# S(t)imulation:

## A comparison of international democracy assistance objectives and non-elite perceptions of democracy in eastern Madagascar

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*to Laura Hinthorne*
*for encouraging me to travel and supporting me along the way*

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the nexus of democratic development, international democracy assistance and local political cultures in one eastern region of Madagascar. In so doing, it questions whether common targets of the democracy assistance industry (i.e. electoral process, freedom of expression, rule of law) merely encourage the simulation of Western democratic systems or actually stimulate democratic development that makes sense to local people. While there are no doubt many explanatory factors for the (in)effectiveness of democracy assistance policies, in this thesis I propose that the perceptions, beliefs, and expectations of ordinary citizens (i.e. political cultures) could help account for the dogged persistence of hybrid regimes. My intention in undertaking this research is not to discredit other variables pertinent to democratic development, but rather to narrowly investigate how ordinary citizens interpret "democracy" and whether these interpretations are compatible with those assumed by the global democracy assistance industry.

I also offer a step-by-step account of the methodological innovations employed in this research. Empirical data on political culture was collected using a modified version of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). The data analysis techniques used in this research were likewise visual, facilitating the translation of highly contextualised field data into thematic trends relevant to democracy assistance policy. The highly visual research process piloted here could be meaningfully applied to a wide range of research problems and contexts, including the emerging trend toward country-led democracy assessment procedures.

The originality of this work lies in its exploration of a highly contested concept (political culture), using an innovative visual research method (the modified TAT) in a country not often researched by (particularly Anglophone) political scientists (Madagascar). This research is significant in that it proposes both a theoretical framework and original methodology for exploring how ordinary people perceive democracy in their countries, and relating these perceptions to specific policy goals.

T<span>ABLE OF</span> C<span>ONTENTS</span>

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work, except where otherwise referenced, and has not been submitted previously at the University of York or any other university.

An earlier version of the MISONGA case study in Chapter Seven was published in the online journal *Knowledge Politics Quarterly*. Additionally, a journal article based largely on chapters Four and Seven will appear in a forthcoming issue of *Democratization*. An account of modifications made to the TAT for this research and my argument for why visual research techniques constitute an integrated, interdisciplinary research method will appear in separate forthcoming editions of *Field Methods*. Much of the information presented in these articles is contained in Chapter Three.

I have also presented papers based on this research at a number of conferences, including: the 60th Political Studies Association Annual Conference (2010), Democratization in Africa: Retrospective and Future Prospects (2009), the ECPR General Conference (2009), the ISS Development Dialogue (2009) and Breaking Boundaries (2009).

*I go downstairs and get a bottle*
*of real vanilla extract from the cupboard.*
*I take it upstairs and tell him to inhale.*
*(Neville 2001: 228)*

My initial inspiration for undertaking this project came from a book of essays by Susan Neville titled *Fabrication*. In her essays, Neville explores not only how things ranging from globes to veneer to vanilla are made, but also the often-symbolic meaning these objects add to our lives. One essay in particular – S(t)imulation – got me thinking. Somewhere between Neville's visit to a family-owned spice factory and her son's mis-adventures in the cyber-world of the Sims, my mind began to wander. Being a political animal, I started to wonder whether democracy assistance policies actually do stimulate the creation of democratic states that not only meet Western expectations but also resonate with the societies they govern. Or, on the contrary, do these programmes merely foster simulation, producing synthetic replicas of a phenomenon that occurred organically elsewhere?

Over a decade ago, an influential group of democracy scholars concluded that "groping toward the First World need not entail mindless imitation: it may lead to successful adaptation to the new international context" (Przeworski et. al. 1995: 7). It has also been argued, however, that democracy assistance is a fundamentally prescriptive exercise, commanding the reproduction of Western political institutions (Grugel 2002: 21, Wunsch 2000: 488). Synthetic vanillin is not vanilla, no matter what the label on the bottle says (Summers 1962). Exploring which metaphorical category better describes the so-called 'third wave' democracies seemed like an interesting challenge.

## Defining the Problem: Hybridity

I began this project nearly four years ago amid speculation that nascent democracies risked being pulled under by an autocratic undertow (see, for example,

Diamond 2002, Levitsky and Way 2002, Merkel 2004, Nathan 2003, Ottaway 2003). These cries have grown louder and ever more certain in the ensuing years,[1] raising concerns that optimism and "financially extensive programmes" may yet prove insufficient guarantors of democratic progress (Merkel 2010: 17). Indeed, the number of countries rated "partly free" by Freedom House has fluctuated only slightly between 2002 and 2010. More significantly, although individual scores may fluctuate slightly from year to year, the vast majority of states rated "partly free" in 2002 remained in this category for the duration of the 9-year period under review.[2] These countries did not achieve "free" status; nor, however, did they slip into the "not free" category. This suggests that the real threat to democratic progress is not the autocracy of old, but rather what Burnell and Schlumberger call "renewed closure" of regimes previously classified as cases of ongoing democratic reform (2010: 2).

In acknowledgment of this class of countries that exhibit few signs of continuing democratic transformation after three or four election cycles, some scholars have started to question labels like "transitional country" and "developing state," arguing instead that these "hybrids" (Diamond 2002) or "complicated places" (Geertz 2004: 578) exist in a "political gray zone" (Carothers 2002: 9) or "twilight zone" (Diamond 1999: 20).[3] They observe that "flailing states" (Andrews 2008: 379) may continue to hold regular elections and ensure citizens a modicum of political and civil rights; nevertheless the democratic credentials of these countries are blighted by:

> …poor representation of citizen's interests, low levels of political participation beyond voting, frequent abuse of the law by government officials, elections of uncertain legitimacy, very low levels of public confidence in state institutions, and persistently poor institutional performance by the state. (Carothers 2002: 9-10)

It could be argued that these states are merely experiencing the growing pains associated with democratic change and that they will eventually emerge from this

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[1] In addition to Puddington's (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010) analysis, see Diamond (2008b), Gat (2007), and Rupnik (2007). Similar views are expressed in a thematic section of the Journal of Democracy devoted to the topic of "backsliding" (2007, issue 4).

[2] Between 2002 and 2010, the number of countries included on Freedom House's "partly free" list ranged from 54 to 62. 39 countries remain on the list for all nine years, with an additional 9 countries appearing on the list at least seven times each.

[3] Collier and Levitsky (1997) famously exposed our predilection for masking democratic deficiencies with palatable adjectives.

stage like all awkward teenagers.[4] Whether this will prove to be the case remains to be seen. In the mean time, the debate has shifted toward what – if anything – outsiders can do to influence the trajectory of states that have already engaged at least minimally with democratic reform but now appear to have stalled (Berman 2007b: 14, Rakner, Menocal and Fritz 2007: 49).

A growing literature explores this conundrum (see, for example, Hyden 2010, Leininger 2010, Rakner, Menocal and Fritz 2007). One emerging trend in response to widespread recognition of the hybrid phenomenon is that sustainable democratic reform requires domestic support (Rakner, Menocal and Fritz 2007: 4, Hyden 2010: 14, Wunsch 2000: 504). Without denying that institutions matter, human agency and human action surely matter as well. While attention has long been paid to political elites, the perceptions, expectations, and ambitions of ordinary citizens – still largely "untouched" by academic research – have become the subject of increased scrutiny (Burnell and Schlumberger 2010: 8, also see Merkel 2010: 26). When I began this research, I suspected that whether democracy assistance produces pure vanilla or synthetic vanillin depends in part on how closely local conceptualisations of democracy and domestic perceptions of the existing political system coincide with international democracy assistance priorities. The nature of this work is, therefore, comparative, exploring the interface between what local people believe about politics and what outsiders – namely those engaged in democracy assistance and assessment – expect.

**The Scope of this Research**

"Given the tendency to become imprisoned in the assumptions of our context," Fierke notes, "it is imperative that an ethical foreign policy creates the space and conditions for real dialogue" (2007: 134). To date, democracy assistance could more aptly be described as a monologue in which developed democracies profess their expertise. Therefore, is persistent hybridity really the mutation of democratic ideals that Western analysts make it out to be? Or could it be the genuine expression of a locally viable political alternative, misconstrued and misrepresented by outsiders masquerading as experts? Finding out requires entering into a dialogue

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[4] Berman (2007a) makes a similar point regarding political violence in developing democracies.

about the meaning of democracy in which both democracy assistance providers and recipients are allowed to speak.

This thesis is an attempt to begin such a dialogue, analysing prominent democracy assistance priorities alongside ordinary people's perceptions of politics and democracy in eastern Madagascar. In so doing, I suggest a new and slightly different way of thinking about the challenge posed by democracy assistance, one that may be particularly pertinent to the problem of hybrid regimes where standardised programmes and policies consistently fall short of achieving their objectives. Leininger (2010) stresses that the identification of explanatory factors for the (in)effectiveness of democracy assistance should be at the forefront of future research. While there are no doubt many facets to this complex problem, I propose that the perceptions, beliefs, and expectations of ordinary citizens (i.e. local political culture(s)) could provide one such explanatory factor.

Much of the literature remains broadly interested in political 'actors', those individuals (often elites) who play defined roles within political organisations. In contrast, I suggest that studying the ways in which the audience, as it were, interacts with the political drama might enable outsiders to better understand the show.[5] A play can be a masterpiece and the actors outstanding, but if it does not resonate with theatregoers its chances of success are slim. I hypothesise that this same dynamic applies to democratic development. Unless the practices and objectives of democracy (and democracy assistance) resonate with ordinary people, democracy will never be more than a charade. To this end, the following chapters address the question:

> *How might local political culture(s) shape and constrain substantive democratic development?*

My intention in posing this question is not to discredit other variables pertinent to democratic development, but rather to narrowly investigate how ordinary citizens interpret "democracy" and whether these interpretations are compatible with those assumed by the global democracy assistance industry.

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[5] Lipset (1959: 69) and O'Donnell (1996b: 40) have both taken interest in how society interacts with institutions. To a lesser extent, Fukuyama (1995) also approaches this subject.

The chapters that follow are necessarily selective and several ideas, explored only fleetingly here, could benefit from further exploration. Different policies pursued by myriad agencies in various countries will no doubt produce a wide range of results. Bearing this in mind, the aim of this eclectic piece of research is to contribute to our understanding of how people in one particular region of the world understand their own political experience and define their democratic aspirations vis-à-vis internationally recognized standards and expectations. Put slightly differently, in the following pages I set out to explore the s(t)imulation of democracy in a particular place at a particular time from the perspective of ordinary citizens. In so doing, I will suggest that this sort of context-specific knowledge could enable more nuanced assessment of the 'demand side' of democracy assistance, paving the way for more effective democracy assistance policies both in Madagascar and elsewhere (Hyden 2010: 14).

Human perceptions and institutional outcomes offer different, but complementary, perspectives; whether we focus on one or the other necessarily depends on the purpose and particularities of any given research project (Schedler 2001: 5). This research is situated squarely in the human perceptions category. Therefore, the democratic institutions discussed throughout this thesis (i.e. electoral process, freedom of expression and rule of law) were not selected for their own sake, but rather because they are perceived to be important to democratic development, albeit in different ways, by both democracy assistance organisations and ordinary people in the eastern region of Madagascar where I conducted fieldwork.

## Choice of Case Study and Potential for Generalization

I discuss my rationale for choosing Madagascar as my case study at length in the Preface to Part II. Briefly, initial analysis of the state of democratic development in Madagascar provided compelling evidence to suggest a possible confluence of perspectives between democracy assistance providers and local people. Madagascar was the first country to receive funding from the newly christened Millennium Challenge Corporation in recognition of the country's laudable commitment to good governance. More significantly, Madagascar performs remarkably well on a number

of democracy assessment indices – well within the fuzzy parameters of hybridity[6] – despite falling short of the standards for economic and human development often identified as conducive to sustainable democratic change. With the usual suspects thus accounted for, Madagascar seemed a logical choice for exploring an alternative variable: political culture(s).

My reason for choosing the exact fieldwork location is more serendipitous. I had initially planned to do a comparative analysis of political culture(s) identified in the capital and another urban centre on the eastern coast.[7] Upon my arrival in the country, however, it rapidly became apparent that I lacked the time and resources necessary to complete thorough research in two discrete regions. I had better contacts on the coast and generally found the people there to be more welcoming. Focusing on a single region where I could establish strong connections with local people also, somewhat unexpectedly, opened the door to a limited amount of research in a rural village. As Madagascar remains predominantly rural, this seemed like a valuable opportunity to add depth to my sample.

The inherent particularity of this research means that there are limitations to its potential for generalisation; as Schmitter observes, "single-case studies are rarely a convincing basis for generalisation" (2008: 290). The relevance of conclusions obtained from data collected in a single region of Madagascar to the country as a whole cannot be assumed. The same warning applies with regard to the relevancy of this research to analysis of democracy assistance and protracted hybridity in other African states or, for that matter, other countries around the world. As I acknowledged above, both democratic development and democracy assistance are likely to look different and work differently in different contexts and geographical

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[6] Madagascar is one of the 39 countries classified annually as "partly free" by Freedom House; see footnote 2 above.

[7] I initially planned on doing urban research for three very practical reasons. First, I was able to establish contacts in these urban centres while still in the United Kingdom. Secondly, both cities are relatively easy to reach in a country with notoriously bad infrastructure; this was an important consideration when I still thought that I would be conducting comparative research in two cities. Finally, I am highly proficient in French, which is widely spoken in urban areas but hardly at all in rural villages. By staying in urban areas I would, therefore, be somewhat less reliant on research assistants.

locations. Indeed, Chapters One and Seven will suggest that overly generalised democracy assistance policies could be part of the problem.

That said, when case studies are done well they provide useful points of reference for the study of similar cases elsewhere. In other words, even specific cases are capable of suggesting viable explanations or interpretations for comparable events in other places (Berg 2004: 259, Gledhill 2000: 7). When dealing with complex social phenomena like hybrid regimes and political culture(s), the "inherent interest" of a particular case lies in what it can reveal about hitherto enigmatic variables (della Porta and Keating 2008: 29). Therefore, while I do not make any sweeping claims about the validity of conclusions deduced from this research, I nevertheless maintain that it contributes much-needed nuance to our understanding of democratic development and unfolding events in Madagascar. Moreover, it adds depth to the argument that sustainable democratic reform requires domestic support and ownership. The innovative method piloted while researching this particular case could also be refined and applied elsewhere in the pursuit of divergent research objectives.

**The Structure and Purpose of this Thesis**

The purpose of this thesis is threefold:

- to hold a critical mirror up to democracy assistance policy (Fierke 2001: 130);

- to investigate whether political culture(s), though controversial within mainstream political science, might yet be a useful concept for better understanding how ordinary citizens interpret their political worlds and define their democratic aspirations; and

- to provide a step-by-step guide to the innovative visual research method I piloted in Madagascar.

On the first point, I have already noted above that democracy assistance remains an under-examined corner of an extensive democracy literature. I intend for the analysis dispersed throughout this thesis to make a critical contribution to policy discourse as we continue to rethink the role of democracy assistance in the context of hybrid regimes. With regard to the second point, the utility of political culture(s) as a variable pivots on how the concept is defined. "Whatever cultures are," Shore astutely observes, "they do not fit inside nutshells" (1996: 44). I reject the truncated

and prescriptive culture concepts commonly found within the literature, developing instead a conceptual framework that does not shy away from complexity.

Finally, I am not – nor have I ever been – a purist. Initially frustrated by the "intellectual isolationism" (Greenblatt 1990: 4) pervading the literature on democracy assistance, democratic development, and anthropological studies of culture, I eventually gained the courage to test established research boundaries. This emboldened me to develop an innovative, visual research methodology for the purpose of investigating connections and complexities obscured or unnoticed by more traditional research methods (Sil 2004). Moreover, as participatory approaches to policymaking become more widely accepted, visual research tools like the one pioneered here could provide a collaborative alternative to focus groups, plebiscites, and surveys. It has also been demonstrated on several occasions that visual research tools reduce the likelihood of miscommunication between the researcher (or policy developer) and research participants (or programme stakeholders). Therefore, this thesis interweaves structured, detailed analysis with grounded, impressionistic interpretation in order to provide new insight into the innately complex democracy assistance enterprise.

