est à moi seul	My dad doesn't let them guard our herds, that's for me alone	
C'est mon job, mon obligation	It's my job, my obligation	
Je garde aussi la forêt	I also guard the forest	
Je fais des va-et-vient dans la forêt	I go back and forth in the forest	
Je me promène dans la forêt, je marche dans la forêt, je joue dans la forêt, je chasse dans la forêt, je chante dans la forêt, et je dors dans la forêt lointaine	I stroll in the forest, I walk in the forest, I play in the forest, I hunt in the forest, I sing in the forest, and I sleep in the faraway forest	30
S'il y a des hommes qui veulent détruire notre forêt, je suis un lion	If there are men who want to destroy our forest, I am a lion	
S'il y a des hommes qui veulent voler notre poisson, je suis un crocodile	If there are men who want to steal our fish, I am a crocodile	
S'il y a des hommes qui veulent faire la déforestation, je suis un loup, faites attention	If there are men who want to do deforestation, I am a wolf, watch out	
Si vous êtes un *malaso* [bandit] je serai votre gendarme	If you are a *bandit* I will be your police	
Si vous êtes un touriste je serai votre guide	If you are a tourist I will be your guide	35
Si vous êtes un journaliste, vous pouvez m'interviewer	If you are a journalist, you can interview me	
Parce que moi je lutte contre ceux qui n'aiment pas la forêt	Because me, I fight against those who don't like the forest	
Et moi je m'appelle Satrok'ala, chapeau de la forêt	And me, my name is Satrok'ala, Hat of the Forest	

Text 7: "Madagascar," 2015, by Caylah[96]

Aleo ny tantara no hitsara	Let history be the judge	1
Laissons l'histoire juger	*Let's let history be the judge*	
Juger du passé	*Judge the past*	
Juger du présent	*Judge the present*	
Laissons le futur murmurer son cours	*Let's let the future murmur its course*	5
Nosy	Island	
Nosy masina	Sacred island	
Madagasikara	Madagascar	
Manan-karena tantara fa nosotasotain'ny mpanjana-tany	Rich in history but profaned by the colonizers	
Nolotoin'ny kolontsaina vahiny	Sullied by foreign culture	10
Na dia teo aza ny fanagasiana	Despite Malagasization	
Malgachisation de nos terres	*The Malagasization of our land*	
Car le Malagasy est notre langue mère	*For Malagasy is our mother tongue*	
Cependant elle n'a guère	*And yet it hardly*	
N'a guère le mérite de nous plaire	*hardly has the merit of pleasing us*	15
Stéréotypé vita gasy	*Stereotyped* Made in Madagascar	
Au même titre que les vita sinoa	*just like* Made in China	
Fa lazaiko an'ialahy anefa fa ny gasy mahavoa	But I'm telling you man, Malagasy people are gifted/talented	
Gasy, gasy ka tsara	Malagasy, Malagasy is good	
Gasy ka manja	Malagasy is beautiful	20
Ka aza manao fanahin-jaza	So don't act like a child	
Aza mitomany razana tsy manendrika ny tena	Don't cry for ancestors that don't suit you	
Fa manendrika ny hafa	But suit others	
Fa miady tsy feno ho'aho ankehitriny ny Malagasy	But Malagasy fight endlessly here	
Azafady	Excuse me	25
Azafady fa efa lamaody izao no miteny amin'ny teny vahiny	Excuse me but it's already fashionable now to speak other languages	
Kanefa tsy omeko tsiny	And yet I don't blame anyone	
Satria efa lasa fialan-tsiny ilay hoe	Because what has become an apology is	
Tsy haiko, tsy haiko fa izaho vahiny	"I don't know, I don't know because I'm not from here"	
Fa ny kilaon'ny votabia izao any amin'ny *la côte* no efa mandeha amin'ny euros	Because a kilo of tomatoes is now being sold in euros on *the coast*	30
Nefa ialahy raha resaka ariary mbola	But in terms of ariary, man, you're still	

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[96] This text was transcribed and translated from the online video by Fela Razafiarison-Josoa and myself. French words/phrases are in italics.

zero	at *zero*	
Mondialisation, globalisation,	*Globalization,*	
Fanatontoloana mira fandrosoana	Globalization equals progress	
Nefa Madagasikara mbola mikorosofahana ao amin'ny fahantrana	But Madagascar is still stuck in poverty	
Ny adalan'ny gasy izao no efa hireharehana	Malagasy stupidity has become a source of pride	35
Ka tsy hita taratra intsony ny maha gasy ny gasy	And the essence of Malagasy-ness is no longer visible	
Ohatra ny olona tsy nandia fianarana, tsy nianatra taratasy	Like those who did not go to school, who did not learn to write	
Madagasikara	Madagascar	
Madagasikara nosindrazako	Madagascar, island of my ancestors	
Madagasikara tanindrazako	Madagascar, land of my ancestors	40
Fa nosotasotain'ny mpitondra fanjakana	Profaned by government leaders	
Tanindrazana	Ancestral land	
Tanindrazana, fahafahana, fandrosoana	Ancestral land, freedom, progress	
Nefa toa mankamamy ny haratsiana sy ny fahalotoana	But it seems to treasure evil and filth.	
Tanindrazana, fahafahana, fahamarinana	Ancestral land, freedom, justice	45
Manjaka ny kolikoly	Corruption is king	
Ny be vola ihany no mifaninana	Only the rich can compete	
Tanindrazana, fahafahana, fitiavana	Ancestral land, freedom, love	
Samy Malagasy no mifamono	Malagasy people kill each other	
Ny ahiahy tsy hihavanana	Suspicion won't lead to fihavanana[97]	50
Ity tany ity toa tsy hahitana filaminana	In this land we won't see peace	
Fanovana sy herisetra	Upheaval and violence	
Poa-basy sy etsetra	Gunshots, et cetera	
Madagasikara nosindrazako	Madagascar, island of my ancestors	
Madagasikara tanindrazako	Madagascar, land of my ancestors	55
Lova tsy mifindra	Heritage that doesn't move,	
Voaravaka sy voarindra ho rado mipetraka ho vakoka	That like jewelry has been decorated and arranged, will remain patrimony	
Fa efa feno ny ran'ny razako	Because it already full of my ancestors' blood	
Ho tombo-kase ny tantara	It will stamp history	
Izao tsy nasian'ialahy lanjany nefa izany ankehitriny	These days you give it no importance	60
Toa zary tsy misy hajany	Almost no respect	
Maty fo aman'aina	The hearts and lives are dead	
Ireo mahery fo manentana an'ialahy	Of those brave hearts[98] who lifted you	

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[97] brotherly solidarity, harmony

	up	
Nefa ialahy ankehitriny toa tsy miraharaha	And yet you don't give a damn about it	
Aiza?	Where?	65
Aiza ilay kolontsaina malagasy	Where is Malagasy culture	
Izay mitambatra vato, izay misaraka fasika	Those who unite are rocks, those who separate are sand	
Izao samy maka ho azy	These days everyone takes for themselves	
Samy mandeha samy mitady	Each goes, each searches[99]	
Dia ny sasany manao tsindrio fa lavo	And some are trampling on those already on the ground	70
Satria zanaka mpanafa	Because they're the children of those who have gotten rich	
Izahay miady amam-by, amam-bato	Us [excl.], we fight with iron and stone	
Satria zanaka mpanarato	Because we are the children of fishermen	
Aujourd'hui c'est la loi du plus fort	*These days it's survival of the fittest*	
Raha kely sandry ialahy zandry	If you have weak arms, little man,	75
Dia *c'est que tu as tort*	Then *it means you are wrong*	
Fanjakan'ny be sandry	Strong-arm government	
Fanjakan'i Baroa	Robber baron government	
Tsy ambara telo	Not shared among three [secret]	
Tsy ambara roa	Not even shared among two	80
Fa mahalasa saina	And it makes you crazy	
Mahalasa amboroho	It makes you think a lot	
Fa izay be sandry ihany no mahavoa	Because only the strong arms succeed	
Voavidim-bola ny marina	Truth can now be bought	
An'ny vola ny rariny	Money owns justice	85
Ady seza no mibahana	Fighting for a spot is common	
Dia vahoaka miandry tantana	And the people are waiting for their share	
Dia tsy afaka ny hinia hikipy aho	And I can't willingly close my eyes	
Hanao maso be tsy mahita	And pretend not to see with my big eyes	
Sanatria manao politika	God forbid I do politics	90
Fa milaza sy manambara ny tantara	I'm just recounting and revealing history	
Ka aleo ny tantara ho hitsara	So let history be the judge	
Ka ho ela velona anie ianao i Gasikara	and long life to you, Madagascar!	

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[98] A common term for those who fought for independence against the French colonizers (see also Makwa's poem in Chapter Three).

[99] A saying used to express the idea that everyone does their own thing.

Chapter 5: Mediating Authority, Orienting Publics

1. Introduction

Following from the previous chapter on translation, circulation, and scale, this chapter shows how and where Malagasy slam poetry lives as mediated by digital technologies, and what this tells us about the central issues of this dissertation: public speech and authority. This is a contribution to a particular kind of media scholarship that "examine[s] modes of mediation that entail the technological but are not reducible to it" (Hirschkind et al. 2017: S3). My aim is not to document which technologies slam poets use and how, nor to assume the "newness" of the kinds of mediation these technologies enable, but rather to interrogate entanglements of heterogeneous media technologies, corporeal and linguistic practices, and relations between audiences and performers. I will argue that some of these technologies induce aspirations of increased "links"—which involve particular kinds of imaginings of and relations to "the public"—without accounting for the concomitant "gaps" (Briggs and Bauman 1992) produced through intertextuality and circulation. As the anticipation of, and anxieties around, digital circulation transform understandings of corporeality and temporality, they also transform understandings of public speech and authority.

While my focus here is on mediation, I will also at times refer to "mediatization," a term that Briggs and Hallin (2016) note has been used to describe the intensified involvement of media institutions in political processes (see their concise summary of this literature, Briggs and Hallin 2016: 9), and which they argue is applicable to other fields such as medicine. The term has also been taken up in linguistic anthropology, and in Asif Agha's (2011) usage refers to the "institutional practices that reflexively link processes of communication to processes of commoditization" (Agha 2011: 163). Other linguistic anthropologists have looked at for example, the mediation of religious experience through media technologies (Eisenlohr 2011) or forms of "biocommunicability" in the production of public health news and knowledge (Briggs 2005, 2011). I use the term mediatization to consider how mediation and communication can be bound up in institutional processes—including social structures, forms of capital, and knowledge production—as well as processes of commoditization. We have seen in previous chapters how some poets portray commercialism and commoditization as antithetical and potentially detrimental to slam as a "community" endeavor, at the same time that commercial success can be framed as an unexpected by-product of increased circulation, particularly abroad. My claim in this chapter is that, while many forms of mediation and communication in slam events are *not* mediatized—that is to say, not primarily institutional and/or commoditized—there is a prevailing anxiety *around* mediatization in the slam community, as it is seen in some cases to threaten the notion of slam as free and open to all. Thus, paradoxically, the circulation of slam poetry to new publics through mediatized forms is sometimes seen as limiting slam's publics.

In the next section, we will examine how understandings of corporeality and temporality are shaped in relation to digital technologies. Here, I suggest that we might productively think of mediation (and sometimes mediatization) as a process of

orientation, where media are not simply conduits of a pre-determined message but are in fact orienting devices that cue us into particular temporal frames and corporeal arrangements. But this is not unidirectional: at the same time, performers and audiences also orient *towards* (or away from) these technologies and modes of mediation, often in ways that are patterned on prior technologies and modes of mediation.

To understand this process we can return to the double-facing orientation to past and future expressed in the call-and-response "Slam is dead; long live slam!" As we saw in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, this expression is itself intimately tied to the past, as it is modeled on the formal announcement on the death of a French monarch and the near-simultaneous proclamation of his successor: "The king is dead; long live the king!" ("Le roi est mort, vive le roi!"). Here, I want to suggest that this expression illuminates how media technologies have been incorporated into the Malagasy slam community, which also illustrates a central claim in media studies. A number of media scholars have noted—particularly Bolter and Grusin in their concept of remediation (1999), but also Gitelman (2006), Boellstorf (2008), and Gershon (2012)— that our encounters with media are always embedded in a history that partially shapes how we understand and use "new" media: for example, our understanding of film builds on how we have learned to understand and make use of print media. Just as "the king is dead; long live the king!" does not signify that the entire structure and institution of the monarchy dies when a monarch dies, but merely one iteration of that monarchy, so it is with media and media technologies: the new may not be quite the same as the old, but it continues on a path forged by that which came before. Similarly, media technologies such as video sharing on YouTube have not replaced or supplanted the live slam event; rather—as we will see in the following section—these technologies have been incorporated into the slam community, enabling "new" modes of performance and authoritative public speech that are imbricated with the "old."

2. Corporeality and temporality in digital circulation

In Fianarantsoa, a city in the Southern Highlands, I went with a group of poets to the radio station for their weekly poetry show with a local DJ. The show was a mix of music and commentary with live performances from the slam poets. Even though we had just met, the DJ asked if I would perform something. I hesitated, not wanting to take airtime away from the "real" poets, and he asked if I could instead answer some questions on air, to which I agreed. The equipment took up two tables in the middle of a large room with no visible soundproofing, and our group of five or six poets sat on the floor along the wall. I had never been on the radio before and I was worried that we were too noisy—cell phones were going off, people were going in and out and whispering to each other. The program began with individual and group performances by a few different poets. When it was my turn to be interviewed, the DJ asked surprisingly astute questions—I assumed he was making them up on the spot, because we hadn't arranged in advance for me to be there. Overall, I was struck by how informal it felt—as if the radio station was yet another hangout spot for the poets, hardly any

more formal or pre-structured than hanging out outside the Alliance or at someone's house.

I had a similar feeling a few months later in Toamasina, on the East coast, where a couple of slam poets had their own radio show. Although the set-up was a little more what I expected from a radio station—a cluster of small soundproof rooms that looked like images I had seen of radio booths—I was struck again by how informal it felt. Here, too, people drifted in and out and sat on the floor chatting, like this was just another hangout spot. And here, too, one of the DJs asked me to join in on his interview with Devine Qui, the 2014 National Slam champion, without arranging it in advance or planning out his questions for me. I was reminded of Jackson's (2013) examples of the nonchalance with which people interacted with microphones during her fieldwork in Madagascar. Despite the even broader, unknown, and invisible public, the poets didn't seem to view these forms of public address as any more formal or serious than a hangout session at the Alliance.

This relaxed atmosphere highlighted a significant divide in our perceptions of these mediatized events. I had imagined the primary audience of these events to be the invisible listeners tuning in from wherever they were, an audience whose only participation, from our perspective, took the form of music requests they texted to the DJs. In other words, I expected the media technology to re-orient performers in such a way that the invisible audience receiving the airwaves would become the focus of the event, rather than those of us who were physically co-present for the broadcast.

Such was not the case. It seemed that, for the poets, the invisible audience was relatively inconsequential. Outside of the DJs' direct address to this audience, no one remarked on these invisible listeners or seemed to pay much mind to their experience. What mattered was the immediate audience—the other poets—and the ways in which this weekly ritual physically brought them together. This is not to say that these events weren't marked as distinct from other kinds of performances and meet-ups—certainly, there is a level of prestige associated with major media outlets and their expensive, high-tech equipment, as well as with the fact of performing for a broader audience than simply those who attend slam events in person. But it seemed that the primary interest of these radio shows for the slam community was not that they enabled communication with a broader audience, orienting the poets *outwards*, but rather that they further integrated the performers, orienting them *inwards*, giving them a reason to congregate regularly and a relatively prestigious format for their performances. After the broadcast, the poets often remained together, going to get a drink or food or simply hang out elsewhere.

In contrast to the kinds of connections across geographical distance that I expected from a radio broadcast, and that are evidenced in nuanced ways by ethnographies of radio and sound production (Spitulnik 2002, Bessire & Fisher 2012, Fisher 2015), the connections engendered by these broadcasts seemed to be primarily those between poets who were in the room together and already knew each other. Two of the cities with some of the most cohesive slam communities—meaning that they met at least once a week and spent a significant amount of time together outside of the Alliance events—were also the ones that participated in these weekly radio broadcasts.

While a number of slam poets in Tana also perform on radio and TV networks, the field of media production there is so vast that there isn't a comparable sense of a cohesive community participating in these performances. Many poets in Tana perform alone or in small groups at these mediatized events, and at the time of my fieldwork there was no regularly scheduled broadcast of slam poetry in Tana. In Fianarantsoa and Toamasina, on the other hand, there are fewer major stations and, although not all poets participated in the broadcasts, there was a sense that these served as a centripetal force, drawing the poets closer together as they participated in regularly scheduled, face-to-face group events. While this media production was not necessarily "digital," in the sense that radio broadcasts in Madagascar are primarily received through analog technologies, it provides a useful example of the incorporation of various media *into* the slam community rather than simply being means by which the slam community can expand *out*.

Similarly, in live slam events there is always an imbrication with the digital, generally through cell phones: audience members and poets alike monitor their Facebook and text messages, take pictures and selfies, and capture video or audio recordings of some of the performances. Some of these pictures and recordings, particularly at high-stakes events such as the National Slam, will be posted on Facebook on individual profiles and group pages for Madagaslam or regional slam associations. Here too, this circulation may reach audiences who are not already involved in the slam community in some way, but it seems primarily to serve as a continuation and extension of live events in other modalities. In this sense, the time and space of the event is expanded into new digital spheres. It is tempting to view this expansion as a movement towards some kind of limitless physical and temporal space, where elements of the event (photos, videos, text) can be accessed from anywhere at any time, but in practice these elements seem to be more of an appendage to the event. The circulation of these elements tends to be physically and temporally proximal to the event—they are most often created, viewed, and commented on within days of the live event by people who were physically present.