Part I lays the theoretical foundation for subsequent empirical research. Chapter One provides an overview of contemporary trends in international democracy assistance and assessment. This includes initial analysis of democracy assistance priorities espoused by a cross-section of prominent agencies, as well as benchmarks and indicators of democracy employed by organisations that compile influential democracy and good governance indices. From this analysis, I identify three predominant themes of democracy assistance and assessment: electoral process, freedom of expression and rule of law. I then discuss each of these priorities at some length, exploring why they are presumed to be significant with respect to democratic values including representation, participation, preference articulation, and accountability.

Having established the position of the global democracy assistance industry, I turn to the controversial topic of political culture. After situating the culture concept in historical context and outlining some principal objections of culture critics, I suggest how political culture can be reconceptualised as a collection of perceptual lenses that colour how people interpret behaviour and events as well as their own

(political) agency. With this new tool in hand, I reformulate Held's (2006) pertinent question *What should democracy mean today?* to *What does democracy mean here?* thereby indicating how a better understanding of local political cultures might lead to more grounded approaches to democracy assistance.

In Chapter Three, I offer a step-by-step account of the methodological innovations employed in this research. Empirical data was collected using a modified version of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). After providing a brief history of the TAT in its native field of psychology, I go on to discuss previous modifications made to this method for use in social science research. A detailed account of how I used a modified TAT to elicit local perceptions of democracy follows. Additionally, the data analysis techniques employed in this research were likewise visual. A synthesis of Framework and thematic networks facilitated the analysis and translation of highly contextualised field data into thematic trends relevant to democracy assistance policy, a process I explain in detail.

The empirical content of this thesis is contained in Part II. The section begins with a brief Preface that both explains my rationale for conducting this research in Madagascar and recounts the country's contemporary political history. The Preface leads in to Chapter Four, which presents my empirical findings on how elections and electoral participation are perceived by ordinary people in eastern Madagascar. I suggest that four likely perceptual lenses warrant consideration and can help explain why people view elections in a positive or negative light. I then reconsider whether elections are a reasonable indicator of democracy and if they provide a viable forum for political representation based on this empirical evidence.

Chapter Five focuses on perceptions of free speech and informal political participation. The field data collected on this topic indicates the presence of three relevant perceptual lenses with noticeably different interpretations of free speech rights in Madagascar. I then consider whether free speech and access to information actually enable political preference formation in the way democracy assistance providers expect and similarly question, in light of the empirical data, whether free speech rights lead to political accountability.

In Chapter Six I explore how ordinary people consulted for this research perceive the rule of law at street level, resulting in the identification of two discrete

perceptual lenses. This analysis leads to a discussion of the rule of law in relation to voting and free speech rights, concluding that it is a mistake to divorce democratic form from democratic function. Democratic rights – including voting and free speech rights – are formally enshrined in Madagascar's constitution and contribute to assessments of the country's democratic credentials. However, people who participated in this research often suggested that these same democratic rights do not exist in Madagascar or are only experienced irregularly. While the priorities pursued by the democracy assistance industry may resonate with Malagasy citizens, expert assessments of Madagascar's democratic progress appear to conflict with the experience of ordinary people.

Finally, in Chapter Seven I return to the idea of s(t)imulation. MISONGA, a multi-million dollar USAID democracy assistance initiative, struggled to achieve its objectives and was sometimes referred to by local people as a "joke." The perceptual lenses identified in Chapters Four through Six suggest that at least three unique interpretations of democracy colour the political worldviews of people in Madagascar, and go some way in explaining why certain MISONGA initiatives encountered significant, local resistance. These political cultures also provide an alternative framework for interpreting Madagascar's most recent political crisis. I conclude by proposing that the international democracy assistance industry should adopt a decidedly more strategic approach to democracy assistance policy. Country-led procedures recently launched by International IDEA and UNDP provide novel examples of how local points of view can be meaningfully incorporated into democracy assistance and assessment initiatives.

# Part I

CHAPTER ONE: THE DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE AGENDA

*Our appetite for democracy is insatiable.*
*Not content with its triumph over all other political forms…*
*governments, international organizations, NGOs, civic associations,*
*protestors and democratic theorists all want more.*
*(Blaug 2002: 102)*

In a speech to the British House of Commons on 8 June 1982 President Ronald Reagan heralded the resurgence of the "democratic revolution." In the decades that followed, an unprecedented variety of "geographies, climates, ecologies, economies, languages, ethnicities, and capabilities" have provided the back-drop for democratic experiments (Gould 2003: 6). Amidst talk of "the democratic century" (Lipset and Lakin 2004) and professions that democracy is the new "normal" standard to which all citizens of the world are entitled (Sen 1999a: 4), international political legitimacy has come to require – at minimum – ostensible adherence to the democratic cause (Faundez 2005: 615, Held 1993: 13). In 2009, Freedom House counted 116 electoral democracies around the world, down slightly from 119 the previous year but nearly double the number identified twenty years previously (Puddington 2010: 136).[8]

Not surprisingly, perhaps, a plethora of agencies has emerged to assist states in their pursuit of "the democratic imperative" (Miliband 2008). While it is impossible to pinpoint the exact value of this burgeoning global industry, conservative annual estimates range from $2 billion (Rakner, Menocal, and Fritz 2007: 1) to over $5 billion (Burnell 2008: 415). Diamond notes that by 2005, the United Nations Development Program alone spent around $1.4 billion on democracy assistance in over 130 countries, predicting that democracy assistance would account for nearly half of UNDP's entire budget in coming years (2008a: 128). Price similarly estimates that USAID's annual democracy assistance budget lies

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[8] The 1989-1990 edition of Freedom House's *Freedom in the World* report identified 69 states as electoral democracies. The organisation's electoral democracy data is available at: http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=439.

somewhere in the region of $1 billion to $1.5 billion (2009: 165). Despite having blossomed into an expansive industry worth billions of dollars each year, "the amount of money spent, and the number of programmes and missions carried out, seem to bear no direct relationship with the success or failure of democratisation experiments" (Grugel 2002: 133).[9] Nevertheless, our seemingly insatiable appetite for democracy compels us to push on (Blaug 2002: 102).

In this chapter, I survey the stated objectives of various leading democracy assistance organisations to ascertain what exactly they aim to achieve with their sizable budgets and how they then go about accomplishing it. I also examine the underlying logic of several influential democracy and good governance assessment indices with the related purpose of identifying not only how they conceptualise democracy or good governance, but also what they measure in compiling their league tables. I begin by outlining the criteria and indicators of democracy used by prominent assessment indices and assistance agencies. Three priority areas emerge from this investigation: electoral process, freedom of expression and rule of law. Although there appears to be widespread agreement within the global democracy assistance industry over these three priorities, individual organisations proffer various explanations to substantiate their importance. I conclude by questioning whether the seemingly logical rationales behind these key democracy assistance priorities retain their validity when examined from the point of view of ordinary citizens in developing countries.

## Democracy Assistance and Assessment

The vast literature on democracy has been compared elsewhere to a "tangled semantic thicket" (Kirkpatrick 1981: 326). Shoring up this assessment, Collier and Levitsky (1997) counted 550 nominal variations on the term in their comprehensive search for definitions of democracy while Schauer eventually concluded, "democracy…rarely appears without a modifier" (1982: 2). Confronted with a range of terms signifying assorted degrees of "democratic imperfection" (e.g. pseudo-

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[9] Multivariate analysis conducted by Knack (2004) provides compelling evidence that no correlation exists between foreign aid and improvements in democracy. He further stipulates, however, that this analysis should not be taken to indicate that none of the democracy assistance initiatives funded by external donors has any effects.

democracy, façade democracy), Posner and Young opt to eschew the term "democracy" altogether (2007: 137). It is easy to understand their frustration. However, to write about democracy assistance policy without ever using the word democracy seems to me to belabour the point. Indeed, significant policy differences may arise from the idiosyncratic nuances of how particular organisations and agencies conceptualise – and subsequently peddle – the virtues of democracy.

It is not, however, my objective in this chapter to provide a comprehensive overview of global democracy assistance policy; reviews of that nature have been complied elsewhere (Burnell 2000, Carothers 1995, Carothers and Ottaway 2005, Cox, Ikenberry, and Inoguchi 2000, Dichter 2003, Schraeder 2002). Instead, I focus on identifying key themes running through the published material of both democracy assistance and assessment organisations in order to establish the fundamental principles that guide their programmes and projects. While some organisations, particularly the development assistance branches of individual governments (i.e. USAID, DFID) may have unwritten ulterior motives, perpetually second-guessing their published statements would lose sight of the primary objective of this research – analysing whether international experts and local non-elites interpret democracy and complex issues of democratic development in similar, or at least compatible, ways.

In this section, I distil the essence of what Ricci (1984: 299) calls a "small conversation," identifying the ways in which this highly influential though finite community identifies and addresses its goal of improving the quality of political governance in developing countries. Although there are semantic and theoretical reasons to distinguish between democracy and good governance, empirically the policy objectives of organisations and indices coalesce around a few salient variables regardless of whether their language endorses the "good governance" or "democracy" agenda.

Additionally, the objectives of good governance and democracy tend to merge; Schraeder, for instance, asserts that "democracy aid should be targeted toward fostering 'good governance' " (2002: 230), while Hibou notes that good governance is "essentially the establishment of…political systems similar to those in

the industrialised democracies" (2002: 173).[10] Similarly, although neither the World Bank nor Freedom House purports to measure democracy directly, both are commonly cited alongside the Bertelsmann Transformation Index and the Economist Intelligence Unit, which do explicitly rank democracy. Furthermore, all four of these indices purport to measure the quality of similar indicators, including political freedoms, civil liberties, and accountability. Rather than climbing aboard the semantic merry-go-round, throughout this thesis I use the single term *democracy assistance* to refer to the efforts of these organisations for two reasons. First, this agenda, regardless of the language used, centres around promoting institutions of governance that advance the common good and reflect the general will of society (Shapiro 2003: 146). Secondly, good governance has the additional objective of making economic markets work better whereas I am narrowly interested in perceptions of political development.

The pursuits of democracy assessment and democracy assistance coexist in a symbiotic relationship. Organisations engaged in democracy assessment including Freedom House, Bertelsmann Stiftung, the Economist Intelligence Unit, the World Bank and Polity IV endeavour to assess the status of various aspects of democratic governance; policy makers at prominent organisations ranging from USAID and DFID to International IDEA and NDI devise and implement projects conducive, in theory anyway, to improving these results. Moreover, a country's ranking on democracy indices can help determine its allocation of democracy assistance funds. The Millennium Challenge Corporation, for example, establishes eligibility for further development assistance based on 17 indicators including those measured by Freedom House and the World Bank (Millennium Challenge Corporation n.d.).

The product of this interaction is an appreciable cohesion of democracy assistance and assessment, with professionals engaged in different aspects of this discussion using the same catch phrases and working (more-or-less) toward a common goal. In this section, I begin by studying a selection of democracy assessment indices before moving on to the policy statements of a collection of key

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[10] In his brief account of the history of the good governance concept in Africa, Mkandawire likewise associates good governance with state-society relations that are democratic and respectful of the rights of citizens (2007: 680).

democracy assistance agencies. What emerges is a broad consensus on the part of those who would influence "from the *outside* the political process *inside* a country" over the objectives of governance assistance (Leininger 2010: 64, emphasis original).

*How Democratic Development is Measured – Indices*

"The existence of different definitions of democracy," Landman and Häusermann observe, "necessarily means the existence of different measures of democracy" (2003: 85). There are currently at least six comprehensive democracy indices in circulation, each with its own methods for measuring democratic performance and thresholds for categorisation (see Table 1). The best known of these is published by Freedom House;[11] other indices included here are published by the World Bank, the Economist Intelligence Unit, Polity IV, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation and Bertelsmann Stiftung. All of these indices are updated at regular intervals and are prominently recognised within the wider democracy assistance community. Moreover, they attempt to empirically assess the progress of countries toward democracy, rather than predict democratic trends based on variables chosen for their relevance to a particular political theory.[12]

Published by a diverse array of independent organisations, these indices give the appearance of being autonomous measures of generally comparable variables.[13] As Erkkilä and Piironen illustrate, however, "this is…a misplaced belief" (2009a:

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[11] The country ratings complied by Freedom House result in broad classifications and do not technically result in an 'index'. Indeed, Gastil, who complied the first survey published in 1973, insists: "It would not be useful to try to rank all 165 or so independent nations in one list, like tennis players" (1985: 162). Assessments made by Freedom House do, nevertheless, result in a clustered numerical categorisation of states. In so doing, Freedom House reports enable – even encourage – comparison of democratic credentials between countries. It is, therefore, reasonable to include Freedom House among producers of democracy indices for the purposes of this study.

[12] I have not included Vanhanen's (1997) comprehensive study of democratic development primarily because it aims to *predict* democratic thresholds rather than *measure* democratic progress. It does not attempt to rank or otherwise index countries, nor is it updated regularly. Polity IV and the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators do not produce comparative indices; they do, however, monitor the political characteristics of individual states over time. A tool for comparing country performance on various indicators is available on the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators website, but it does not explicitly rank countries in the way an index does.

[13] The intricacies of individual index methodologies are beyond the scope of this research. For a technical critique of the standards of assessment maintained by a selection of democracy indices

## Table 1: Indicators of Democracy Used By Assessment Indices

| Index | Indicators |
|---|---|
| **Bertelsmann Transformation Index** <br> *Produced by*: Bertelsmann-Stiftung <br><br> 125 developing countries | stateness, **political participation**, **rule of law**, stability of political institutions, political and social integration, **elections** |
| **EIU Democracy Index[a]** <br> *Produced by*: The Economist Intelligence Unit <br><br> 167 countries | **electoral process** and pluralism; **civil liberties**; the functioning of government; **political participation**; political culture |
| **Freedom in the World** <br> *Produced by:* Freedom House <br><br> 193 countries and 15 disputed territories | **electoral process**, political pluralism and **participation**, functioning of government, **freedom of expression** and beliefs, associational and organisational rights, **rule of law**, personal autonomy and individual rights |
| **The Ibrahim Index** <br> *Produced by*: The Mo Ibrahim Foundation <br><br> 53 African Countries | safety and **rule of law**, **participation** and human rights, sustainable economic opportunity, human development, **elections** |
| **Global Trends in Governance** <br> *Produced by*: Polity IV <br><br> 163 countries | executive recruitment, executive constraints, **political participation** |
| **World Governance Indicators: Voice and Accountability[b]** <br> *Produced by*: The World Bank <br><br> 212 countries | **participation** in selecting the government, **freedom of expression**, freedom of association, a free media, (**rule of law***) |

*Rule of Law is a separate World Governance Indicator

*Sources*: Unless indicated otherwise (below) all information is available on the respective organisations' websites.
   [a] Economist Intelligence Unit (2007: 2)
   [b] The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank (2007: 2)

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see Munck and Verkuilen (2002) and the subsequent discussion that occurred in *Comparative Political Studies* (Vol. 35 No. 1).

141). They go on to point out that the apparent conceptual consensus underwriting indices is easily explained by the working relationships – the small conversations – that exist between members of the various organisations producing them:

> In addition to the direct sharing of data, the conceptual consensus in the background of objectifications of good governance results in a range of activities: joint conferences, seminars, workshops, and publications… Developers of indices also use other indices to validate their own products; more than disqualifying the other, this relatively soft contrasting in effect serves to legitimate them both. (Erkkilä and Piironen 2009a: 141, also see Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2003)

The World Bank Governance Assessment, for example, is in actuality a compilation of assessments made by other organisations including Bertelsmann Stiftung, Freedom House, and the Economist Intelligence Unit. The Mo Ibrahim Foundation similarly includes Bertelsmann Stiftung, Freedom House, and the Economist Intelligence Unit among the sources for its index. Regional barometer public opinion surveys (e.g. Afrobarometer, Latinobarómetro) inform the country rankings of numerous indices, including the Economist Intelligence Unit, the World Bank and Freedom House. Although these indices project an air of scientific objectivity, on reflection their individual assessments are less autonomous than they first appear (Gastil 1985: 171).

The conceptual consistency that Erkkilä and Piironen allude to is clearly evident in Table 1. All six democracy assessment measures include political participation as an indicator of democratic governance, for instance. Participation in the political process, particularly via elections but also through civil society organisations and political parties, should lead to representation in political decision making (Santiso 2000: 170). Similarly, The Economist Intelligence Unit, Freedom House and the World Bank all evaluate evidence of an electoral process when measuring democratic development.[14] Indeed, "the best established mechanism for giving citizens voice," from the perspective of the World Bank, "is the ballot box" (Santiso 2000: 171). Even so, freedom of expression is a third indicator of democratic development used across several indices and is likewise included in the Economist Intelligence Unit's appraisal of civil liberties. A final indicator measured

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[14] The World Bank looks for "participation in selecting the government," but in practical terms this is based largely on the quality of electoral contests as measured by Afrobarometer, The Global Integrity Index, Gallup World Poll, and Freedom House (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2009).

by multiple indices is rule of law. While other indicators are used less regularly to round out the democracy assessments produced by individual organisations (e.g. stateness, political culture), these four variables are widely acknowledged to contribute to democratic practice (see, for example, Barber 2003, Diamond 2008a, Grugel 2002, Santiso 2000, Scott 2002, Weale 2007).

Though widely accepted among industry and academic establishments, democracy indices are not without critics. Some indices, including Freedom House and the Economist Intelligence Unit, rank developed and developing democracies on the same scale, a method of assessment that Andrews describes as "telling developing countries that the way to develop is to become developed" (2008: 383). On a similar note, Forje argues that democratic performance rankings crucially fail to consider the internal context of individual countries, including the human and economic resources at their disposal (1997: 318); it may be worth recognising states that have achieved much with little and, conversely, those that have sustained relatively weak democratic reforms despite boasting the resources (theoretically) conducive to sustained democratic governance. Seleti (1999) and Bradley (2005), meanwhile, question the appropriateness of judging African democracies by Western criteria, arguing that democracy's core values (i.e. equality, liberty, etc.) will be realised differently in different contexts depending on local factors. Similar arguments framed in terms of cultural exceptionalism have also been made for Asian (Pye 1985, Zakaria 1994) and Muslim (Filali-Ansary 1999, Kedourie 1994) social orders.[15] Although certain principles (e.g. rule of law, public participation) are widely recognized as intrinsic to democratic governance, critics contend that by presenting their findings as facts democracy assessment indices fail to acknowledge the full range perspectives from which people observe and judge their governments (Andrews 2008: 381, Beetham 1994a: 4, Erkkilä and Piironen 2009a: 131, Erkkilä and Piironen 2009b: 1, Parekh 1993: 167, Parry and Moyser 1994: 59-60).

With the exception of the Polity IV measurement, which is still largely an academic exercise, the democracy assessment indices discussed above are not

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[15] For a critique of cultural relativism see Diamond (2008a: 35) and Weale (2007: 253). Additionally, the Ibrahim Index, an African initiative that assesses country performance in areas including rule of law, participation and human rights, appears to reconcile international norms with African governance.

compiled simply to track changes in democratic governance around the globe. The organisations that compile these rankings have a "policy-oriented motive" (Erkkilä and Piironen 2009a: 125). These indices are marketed and employed as tools that monitor the impact of democracy assistance policies, enabling funding bodies to draw correlations between the initiatives they finance and identifiable governance trends (Leininger 2010: 72, Knack 2004: 262). Consequently, the rankings established by democracy assessment indices are not only descriptive of the quality of governance in any given country, but are also prescriptive in the sense that they help determine areas requiring additional assistance funding (Erkkilä and Piironen 2009a: 130). I now turn to the international democracy assistance agencies and identify their key priorities with regard to democratic governance.

*How Democratic Development is Assisted – Agencies*

The multi-billion dollar democracy assistance industry is founded on the simple premise that domestic democratic development in the global south "can and must" be encouraged and supported by external support and, where necessary, intervention (Rogers 2004: 124). This is not to suggest, however, that democracy assistance is "merely a matter of advocacy via an international megaphone" (Price 2009: 159). While trumpeting the many virtues of democracy is surely one aspect of democracy promotion, the rhetoric is grounded and enhanced by pragmatic democracy assistance initiatives. Table 2 incorporates the priorities adopted by a cross-section of international bodies, government departments, and independent foundations all working towards the common goal of embedding democratic institutions in developing countries. The organisations discussed here are not a representative sample of the entire industry; none of them are from developing countries, for example. As some of the most established providers of democracy assistance, however, their priorities have shaped the evolution of democracy assistance over the past half-century and continue to influence contemporary trends.

Whereas democracy assessment indices by their very nature rely on well-defined indicators, the objectives of democracy assistance organisations can be more difficult to identify, particularly outside the context of a specific project. In the past, those providing democracy assistance have tried "to do a little of everything

**Table 2: Priorities Identified by Democracy Assistance Organisations**

| Organisation | Priorities |
|---|---|
| **The Carter Center**<br>*Country*: United States | **elections**, **accountability**, human rights, **rule of law**, **participation** |
| **Department for International Development (DFID)\***<br>*Country*: United Kingdom | state capability, **responsiveness**, **accountability**, political parties, parliament, **the judiciary**, **the media**, and civil society, **elections**, human rights, **rule of law** |
| **The Ford Foundation**<br>*Country*: United States | transparency, **accountability**, **responsiveness**, effective public institutions, **participation**, **freedom of expression**, human rights |
| **International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)**<br>*Country*: Sweden | **participation**, **representation**, **accountability**, transparency, **responsiveness**, **electoral processes**, political parties, political institutions |
| **National Democratic Institute for International Affairs**<br>*Country*: United States | political parties, **citizen participation**, **electoral processes**, strong legislatures, **accountability**, transparency, **representation**, pluralism, strong public-sector institutions |
| **Open Society Institute**<br>*Country*: United States | **accountability**, safeguarding fundamental rights, **justice**, **freedom of information**, human rights, legal reform, public administration |
| **United Nations Development Program (UNDP)**<br>*Country*: Multi-national | **participation**, **accountability**, **access to information**, equal rights, **rule of law**, **electoral processes**, human rights, public administration |
| **United States Agency for International Development**<br>*Country*: United States | **rule of law**, **elections** and political processes, civil society, **citizen participation**, **independent media**, efficiency, **responsiveness**, **accountability** |
| **Westminster Foundation for Democracy**<br>*Country*: United Kingdom | political parties, **civic participation**, **elections**, **rule of law**, **media**, human rights, pluralism, **representation** |

*Sources*: Unless stated otherwise (below) all information can be found on the respective agency websites
 \* Department for International Development (2007)

according to a template of ideal institutional forms…falling back on a smorgasbord of democracy programs based on the vague assumption that they all contribute to some assumed process of consolidation" (Carothers 2002: 18). This approach, alternatively described as "democracy on the instalment plan" (di Palma 1990: 17, also see Burnell 2000: 25) reflects the influence of trends in democratic theory including sequentialism (Cammack 1994, Green and Kohl 2007, Mansfield and Snyder 2005, for a critique see Berman 2007a, Carothers 2007) and the transition paradigm (Blondel 2006, Goodin 1996, Linz and Stepan 1996, Zucker 1991).

In recent years some analysts have suggested that a split is emerging between European and American approaches to democracy assistance. European democracy assistance programmes, they observe, have taken on a "developmental" character, as evidenced by a general "building-block" philosophy and emphasis on widespread technical reform (Carothers 2009a: 18, Youngs 2008: 167). Contemporary European aid initiatives rarely focuses on "democracy" as such, instead allocating resources according to themes associated broadly with social and economic development as well as human rights (Youngs 2008). The American approach to democracy assistance, on the other hand, has tended toward more overtly political priorities. Aid is often targeted directly at domestic actors perceived to be working for democracy including, for example, political parties and the independent media (Carothers 2009a: 7).

The distinct contours of American and European democracy assistance policies can be traced at least as far back as 1990 when USAID officially adopted the Democracy Initiative, cementing democracy promotion as a key facet of this organisation's remit (Hirschmann 1995: 1291, Lawson 1999: 5). Prior to this directive, the agency's rhetoric more closely matched that of its European counterparts, advocating less overtly ideological priorities like justice and human rights. A shift back towards foundational priorities may be eminent, however; both President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton have voiced concern that the United States has put too much emphasis on elections (Carothers 2009b: 2). Although electoral assistance has been one of the more visible signs of USAID's commitment to assisting democracy, Azpuru et. al. seek to dispel the common conception that American democracy assistance is "geared only toward 'free and fair' elections" (2008: 155-157). Citing 16 years of USAID spending records, they demonstrate that

funding allocated for "elections" assistance actually comes in fourth behind USAID's other democracy assistance priorities (i.e. rule of law, governance, and civil society). Carothers confirms that less than 20% of American funding for democracy assistance is earmarked for electoral programmes (2009b: 3). While the financial figures may be indisputable, the authors' evidence that "there is no 'one size fits all' model" remains somewhat less than convincing as they notably fail to provide any compelling evidence that funding earmarked for priorities other than elections is actually spent on bespoke projects and initiatives.[16]

Despite the appreciable distinctions in how agencies on either side of the Atlantic frame their democracy assistance efforts and allocate their sizeable resources, they still appear to advocate largely the same objectives as the highlighted priorities in Table 2 clearly indicate. All of the organisations surveyed here identify either citizen participation or elections as a top priority of democracy assistance, reinforcing the "common sense" notion that democratic governance is fundamentally dependent on competitive elections (Zakaria 2003: 19, also see Adar 1999, Huntington 1991, MacIver 1947, Przeworski 1986, Schedler 2001, Schumpeter 1954, Wedeen 2004). However, as Table 2 also illustrates, there is broad consensus within the democracy assistance industry, if not in the academic literature, that democratic governance cannot survive by elections alone. Indeed, the emphasis that some of these organisations place on priorities including rule of law, accountability, and human rights suggests that what they really advocate is a liberal model of democracy that recognises the rights of citizens while limiting the power of governments (for a discussion of liberal democracy see, for example, Bútora 2007, Fukuyama 2007, Grugel 2002, Plattner 1999, Wolf 2007, Zakaria 1997). This is true of both American and European democracy assistance organisations. The National Democratic Institute proclaims, for instance, that its "governance programs seek to promote effective public-sector institutions and processes that operate in a manner consistent with democratic values of transparency, representation, pluralism and accountability" (n.d., *Democratic Governance*) while the Westminster Foundation for

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[16] According to the dataset compiled by Azpuru et. al. (2008), the "civil society" sub-sector accounted for nearly 40% of USAID democracy assistance between 1990 and 2005. Unfortunately, however, they do not provide specific evidence that funding earmarked for "civil society" initiatives is spent on more bespoke projects than funds dedicated to "elections."

Democracy similarly "believes that a strong constitution and respect for the rule of law are essential ingredients of a flourishing democracy" (2010, *Rule of Law*). In both of these instances, democracy is presumed to rely on substantially more than just elections.

As a rule, democracy assistance initiatives tend to incentivise the creation of institutions that mimic the form of Western models of democracy. They often put a premium on electoral, legislative, and constitutional processes that should first encourage (and later ensure) democratic priorities including citizen participation, accountability, responsiveness, and rule of law. Indeed, apart from the Open Society Institute, all of the democracy assistance organisations included here mention institutional reform in the descriptions of their work published on their respective websites. Moreover, the prevalence of formal embodiments of these values around the world (e.g. electoral commissions, parliaments, high courts) suggests that the democracy assistance industry has actually achieved a great deal. Having established the institutional and organisations frameworks for democratic governance, questions are starting to arise about their functionality. As I pointed out in the Introduction, an unprecedented number of states now occupy the uncharted middle ground somewhere between democracy and autocracy. Technocratic democracy assistance initiatives, though successful at creating hybrid regimes, have thus far largely failed to meaningfully engage with the complex social processes, perceptions, and expectations that influence political behaviour (Grugel 2002: 136, Smith and Loudiy 2005, Sørensen 2000). This observation provided the catalyst for this research and I will return to it again at the end of this chapter.

Rather than reassessing the goals of democracy assistance when encountered with persistent hybridity, the democracy assistance industry appears to have remained largely committed to a standard agenda. One explanation for this may lie in the industry's preoccupation with creating data and measuring performance (Andrews 2008: 381). Berman posits, however, that the object of democracy assistance may have started to shift in recent years in response to the hybrid phenomenon discussed in the Introduction. Whereas regime change and the subsequent creation of democratic institutions (i.e. democratic transition and consolidation) was once the industry's unmistakable objective, the "real debate," she argues, has now turned to what, if anything, outsiders can do to influence the onward trajectory of states that

have already engaged at least minimally with democratic reform (Berman 2007b: 14). That may be true; Table 2 indicates, however, that democracy assistance agencies still appear to rely largely on "nearly standard portfolios of aid projects consisting of the same diffuse set of efforts all over" (Carothers 2002: 18, also see Rakner, Menocal, and Fritz 2007: 25, Wunsch 2000: 488). Widely recognised[17] priorities of democracy assistance organisations (e.g. elections, participation, rule of law, access to information) are, moreover, largely shared by democracy assessment indices, enabling the industry to "track and celebrate" democracy's progress (Diamond 1996: 21-22). I will now turn my focus to electoral process, freedom of expression and rule of law, three prominent priorities identified above, in order to ascertain why they continue to be such central features of the democracy assistance agenda.

**Three Prominent Themes of Democratic Development**

As indicated above, the democracy assistance industry seems to have reached a general consensus over the interconnected fragments deemed necessary for democratic governance (Rakner, Menocal, and Fritz 2007: 4, Sklar 1987: 714). As I specified in the Introduction, electoral process, freedom of expression and rule of law are recurrent themes throughout this research in part because they take precedence among a plurality of democracy assistance and assessment organisations. In Part II of the thesis, I explore the extent to which non-elites in one region of eastern Madagascar concur with the democracy assistance industry's emphasis on and interpretation of these elements of democratic governance. First, however, I address the segues between concrete democracy assistance priorities (i.e. electoral process, freedom of expression, rule of law) and more abstract notions of accountability, responsiveness and participation so often trumpeted by influential organisations involved in the democracy assistance enterprise.

*Electoral Process*

Electoral assistance and monitoring remain among the most popular tools in the democracy assistance repertoire (Rakner, Menocal, and Fritz 2007: 28). Although DFID, for example, adamantly maintains that elections are only one piece of the democratic puzzle, this bi-lateral development organisation spent £16.6 million

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[17] Packenham (1973) goes so far as to suggest that they are taken for granted.

(approximately $25 million) in support of Afghanistan's 2009 presidential elections alone (UK Department for International Development 2009). Despite the almost farcical outcome,[18] Douglas Alexander, the UK Minister for International Development at the time, said that his job would have been made "more difficult" had the elections not taken place, insisting "we always recognised these elections were never going to be perfect" (Gray 2009). This position reflects the international community's long history of endorsing clearly flawed electoral processes (Lawson 1999: 6, Joseph 1989: 368).

Why do professionals engaged in democracy assistance cling so steadfastly to elections, even in places like Afghanistan where elections are admittedly flawed? Collier speculates that the overemphasis of elections was "inevitable," pointing out that "electoral competition can be introduced with great speed even in the most unpromising conditions" (2007: 146). Common reasons given by democracy assistance and monitoring organisations for focusing on elections fall into three broad categories: (i) elections are an identifiable indicator of democracy, (ii) electoral processes enable political representation, and (iii) political participation (via elections) is a human right. These three lines of reasoning all contribute to the highly visible prioritisation of electoral process by the democracy assistance industry.

<u>Elections are an identifiable indicator of democracy</u>

It may be feasible to have elections without democracy, but it is virtually impossible that any country today could be considered democratic without them. Strengthening electoral processes is, therefore, a logical first step in assessing and assisting democratic development. This rationale appears prominently on the websites of various democracy assistance agencies including the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the National Democratic Institute (NDI). For instance, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (2009) identifies elections as "a prerequisite for a flourishing democracy," going on to conclude that electoral processes "indicate the state of a country's democracy." The NDI, meanwhile, sees elections as "a periodic test of the strength of democratic institutions" and specifies

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[18] See, for example, the first-hand account of Peter Galbraith (2009), former deputy special representative of the UN in Afghanistan.

that its programmes "promote the integrity" of electoral processes (n.d., *Elections*). When elections and electoral integrity are positioned as central to democracy assistance efforts, organisations can illustrate the success of particular projects in case studies and country reports by pointing to the deployment of newly trained national election monitors or increased voter participation (The Carter Center n.d., National Democratic Institute n.d., *Who We Work With*). Positioned at the forefront of election monitoring, The Carter Center alone has observed 79 elections in 31 countries since 1989 (The Carter Center n.d.). Not only do internationally monitored and sanctioned elections demonstrate the democratic credentials of a given country, demand for electoral monitoring and support has cemented the role of international democracy assistance agencies in domestic electoral processes.