In Chapter Three, we saw how language orients speakers and listeners in time and space. Given that language and corporeality are forms of mediation, in that they mediate experience, I want to argue that we must understand digital media, too, as orienting devices. This is related, though not reducible, to Marshall McLuhan's classic dictum that "the medium is the message" (McLuhan 1964): while taking up the notion of orientation might alert us to the fact that the medium shapes, frames, and in many ways constitutes a "message," conceiving of mediation as orientation goes a few steps further. First, as a phenomenological concept, "orientation" highlights the spatiotemporal interactions between media and bodies, rather than imagining media as abstract, bodiless, and/or timeless entities (see Ahmed 2006). Second, orientation mediates scales—as we saw with the discussion of phenomenology and practice theory in Chapter Three—between micro-level interactions between particular bodies and large-scale formations of institutional fields, networks of global circulation, and social structures. Finally, conceiving of mediation as orientation leaves room for individual motivations, anticipations, and imaginings, without confining us to a psychological or

cognitive framework for understanding how people and groups interact with various forms of mediation, whether language or media technologies.

In what follows, we will see two examples of how performers and audiences orient themselves to media technologies, and how media technologies orient performers and audiences: the Spoken Word Project and the Slam Média competition. As with the example of radio broadcasts, I will show how these events do not entail entirely "new" orientations, but are patterned on and intertwined with prior forms of mediation, particularly the live communicative event. Before turning to these examples, we will first examine the interplay between mediation and theorizations of the public sphere.

3. Orienting (counter)publics

Despite these realities of media practices as patterned on prior practices, anxieties proliferate around the specter of unruly circulation in "new" digital spheres. The recent "cybercriminality law" is a case in point: in 2014, the Malagasy Supreme Court passed a law (Law n°2014-006) ostensibly addressing crimes perpetrated online or in relation to digital systems. The law contains 41 articles, divided into two chapters. The first concerns crimes perpetrated *against* information systems (hacking is a prime example). The second chapter is titled "Offences against physical persons by means of an information system" ("Les atteintes aux personnes physiques par le biais d'un système d'information"), where digital technologies are portrayed not as the "victim" or object of crime but the means by which a crime is carried out—the medium of the crime.

The most widely-discussed article of this law is from this second section. In its first instantiation in 2014, Article 20 criminalized all "slander or defamation" (l'injure ou la diffamation") against government officials and private citizens with a fine and a *minimum prison sentence of two years* when the target is a government official (reduced to six months when the target is a private citizen). This lead to an uproar over press freedoms and the freedom of expression. The National Assembly and Senate responded with an updated law in 2016 (Law n°2016-031), which removed the prison sentence but kept all other aspects of the prior law intact, including the fine. Notably, both versions of the law provide an exception in the case of the slander of a private citizen when it is "preceded by provocation" ("précédée de provocation")—the implication being that government officials either do not provoke others to slander or defame them, or that they do but cannot be held responsible for the response. There is no elaboration on what constitutes "provocation"—or, for that matter, "slander and defamation."

What is striking about this law is not that it criminalizes "slander and defamation," whether of public officials or private persons—this was already illegal. Of course, the extreme minimum penalty established for this crime is of critical concern, but for our purposes here what is particularly of interest is the fact that public officials deemed the *digital circulation* of slanderous commentary so threatening as to warrant an updated law with increased penalties. Their anxieties about the noxious impact of political critique and satire seem to have been exponentially intensified by the thought that this critique might be more unmanageable, more unruly, and thus more harmful in a digital

space. This echoes prevailing anxieties *and* aspirations for digital circulation, which is frequently portrayed as unbounded by physical and temporal limitations, with both miraculous and disastrous potential.[100]

This law and the ensuing debate exemplify the struggle over authority in digital spheres, where the government struggles to maintain and even expand its authoritative control over public speech at the same time that speakers sense an opportunity to reach wider audiences. In slam poet Gad Bensalem's idiom of "managing freedom," speakers are now not only responsible for the immediate consequences of their speech vis-à-vis a live audience that they can perceive and interact with: they are now also responsible for unseen audience reactions and un(fore)seen consequences. This entails different orientations to temporality and corporeality. In what follows, we will see how this might inform our understanding of both the "public sphere" and "counterpublics."

In one dominant conception of publics, formulated by Jürgen Habermas (1962) and later developed by Benedict Anderson (1983), publics are understood to have been fashioned by European liberal democratic bourgeois culture, and in particular by practices of reading and commenting on published texts, whether newspapers or novels. The public is understood as the audience of these texts as well as the community that coheres around their interpretation, in contrast to the "private" sphere of the household. Nancy Fraser's (1990) influential reading of Habermas problematizes this dichotomy in her elaboration of a political economic vision, when she writes that "a multiplicity of publics is preferable to a single public sphere both in stratified societies and egalitarian societies" (Fraser 1990: 77). Her critical insight that there might be multiple publics (aside from whether or not this is "preferable") is lost in her introduction of a further dichotomy, stratified versus egalitarian, which remains largely unexamined and under-theorized.

Michael Warner (2002) extends the debate by providing a fuller analysis of a public as "a space of discourse organized by discourse" (Warner 2002: 68) and by delineating the elements that define a public, which he categorizes into seven points. What is relevant for us here is his next point, on the constitution of "counterpublics," in which he takes up Fraser's conception of "subaltern counterpublics" as, in her terms, "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser 1992: 67). In Fraser's delineation of what she views as the "emancipatory potential" of these counterpublics, she locates in them a source of

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[100] According to one news article (http://dwizernews.com/loi-cybercriminalite-ce-pourrais-faire/), an anonymous member of the National Assembly has said that this law was presented to the Assembly as an anti-terrorism measure by the Minister in charge of anti-terrorism efforts, that there was not ample time to read the law, and that "the Minister's presentation was solely focused on terrorist crime online, at the request of financial lenders, so that Madagascar could join the group of countries that signed this charter" ("l'exposé du ministre était axé uniquement contre la criminalité terroriste sur le net, à la demande des bailleurs de fond, pour que Madagascar puisse intégrer le groupe de pays qui ont signé cette charte," my translation). Although this is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is important to note here the confluence of Western anti-terrorism efforts, international development, and digital circulation. This law seems to have been the Malagasy government's attempt to prove its commitment to global anti-terrorism efforts in order to secure necessary global funds, which then resulted in reprimands from global leaders (not to mention the Malagasy population) for restricting individual and press freedoms.

resistance to "dominant social groups" as part of a liberatory politics of democratic egalitarianism (Fraser 1992: 68). While Warner does not go so far, he nonetheless understands counterpublics in a similar sense of the relation between a subordinate group and a dominant one: "A counterpublic maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status. The cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public, but a dominant one" (Warner 2002: 86). Thus, while Warner does not locate in counterpublics a form of resistance per se, he does see them as discursive spaces of transformative potential, where they might refashion dominant modes of world-making (Warner 2002: 88).

Somers-Willett (2014) defines slam poetry in the U.S. as one such counterpublic, following these definitions, as she argues that "poetry slam's open and democratic model of participation performs two main oppositional functions, both of which serve to critique dominant structures and enact (or at least imagine) counterpublic alternatives" (Somers-Willett 2014: 5). The first of these "oppositional functions" is the "anti-establishment" bent to slam, as it was originally created in opposition to academic poetry readings and the institutional boundaries surrounding the production and critique of poetry. The second is what Somers-Willett calls "a shared value of difference, expressed primarily through identity performance and its reception" (Somers-Willett 2014: 3), which often takes the form of critiquing power structures even though many audience members and performers in the U.S. belong to the very same social group that dominate these power structures.

I have shown in Chapter Two how this aspect of "identity performance" is not at all central to Malagasy slam poetry—while many (though certainly not all) slam poets in Madagascar may offer critiques of sociopolitical issues and figures, these critiques are rarely voiced from the perspective of first-person singular experience. More commonly, they are voiced in the first-person inclusive plural or in the third-person as the thoughts/feelings/concerns of "the people," and thus as coming from the majority—that is to say, the public broadly speaking. To what extent, then, can we call this a counterpublic?