Widespread agreement over the utility of identifying democracy at least in part by elections also exists among organisations compiling democracy assessment indices, which similarly monitor electoral performance as an indicator of democratic vitality (see Table 1, above).[19] Freedom House, Polity IV, the World Bank, Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Economist Intelligence Unit have all designed quantitative points-based systems for assessing governance around the world, each of which includes an appraisal of electoral performance. Examples of some of the questions they use in allocating marks are included in Figure 1. It is also notable that elections are generally the first indicator assessed (i.e. Question 1 on the assessment rubric). Freedom House additionally assigns the label "electoral democracy" to countries capable of demonstrating (i) a competitive multi-party system, (ii) universal adult suffrage, (iii) regular free and fair elections, and (iv) open political campaigning. While there is no agreed upon definition of democracy or standardized way of measuring its development, there does appear to be widespread agreement among organizations tracking the democratic progress of developing countries that elections are a necessary, though not alone sufficient, indicator of democracy (for a critique of this position see Teivainen 2009).

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[19] Polity IV's executive recruitment indicator is based in part on elections. Likewise, the World Bank's criterion of citizen participation in government selection essentially equates to citizen participation in electoral processes.

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**Figure 1: Measuring the Quality of Electoral Process**

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*Are elections for the national legislature and head of government free?*

*Can citizens cast their vote free of significant threats to their security from state or non-state bodies?*

**– The Economist Intelligence Unit, Questions 1 and 5**

*To what extent are rulers determined by general, free and fair elections?*

*Are the legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?*

**– Bertelsmann Stiftung, Questions 2.1 and PS1**

*Is the head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?*

*Are the electoral laws and framework fair?*

**– Freedom House, Questions 1 and 3**

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<u>Elections enable political representation</u>

While elections are widely regarded as a reasonable sign of democracy, the international community has been charged with "focus[ing] excessively on a one-off highly visible electoral event" (International IDEA n.d.). Some organisations, consequently, now recognise elections as only a small blip in a longer-term process of citizen representation and interest articulation.[20] Merely holding elections, however, does not lead to the representation of citizens' interests in the political system. In addition to whether elections are deemed 'free and fair', a crucial factor in determining whether elections fulfil their representative potential is whether voters are offered a genuine choice between competing political parties (Pitkin 1967: 240, Santiso 2000: 171). Effective democratic elections rely on political parties to organise articulated interests and coalesce likeminded social groups into organisations capable of effectively shaping political debate. In this way, political parties transform a basic box-ticking exercise into a hard-fought competition and opportunity for change (Grugel 2002: 73). Consequently, they have become a widely recognised "instrumental necessity" to electoral and democratic processes (Zakaria 2003: 94, also see Diamond 2008a, Jupp 1968, Randall 1988, Rosenblum 2008, van Donge 1995). Before equal voting rights can translate into representative democratic governance, voters must be given a choice between competing ideologies or agendas.

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[20] Democracy indices also rely on a plurality of indicators in addition to elections to assess the degree of citizen participation in political processes.

Several democracy assistance agencies clearly specify that their support for elections is rooted in early preparations for representative electoral processes, rather than simple vote counting on the appointed day. Common democracy assistance initiatives aimed at enhancing the representative quality of elections include supporting political parties and engaging civil society organisations. International IDEA, for example, prioritises "enhancing voter confidence" in the electoral system and supporting political parties within its electoral assistance portfolio (International IDEA n.d.). USAID, which prioritises political parties as a beneficiary of democracy assistance, works to promote elections that "offer political parties and civic groups an opportunity to organise supporters and share alternative platforms with the public" (USAID n.d., *Democracy and Governance*, also see USAID 2003). The Westminster Foundation for Democracy likewise assists in the creation of policy based political parties capable of providing the electorate with genuine choice so that elections can "act as a litmus test of public support for current government policy" (2009, *Elections*). Finally, the Carter Center (n.d.), widely renowned for its dedication to electoral support and monitoring, takes a similar tack by initiating support to civil society organisations and voter education efforts "long before election day." The presumption that elections are an important democratic prerequisite informs the initiatives of all of these organisations. Instead of valuing elections for their own sake, these democracy assistance initiatives emphasise the important role played by political parties in the electoral process and subsequent representative governance.

The role of political parties in developing democracies is not uncontested, however. In contrast to the agencies cited above that advocate buttressing fragile political parties, some democracy theorists have questioned the suitability of multi-party competition to the political context in developing countries. Political parties may be inappropriate, for example, to societies unused to individualistic forms of representation or where interest groups are established primarily along family or ethnic lines (Ake 1993: 243, Bradley 2005: 420-421). In such cases, political elites might manipulate social divisions and create political parties for the sole purpose of gaining power rather than establishing platforms to address widespread social issues

(e.g. health, education).[21] Moreover, one-party dominance of the political landscape can result in rule changes that regulate or curtail who is allowed to participate in future electoral contests (Bratton 1998: 63, also see Cammack, Pool, and Tordoff 1993, Chazan 1979, Ware 1986). Bearing these concerns in mind, party politics could actually be the "bane of democratic aspirations" in multi-ethnic, young democracies and "cannot be assumed or taken for granted as a universal norm" (Bradley 2005: 420).

Blind support for political parties, therefore, poses a similar risk to unconditional encouragement of elections, namely the assumption that "in one way or another, explicitly or implicitly, willy-nilly…the electoral contest will offer tolerable chances of representation to all" (di Palma 1990: 135-136). In Chapter Four, I use evidence gathered in eastern Madagascar to illustrate the dire effects of one-party dominance of an otherwise fractured party system from the perspective of ordinary citizens. Indeed, some people I spoke with suggested that the unbalanced power dynamic created by an oppressive ruling party and a fragmented opposition undermines the entire electoral process. Encouraging the development of representative political parties is easier said than done, however, as an example from a USAID funded project demonstrates in Chapter Seven.

<u>Political participation (through elections) is a human right</u>

> According to Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:
>
>> Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives [and]…The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

This holistic approach to elections is consistent with the position outlined above that electoral results should represent voter interests. Indeed, participation and representation are closely linked when, as the Article states, people participate in politics though their elected representatives. Santiso goes so far as to say that "participation implies representation," whether through electoral processes or

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[21] The out-sourcing of critical policy areas to international institutions (i.e. the IMF, the World Bank) has also been cited as a likely explanation for the lack of clear ideological distinctions among political parties in third wave democracies (Joseph, 1997: 374).

political parties and interest groups (2000: 170 emphasis original, also see Vanhanen 1992: 22). In order to be meaningful, however, participation must be more than merely symbolic (Chazan 1979: 151, Saward 1998: 50).

In this regard, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) highlights its commitment to "achieving a balance between supporting the 'act' of voting as exemplified by short-term, event-specific election assistance, and supporting the longer-term…processes that help to sustain democratic principles" (United Nations Development Program n.d.). These "longer-term" initiatives sustain and deepen representative bodies (i.e. political parties, civil society groups) and participatory values. The NDI likewise affirms that elections "are a fundamental human right linked to a broad array of institutions and the ability of citizens to exercise other civil and political rights" (n.d., *Elections*). This position from the NDI alludes not only to political rights (e.g. voting) but also civil liberties conducive to other forms of political participation (e.g. free speech and association). The Polity IV index takes a similarly 'big-picture' approach to democracy assessment, recalling the historical evolution of political participation as a right in Western Europe in order to explain why electoral participation is a reasonable indicator of democracy anywhere. It then applies this "recognition of citizens' rights to voice and act on political opinions" to the creation of democracy and autocracy indicators (Marshall and Jaggers 2005: 12). In all of these instances, elections are identified as a vehicle for citizen participation in democratic governance, integrating the formal electoral process with broader values of political representation and participation.

In this section, I have sought to unravel why a number of influential international democracy assistance organisations prioritise elections – seen to include electoral participation and political representation – as a fundamental building block of democracy. The democracy assistance efforts briefly discussed above acknowledge that legitimate elections must pass both technical scrutiny and the trial of public opinion. Citizens need to believe that participation in electoral processes is desirable and then actually choose to take part (Diamond 1993: 13-14). To what extent, however, do average citizens in developing democracies value their role as electors? Do they perceive opportunities for representation and participation in the same way that international experts do? While international observers can play a role in discrediting fraudulent elections, the data often used to judge whether elections were

"free and fair" may not accurately reflect domestic interpretations of elections and the regimes they sweep to power. On this point, Marcus and Razafindrakoto (2003) have warned that minimalist electoral processes that fail to produce indisputable outcomes may actually jeopardise democratic development rather than strengthen it. I return to these questions in Part II, but now move on to another priority engrained in the democracy assistance agenda: freedom of expression.

*Freedom of Expression*

As Collier bluntly declared: "Elections are not enough" (Collier 2007: 146). Though often less prominently displayed than electoral assistance, most international democracy assistance and assessment efforts also realise that functional democracy requires mechanisms for holding elected political representatives accountable between election cycles (Price 2009: 160). Rights of free speech and access to information occupy this established, though less conspicuous, pedestal (Weale 2007: 193, also see Chazan 1979, Lawson 2000, Mackie 1998, Pitkin 1967, Price 2009, Whitehead 2002). Rationales for associating theses rights with democracy vary, however, ranging from a strong emphasis on freedom of expression as central to securing all other democratic freedoms to the more ambiguous assertion that a vibrant civil society depends on access to information. Though murky at first, this distinction is more than superficial.

In this section, I will demonstrate that the nature of the assumed correlation between free speech and democracy has considerable policy implications. The perceived strength of association between freedom of expression and democracy gives rise to two very different policy positions with regard not only to freedoms of speech and access to information, but to the very model of democracy endorsed. Where freedom of expression and democracy are only weakly associated, support for free speech and access to information will likely be implicit in stated policy objectives. When a strong correlation is identified between freedom of expression and democracy, by contrast, explicit policy support for the right to free speech often results.

Free speech is sometimes conceptualised as a tool, an instrument that enables or facilitates other processes more central to democracy. A common trend permeates the literature on democratic development, conceding that political rights and civil

liberties are important insofar as they contribute to an enabling environment for minimal electoral competition (see, for example, Bratton and van de Walle 1997, Clapham and Wiseman 1995, di Palma 1990, Schumpeter 1954, Vanhanen 1992). Practical extensions of this theoretical persuasion would include, for example, the ability of people to cast their votes free from intimidation and the ability of opposition parties to field candidates to challenge the incumbent. Alternatively, protection for freedom of expression or a free press formally enshrined in rule of law (e.g. the constitution) may prove sufficient, adherence to the rule of law also being a widely acknowledged (pre-)condition of democratic governance, a detail I return to below.

The creation of an informed electorate capable of participating in democratic polls that produce results representative of voter interests can likewise be said to depend on some degree of access to information via a pluralistic media (e.g. newspapers, radio stations, the internet). "For all their shortcomings," Donnelly observes, "free and open periodic elections carried out in an environment with few restrictions on freedom of speech, press, assembly, and association do provide a relatively reliable gauge of popular political preferences" (1999: 82). Freedom of expression and access to information, from this point of view, are acknowledged to enable and strengthen democracy but nevertheless remain peripheral to democracy's electoral core.[22]

Policy objectives concurrent with this position similarly allude to freedom of expression and freedom of the press in pursuit of predominantly electoral objectives. USAID's adopted policy position, for instance, candidly depicts free speech as an ancillary feature of democracy: "For an election to be free and fair, certain civil liberties, such as the freedoms of speech, association, and assembly are required" (2009: 16). Concrete policy aims in support of free and fair elections, however, concentrate on objectives more narrowly relevant to the facilitation of a transparent electoral process such as "training election commissions, poll watchers, and international election observers" and "developing civic and voter education

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[22] A slightly different argument holds that freedom of speech and access to information are both features of "liberal democracy" but are not necessary for a country to be considered an electoral democracy (see, for example, Diamond 1999, Zakaria 2003).

techniques" (USAID n.d., *Democracy and Governance*). USAID likewise associates the ability of people to express their views publicly and debate policy choices with its conceptualisation of a "free society." Once again, however, freedom of expression is implicit in policy objectives such as increasing the advocacy skills of NGOs (USAID 2005). While this organisation recognises freedom of expression and the existence of a free press as inherent to democracy, it does not appear to adopt policy positions or develop democracy assistance initiatives that focus explicitly on this issue. The contrast between implicit and explicit identification of free speech as an issue for democratic development will become more pronounced when the position taken by USAID is juxtaposed with those of other organisations below.

Another, more compelling argument portrays freedom of expression and access to information as defining features of democracy, without which meaningful political participation is impossible. "The right to freedom of speech and expression" is, for instance, the first in Saward's long list of "logically necessary conditions of democracy" (1994: 16, also see Cammack, Pool, and Tordoff 1993: 131, Forje 1997: 317, Schmitter and Karl 1991: 78). Haworth similarly emphasises free speech as an "empirically necessary condition" for democracy (1998: 185). Both of these arguments concentrate on democracy in practice. In other words, they distinguish freedom of expression as a necessary prerequisite to any other substantial manifestation of democratic participation – including electoral participation. This stands in contrast to the implicit recognition of free speech as a mere facilitating condition, above. Indeed, freedom of expression and access to information make intrinsic contributions to democratic practice in three distinct ways: participation, preference formation and articulation, and accountability.

<u>Free speech and political participation</u>

Democratic participation entails more than just voting in periodic elections, it requires staying informed of current events and policy issues in order that votes cast accurately reflect the voters' interests and opinions (Diamond 1993: 13, also see Barber 2003, Dahl 1971, Parry and Moyser 1994, Pateman 1970). Recognising that democracy begins with the everyday practice of ordinary people, attention must be paid to how people communicate with others, particularly in the public sphere (Chan 1999: 216, Smith and Loudiy 2005: 119). While this can include identifying representative processes and opportunities for collective decision-making, freedom

of expression and participation in public life must equally be open to individuals, including new or previously submerged voices (Sunstein 1993: 246-247).

Organisations engaged in monitoring democratic progress around the world often latch on to participation as a quantifiable measure of democratic strength. Indeed, apart from the Worldwide Governance Indicator *Voice and Accountability*, all of the democracy assessment measures listed in Table 1 include participation among their chosen indicators. In measuring 'participation' these organisations do not, however, turn to easily quantifiable readings of voter turnout. Indeed, participation is rarely linked directly to elections, referring instead to public participation between election cycles. A selection of questions used by various democracy assessment indices to determine country rankings for participation is included in Figure 2. In each of these cases, freedom of expression and the presence of a free press are used to gauge the ability of people to participate in public life. Greater opportunity for participation contributes directly to higher democracy and good governance rankings. While it is unlikely that a country would score well on participation indicators in the prolonged absence of regular elections, these indicators clearly identify participation as a democratic good in and of itself without reference to electoral procedure.

Democracy assistance priorities identified by some key organisations demonstrate similar concern over openings for ordinary people to participate in democratic governance beyond voting in periodic elections. International IDEA (2005) states outright that a "culture of participation" is essential to democracy, identifying policy objectives that enable citizens to acquire a political voice (e.g.

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**Figure 2: Measuring Political Participation**

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*Is there freedom of expression and protest (bar only generally accepted restrictions such as banning advocacy of violence)?*

**– Economist Intelligence Unit, Question 46**

*To what extent can independent political and/ or civic groups associate and assemble freely?*
*To what extent can citizens, organisations, and the mass media express opinions freely?*

**– Bertelsmann Stiftung, Questions 2.3 and 2.4**

*Are there free and independent media and other forms of cultural expression?*
*Is there open and free private discussion?*

**– Freedom House, Questions D1 and D4**

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media pluralism, an active civil society, competitive political parties). The Ford Foundation (2010a), meanwhile, singles out Freedom of Expression as a unique policy area separate from both Human Rights and Democratic and Accountable Government because "free expression is central to all other freedoms." The Ford Foundation's (2010b) work in this area aims to develop "a better-informed and engaged citizenry" which "is essential to strengthening democratic practice and securing social justice." The Carter Center (n.d.), likewise links civil society to participation and participation to democracy, providing support to civil society groups with the specific aim of enabling active democratic participation, particularly among marginalised communities. This explicit focus on freedom of expression and more nuanced understanding of the practical impacts of this right on democracy contrasts sharply with the implicit respect for free speech briefly outlined in the case of USAID, above. And while DFID similarly identifies civil society as a potential partner and beneficiary, the interdependence it recognises between civil society, participation and democracy remains considerably more tenuous than the positions of other organisations briefly surveyed here.

The relationship between participation in public debate and democracy in developing countries is well documented, if sometimes tumultuous. Once people have become accustomed to political participation, restricting their ability to engage in public debate by curtailing freedom of speech and the press can result in more violent outbursts. Bratton and van de Walle document the prevalence of this phenomenon across Africa in the 1980s, noting that populations habituated to mass political participation through regular, non-competitive post-independence elections generally found new outlets for participation (i.e. strikes, protests) (1997: 142-143). Like Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Kenya and Zambia, Madagascar has historically experienced a "high frequency" of political protest (Bratton and van de Walle 1997: 141). Possible explanations for why Malagasy society routinely resorts to protest as a mode of political participation are examined in detail in Part II. Whereas social unrest has sometimes been used as an excuse for clamping down on free speech, Warburton advocates "extensive protection" of this right, arguing: "without it government could not be genuinely participatory" (2009: 3).

Preference formation and articulation

A second, though somewhat less evident, link between freedom of expression, access to information and democratic governance revolves around the crucial processes of preference formation and articulation. Before casting their ballots, voters "have an interest in hearing and contesting a wide range of opinions and having access to facts" that will enable them to identify and act in their own best interests (Warburton 2009: 3). Sen also identifies freedom of expression and discussion as "pivotal" political rights, noting the constructive role they play in the formation of values and priorities (Sen 1999a: 96). In order for freedom of expression to play this vital role, individuals must have open access to information upon which they can form individual preferences, including candid communication with their fellow citizens (Frankel 1962: 36).

Political competition and participation cannot be genuine unless people have the capacity – and the opportunity – to make an informed choice (Ng 1997: 22). Without access to information, conversely, people cannot possibly cast their votes intelligently (Sunstein 1993: 252). For this reason, Schauer logically concludes, "denying access to…information is as serious an infringement of the fundamental tenets of democracy as would be denying the right to vote" (1982: 38). Restrictions on freedom of expression and access to information, therefore, weaken the very foundations of democratic society, rendering subsequent electoral processes suspect (Coliver 1998: 18). Where a genuine capacity to make an informed choice is lacking, democracy exists in name only (Cammack, Pool, and Tordoff 1993: 131).

Current policy positions adopted by democracy assistance agencies also exhibit recognition of this important association between democracy and freedom of expressions. Among them, DFID identifies one's ability to access alternative sources of information as fundamental to processes of social decision-making. This organisation accordingly supports "a range of partners" to "provide an environment in which freedom of information and expression can be promoted" (UK Department for International Development 2007: 19, 65). What form this advocacy takes varies from country to country, sometimes resulting in initiatives targeting civil society or political parties and in other contexts pushing for legislative changes outright (UK Department for International Development 2007: 65). These sorts of policy priorities specifically target individual freedoms of expression and information

that this organisation identifies as "crucial" to ensuring that ordinary people can influence political decision making processes. The NDI likewise advocates access to information as an essential building block of democratic development. This position is based on the guiding principle that fully functional democracy depends on citizens who know their own best interests and can voice them free from harassment and intimidation (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs n.d., *Citizen Participation*). Again, these positions support citizen participation in the political domain outside of formal electoral participation as integral to democratic development, and understand that citizen participation between election cycles crucially depends on freedom of expression.

<u>Accountability</u>

Thirdly, freedom of expression and access to information are commonly associated with the principle of accountability, another prevalent priority of the global democracy assistance industry. Instead of characterising public engagement as a way of preparing for elections, not unlike cramming for an exam, active political participation can be seen as an ongoing process in which democracy fulfils its promise of government by the people. Accountability bridges the gap between electoral contests by encouraging governance reflective of the public interest and responsive to popular demands (Merkel 2004: 39, O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 7). A citizenry capable of monitoring government decisions (i.e. requiring access to information) and deliberating these positions openly (i.e. engaging in free speech) can prevent elites from acting with impunity. Whereas electoral contests provide a limited forum for objection every several years, "individual rights to freedom of political speech provide a mechanism for immediate dissent" (Donnelly, 1999: 83). The foundation of democratic governance, therefore, is not elections, but rather active citizens who know how to hold their elected officials to account, can access information relevant to this purpose, and are able to voice dissent without fear of retribution.

Those engaged in assisting and assessing democratic development around the world have largely come to a similar conclusion. Accountability is used as an indicator of democracy by all of the democracy assistance agencies surveyed here. Among democracy assistance organisations, UNDP identifies a free press and freedom of expression as essential mechanisms for securing accountable governance

(2006: 116). DFID (2010) and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (2010a) take similar positions on the interdependence of government accountability, access to information, and freedom of expression. The most forthright argument for free speech as a necessary element of democratic accountability, however, comes from International IDEA. For this organisation, democracy "requires a set of political institutions and processes based on the principles of popular control over public decisions" further requiring "equality of…voice between citizens in the exercise of that control" (2005: 2). IDEA goes on to specify that citizens acquire political voice through "a culture of participation," demonstrating how the three explicit justifications for linking free speech and democracy – participation, position formation, and accountability – are themselves interconnected.

*Rule of Law*

Having established the centrality of elections and freedom of expression to formal democracy, I turn now to the rule of law. While not irrelevant to successful elections, rule of law, like freedom of expression, is principally about what happens between election cycles. Modern democracy is founded on the premise that all citizens are equal. No one stands above the law, including elected political elites (O'Donnell 2004: 33, Cammack 1993: 131, Diamond 1999: 12). Whereas constitutional liberalism in now established democracies was mandated gradually in response to domestic political bargaining, formal rules in contemporary developing democracies were installed as a "strategic tool" for organising and constraining contested power relations (di Palma 1990: 135 also see Bates 2001, Zakaria 2003). Consequently, the rule of law in many developing democracies today is severely truncated (O'Donnell 2004: 42, Rogers 2004: 120). Legal rights – free speech and universal adult suffrage among them – survive in formal constitutions and official legal codes. In practice, however, these rights may be subject to varying degrees of violation and are only irregularly experienced by the general public. While formal laws in hybrid regimes may pass muster, flaws in their application undermine the rule of law (O'Donnell 2004: 40).

The literature on democratic development generally supports an affiliation between democracy and rule of law (see, for example, Burnell 2000, Rogers 2004, Santiso 2000; for a critique of this perspective see Becker 1999, Zakaria 2003). The position adopted by several democracy assistance organizations, discussed below,

likewise concentrates on how constitutions underpin democracy and provide critical legal foundations for the practice of democratic governance (O'Donnell 2004: 36, Saward 1998: 59). However, whereas democracy assistance organisations often endorse constitutional reform, democracy theorists are more likely to emphasize the importance of constitutional durability and reliability (see, for example, Santiso 2000: 168, Whitehead 2002: 137).

Since the mid-1990s, organisations engaged in measuring and monitoring democratic trends have regularly incorporated appraisals of the rule of law into their country assessment procedures (Rakner, Menocal, and Fritz 2007: 36). Crucially, in evaluating the fortitude of rule of law prominent assessment organisations, including Freedom House and the Economist Intelligence Unit, attempt to look beyond formal constitutional or legal guarantees of rights (Economist Intelligence Unit 2008, Freedom House 2006). Greater emphasis falls instead on the practical fulfilment of these rights. That said, accurately measuring the extent to which constitutional rights are experienced on the ground remains problematic. A selection of questions drawn from the methodologies of various organisations in Figure 3 illustrates the subjective ambiguity hidden behind sterile quantitative scoring systems (also see Beetham 1994b: 33, Browne 2006: 108). In each of these cases, analysts are asked the extent to which individual freedoms are protected by the rule of law. Although it is unlikely that a country would score well on these indicators if blatant attacks on civil liberties and political rights occur routinely, the accuracy of these assessments remains questionable where commonplace subversion of the rule of law is less extreme but pervasive.

## Figure 3: Measuring Rule of Law

*The degree to which citizens are treated equally under the law. (Consider whether favored members of groups are spared prosecution under the law.)*

**– Economist Intelligence Unit, Question 54**

*To what extent is there a working separation of powers (checks and balances)?*

*To what extent are civil rights guaranteed and protected, and to what extent can citizens seek redress for violations of these liberties?*

**– Bertelsmann Stiftung, Questions 3.1 and 2.4**

*Is there protection from political terror, unjustified imprisonment, exile, or torture, whether by groups that support or oppose the system? Is there freedom from war and insurgencies?*

*Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?*

**– Freedom House, Questions F3 and F4**

It is commonly understood that rule of law provides the cornerstone for democratic development, protecting the rights and freedoms conducive to a fair political system. Indeed the audit of key democracy assistance agencies carried out above suggests that they recognise the potential threat that a weak rule of law poses to democracy in developing countries. These organisations appreciate that lasting progress in areas of electoral reform and public participation depends on if and how well political rights and civil liberties – including voting and free speech rights – are protected by the rule of law. Salient features of rule of law identified by democracy assistance organisations include "a free and fair political system" (International IDEA n.d.) and a democratic legal system that reinforces constitutional protection for individual rights (The Carter Center n.d.). DFID adopts a similar approach to addressing the rule of law, arguing that democracy requires a constitutional framework which "guarantees the rights of the citizen, sets the scene for free and fair elections, and gives legitimacy to properly elected governments" (n.d.: 3). In all of these cases, rule of law contributes to the durability of democracy by safeguarding some of its most basic features (i.e. individual rights, fair elections). Specific policy support for rule of law, however, is somewhat less pervasive than assistance targeted at either elections or free speech.

Rhetoric can only take us so far. More important is how democracy assistance organisations address pervasive perversions of the rule of law in practice. While many of the organisations reviewed here claim to support initiatives aimed at strengthening rule of law (see Table 2), factual evidence of this remains surprisingly sparse. The funding objectives of USAID, International IDEA, and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy give some indication, however, of priorities known to receive substantial amounts of funding. In 2009, USAID's Democracy and Governance program awarded a budget of $300 million to a consortium of contractors tasked with providing "international rule of law technical assistance services" to USAID missions in developing countries (2009: 13). Technical services covered by this contract range from "justice sector assessments" and "justice sector training" to "analysis of linkages between rule of law and economic growth objectives" (USAID 2009: 14, also see USAID n.d., *Rule of Law*). These strategic goals in respect to rule of law demonstrate USAID's prioritization of constitutional reform and justice services.

International IDEA and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, meanwhile, are somewhat more direct about their activities targeted at strengthening rule of law in developing democracies. International IDEA is currently in the process of developing various resources, including a handbook and training curriculum, offering general guidance and comparative examples on the topic of constitutional development. At country level, IDEA (n.d.) currently plays a supportive role in constitution building in Bolivia, Georgia and Nepal. The Westminster Foundation for Democracy appears to take a slightly different approach to strengthening rule of law, focusing on grass-roots training instead of wholesale constitutional reform. Providing funding for grass-roots paralegal training initiatives in Uganda is one concrete example of this approach (Westminster Foundation for Democracy 2010b, 2010c). Distinct from the initiatives of the other two organisations briefly addressed above, principal priorities of this project include educating people of their existing rights and providing community-level advocacy training. Whereas equal treatment under the law takes priority in USAID and IDEA initiatives, this Westminster Foundation for Democracy funded project emphasizes equal access to the law.

The idea of equality also takes precedence in some of the literature (Merkel 2004: 40). That no one is above the law – including political leaders – distinguishes democracy from other forms of governance. The fundamental rights characteristic of democratic constitutions (e.g. to a fair trial, protection against arbitrary arrest) guarantee, in theory, both equal access to the law and equal treatment under it. Initiatives aimed at educating and empowering citizens with regard to their legal rights, like the project in Uganda funded by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, clearly fit within the parameters set by academic theory on democratic development. International advisors can play only a limited role, however, in framing expectations for rule of law. The norms and assumptions that ordinary people apply in quotidian daily encounters also shape how laws are applied and the extent to which political practice reflects democratic ideals.

One facet in the literature not directly addressed by organisations that assist and monitor democratic development is the ability of constitutions and legislatures to constrain executive power (Diamond 2008b, Kapstein and Converse 2008: 64, O'Donnell 2004: 32, Welzel and Inglehart 2008, Pitkin 1967: 232, Wedeen 2004: 278). At the core of this literature rests the conclusion that unless elites face

consistent pressure to respect institutional constraints on their power, they will likely corrode constitutional restrictions. A strong state, notable for capable central government institutions including the executive, simultaneously enables and threatens democratic governance (Sejersted 1993: 132). The government must be strong enough to get things done. Respect for the constitution and rule of law, however, should curb abuse of power and avert descent into illiberal democracy. While some responsibility for keeping elites in check surely rests on the shoulders of the citizenry, Welzel and Inglehart (2008) overestimate the practical ability of ordinary people to exert strong domestic pressure on a domineering executive. Fully recognising that foreign democracy advocates cannot force the elites governing developing democracies to respect the rule of law, Rogers (2004) argues that the international community can – and should – refocus the debate, putting greater emphasis on this important facet of democracy. To date, however, there are few signs that this is happening.

**Conclusion**

Although there seems to be a general understanding that democracy requires widespread acceptance from both the mass public and elites (Fox 1994, O'Donnell 1996), ordinary citizens are rarely considered more than bystanders to the political game once election results have been tabulated (Grugel 2002: 61). The "logical possibilities" of democratic governance and democracy assistance are not, however, the same as "empirical probabilities in real-world democracies," at least in part because democratic practice cannot be separated from its human agents (Gilley 2009: 117). The empirical chapters in Part II will explore how ordinary people in one eastern region of Madagascar perceive the electoral process and their role as voters, opportunities for freedom of expression, and the rule of law at street level. The implications of socio-political attitudes and perceptions are difficult to predict (Weale 2007: 245). Nevertheless, common points of view identified in eastern Madagascar can contribute to a more nuanced interpretation of the 2009 political crisis as illustrated in Chapter Seven.

"Once we acknowledge that there is more to democratic life than a universally applicable one-size-fits-all, minimalist model of democracy," possibilities begin to emerge for alternative incarnations of democracy that more closely correspond with local socio-political logic and the needs of ordinary people (Dryzek

and Holmes 2002: 9, also see Diamond, 2008a: 316, Bradley 2005: 427, Nazarea et. al. 1998: 168). It turns out that 'democracy' is itself a contested concept, once you begin to ask people what it means to them (Dryzek and Holmes 2002: 4). Before examining the contested nature of democracy in the Antsinanana region of Madagascar, however, it is necessary to conceptualise political culture and its implications for the "deep politics of society" (Luckham, Goetz and Kaldor 2003: 21, also see Migdal 2001, Sklar 1987). In the following chapter, I discuss why the concept of political culture has attracted so much controversy and propose how it might yet contribute to analysis of democratic development.

# CHAPTER TWO: ENGAGING THE POLITICAL CULTURE CONTROVERSY

> *Political culture is one of the most popular*
> *and seductive concepts in political science;*
> *it is also one of the most controversial and confused.*
> *(Elkins and Simeon 1979: 127)*

The established indicators of and criteria for democratic development discussed in Chapter One suggest that democratic development can be assisted and monitored in an objective, technocratic way. But how well can we assess or, indeed, assist democratic development in other societies without first discovering how politics and democracy are understood locally? Do "internal models of reality" coincide with those of international experts (Keesing 1974: 90)? And if not, do the consequences matter? The international democracy assistance industry has historically eschewed discussion of political culture (Muller and Seligson 1994: 635). Compelling signs are beginning to emerge, however, that the policy community may be putting a new premium on indigenous knowledge (see, for example, de Lange 2010: 22, Dietz et al. 2009: 19, Hyden 2010). Recent reports published by the UK Department for International Development (2006, Armon 2007) and the Advisory Board for Irish Aid (Rakner, Menocal, and Fritz 2007) note the importance of 'culture' while Sweden's Ambassador for Democracy has likewise identified democratic culture as a "key feature" of sustainable democracy (International IDEA 2008: 5). Even the World Bank now acknowledges that the "perceptions, impressions, and views" of citizens matter (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2009: 4).