In this section, I want to argue for a broader understanding of the notion of the counterpublic that does not rely on subaltern or subordinate status and/or resistance to dominant groups. A number of anthropological discussions of publics have given nuance to the notion of "publicness" by detailing histories, traditions, and practices outside of the European bourgeois reading public (Hirschkind 2006, Jackson 2013, Fisher 2015), and have thus illustrated how the concept of counterpublics, too, might not be so simply categorized as resistance to (the) dominant public(s). Hirschkind (2006), for example, has defined the counterpublic not as oppositional to the types of people who make up the "public" or to the content of their discourse, but as operating under a different *logic* than that of the European bourgeois public sphere, in which "deliberation […] is conceptually immunized from what are understood as the necessarily distorting effects of power" (Hirschkind 2006:106). Rather, in the counterpublic of Islamic cassette sermons that he investigates, Hirschkind finds "a conceptual edifice in which deliberation and discipline, or language and power, are regarded as thoroughly interdependent" (*idem*); it is the divergence of this model from that of the bourgeois

Habermasian public sphere that makes it "counterpublic." The counterpublic here is "counter" due to its difference from, rather than its resistance or subordination to, the bourgeois public.

Similarly, it is not that Malagasy slam poetry necessarily constitutes a counterpublic in the sense of expressing and/or embodying resistance to mainstream/dominant society, although it is occasionally a locus for this kind of resistance. Rather, the counterpublic nature of Malagasy slam can be found in its performance of a different kind of public discourse, distinct at once from the bourgeois reading culture of academic poetry *and* from traditional Malagasy modes of authoritative speech. That is to say, slam in Madagascar expresses a language ideology that runs counter both to the European model of the bourgeois public sphere *and* to that of the authoritative public speaker of kabary. It does not, however, explicitly resist these spheres or their language ideologies. It performs a different kind of public address, which intends a different kind of public.

This understanding of the "counter" in "counterpublic" is left out of accounts of online circulation such as Somers-Willett's (2014), in which she critiques the Def Jam poetry series on HBO as overly commercialized, and thus not constitutive of a counterpublic. Here, she describes counterpublics as operating outside of or against commercialization and thus, we might say, against mediatization. She notes that illegally uploaded (pirated) videos from the Def Jam series circulating on YouTube can create

> a kind of 'viral counterpublicity' where multiple conversations and debates are possible in ways that both capture and supercede the live context. The videos—which can be paired, linked, sent, embedded, and most importantly commented upon at all stages of its viral distribution—create a diffuse network of people in which counterpublic exchanges occur. […] Key to the formation of these real counterpublics (as opposed to imagined or "staged" counterpublics of the commercial context) is that such platforms are democratic and permeable; like the poetry slam, anyone with Internet access can participate, evaluate, and comment. In these online communities and platforms where the performances are wrested away from their commercial origins and circulate freely (albeit illegally) among audience members, *Def Poetry*'s counterpublic potential seems most fully realized. (Somers-Willett 2014: 21)

In this account, the presumed "free" circulation of these videos is predicated on two assumptions: that viewers have equal and uninhibited access to the videos, and that their circulation is unhindered by commercialism simply because they have been pirated. Regarding the first assumption, I cannot speak to the U.S. context (though I suspect many of my claims here would also apply in the U.S.), but access to the internet in Madagascar is anything but equal and inhibited. In addition to issues of access, there are also issues of digital literacy—the ability to navigate a YouTube requires not only alphabetic literacy but also knowledge of how a computer works, how a webpage works, and how YouTube works in particular.

Somers-Willett's second assumption is that these videos "circulate freely" on YouTube "at all stages of [their] viral distribution" (Somers-Willett 2014: 21). Anthropologists of media have been quick to critique characterizations of media technologies—and communication more broadly—as enabling boundless, seamless, and/or effortless transmission (Agha 2011, Briggs 2011, Hirschkind et al. 2017). Charles Briggs (2011), for example, argues for an understanding of mediation and communication as "constructed in quite complex, contested, and historically shifting ways" that are not ethereal or abstract but rather "closely embedded in the materiality of discourse and discursive dimensions of materialities" (Briggs 2011: 225-226).

This complex material and historical embededness is nowhere more evident than in the circulation of YouTube videos: while it is true that anyone with access to and knowledge of recording equipment and high-speed internet (an infinitesimal subset of the Malagasy population) can upload a YouTube video, the channels by which these videos circulate and become popular are very much tied to commercial interests as well as enduring socioeconomic structures. They are not solely mediated, but *mediatized*. With the video of Caylah's poem that we saw in Chapter Four, for example, we saw how its popularity had much to do with the fact that the producers were French and thus had professional networks outside the country; this is in addition to the poem's translation and the ways in which it was discursively and aesthetically fashioned into a circulate-able object.

As I have argued, I do not view the Malagasy slam community as a counterpublic in the sense that Somers-Willett defines this term, whether in live events or videos circulating online. It is not that slam is a "democratic" platform open to all, that it actively resists dominant publics, or that it resists commoditization. Rather, it is a counterpublic in the sense that it operates "counter" to the notion of a public in the Habermasian sense of the bourgeois public sphere. Where Habermas defined the public in opposition to the private sphere, slam poets blur the boundary as they publicly perform "private" embodied histories, experiences, and viewpoints. Slam is not therefore *more* of a counterpublic when it circulates online, but when it ties discourse to particular bodies in particular places even as it circulates.

Further, the capacity for feedback and commentary that Somers-Willett locates on the YouTube page is not a blank slate but is, in fact, an orienting device. The comment box on a YouTube page invites a textual modality—users cannot comment with anything but text, which remain publicly visible unless the user decides to delete it or—in very rare cases—a moderator deletes it for violating YouTube policies. In this way, YouTube comments entail a particular orientation to temporality and corporeality that is widely divergent from the kind of live feedback audiences give performers and each other. As opposed to the physically and temporally bounded live event, text comments on YouTube videos are temporally and physically stretched yet also subject to deletion: they are visible to anyone who visits the page, but liable to editing and/or deletion by the author or moderators at any time.

These videos further orient viewers to the performer and their words rather than to the event as a whole. Even when the video in question was recorded at a live slam event (as opposed to a one-off performance in a "slam style" like Caylah's poem

"Madagascar"), it circulates as a discrete object as if there were no surrounding event at all. Slam circulating on social media platforms is Pilote le Hot's nightmare of slam-as-individual-performance (in his terms, "showbiz") rather than as a live event where performers and audience are co-present. For many poets, these videos represent the mediatization of slam poetry, as it showcases individual performers in ways that might lead to the commercialization of their work.

We must also consider the platforms through which slam videos in Madagascar are accessed. Facebook, rather than the YouTube website, is the medium in which many if not most slam videos are watched in Madagascar. On Facebook, videos start playing automatically as one scrolls through the News Feed, just one of many visual, textual, and aural objects vying for attention in an endless scroll of pictures, text, gifs, and advertisements (often cleverly disguised as part of the News Feed itself). Orienting *to* a slam video in this dynamic and media-saturated landscape is often only a partial attunement, but this fact in and of itself is not necessarily so different from a live event, where participants frequently fade in and out of focusing on the performer while chatting with other, checking Facebook, etc. What is different about the viewer's orientation to an online video is that they can choose at any time to simply turn it off. While an audience member can choose to leave a performance, they do so with the knowledge that the event continues without them. The online video, on the other hand, is at the beck and call of the viewer. This represents a rather different relation to the authority of the speaker, where the beginning and end of speech is no longer decided by the performer.

It is true that as slam events circulate through media technologies—from radio to Facebook—they reach audiences they otherwise wouldn't: people who can't travel to live events or who don't feel comfortable attending such events. They also orient these audiences in ways that are similar to live events, for example by highlighting the voice and speech of the performer. But, as Bauman and Feaster (2005) and Bauman (2010, 2016) have shown in the case of sound recordings in the late 19th and early 20th century U.S., these orientations are profoundly transformed through "the rendering of face-to-face performance forms through the mediation of another communicative technology," a process he terms "remediation" (Bauman 2010: 23). In the case of radio, the performer's vocal qualities and speech are all that the audience can perceive; in the case of video recordings of live performances, the audience is oriented to the performer alone rather than to the entire physical and temporal scope of the live event. It remains to be seen to what extent this kind of circulation—particularly the virtual circulation that takes place on Facebook and YouTube—will significantly expand or reshape the boundaries of the "live" slam community, or its counterpublic qualities.

In the following examples—the Spoken Word Project and the Slam Média competition—we will see how media technologies are incorporated *into* a live event in ways that are both orienting and oriented, enabling new possibilities for mediation that are nonetheless patterned on prior media forms.