Rhetoric aside, however, democracy assistance providers continue to fall short of addressing problems associated with measuring, interpreting, or evaluating the relationship between political culture and democratic development. The Economist Intelligence Unit, for example, includes a "political culture" indicator in its index rankings. Heavily reliant on survey data, this indicator purports to measure variables including social cohesion, perceptions of leadership and separation of church and state, but neglects to interpret these "scores" in a contextualised way (Economist Intelligence Unit 2008: 26-27). Rakner, Menocal, and Fritz (2007)

likewise recognise the evolution of a democratic political culture as crucial to democratic consolidation; they provide little indication, however, of how international democracy assistance in identified key areas of electoral assistance, political party support and judicial reform might contribute to this process. There seems to be growing consensus that the domestic context in which democracy assistance occurs matters. The next step, however, must be to develop tools that enable those engaged in democracy assistance to develop policies that reflect this paradigm shift away from technocratic blueprints.

This chapter dissects the political culture concept with the objective of identifying how political culture variables might be studied empirically, a necessary precursor to the inclusion of cultural considerations in processes of policy formation, implementation, and analysis. If the development community is going to do more than pay lip service to this contentious topic, tools must be identified for measuring, interpreting, and evaluating local political culture(s) and gauging how these relate to democracy assistance objectives. This chapter begins by situating the culture concept in historical context and addressing why it is mired in controversy. I go on to reconceptualise political culture as a particular political worldview identifiable from patterns of individual competences and dispositions. I conclude the chapter by reformulating Held's (2006) astute question *What should democracy mean today?* to *What does democracy mean here?* In so doing, the primary focus of inquiry shifts away from theoretical conceptualisations of and criteria for democracy to those that can be identified empirically in hybrid regimes like Madagascar.

**The Culture Concept in Historical Context**

At one time or another, culture has been claimed by all of the social sciences (see, for example, Almond and Verba 1963, Eckstein 2000, Etounga-Manguelle 2000, Frake 1962, Fukuyama 1995, Handelman 1999, Kavanagh 1972, Pateman 1971, Sen 1998, Starr 2007, Tully 1995, Willey 1929, Zucker 1991). In recent years, the contestability of this concept has even penetrated its native field of anthropology.[23] Political culture, meanwhile, has been used to variously account for the legitimacy of

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[23] For an overview of this discussion, see Bashkow (2004), Boggs (2004), Clausen (1996), Coombe (1991), Feinberg (1994), Gupta and Ferguson (1997), Handler (2004), Lewis (1999), Rosenblatt (2004) and Shore (1996).

a political system (Almond 2000), the functioning of a political system (Pansters 1997), and the perceived role of a political system (Nuijten 2003). A disputed concept in its own right, political culture is generally understood to encapsulate the perspective from which individuals and groups interpret both political institutions and the political behaviour of fellow citizens, including political elites and elected representatives. Moreover, it provides a useful mechanism for distinguishing that worldview from the formal and informal institutional rules that govern society (Monaghan and Just 2000: 54, also see Kelly and Bening 2007, Mackie 1998, Mohamed 2007), a consideration discussed further below. A brief examination of the history of the culture concept in political science helps shed some light on why political culture is so contentious and how difficulties often associated with this concept might be overcome.

*The Civic Culture*

The idea of political culture has been traced back to ancient Greece (Obeidi 2001). However, its modern incarnation – and much of the controversy – is rooted in the civic culture concept developed by Almond and Verba in the 1960s. Having defined political culture as "the political system as internalised in the cognitions, feelings, and evaluations of its population," Almond and Verba go on to identify particular political culture variables that they believe are conducive to democratic governance (1963: 14, also see Bourdieu 1990). From their study of five countries, these authors conclude that a "balanced" political culture (i.e. the civic culture), in which political activism is tempered by "passivity, traditionality, and commitment to parochial values," is not only compatible with but reinforces democratic governance (Almond and Verba 1963: 32). This hypothetical equilibrium is notable for its combination of civic activism (widely associated with democratic participation) and the simultaneous political passivity of most citizens. The defining feature of the civic culture, then, is moderation: "there is awareness of political issues, yet such issues are not the most salient for the ordinary man; there is involvement in politics, but the involvement is not intense" (Almond and Verba 1963: 500). While any number of political cultures may be demonstrated to exist, they argue that only the civic culture – characterised by a fusion of active participation and docile passivity – is conducive to democratic governance.

Like most research, this study was a product of its time. Adherents of modernisation theory, Almond and Verba presumed that a certain level of economic development underpinned the civic culture and, consequently, they did not consider the possibility that poor countries might also undertake the democratic experiment. Similarly, Almond and Verba's seminal work champions a profound understanding of civic duty, a feature of the civic culture seemingly at odds with the liberal individualism typical of contemporary Western political culture. Indeed, Almond has publically recognised that the civic culture "has had its day," concluding that the collapse of communism dramatically altered both international and domestic political environments and largely undermined the civic culture equilibrium in the process (1996: 10). Even so, Almond remained convinced of the interpretive power of political culture and advocated new research into the complex relationship between democracy and contemporary socio-political expectations. In acknowledging *The Civic Culture's* shortcomings, Verba likewise stressed that their theory provided the impetus for other scholars to go "several steps further" (1989: 395). Indeed, while the civic culture remains the most widely recognised articulation of culture within political science, the spread of democracy has prompted fresh discussions of the democracy-culture equilibrium.

*Democratic Culture, Revisited*

Like most political theories, the civic culture eventually fell out of fashion. Then, in 1988, Inglehart published an article in the *American Political Science Review* claiming: "over half the variance in the persistence of democratic institutions can be attributed to the effects of political culture alone" (1988: 1220). Pointedly critical of the overemphasis that rational choice theory puts on economic variables, Inglehart sets out to demonstrate how models of development that ignore cultural factors remain incomplete. Likening culture to a "syndrome" of attitudes, Inglehart identifies a correlation between high levels of interpersonal trust and political satisfaction to the endurance of democratic institutions (1988: 1216). The article concludes that political culture is an "intervening variable" between economic growth and democratic stability, providing evidence that democratic governance is not the product of economic development alone (Inglehart 1988: 1229).

Insufficient data was available in 1988 to conclusively establish this relationship; by 2005, however, Inglehart and Welzel could draw on copious amounts

of survey data to credibly suggest that political culture provides the bridge between economic growth and democracy. Economic development, they argue, creates an environment of existential security, which in turn gives rise to increased self-expression values and political democracy. "Genuine democracy," therefore, "is not a machine that, once set up, will function effectively by itself," but rather an expression of human emancipation dependant on the aspirations of ordinary people (Inglehart and Welzel 2005: 300).

Lipset[24] and Lakin (2004) have also recently advocated the revival of political culture, contending that democratic governance requires particular structures of political relationships and obligations. Critical that the civic culture concept focused too narrowly on the attitudes of citizens toward state institutions, Lipset and Lakin propose what they describe as an alternative, distinctively democratic culture concept (2004: 202). Specifically, these authors argue that that democratic culture is "rooted in secularism, tolerance, liberal individualism, [and] respect for and obeisance to the rule of law" (Lipset and Lakin 2004: 197-198). Democratic governance, they continue, requires a society to "swallow these values and adapt them to its own" (Lipset and Lakin 2004: 197-198). Lipset and Lakin state that prescribed democratic values must be "adapted" to fit the local culture, but the insinuation runs through the book that local cultures must, in effect, *adopt* these values as well as democratic institutions. They do concede, however, that sufficiently stable democracy requires only relative – not absolute – adherence to these norms. Indeed, this argument echoes previous positions advocated by Braybrook (1968) and Kirkpatrick (1981) who have similarly argued that values including individual liberty, political representation, and limited government should not be "defined away" as increasingly diverse states vie to gain the democratic stamp of approval.

*Culture Critics and Conceptual Truncation*

Critics of the culture concept in political science question whether the inclusion of a culture variable does indeed help explain the persistence of democracy.

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[24] Lipset's interest in the complex relationship between society, politics, and democracy can be traced back to the middle of the last century (Lipset 1959, Lipset 1960, Lipset and Lowenthal 1961). While his long career undoubtedly influenced the conclusions proposed in *The Democratic Century*, in this discussion I remain narrowly focused on Lipset's final analysis of the interplay between culture and democracy.

What is it about culture that matters, precisely? Muller and Seligson (1994), for instance, carefully pick apart Inglehart's (1988) claim that culture can explain a significant amount of variance in the persistence of democratic institutions. In brief, their study subjects Inglehart's variables to a more complex modelling technique. By breaking the political culture concept down into its component parts, Muller and Seligson found that, rather than accounting for over half the variance of the stability of democratic institutions as Inglehart claimed, only the percentage of the population that prefers gradual reform (as opposed to revolutionary reform or no reform at all) has any positive correlation with democratic change (1994: 646-647). Moreover, Muller and Seligson found that interpersonal trust was not a relevant factor in democratic development, a conclusion at odds with previous research (Almond and Verba 1963, Dahl 1971, Inglehart 1988).

The analysis completed by Muller and Seligson additionally demonstrated that experience of living in a democracy actually enhanced some aspects of democratic culture, including levels of interpersonal trust and political competence (Muller and Seligson 1994: 635). Therefore, while the results from this exercise appear to widely refute Inglehart's claims about the explanatory power of culture, Muller and Seligson also add to the complexity of the debate by suggesting that the causal arrow may instead point from democracy to political culture. Schmitter and Karl come to the same conclusion, speculating that democratic culture may be the product of democratic experience while maintaining that persistent emphasis on the civic culture is "misleading" (1991: 83).

In a similar vein, Przeworski, Cheibub and Limogi insist that people "can be taught to behave as democrats" even in places where democratic values have not previously prevailed (1998: 127). Instead, they argue, economic and institutional factors adequately explain why the democratic experiment succeeds in some countries and fails so miserably in others (for a critique, see Gallagher 2002: 338, Mainwaring 1999: 35-38). Ties between economic growth, political development, and cultural change have long been suspected (Almond and Powell 1966, Apter 1965, Apter 1987, Huntington 1968, Weiner 1966, Przeworski et al. 1995, Welzel and

Inglehart 2008).[25] Inglehart's 1988 study proposed that culture was an "intervening variable" between economic growth and political development, a speculation substantiated by his later collaboration with Welzel (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Therefore, while there is some agreement that material progress, cultural change, and political – specifically democratic – development are complexly interrelated, controversy persists over causal influence and explanatory significance. Indeed, even Przeworski (2005, 2006) has expressed acquiescence to the viability of a "culture equilibrium" with democracy not dissimilar to that advocated by Almond and Verba. He maintains, however, that causal, interpretive power should not be attributed to the culture concept in the study of democratic development.

Additionally, the indicators of culture used in quantitative studies may be "too crude" to accurately determine what causal relationship exists, if any, between social attitudes and democratic institutions (Muller and Seligson 1994: 647). On one hand, research attempting to test the linkages between culture and democracy has often truncated culture to religion based on the justification that the concept is effectively too complicated to be of analytical use when conceived of in any other way (Przeworski et. al. 1998: 125-126, also see Huntington 1997: 57-59, Migdal 2001: 241). On the other hand, qualitative survey data may be useful in explaining the preferences of people in different societies, but its predictive and explanatory transferability to quantitative studies remains contested (Inglehart and Welzel 2005, Przeworski 2006). The very need to conceptualise culture in such a way that it becomes suitable for quantitative analysis might be part of the problem. Culture cannot be "uncontaminated" of its association with human beings and the settings in which they interact and, consequently, requires qualitative analysis capable of considering complex social contexts and the more subtle influences of cultural attitudes on political behaviour (Keesing 1974: 90).

Equally, quantitative assessments of democratic stability and longevity fail to consider how democracy works, often relying instead on a minimalist definition of electoral democracy. Purely electoral standards, however, tell us very little about

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[25] The reverse argument – that good (i.e. democratic) governance encourages and enables economic development – has gained ground in recent years (see, for example, Light 2001: 75, Pankhurst 2000: 155). For a critical assessment of this position, see Lewis (2008).

either how states are governed or the political experience and agency of citizens (Rakner, Menocal, and Fritz 2007: 16, 28). Indeed, there is considerable disquiet within the literature regarding overreliance on electoral evidence in democracy assessment and analysis (Carothers 2002, Diamond 1996, Karl 1995). Inglehart and Welzel's (2005) analysis provides a notable exception. In their study, the authors largely manage to avoid this pitfall by making the important distinction between "formal" and "effective" democracy.

## A Brief Word on Institutions

The relationship between institutions and culture comes up reasonably often in the literature, particularly among institutionalists. Helmke and Levitsky, for example, warn that it is "essential not to conflate these two phenomenon" even though the border at which they meet "can admittedly be difficult to discern" (2006: 7, also see Shore 1996: 44). Thelen and Steinmo (1992: 29) and Archer (1995: 11) have likewise suggested that not all constraints on behaviour are necessarily institutional, and that further study into how institutions interact with other social forces is required. Although a growing literature on the prevalence and power of informal institutions goes some way in clarifying how people behave politically, it still does not adequately explain *why* (Goodin 1996: 21, also see Bratton 2007, Helmke and Levitsky 2006, Lauth 2000).[26]

"The rules of a ritual are not a ritual, a grammar is not a language, the rules of chess are not chess, and traditions are not actual social behaviour;" rules are not irrelevant to social behaviour, but neither can they fully explain it (Flyvbjerg 2001: 43). The meanings of actions are derived from the context in which they occur. Democratic institutions may account for part of that context, but it also has a cognitive dimension inseparable from the human participants in democracy. We cannot, therefore, accurately grasp the structure and function of institutions in any

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[26] Habits, understood as context specific repetitive behaviour, occupy the border region between institutions and culture. Hodgson attempts to clarify the relationship between culture, institutions, and habits, writing: "culture is essentially a complex of shared habits, whereas an institution is a system of rules, which in turn are grounded upon shared habits" (2001: 297-298). For a selection of culture concepts inclusive of habits, see Bourdieu (1990), Hyden (2010: 16), Murphy (1994: 537) and Willey (1929: 206).

particular locality without looking beyond them to the social context in which they are nestled (Barth 1993: 157, Flyvbjerg 2001: 49, Hutchings 2000: 50).

## Reconceptualising Political Culture

Democracy is a way of life, not simply a collection of government institutions (Barber 1996: 146). In developing countries, the sudden injection of democratic institutions has drastically altered the political environment. As Putnam has pointed out, however, "that institutional reforms alter behaviour is a hypothesis, not an axiom" (1993: 18, also see Dryzek 1996: 122, Grugel 2002: 76, Lawson 2000: 78, Light 2001: 90-91). Rather than presuming that societies will adopt democratic postures in response to democratic institutions (Schmitter and Karl 1991, Muller and Seligson 1994, Przeworski et. al. 1998), we must also consider the possibility that it might be democracy that adapts to its new keepers. The objective of this research, therefore, is to develop a culture concept capable of identifying the "particular core syndrome" integral to the political life of a country (Carothers 2002: 19), at which point it becomes possible to at least provisionally determine whether and how local logic "complicates" or "resists" established democracy assistance objectives (Ralph 2000: 215).

In place of black and white performance indices and quantitative ranking systems, in this thesis I attempt to sketch in more subtle shades of gray "how people engage in the working out of a particular and distinctive sort of politics in a particular and distinctive sort of world" (Geertz 2004: 583).[27] Departing from more conventional definitions, I conceptualise political culture as the composite lenses though which individuals view and interpret their political world. These lenses determine not only the visible 'facts' of the case, but also opportunities for individual agency and the meanings associated with particular sorts of behaviour. Political culture is, therefore, both a state of mind and, as Forje argues, a way of living that can be analysed alongside and in relation to the parameters set by democratic governance (1997: 318). It is my contention that empirical research on political culture(s) may reveal alternative interpretations of what might otherwise be labelled

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[27] Bell (1986: 40), Etounga-Manguelle (2000: 67), Obeidi (2001: 1) and Ross (2000: 40) all share a similar understanding of culture.

"deviant" behaviour in hybrid regimes. Indeed, it is possible that trends identified by international observers as un-democratic may actually represent "desires for different, perhaps more authentic, democracy" (Dryzek and Holmes 2002: 15).

*An Alternative Point of View*

I suspect that exactly what culture means "is still up for grabs" for two interrelated reasons (Kompridis 2005: 318). First, the sheer abundance of culture concepts present in various social science literatures has no doubt contributed to the common perception that culture (political or otherwise) is exceedingly difficult to define (Keating 2008: 99, Kompridis 2005: 318-319, Lawson 2000: 89). Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952), for instance, identify 164 discrete definitions of 'culture' in their critical review of the concept. Second, among this profusion of culture concepts are some most notable for being "broad and clumsy" (Keesing 1974: 72, 83). The difficulty of defining culture can be used as an excuse for falling back on proxy definitions, as the conversion of culture to religion above illustrates. The search for a quantifiable culture indicator easily identifiable in large-n datasets has further contributed to the unsatisfactory nature of culture concepts in political science. These challenges, however, are not insurmountable (Keating 2008: 100).

In this research, I take a different tack. Rather than defining political culture as a descriptive variable that can be isolated (and analysed quantitatively), I propose that it constitutes an interpretive framework or set of codes deeply embedded in society. These codes not only make the external world intelligible, but also instil individual actions with particular meaning and significance (Gledhill 2000: 8, Inglis 1993: 22, Keating 2008: 103, Shore 1996: 68, Simpson et. al. 1961: 524). It is possible, moreover, for multiple political cultures to coexist within a society at any given time, accounting for why groups of people may interpret a single incident in conflicting ways. In stark contrast to conceptualisations that portray (political) culture as stagnant norms and values, the cognitive interpretive framework promoted here is a dynamic and changeable composite of social learning and individual experience.

This conceptualisation of culture does not presume to account for everything that individuals know about their worlds, but rather how they interpret and make broader sense of particular experiences, observations, and human interactions. In other words, it is an individual's "theory of what his fellows know, believe, and

mean, his theory of the code being followed, the game being played…" (Keesing 1974: 89, also see Hyden 2010: 15). Fukuyama (2005) calls this phenomenon "habits of the mind" while Geertz (1973) refers to the same idea as "the informal logic of actual life." Dryzek similarly contrasts institutional "hardware" with the cognitive "software" that enables it to function (Dryzek and Holmes 2002: 5, also see Dryzek 1996). Crucially, these ingrained patterns of meaning may not be immediately intelligible to outsiders, including other domestic political culture communities and, in the case of this research, democracy assistance experts (Dryzek 2005b: 9).

Somewhat unusual in the context of democracy assistance, this approach to understanding the (political) world from the 'native's point of view' has much in common with ethnographic research (Brown 2005, Stack 1997, Tucker and Taylor 2007, Theiss-Morse 1991) and is not dissimilar to reconstructive democratic theory (Dryzek and Berejikian 1993).[28] These approaches open up the possibility for engaging in new discourses, as they pay particular attention to how ordinary people 'out there' explain their political world instead of relying solely on the language used in academic or professional circles (Dryzek and Berejikian 1993: 48, Dryzek and Holmes 2002: 4). In other words, the focus of research shifts away from identifying ideal attitudes and behavioural patterns and toward determining how real people understand and experience democracy. Consequently, the purpose of political culture research is to neither test nor develop existing theories of democratic development, but rather to provide new interpretations of perplexing, observable phenomena (i.e. protracted hybrid regimes, the 2009 political crisis in Madagascar).

Previous approaches to reconciling democracy and political culture have often started by identifying particular democratic norms and then proceeded to construct or identify supportive cultural patterns,[29] leading to a constricted discussion within mainstream political science over what political culture is instead of how it might be used as an analytical tool (Hyden 2010: 15). The conceptualisation of political culture advocated here recommends an alternate approach that begins by empirically examining non-elite political cultures in a hybrid regime (Madagascar, in

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[28] I would like to thank John Parkinson for bringing this body of literature to my attention.

[29] See, for example, Diamond (1993), Ellis and Thompson (1997), Harrison and Huntington (2000), Holm (1996), Kavira (1996), Larmour (1996), and Obeidi (2001).

this case) and then considers the possible implications of these existing political cultures for democratic development and democracy assistance policies. In other words, it aims to discover how ordinary people in developing countries interpret notions of legitimacy, accountability, participation and representation identified in Chapter One as particularly salient to democracy assistance policy.

This model recognises that culture is political in three distinct ways. First, political culture refers to the subjective meanings that people attribute to their specifically political world (e.g. the system of governance, authority figures) (Forje 1997: 327). Secondly, it demonstrates the contested character of political concepts (e.g. elections, free speech), dislodging assumptions embedded within both the literature and prominent policy initiatives about what things mean and the subsequent consequences of these meanings for rational action (Theiss-Morse et al. 1991, Whitehead 2002: 16, 190). Finally, in highlighting the contested nature of political experience, this definition of political culture discourages default acceptance of the language that presently dominates democracy assistance and assessment while encouraging the exploration of local concepts and understandings. Importantly, political culture includes knowledge of the political system that may not necessarily coincide with objective truth (Dietz 2009: 21). For instance, general knowledge that elections are rigged is not less valid to the analytical study of political culture if empirical research can demonstrate that electoral processes are transparent and well regulated. Although political cultural perspectives may not correspond with objective fact, they nevertheless constitute the truth for people interpreting their world in this particular way.

*Forging an Analytical Tool*

Having loosely defined political culture as a cognitive interpretive framework for political agency and events, how can it be used empirically as an analytical tool? The diagram in Figure 4 demonstrates that political culture as employed in this research has three analytical levels. The pyramid is capped by political culture – the overarching interpretive framework; in this case, how people understand democracy. As Chapter One demonstrated, however, democratic governance is widely understood to result from a combination of, among other things, electoral processes, freedom of expression, and the rule of law. It is, therefore, useful to know how ordinary people interpret these component parts of democracy and how these

**Figure 4: The Building Blocks of Political Culture**

| Political Culture | Rules Based Democracy | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceptual Lenses | Positive (re. voting) | | Passivist (re. protest) | |
| Competences/ Dispositions | **competence** e.g. voting is a free choice | **disposition** e.g. people are happy to vote | **competence** e.g. discuss current events | **disposition** e.g. strikes are bad |
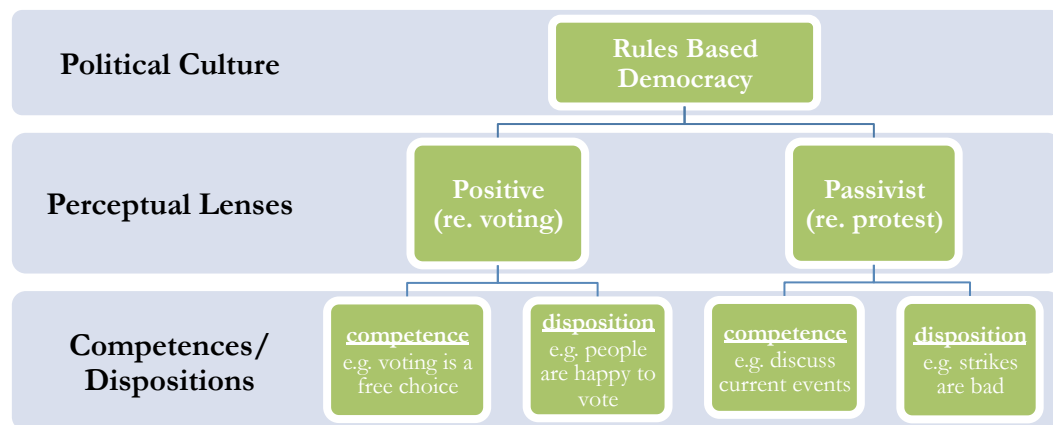
interpretations fit together. I call this middle level of political culture analysis perceptual lenses. As I explain further below, perceptual lenses select for attention particular features from what would otherwise be a hopelessly complex reality, and organise these details in an intelligible way. Competences and dispositions, located at the base of the pyramid in Figure 4, are the discrete expectations and beliefs about desirable and appropriate political behaviour. These are the least abstract elements of the analytical model and, as the following chapter illustrates, can be collected as raw data in the field.

This model of political culture illustrates how alternative cultures are created from shared meanings and interpretations. Which is not to say that the perceptions of individuals always overlap exactly (Simpson et. al. 1961: 522). As the empirical chapters in Part II demonstrate, however, identifiable patterns of competences and dispositions suggest the contours of shared points of view (i.e. perceptual lenses) that make particular events and behaviours commonly intelligible in different ways to different communities (Keesing 1974: 89, Simpson et. al. 1961: 522-523). The example of *rules-based democracy* in Figure 4 is one of three distinct political cultures identified from this research, indicating that multiple systems of interpretive codes can coexist even within a small region. All three political cultures, their component perceptual lenses and patterns of competences and dispositions are discussed in full in Part II. Before moving on to a discussion of how this analytical conceptualisation of political culture can be applied to the study of democracy, I will first expand on what I mean by perceptual lenses, competences and dispositions, demonstrating in

the process how this model goes beyond aggregating individual attitudes to represent complex patterns of meaning evident within society.[30]

<u>Perceptual lenses</u>

The innumerable tacit conclusions that enable us to coherently and meaningfully comprehend the events we experience and the places we live are conceptualised here as perceptual lenses. In other words, when we habitually "select for attention a few salient features and relations from what would otherwise be an overwhelmingly complex reality" we unconsciously view the world through a particular perceptual lens (Schön and Rein 1994: 26, also see Elkins and Simeon 1979: 128, Leininger 2010). This habituation can, however, blind us to the vast plurality of other equally correct conclusions. Determining "what is true or false, good or bad, useful or useless, beautiful or ugly, is a cultural process," that we all engage in unconsciously on a daily, even hourly, basis (Dietz 2009: 19, also see Keesing 1974: 89). Only very rarely, if ever, will everyone in a community perceive or interpret events or actions in exactly the same way. Even so, these intuitive judgments enable inter-personal communication and contribute to social cohesion. An analytical political culture concept must, therefore, be able to account for a plurality of competing perspectives, which is what the mid-level analytical concept of perceptual lenses effectively does (Coombe 1991: 113, Schneider and Schneider 2005).

The conceptualisation of perceptual lenses here remains tightly focused on three primary features: (i) they are tacit, (ii) they distinguish some elements of an idea or situation over others, and (iii) they determine the realm of possible or appropriate action. Most of the time we take the lens through which we view the world for granted (Elkins and Simeon 1979: 23, Schön and Rein 1994: 187). There are, of course, exceptions to this rule; academics, for example, often overtly subscribe to a particular paradigm or philosophy and consciously interpret their subject accordingly. Generally, however, most people do not make this sort of conscious decision or distinction. Instead, interpretations of quotidian situations are based on learned

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[30] This analysis of political culture does *not* account for how culture is learned or how culture changes over time.

beliefs and unconscious impressions that allow us to make sense of current phenomena based on past experience.[31] In other words, we automatically interweave new experiences of events and people into an existing social narrative (Oberschall 2000: 989). These unconscious judgments that enable us to understand and assign order to our environment have been described elsewhere as an interpretive screen (Vickers 1995), a frame of reference (Schön and Rein 1994, also see Lebow, Kansteiner, and Fogu 2006, Nazarea et. al. 1999a) a cognitive frame (Oberschall 2000, 2007), and patterns of assumptions (Elkins and Simeon 1979). Perceptual lenses, therefore, tacitly influence the way an individual (or organization) interprets a situation by determining the very facts of the case (Vickers 1995: 28).

Perceptual lenses enable us to recognise the scope and appropriateness of our own agency within a particular context. "This sense of the obviousness of what is wrong and what needs fixing" is emblematic of the influence perceptual lenses have on human judgment and subsequent behaviour (Schön and Rein 1994: 128, also see Elkins and Simeon 1979: 93). In other words, our tacit assumptions about the world around us "focus our attention on certain features of events, institutions, and behaviour," thereby narrowing the perceived realm of possibilities in any given situation (Theiss-Morse et al. 1991: 133). I must be clear, however, that while perceptual lenses distinguish possible actions as appropriate while unconsciously discrediting others, they are not deterministic. Instead, they predispose individuals toward particular options and "whether they perform these actions will depend on the opportunities afforded them" (Elkins and Simeon 1979: 83). While it may seem from this brief description that the influence of perceptual lenses has been unduly exaggerated, it should be remembered that without them "we could not see or value or respond to anything" (Vickers 1995: 4, also see Dryzek and Holmes 2002).

Having accepted the theoretical premise that divergent, though not by definition mutually exclusive, perceptual lenses exist, we are faced with the inevitable problem of identifying other people's tacit point(s) of view. While this may initially seem an insurmountable barrier to empirical research, reconstructive democratic

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[31] This past experience does not have to be personal, but may come from historical communal experience or knowledge of how others have coped with a similar situation (also see Obeidi 2001: 11).

theory sets a useful precedent. As noted above, this novel approach to studying democracy contrasts implicit "democratic software" (i.e. what people think they are doing) with explicit "democratic hardware" (i.e. institutional prescriptions) (Dryzek and Holmes 2002: 5, also see Dryzek 1996, Dryzek and Berejikian 1993). By emphasising the competences and dispositions of individuals – what they deem possible and appropriate action or response – it becomes possible to at least partially identify the perceptual lenses through which other people interpret politics and democracy without being hopelessly hampered by one's own interpretive perspective.

Competences and dispositions

As Figure 4 illustrates, competences and dispositions are understood here as the building blocks of perceptual lenses and are the most basic analytical concepts contributing to this political culture model. Competences include knowledge of and access to the political sphere. They also include beliefs or convictions about one's ability to act in particular circumstances and what those actions signify. The example in Figure 4 of a political culture supportive of rules-based democracy is built in part on competences including "voting is a free choice" and "[people can] discuss current events." They are known facts and available actions. Keesing similarly understands a competence as "all of what an individual knows and thinks and feels about his world" (1974: 89). While I agree that competences include all that is thought and known, I designate feelings to a separate category: dispositions. In addition to feelings, dispositions include attitudes, inclinations, and tendencies (Barber 2003: 5). They are more emotive than competences and are only indirectly linked to action or agency. This distinction is exemplified by the examples of dispositions included in Figure 4: "people are happy to vote" and "strikes are bad."

Empirically researching competences and dispositions requires the researcher to actively engage with research participants in a collaborative way, discussed at length in Chapter Three. Briefly, integrated patterns of competences and dispositions – indicative of perceptual lenses – emerge when people express their beliefs in the context of interpreting a particular situation (e.g. voting, a public demonstration). The analytical conceptualisation of political culture as a compilation of perceptual lenses each made up of distinctive patterns of competences and dispositions is interactive in two respects. First, it examines the symbolic relationship between ordinary citizens and democracy by emphasising that the expectations and abilities of

individuals are products of a particular social context and have identifiable consequences for how people interpret democracy locally. Second, like reconstructive democratic theory, this political culture model is built on a foundation of indigenous concepts and codes of meaning instead of relying solely on the researcher's own theoretical and linguistic traditions.

## What Does Democracy Mean Here?

One advantage of the model of political culture advocated here is that it bridges what people think with how they themselves believe they (could) behave, making connections between attitudes about politics and (likely) actions (Raab 2008: 431). In other words, "how individuals construct reality is inseparable from the roles they think they can, do, and should play in relation to that reality" (Dryzek and Berejikian 1993: 50). As conceptualised above, political culture can be employed to identify the logic that local people use when observing their political environment and deciding (perhaps unconsciously) how to respond to those observations (Barth 2000: 20). While this notion of political culture deviates somewhat from definitions used elsewhere in the literature, it relates seamlessly to established democratic theories, which, after all, "are built upon assumptions about the capabilities and dispositions of individuals" (Dryzek and Berejikian 1993: 59). Not only does this imply that the expectations laid down by democratic institutions, whether implicit or explicit, are neither neutral nor universal, it similarly reveals that people's beliefs and expectations regarding those institutions are of significance.

In this thesis, I propose that local political culture influences the shape that democracy takes in any particular state. One distinction between a hybrid regime and a functional democracy is that the latter benefits from a fusion of institutional and cultural understandings on the part of both political elites and average citizens (Blaug 2002: 109). The democratic rules championed so ardently by theorists and experts from the democracy assistance industry are implicitly understood and valued. In hybrid regimes, however, this fusion may have yet to develop. Alternatively, nominally democratic institutions and local political culture(s) may have merged at a common juncture that is neither fully democratic nor blatantly autocratic. This research, therefore, proposes that accurately assessing democracy in a particular place compels the researcher or analyst to try to understand if and how this fusion between political culture and democratic institutions has occurred by learning how local

people interpret their own political environment and agency. This approach also shifts away from disputes over quantity (e.g. electoral democracy) and concentrates instead on the quality of democratic governance perceived by different stakeholder groups (e.g. international democracy assistance providers, ordinary local people, domestic political elites).