4. The Spoken Word Project

During my preliminary fieldwork in May 2013, the Goethe Institut (German Cultural Institute) in Johannesburg announced an international performance competition called the Spoken Word Project. Over the course of a year, eight German cultural centers around sub-Saharan Africa hosted spoken word competitions that were professionally filmed; the videos were uploaded to YouTube and to a website dedicated to the project.[101] The first event took place in Johannesburg; the champion, who goes by the name Kb, then traveled to perform at the second competition in Tana (as a guest performer, not a competitor), where poets had watched his video with French subtitles[102] and created their own performances in response. In this tag-team fashion, the champion of each country traveled to the next to perform as a guest at that competition. Benson, whose poem "Mamadou" we saw in Chapter Two, was the winner of the Tana competition and was sponsored to travel to Cameroon. As each city's performers fashioned their own performances in response to videos of the previous cities' top three winners, the project began to resemble a game of "Telephone," where each new iteration was somehow tied to the previous one but always in a new and surprising way.

The sleekly-designed website is available in four languages (English, French, German, and Portuguese) and features a stylized map of Africa on the homepage, with looping and interweaving orange lines illustrating the trajectories of the poets and their videos. The website describes the project thus:

> The Spoken Word Project aims to find ways of documenting this oral art form and increase its visibility in the region as well as abroad. The videos on this website capture both the textual and performative elements of a spoken word narrative as well as the reactions of the audience. The question is how spoken word can live, and even thrive, in the internet. The project thus serves to increase the links between the fairly contained scenes of the spoken word movements in different cities and countries of sub-Saharan Africa whilst demonstrating the significance of spoken word on the continent and thus creating an increased global awareness for this art form. The project further links the traditional art of storytelling as still widely practiced, for instance, in West Africa, with one of this tradition's modern manifestations – spoken word.

The project, as described here, addresses three issues of scale and circulation: the perceived lack of communication between disparate spoken word scenes across Africa (portrayed as a place where oral traditions are still "widely practiced" but not "modern"),

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[101] http://www.goethe.de/ins/za/prj/spw/enindex.htm

[102] Unfortunately the only publicly available videos on YouTube do not contain the French subtitles, so I don't have access to the French translations. The only two videos of the Tana competition on YouTube are of the first and second place winners, Benson and Ranala, who both performed in French. These do not have English subtitles.

a lack of global awareness about spoken word in general but especially as it is practiced in Africa, and the documentation of spoken word on a digital platform—the internet.

The Spoken Word Project is a prime example of the dissimulation of mediatization—that is to say, of the complex ways mediation is bound up in flows of capital and commoditization. The description frames the project as straightforwardly increasing "visibility" and "awareness," and all of the project's events, as well as access to the site and videos, are "free" (though we will see later in this chapter how the absence of an entrance fee and/or paywall does not equate to unlimited accessibility). It would seem, on the surface, that this is project involves mediatization via institutional networks but not commercialization. Yet the project itself required money, of course, which was provided by the Goethe Institut in Johannesburg. What looks, on the webpage, like a series of joyful leaps across the map of Africa in fact required vast amounts of financial, institutional, and cultural capital. Further, the "hop" all the way up to Germany was not something all poets could compete for, but was instead limited to the South African poets who participated in the project. What we don't see is the ghost map behind this, showing the networks of capital and institional power that made this possible.

Although a number of organizations in Madagascar have hosted and provided financial support for slam events, the Spoken Word Project was the first competition that was created entirely by a foreign cultural center (rather than merely funded by one) and that was not restricted to Francophone contexts. The CGM (Centre Germano-Malgache) that hosted the event in Tana was already respected among poets for more actively promoting Malagasy language and culture than the French Institute, as I discuss in Chapter Two, and this event strengthened that perception. While the project does not seem to have forged enduring ties between different slam communities, particularly between Anglophone and Francophone African countries, it did serve to at least open some channels of communication and allow poets to gain a sense of what other slam communities are up to. It was also the first competition (and the only one, to my knowledge) in which a native English speaker performed, a Ghanaian-Malagasy woman who performed entirely in English.

The project also brought in a more diverse group of performers due to its emphasis on spoken word rather than slam. The CGM held a meeting with representatives from a number of genres—theater, slam, "literary" poets, and mpikabary—to invite them to participate in the project, and selection rounds were scheduled for each of these groups. The latter two groups, however, ultimately did not participate or show up to the selection rounds. In the case of the mpikabary, they said it was because the announcement was made too late (one month in advance of the competition) for them to be able to prepare a text based on Kb's performance. The competition was thus still dominated by slam poets, but one theater performer participated in the final bout.

The second goal of the project, promoting awareness of African spoken word abroad, also may have met with mixed success. On the one hand, a number of South African performers were sponsored to perform in Germany at the end of the project, which may have created some channels of communication between the two countries,

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but these performers were selected by the Goethe Institut of Johannesburg and poets from other countries were not considered. Thus, if the project had an impact on German perceptions of African spoken word, it did so on the basis of *South African* spoken word. Further, the videos posted to YouTube were not subtitled, and thus the Francophone poems remain accessible only to Francophone audiences and vice versa for the Anglophone videos. Significantly, there are no videos in languages other than English or French, even though—at least in the case of Madagascar and Malagasy—there were live performances in other languages. The videos of all competitions are still available on YouTube and on the project website, but these are unlikely to have had a large impact on non-African audiences.

The project is perhaps most interesting for its imagination of how digital media and live performance might work in tandem, for those already involved in the slam community. Given the difficulty and expense of travel between many African countries, especially Madagascar, viewing slam videos online is one of the only ways for most Malagasy poets to gain a sense of slam practices in other countries. But if the aim of the project was to increase awareness and connections between *all* the participating countries, it was not entirely successful: at least in Madagascar, the poets only seemed to have watched the video by Kb, the winning Johannesburg poet. While some Malagasy poets may have also watched subsequent videos of performances in other cities on their own, I never heard them discuss this and there was no follow-up event at the CGM to screen these subsequent videos. The vision of seamless flows of communication back and forth between multiple countries, as illustrated in the map on the project homepage, does not seem to have been borne out.

Instead, the project was more like a relay, with a clear forward movement and little to no communication between those who were not immediately linked. There was a connecting thread, but participants were not necessarily afforded an opportunity to view the larger picture and track the thread all the way through. Performers were asked to view the video of the winning performance from the city that preceded them in the line-up—in the case of Madagascar, this was Kb's poem from Johannesburg—and draw from this poem in some way in their own performance. When I attended the first qualification round for the project in Tana, without knowing the precise details of the competition, I was struck by how many poets were addressing the issue of orphaned children. I thought initially that there had been some prominent news story about an orphanage, only to find out later that Kb's poem "Lonesome Soul"[103] opens with these lines:

Now who's got your back
when you've got your back backed against the wall
with no back-up plans in your backpack,
and you don't even have a backbone to support your back?
Boy, grow a backbone
Boy, grow a backbone
A boy horrified in an orphan age

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[103] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-0tufd40vk&t=12s

Questions of why he's there are asked with rage
His story leaves a blank page

While every performing poet in Tana made some reference to an orphan in at least one of their poems, and many of them chose to write entire poems about an orphan, the connections they drew were not limited to this overarching subject of the poem. Many found inspiration in single words and lines from Kb's poem: backbone ("épine dorsale"), "a thin line between love and hate" ("une ligne subtile entre l'amour et la haine"), "I'm dignified by the way I dress" ("la manière dont je m'habille me définit").[104] Yet these connecting threads did not limit the poems, as evidenced by the sheer breadth of topics and styles covered by the competing poets in Tana.

In one poem by the second-place winner, a poet from Tana named Ranala, she references Kb directly in her take-up of his "thin line between love and hate," but uses it to talk about the political crisis Madagascar was undergoing at the time—in 2013, four years after Andry Rajoelina took control of the government in a military-backed coup, the country still had not held elections and was ruled by Rajoelina's "transitional" government. The crisis had severe economic consequences, not least because the U.S. and other Anglophone countries suspended aid to Madagascar because they did not recognize Rajoelina's government as legitimate. Here, without ever naming Rajoelina directly, Ranala delivers a fierce critique:[105]

Kb dit qu'on pense qu'une ligne subtile existe entre l'amour et la haine	Kb says it is thought that there's a fine line between love and hate	A 1
Moi j'ai l'horreur de vous déclarer la guerre	Me, I have the horror of declaring war on you	B
Pour cette paix que l'on a pas	For this peace we do not have	C
Pour vos paroles en mode d'appât	For your baiting words	C
Pour pécher et souiller les bonnes âmes d'ici-bas	For fishing and sullying the good souls here below	C 5
Pour la bassesse de vos coups bas	For the lowness of your low blows	C
Pour mieux étouffer les cris d'alarme et de détresse	To better stifle the cries of alarm and distress	D
Pour contenir le [son?] des larmes de ceux qu'on réduit au silence	To better contain the [sound?] of tears of those reduced to silence	E
De ceux qu'on oppresse	Of those who are oppressed	D
De ceux qui recoivent au quotidien les tristes leçons de leur réalité dans la presse	Of those who daily receive the sad lessons of their reality in the press	D10

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[104] The French line, from a performance by Nate, gives "defined" rather than "dignified." I have not been able to find the French translation of Kb's poem, so it is unclear whether the translation was incorrect, Nate misread it, or he made a conscious decision to alter the line.

[105] See Text 8 for full text and translation (my transcription and translation); these are my line breaks and rhyme scheme annotations.

Vous ne m'aurez pas J'ai l'horreur de vous déclarer la guerre	You won't get me I have the horror of declaring war on you	C B

The recording does not, as the Spoken Word Project website claims, "capture the audience reactions," unless they mean that these are captured aurally—the audience is reduced to an invisible mass of sound, applauding and laughing, but it is clear that this video is grounded in a live performance setting. It provides a closer view of Ranala's face than an audience member would have, orienting us to her dramatic facial expressions.

Ranala reads the poem from two pages taped together at the short end, forming one extra-long page that she holds with one hand at the top and one at the bottom—it gives her the appearance of reading from a scroll to formally announce her declaration of war. Ranala is a prominent member of the theater troupe Miangaly, which numbers quite a few slam poets, and her theatrical training shines through in this performance, in part, perhaps, because the competition—as a spoken word competition—did not follow the rules of slam and so allowed props. While texts read from a cell phone or printed page do not generally count as props in slam, given the theatrical use Ranala makes of the page in this case, it would likely have disqualified her in a slam competition.

Ranala's performance incorporates a number of elements discussed throughout this dissertation as central to the genre of slam as it is practiced in Madagascar: first of all, her authority as a speaker is undergirded by her relation to the audience, particularly in the last lines, "So in the name of one, of two, and of three,/ Citizens, on your feet, wake up!" ("Alors au nom du un, du deux, et du trois,/ Citoyennes et citoyens, debout réveille-toi!" l. 44-45). This ending was marked by a significant rise in volume and intensity, and Ranala lowered the page to count off on her fingers and point directly to the audience on the very last line. The audience responded with loud cheering and applause and shouts of "Ten!" ("Dix é!") Although this is not recorded on the YouTube video, I noted that one audience member stood up in response to this last line, raising his fist and cheering.

Secondly, Ranala's authority as a speaker does not reside in a focalization of her own personal experiences but rather in an expression of the experiences and desperation of the general public. While there are a few instances of the first-person singular, notably in her repeated assertion "I have the horror of declaring war on you" ("J'ai l'horreur de vous déclarer la guerre"), the majority of the poem is a description in the third-person (such as "this hungry people" – "ce peuple qui a faim," l. 40), or in the first-person plural (such as "our hopes" – "nos espérances," l. 13). Of course, the primary focus in the poem is the second-person addressee, "you" ("vous"), which—even without knowing anything about Malgasy politics—we quickly understand as the politician(s) responsible for the suffering people.

This last point connects to the third aspect of Ranala's poem that is related to arguments I have made earlier in the dissertation: in her decision to perform in French and to leave out contextual references that would root the poem in the specifics of Rajoelina's regime, she has fashioned a performance that can easily circulate across

national and linguistic boundaries. With the exception of the very first line, "Kb says…" ("Kb dit…"), there is nothing in the poem to anchor us to a particular temporal or physical location. She could be railing against the French monarchy, or nearly any politician, anywhere.

What I want to emphasize here, and what the focus on mediation in this chapter makes clear, is that Ranala's performance is also made more authoritative by its incorporation of a form of mediation that is easily read as "old": the paper scroll. Her use of this simple prop employs an authoritative media technology, albeit a very old one, to link her performance to the royal decrees of long-ago monarchies; this theatrical effect is heightened by her reference to those in power as "dear little kings and little queens" ("chers petits rois et petites reines," l. 42).[106] As I argued earlier in this chapter, Ranala's performance of authority here maintains a double-facing orientation: it is modeled on ancient authoritative media forms and modes of address (the royal paper scroll) at the same time that it anticipates thoroughly contemporary ones (transnational circulation via digital technologies and circuits).

The anchor of this double-facing orientation, as in the double horizon of phenomenology, is the body. Contrary to common construals of media technologies (whether a paper scroll or a Facebook page) as virtual and body-less, in this form of authoritative communication the speaker's body is front and center. Corporeal immediacy mediates between the written word and the digital video through Ranala's masterful use of the scroll as theatrical prop—the way she grips it, the look on her face as she squints up from it with one eyebrow cocked—as well as the aural qualities of the rhyme scheme and her vocal delivery. The rhyme scheme, for example, is replete with internal rhymes that are obscured in the written text, and her repetition of "I have the horror of declaring war on you" is made all the more salient by the fact that this is one of the few lines in the entire poem that does not rhyme with any others.

The video of Ranala's poem on YouTube has not had a particularly wide circulation: 400 views, five likes (one of which is mine), and two appreciative comments in French from users with Malagasy names. But this is nonetheless substantially more than Ranala's live audience, even if we consider that many of these are probably repeats by the same viewer (I am also responsible for quite a few of those). If we compare this poem to Caylah's "Madagascar," it has not circulated nearly as far. This is undoubtedly due in large part to the fact that the video is a fairly straightforward recording of Ranala's live performance, rather than a staged and heavily edited video.

Unlike Caylah's poem, then, the video of Ranala's performance is not a new modality for slam, but instead makes the live event circulate via new groups of slam poets. As with the radio broadcasts in Fianarantsoa and Toamasina, the Spoken Word Project did not have a major impact in terms of reaching or creating a new audience for slam. While the project's website proclaims a multiplicity of scalar linkages—between sub-Saharan African slam communities, between these communities and the "global," as well as between spoken word and its origin, "the traditional art of storytelling"—it is

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[106] I interpreted this line as referring to a singular king and singular queen, who I assumed were Rajoelina and his wife, but when I asked Ranala to review my transcription she corrected it to the plural. The difference in French, unlike in English, is not audible.

clear that, as with any case of intertextuality, there are as many gaps as links (Briggs and Bauman 1992). The project's main impact seems to have been on the slam community itself: in the case of radio, by creating another venue for informal slam performances and "hanging out"; in the case of the Spoken Word Project, by creating a new performance format involving digital media that enabled poets to interact with performers and audiences across national boundaries—if not necessarily linguistic ones.

5. The "Slam Média" competition

Although the Spoken Word Project was not replicated, nor was the model of basing a performance on another performer's video, the use of video in live events has become an annual occurrence. In 2015, Madagaslam debuted a new event at the National Slam festival: a competition called "Slam Média," which invited poets from across the country to send in videos of themselves performing a poem under the same rules as a regular slam (three minute maximum, no props, no music). The rules further stipulated that there could be no special effects or editing: it had to be a continuous recording. The videos were projected for a live audience and judges in a classroom at the IFM, preceded by an unjudged open mic session—this was where Baly performed his "Satrok'ala" poem, discussed in the previous chapter.

Events such as this one have opened up participation to those who otherwise could not physically attend (which is not to say that they magically actualize universal access), thereby creating a new kind of event. There is something odd about these events, which the audience seems to sense as well—the immediacy and spontaneity of the poems is gone, and because we know our reactions are not being viewed and experienced by the poet (unless they are also among the live audience), there is less incentive to actively engage by shouting comments, cheering, reciting part of the poem along with the poet, etc. The temporal immediacy is lost, even if the video is the "first take" (and we have no way of knowing if it's the first or the fiftieth). While this also can be argued for some of the slam videos that circulate online, the fact of watching these videos while co-present with others, in a setting that would "normally" involve live performances, makes for a rather strange encounter.

The Spoken Word Project may have been part of the impetus for the Slam Média event, but the idea seems to have come most directly from Slamlakour, a slam organization on Reunion Island that has worked closely with Madagaslam in the past.[107] Slamlakour held their first "Digislam" in March/April 2015, but with slightly different rules: videos had to be 90 seconds or shorter, and poets were encouraged to edit their videos and add a soundtrack using YouTube's editing tools. Slamlakour has continued to hold this competition, posting all the videos on YouTube; Madagaslam has also continued to

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[107] The concept is not limited to the Indian Ocean: a recent Facebook post—by a Gabonese slam poet who competed in the 2015 World Cup and later participated in the 2015 Madagascar National Slam festival as a guest poet—announces an online slam competition, an "e-scène slam," with poets from a number of Francophone West African countries).

host a Slam Média as part of the National Slam festival, but the videos are not publicly available online even though videos of the live National Slam final performances are.

Incorporating the Slam Média competition into the National Slam has enabled poets from other regions to participate in the National Slam in some way, even if they are unable to physically attend one of the open mic events of the festival. It has also meant that poets under 18 are now able to compete in a National Slam event: given the legal issues involved in providing transportation and accommodation to minors, Madagaslam—and, perhaps more importantly, its sponsors—has preferred to limit the National Slam competition to those over 18. The World Cup in Paris is also only open to poets over 18, so even if Madagaslam opened up the National Slam to minors, if a minor won first place they would not be able to represent Madagascar at the World Cup.

This apparent broadening of access presents an intriguing conundrum, which speaks to larger concerns around digital media. On the one hand, Slam Média would appear to have broadened access to the National Slam: Slam Média participants do not have to qualify in a regional bout in order to participate, nor do they have to be physically able to travel to Tana, nor does Madagaslam (and its sponsors) have to take financial and legal responsibility for these participants' travel and accommodation. The Slam Média competition can thus include a number of people who could not enter the "live" competition: minors, people who couldn't take time off to participate in the National Slam even if they had qualified, those who were unable to travel to the regional bout nearest to them, those who did participate in their regional bout but did not qualify, people who prefer not to perform before a live audience, etc. But we must also take into consideration the people who are also unable to compete in Slam Média: those who don't have access to recording technologies and/or an internet connection strong enough for a video upload, those who would not have heard of Slam Média in the first place, etc. We should consider, too, that the judges are still Tana judges, and thus that this competition does not address the concerns about discrimination and stereotyping that non-Tana poets have expressed about the National Slam overall.

What both Slam Média and the Spoken Word Project show is that there are a number of ways of incorporating digital media objects into live slam events. This changes the embodied relation of performer and audience and orients the audience to corporeality and temporality in different ways, though often patterned on prior forms and technologies of mediation. Performers may indeed reach new audiences through digital circulation, and there may even be an element of mediatization in some cases, where media circulation correlates with commoditization, but—as we saw with the radio shows—the primary impact seems to be on those who are physically present at the live event. Further, it is significant that neither event has circulated as widely as Caylah's poem (discussed in Chapter Four), indicating that this circulation is enhanced by offline circuits of power, connections, and capital.

6. Conclusion

The previous chapters of this dissertation have shown the centrality of the dialogic co-production of authority between performer and audience, and this chapter does not exactly present a conclusive answer to the question posed at the outset: "how and where does Malagasy slam poetry live as mediated by digital technologies?" That is because, if slam was founded on the principle that authority and community live in the relation between participants in the face-to-face event, the mediation of these events through radio, video, and digital circulation seems in some ways to upend the very foundations of slam.

The felt disjuncture between live and mediated is evident in the subdued and somewhat restless atmosphere at the Slam Média competition, where videos are screened for a live audience and judges—it seems that audiences do not quite know how to engage with these virtual performances presented "live." We saw in the case of Ranala's performance in the Spoken Word Project, however, that digital circulation does not spell the disappearance of corporeality and the "liveness" of performance. Instead, Ranala's live performance orients us both to a prior media technology (the scroll) and form of face-to-face communication (the royal decree), *and* to the contemporary circulation of videos online.

Similarly, in slam poets' radio broadcasts in Fianarantsoa and Toamasina, the live co-presence of performers is as important, if not more so, than the invisible audience presumably listening in. This challenges the presumption that media technologies primarily expand or broaden access to new publics--a presumption that frequently elides the "gaps" produced by circulation between contexts and scales. While technologies such as radio and digital video recordings may indeed reach audiences who have never attended a live slam event, my research showed that poets were often more interested in the ways that these technologies consolidate extant publics and communities of practice—whether the group of poets who perform together on the radio, or poets and audience members who post videos and pictures from slam events online.

Further, I have shown that the mediatization of slam is not a straightforward process of enhancing its counterpublicity, as Somers-Willett (2014) has claimed. Rather, the counterpublic nature of Malagasy slam is tied to the ways that it reimagines possibilities for the performance and evaluation of authoritative speech that differ from those of academic poetry or of kabary. Central to this reimagining is the embodied relation between performer and audience, even if this is mediated through digital technologies.

I have argued here that the imbrication of "new" and "old," "live" and "mediated," is a feature of most, if not all, media technologies as they are taken up in specific historically and materially embedded contexts. As slam events are reshaped through the incorporation of digital media technologies, they do not magically mutate into something altogether new and different. Rather, as the expression "Slam is dead; long live slam!" reminds us, new iterations of slam are inevitable, and they are never divorced from what came before.

Text 8: "I Have the Horror of Declaring War on You" ("J'ai l'horreur de vous déclarer la guerre") by Ranala, June 2013, Centre Germano-Malgache (Antananarivo)[108]

Kb dit qu'on pense qu'une ligne subtile existe entre l'amour et la haine	Kb says it is thought that there's a fine line between love and hate	A 1
Moi j'ai l'horreur de vous déclarer la guerre	Me, I have the horror of declaring war on you	B
Pour cette paix que l'on a pas	For this peace we do not have	C
Pour vos paroles en mode d'appât	For your baiting words	C
Pour pécher et souiller les bonnes âmes d'ici-bas	For fishing and sullying the good souls here below	C 5
Pour la bassesse de vos coups bas	For the lowness of your low blows	C
Pour mieux étouffer les cris d'alarme et de détresse	To better stifle the cries of alarm and distress	D
Pour contenir le [son?] des larmes de ceux qu'on réduit au silence	To better contain the [sound?] of tears of those reduced to silence	E
De ceux qu'on oppresse	Of those who are oppressed	D
De ceux qui recoivent au quotidien les tristes leçons de leur réalité dans la presse	Of those who daily receive the sad lessons of their reality in the press	D 10
Vous ne m'aurez pas	You won't get me	C
J'ai l'horreur de vous déclarer la guerre	I have the horror of declaring war on you	B
Pour vos mensonges qui rongent nos espérances	For your lies that eat away at our hopes	E
Pour vos plans d'action prenant les formes de rance	For your rancid action plans	E
Pour faussement donner un sens à nos errances	For falsely giving meaning to our wanderings	E 15
Pour aggrandir à chaque instant sur toutes les instances le fossé de nos différences	For constantly in all instances enlarging the gulf of our differences	E
Et le danger de l'indifférence	And the danger of indifference	E
Vous ne m'aurez pas	You won't get me	C
J'ai l'horreur de vous déclarer la guerre	I have the horror of declaring war on you	B

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[108] Transcribed and translated by myself from the YouTube video, with a few modifications sent to me by Ranala that are based on her written version. Line breaks and annotated rhyme scheme are my own. The video is available at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBEOk47GxEU&index=14&list=PLkQFOdYCPcozpqzEq0ZMC7Bwjq6kZltSf

Moi, femme de cité, émancipée,	Me, emancipated woman of the city/projects,	F 20
incitée par l'opacité de la transparence	incited by the opacity of the transparency	E
que vous dites instaurer dans les mailles et les failles de notre société,	you claim to be establishing in the mesh and rifts of our society,	F
C'est une blague? Ou ça y est,	Is that a joke? Or that's it,	F
je suis atteinte d'une sérieuse cécité?	I'm suffering from serious blindness?	F
Non, il y a vraiment un besoin, une nécessité	No, there is truly a need, a necessity	F 25
de voir, d'avoir des hommes et des femmes plus justes à la tête de ce qui est censé être notre pays	to see, to have more just men and women at the head of what is supposed to be our country	G
Mais combien de temps encore devrons-nous payer de notre propre personne	But how much longer will we ourselves have to pay	H
avant que ces personnes propres ne pointent le bout de leur nez et ne sonnent	before these tidy people rear their heads and sound	H
l'arrivée de la paix,	the arrival of peace,	F
du lait et du miel?	of milk and honey?	I 30
À quand l'ordre dans tout ce bordel?	When will there be order in all this chaos?	I
On pense qu'une ligne subtile existe entre l'amour et la haine	It is thought that there is a thin line between love and hate	A
Moi j'ai l'honneur	Me, I have the honor	J
de vous déclarer l'horreur	of declaring the horror	J
de mes quatre vérités:	of my four truths:	F 35
Un pour toutes ces bouches qui ne touchent plus une seule cuillère depuis hier, avant-hier, maintenant depuis longtemps,	One for all these mouths that haven't touched a single spoon since yesterday, the day before yesterday, for a long time now,	K
Deux pour toutes ces mains en panne qui peinent à peigner les abcd de leurs propres noms,	Two for all these broken-down hands that struggle to disentangle the ABCs of their own names,	L
Trois pour tous les biens mal-acquis de ceux qui n'ont pas voulu suer mais qui ont seulement su tuer, grâce à votre ami l'insécurité,	Three for all the ill-gotten gains of those who haven't wanted to sweat but have only killed, thanks to your friend "insecurity,"	F
Quatre pour la tranquillité que vous ne méritez pas et pour l'apaisement qui devrait vous quitter,	Four for the tranquility you don't deserve and for the calm that should leave you,	F

Pour tout cela, j'ai l'horreur de vous déclarer la guerre.	For all this, I have the horror of declaring war on you.	B 40
Mais ne vous inquiétez pas:	But don't worry:	C
Même si on pense qu'une ligne subtile existe entre l'amour et la haine,	Even if it is thought that there is a thin line between love and hate,	A
Moi je ne peux pas vous haïr,	I can't hate you,	M
Parce qu'à la base je n'ai jamais su vous dire "Je t'aime."	Because I could never say "I love you" to begin with.	/A
Ceci étant, attention:	That said, watch out:	L 45
Il y a une fin à la patience de ce peuple qui a faim,	There is an end to the patience of this hungry people,	N
de ces âmes que vous prenez grand plaisir à faire souffrir,	of these souls you take great pleasure in making suffer,	M
Sâchez chers petits rois et petites reines,	Know this, dear little kings and little queens,	A
Qu'après trois vont naître tous vos problèmes:	That after "three" all your problems will begin:	/A
Alors au nom du un, du deux, et du trois,	So in the name of one, of two, and of three,	O 50
Citoyennes et citoyens, debout réveille-toi!	Citizens, on your feet, wake up!	O

Conclusion: *Fehin-teny (*Knotting Words)

Throughout this dissertation I have argued that Malagasy slam poetry provides a lens through which to reconceptualize notions of authority, free expression, and public speech. This reconceptualization has proceeded throughout each chapter: we saw in the Chapter One how authority has been conceived in the formal speech genre of kabary as deriving from the words and logics of the ancestors, and how it is produced dialogically between speakers, ancestors, and audience. We saw how the role of speaker was historically limited to elder men, and continues to be limited to those who have the necessary skills or social role to speak publicly in this genre.

We then moved, in Chapter Two, to the ways that slam poets have reformulated authoritative speech. They have taken from kabary the insistence on the embodied dialogism between speaker and audience, but have merged this with a liberal democratic notion of the individual right to "free expression" that is available to all, regardless of social status. In one poet's framing, this is not a universal and abstract right but rather entails a responsibility to "manage" one's freedom in relation to one's audience and to the context of performance.

In Chapter Three, we saw how poets from regions outside of the capital managed this "freedom" during the National Slam, through embodied orientations to and through language, as they sought to speak about discrimination and histories of ethnic division. This chapter introduced issues of scale and scalar hierarchies as they are imbricated in conceptualizations of difference and diversity, such as those invoked in the language politics of "plurilingualism" or in the invocation, during the National Slam, of a national community of slam poets who will bring "diversity and interculturality" from other regions to the capital. Many of these poets' experiences of discrimination in the capital, and the centralization of power there, provide an important counterpoint to these claims of national unity.

Chapter Four considered authority, and "managing freedom" in relation to translation and circulation, where poets anticipate foreign audiences and seek to render their performances commensurate with the social worlds and expectations of their audience, whether at the National Slam in Tana, the World Cup in Paris, or online. Here, I argued for an analytical differentiation between translation, interpretation, and commensuration as interrelated yet distinct processes. Further, I argued that theories of translation must consider how networks of power and capital impact how the target audience is imagined and anticipated, and thus the translation itself.

Finally, in Chapter Five we considered slam as a form of mediation—through language, bodily practices, media technologies, and processes of mediatization—that orients its audience across multiple scales. This does not always, or primarily, forge new publics, but rather new forms of engagement and communication with extant publics and performers. Embodied relationality remains the central node of slam, even as live events intersect with media institutions such as radio stations and YouTube, with the digital circulation of sound and images, and with intertextual linkages and gaps across physical, temporal, and virtual space.

This dissertation thus dynamically rethinks a number of critical issues in linguistic and sociocultural anthropology as well as studies of performance, media, and literarature. My approach to corporeality and embodied relationality through a synthesis of phenomenology and practice theory enables a more nuanced understanding of performance as a constellation of the individual double horizon, embodied social interaction, institutions, and networks of power. In so doing, my analysis rethinks scalar hierarchies of micro versus macro interactions and processes, and investigates the ideological frameworks that sustain and enable these hierarchies. I have focalized authority as a critical node that connects these issues, because it can at once be framed as an individual trait, an interpersonal relation, and an institutional exercise of power. Authority, as defined and refined through Malagasy slam poetry in particular, has been a fruitful site of investigation because slam poets themselves have contemplated, theorized, and expressed this seeming ambiguity or contradiction through their poems and their social practices, producing compelling insights into the imbrication of power and discourse, aesthetics and pragmatics, individual freedom and dialogic authority.

By way of conclusion, I provide an alternate take on the key theoretical contributions of this dissertation—a way to conceptualize them across the arc of my argument rather than in discrete chapters.

1. Integrating phenomenology and practice theory

While phenomenology and practice theory may seem to be unrelated or even oppositional frameworks for understanding human sociality, I have argued here that they are in fact complementary and provide a way to mediate the scalar hierarchy between "small-scale" practices (through a phenomenological attention to corporeality and the double horizon) and "large-scale" structures (through a practice theory approach to the social and institutional fields that shape habitus). In order to understand the performance of authority in slam poetry, it is necessary to understand at once the double horizon of past experience as it informs future possibilities, enabling individuals to perform in particular ways, and the broader social relations and institutional fields that shape this horizon. We have seen, for example, how social classifications such as gender, race, and class are factors in an individual's double horizon, and how that horizon can be modified through practice. This integration of phenomenology and practice theory is informed by feminist and critical race theories of embodiment and social power, and I move the discussion forward by bringing these insights to bear on conceptualizations of public speech, authority, and free expression.

2. Freedom of expression

Prevailing understandings of "free speech" and "free expression" in the Western liberal tradition tend to prioritize abstract individual rights over contextual judgments of appropriateness and responsibility vis-à-vis one's interlocutors. Slam poet Gad

Bensalem's discussion of the necessity of "managing" the freedom of expression is illuminating, as it emphasizes the embodied relationality between poet and audience as well as the poet's responsibility for the consequences of their speech. I have shown how slam poetry in Madagascar maintains a fine balance between a liberal emphasis on the individual's right to express themselves, on the one hand, and an acknowledgment of responsibility and an attunement to context, on the other. This nuanced approach to the issue of public speech as an embodied encounter is of paramount importance in the increasingly divisive "free speech" debates.

3. Diversity and difference

We have seen how Malagasy slam poets address issues of unity and belonging, on the one hand, and difference and division, on the other. These portrayals may take place in the interactions between performer and audience, for example, as well as between regions, dialects, languages, and nation-states. Liberal democratic discourses of multiculturalism and multilingualism portray difference as desirable at the same time that they encode a presumption of a normative order (often framed as "large-scale") against which the difference of the ("small-scale") Other is juxtaposed. Discourses of plurilingualism and interculturalism, in the E.U. and in Madagascar, have been taken up precisely to interrogate this presumption, but they have not deescalated tensions over linguistic, regional, and ethnic divisions, the scalar hierarchies they invoke, nor the histories that precede them. My contribution to these issues merges an attention to ideologies of scale with a theoretical approach to language as a corporeal practice that is both oriented and orienting.

4. Translation

I have made the case that translation should be analytically considered as a separate process from interpretation and from commensuration, even if in practice it may be hard to distinguish between these. By disentangling these processes, we can better analyze how linguistic transformation (translation) is impacted by and further impacts the interpretation and commensuration of social worlds. I have further shown how translation may obscure the unequal power dynamics and ideologies of scale between social worlds and the languages they use, and I have argued for a method and critical theory of translation that takes these power dynamics seriously. Finally, I have disagreed with Walter Benjamin's classic vision of translation in arguing that imagining and anticipating the audience is central to the work of translation. This approach advances theories of translation by centering embodied orienations to and through language.

5. Publics

Rather than reifying either publics or counterpublics, I have investigated the notion of publics through the lens of the performer's interaction with the audience. I argue that this relation is mediated through language, embodied practices, and media technologies that *orient* the audience in particular ways. This orientation is a spatiotemporal attunement that entails a structure of relevance. As performances circulate in mediatized forms and appear to jump scales through virtual as well as physical circuits, the relation between audience and performer shifts, as does the responsibility of the performer for the consequences of their speech. This does not mean that performers do not take responsibility for their speech when it circulates virtually, but rather that it becomes difficult for performers to anticipate those consequences. This argument constitutes an important intervention in media theory, as it centers embodied relationality as mediated through language and media technologies.

6. Authority

Finally, I have shown how authority is understood in Malagasy slam as simultaneously an individual capacity—in a liberal idiom—and as a social achievement that emerges through a relation of embodied co-presence and co-participation with an audience. This conception, then, mediates between multiple scales, much as I have argued that the integration of phenomenology and practice theory does. Authority is located at the scale of an individual's double horizon, in the interactions between performer and audience, and in the relations between these social groups as well as the institutions, social structures, and categorizations that shape them. This conception also challenges the equation of authority with coercion, which cannot account for the nuanced ways in which authority can both take shape and be reformulated and reimagined. This reimagining, I argue, is precisely what slam poets have done in Madagascar, as they claim an individual right to speak at the same time that they carefully modulate their performances through an embodied attunement to their audience and context.

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