When democracy is taken down off its ideological pedestal and trusted to the grubby hands of real people, it often loses some of its sheen but invariably gains substance. The nuance of democracy is augmented in the context of cross-cultural research (and democracy assistance for that matter) where local manifestations of democracy often demonstrate "a peculiar mixture of familiarity and strangeness" (Schaffer 1998: ix). In this chapter I have defined political culture as the way in which people make sense of the socio-political landscape, conceptualised here as perceptual lenses identifiable from discrete patterns of competences and dispositions. I further specified that political culture not only makes the behaviour of others intelligible but that it also establishes the contours for one's own political agency and the identification of an appropriate response given the (always subjective) 'facts' of any situation. Political culture is, in other words, not only a lens for interpreting political phenomena and recognising appropriate responses, but "a way of looking at the world that requires an account of how symbols operate in practice, why meanings generate action, and why actions produce meanings, when they do" (Wedeen 2002: 720).

To date, those concerned with democratic development have largely ignored how people living in hybrid regimes interpret 'democracy' and how those perceptions duly influence political behaviour. Instead of asking what democracy means today, as Held (2006) does, we should be asking: What does democracy mean *here*? The notion that the democratic ideal is malleable to diverse cultural contexts is neither new nor controversial. Both Sweden and Switzerland consistently rank among the top ten democracies in the world according to the democracy indices; yet few would deny that significant differences exist between Sweden's constitutional monarchy and Swiss federalism. The process and local importance of the Iowa caucuses provides yet another example of democratic diversity not immediately intelligible to people living outside (and even inside!) the United States.

In the previous chapter, I highlighted the emphasis that the international democracy assistance industry places on electoral processes, freedom of expression and rule of law. There is reasonable evidence that these priorities are not without grounds in even some of the poorest developing countries. Throughout the world, democracy is associated with voting and the idea that decisions are made by those who show up (Sen 1999b, Plattner 1999, Crick 2002). Participation in elections, however, is only consequential insofar as people are free to say what they mean and, conversely, actually mean what they say (i.e. actually support who they have voted for). Meaningful political participation is, therefore, predicated upon a political culture that tolerates dissent (Diamond 1999, Economist Intelligence Unit 2007, Lipset 1959, Wolf 2007). Indeed, "one of the paradoxes of democracy is that sustainable self-governance must be respectful of government authority and also distrustful of it," suggesting that in any democracy there must be room for open, critical dialogue (Diamond 2008a: 155). Meanwhile, accommodation and compromise encourage participants in democratic governance not only to challenge each other to tests of who can shout the loudest, but to reach some modicum of agreement on the path forward. Where citizens have the formal right to dissent but only do so mutedly, and where the opposition exercises severe self-restraint, democratic institutions may continue to function, but only weakly.

Democratic governance is likewise founded on notions of citizenship and the rights that this status confers. Safeguarding these rights requires respect for the rule of law at elite and mass levels so that citizens' rights are neither impinged from above (e.g. state sponsored censorship) nor dismissed from below (e.g. fear to speak freely). In other words, rights must not merely exist on paper; it is imperative that people can and do choose to put them into practice. Cox has similarly described constitutionalism as "the development of a political culture in which power is subject to the rule of law" (2003: 273, also see Kedourie 1994, Sklar 1987). Where local perceptions match those of democracy assistance providers, it stands to reason that democratic development will be reasonably robust. On the other hand, one would expect to find hybrid regimes in places where local political cultures interpret politics and democracy differently from the international community. Political culture can help explain variations between international and local perceptions of democracy, democratic development, and acceptable political behaviour. In Part II, I demonstrate how perceptual lenses identified in eastern Madagascar can reveal how

non-elites perceive politics. Once recognized, these can be used to identify discrepancies between the expectations of international democracy assistance experts and those of local people with regard to aspects of democratic development including electoral process, freedom of expression, and rule of law. I then return to the question of what democracy means here (i.e. in the Antsinanana region of Madagascar) in Chapter Seven.

## How Might This Be Useful?

Over two decades ago, Sklar concluded "there are no reliable blueprints of developmental democracy, no models for third-world development in the late twentieth century, democratic or otherwise" (1987: 714). At a time when most countries are at least experimenting with democracy, it strikes me as odd that the international democracy assistance industry would continue to rely on the same standards and criteria in all – or even most – country contexts. The institutions commonly associated with democracy today – such as electoral processes and rule of law – are essentially frameworks for securing the basic principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness identified by the framers of the American constitution. Likewise, the ideal of equality, commonly associated with democracy and democratic governance, is a derivative of this same premise. However, whereas Western liberal democracy often extends this emphasis on equality to support individual liberty; societies that do not understand individuality in quite the same way may interpret the social tenets of democracy somewhat differently (see, for example, Kavira 1996, Mohamed 2007).

Organisations now tasked with assisting democratic development around the world might, therefore, be fighting a losing battle when the liberal democratic institutions they advocate are not congruent with local attitudes and expectations (Linz and Stepan 1996: 5). Indeed, Nodia has warned of the "malign legacy of an undemocratic political culture" suggesting that institutional changes alone may not be enough to inspire real political change (2002: 18). Lipset and Lakin similarly concluded that institutional changes might result in the implementation of democracy "but that lack of value changes may lead to instability" (2004: 195). Existing local political cultures may, therefore, have significant consequences for the successful implementation of democracy assistance policies (An-Na'im 1999: 47, Light 2001: 90). Despite the perceived complexity and limited popularity of political

culture within political science, in the chapters that follow I explore the possibility that this much neglected analytical tool might be able to help explain why some states like Madagascar fail to meet the expectations of international donors and so often get stuck in the mire of hybridity. A better understanding of local political cultures might also be able to inform more credible democracy assistance policies.

**Conclusion**

In the contemporary political science literature, culture is often either dismissed as too difficult to measure or truncated to 'religion'. Democracy assistance organisations appear to take a largely similar view, sometimes suggesting that culture is important but failing to adequately address why that might be or how to go about researching its significance. In neglecting to take culture fully into account, both democracy theorists and democracy assistance professionals fall short of acknowledging that democratic institutions and processes might look very different when viewed through a perceptual lens other than that which created them. This difference of perspective is neither captured nor addressed by either prescriptive typologies or formal institutional frameworks. Nor should the difficulty of collecting the necessary data rescind a researcher's obligation to consider all relevant variables, culture included.

Political culture, as defined in this chapter, has the potential to help determine whether democracy assistance will have the lasting results intended by those who fund and implement multi-million dollar democracy initiatives. Or if, instead, they produce only an externally imposed set of rules that has very little to do with how people live their daily lives. Taking this concept seriously challenges the researcher to pay particular attention not only to the ordinary people on whom democracy ultimately depends, but also to the assumptions implicit in applied definitions of democracy itself. Held has similarly stated:

> In examining past, present and perhaps future models of democracy, it is important to inquire into their key features, their recommendations, their *assumptions about the nature of the society in which democracy is or might be embedded*, their fundamental conceptions of the political capabilities of human beings and how they justify their views and preferences. (2006: 7, emphasis added)

In this chapter, I have made the same argument, but have approached it from a different angle. Instead of focusing on the sort of ideal society in which democracy will flourish, as Almond and Verba and Lipset and Lakin, among others, have done, I

recommend that we start by looking at the political culture(s) already present in countries struggling with democratic development. Only then does it become possible to assess whether current democracy assistance efforts are appropriate and assessment criteria are accurate, or, alternatively, whether common preconceptions prevent democracy experts from accurately understanding complex local realities.

CHAPTER THREE: DEVELOPING A NEW METHOD

*"What is the use of a book," thought Alice,*
*"without pictures or conversations?"*
*(Carroll 2000: 19)*

How will you know it when you see it? This question haunted me in the months leading up to my fieldwork. It seemed like no matter who I talked to – my supervisors, my parents, my friends – the topic of what exactly I would be doing in Madagascar inevitably came up. Everyone knew that the objective of my trip was to research how ordinary Malagasy understand democracy and their own political agency; what exactly this entailed, however, remained frustratingly elusive to all of us. Stereotyped as "fluid, porous, unbounded, and ever renegotiable" culture is notoriously difficult to measure, a challenge I acknowledge in Chapter Two (Kompridis 2005: 319) Indeed, a quarter century ago German political scientist Max Kaase compared measuring political culture with trying to nail jell-o to a wall (Dalton 1996: 338).[32] Shaken but undeterred I pressed on, spurred by the conviction that when something is difficult – in this case empirically measuring political culture – there is all the more reason for doing it (Rilke 2002).

My task was further complicated soon after I arrived at my research site when it quickly became apparent how fearful people were of speaking openly about anything remotely related to politics or democracy. The mixed bag of qualitative methods I had settled on in the United Kingdom, including semi-structured interviews, cognitive mapping exercises and focus groups, proved incompatible with this new and unexpected setting. Wax observes that while most discussions of fieldwork focus on the data collection phase – "the period of tangible accomplishments" – it is in the overlooked initial interlude when a researcher discovers whether or not the project is in fact feasible (1971: 16). Those first few, uncomfortable days in Madagascar, it seemed as though my project, or at least the way I had envisioned it only one week previously, was not.

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[32] I would like to thank Matthias Ecker-Ehrhardt for bringing this apt analogy to my attention.

In short, I faced the grim prospect of failing to pin political culture down not because it is wily and elusive but because I was unequipped to even begin the chase. With five months remaining before I could get on a plane and fly home, I opted to experiment with a research method not previously used in political science: the Thematic Apperception Test.[33] Adapted from clinical psychology, the modified Thematic Apperception Test piloted for this research involves asking research participants to tell a story about a cartoon, and then analysing their responses. As demonstrated below, this method has considerable potential both for investigating sensitive, controversial or interdisciplinary topics, and for generating data distinct from that obtained using more traditional methods. In this chapter I establish the empirical credentials of the modified Thematic Apperception Test before illustrating how the similarly visual thematic network approach to data analysis makes the proverbial task of nailing jell-o to the wall tricky – but possible.

The chapter begins by contextualising my decision to adopt and adapt a visual research technique in the quasi-ethnographic approach I took to fieldwork. I go on to situate the Thematic Apperception Test in historical context before recounting how this method has been modified twice previously for use in social science research. Though developed independently of similar visual research methods sometimes used in sociology and anthropology, modified Thematic Apperception Tests sit comfortably alongside more-established visual research tools including photo elicitation and participatory mapping. I then describe how I adapted this method to my particular project while in the field. Sorting through my data back in the UK, it became clear that this eclectic methodology would also require an innovative mode of analysis conducive to translating my data for an audience of democracy experts and policymakers. Using two analytical devices – Framework and thematic networks – in combination resulted in the production of visual models or maps that convincingly approximate the perceptual lenses ordinary people in eastern Madagascar use to interpret their political world.[34]

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[33] In future publications, I will refer to the method developed during fieldwork and discussed at length in this chapter as the Visual Interpretation Narrative Exercise (VINE). A short précis of the VINE technique as a distinct visual research tool can be found in Appendix 4.

[34] One of the 51 modified TAT interviews was conducted with a project manager working in the upper echelons of KMF-CNOE, a local NGO that focuses on electoral monitoring and civic

**A Quasi-Ethnographic Approach to Fieldwork**

While the five months that I spent in Madagascar hardly qualifies as ethnographic fieldwork in the classical sense, it was that experience of immersion that I sought to emulate, both before my departure and once I had arrived. In order to collect the sort of intimately subjective data I needed, I would have to find a way of "break[ing] into the enchanted world of others," of understanding and interpreting politics and democracy from someone else's point of view (Barth 1993: 158). The feasibility of this endeavour has been questioned elsewhere and I acknowledge that the only experience one can ever hope to fully understand is one's own (see, for example, Bryman 1988: 73). However, I agree with Barth that this is an inherent flaw not in ethnography but in the human condition itself. There is no reason, consequently, why a researcher conscious of his or her own subjectivity should not also be able to gain a closely approximate point of view to that of research participants in the same way that different individuals roughly understand the perspective of their colleagues or neighbours in common social interaction.

In 1922 Bronislaw Malinowski wrote: "The goal [of ethnography] is, briefly, to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world" (25, emphasis original, also see Bray 2008). Anthropology as a discipline has evolved considerably since *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* was first published, but the objective and emphasis of ethnographic fieldwork – to better understand how others understand themselves – remain firmly intact. What makes this approach distinctive is the overt acknowledgement "that the eyes of the beholders and the I's of the beheld see things differently and see different things" (Cohen 2000: 5, also see Thomas and Thomas 1928: 572, Oberschall 2007: 24). Indeed, the realisation that other lives create other worldviews and rationalities is the most important contribution of an ethnographic approach to studying democratic development, contrasting starkly with the common expectation that democratic institutions will look the same and perform similar functions no matter where one finds them.

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education efforts. Though perhaps more articulate, his responses do not differ significantly from those of other research participants and are identified as coming from Todilahy when cited in subsequent chapters. I additionally completed traditional semi-structured interviews with senior officials from CARE and KMF-CNOE. These interviews, however, are not pivotal to the research presented in the following chapters and are only occasionally referred to for triangulation purposes.

Therefore, my objective of establishing how non-elites in Madagascar understand and interpret democracy does not equate to "getting into the heads of informants" but rather to carefully observing "the ways in which people attempt to make apparent, observable sense of their worlds – to themselves and to each other" through a collaborative research process (Wedeen 2002: 721). In other words, "the social world is of our making" (Banks 2007: 10, Kratochwil 2008: 97). This research into world-making processes is, therefore, exploratory in nature rather than an attempt to definitively confirm why Madagascar has experienced difficulties in consolidating democracy. As such, the qualitative investigation recounted here evolved organically from a constructivist motivation to identify local factors likely to influence democratic development in a particular place and time (Flyvbjerg 2001: 77).[35]

The question remains, however: How exactly can a researcher come to understand the world as the people s/he is studying do, and then relate this worldview to others? The most coherent framework that I have encountered for doing this sort of research, and the one that I turned to for guidance in Madagascar, is that proposed by Barth so I will quote him at length:

> …with a reasonable amount of patience and genuine interest in the lives of particular individuals we encounter in another society, their intentions and interpretations can become to a large extent accessible to us…We achieve this attunement progressively through observation, reflection, conversation, and participation, i.e. through social and cultural immersion. There is no way we can enter inside the skin of another person, but this is an impediment inherent in the human condition…it is as true of a person at home as of a person doing… fieldwork, so it is a circumstance all communication and social participation are designed to handle. We cannot stop the moment's action and demand to have delivered to us the keys people are employing to interpret that passing moment. But there is nothing to prevent us from progressively equipping ourselves…with the knowledge and insights needed to make increasingly intelligent guesses at what is going on as further events unfold. (1993: 160)

Ethnography, therefore, essentially entails "a contradictory synthesis of insider and outsider" which, though somewhat counterintuitive, is not impossible to achieve during even a relatively short visit to the field (Barfield 1997: 190, also see Bryman

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[35] Quantitative datasets and responses to large-n surveys are useful for comparative analysis but offer few explanations for *why* respondents provide the answers they do (Marsh and Furlong 2002: 21, 27, also see Barabas and Jerit 2010). That said, Q-methodology notably attempts to refine and attune surveys to the population under investigation (see, for example, Dryzek and Berejikian 1993, Theiss-Morse 1991).

1988, Neuman 2003, Toren 1996). Fieldwork that emphasises empathy and understanding with research participants can lead to insider 'expertise' which informs more detached, critical analysis when the data is translated for a new audience (Bray 2008: 307, Collier and Collier 1986: 105, Lebow, Kansteiner, and Fogu 2006: 5).

Fundamental to this approach to fieldwork – and research more broadly – is the innate understanding that the people we are researching, who we rely so heavily on for 'data', are indeed people and not just repositories of information. This is what Barth means when he says that ethnography entails taking a "genuine interest" in the individuals encountered during fieldwork. Image-based collaborative research methods, discussed further below, are inherently ethnographic, as discussion of the image leads researcher and research participant toward common understanding over the course of the interview. These techniques also blur the traditional roles of interviewer and interviewee, as both participants become just two people trying to work out the meaning of an image together (Banks 2007: 70, Collier and Collier 1986: 105, Harper 2002: 20).

The second point of guidance offered by Barth above is that ethnographic fieldwork requires patience. Acutely aware of the return plane ticket locked away in my luggage, my instinct in the first few days, and indeed weeks, was to hit the ground running. Make first contact with potential research participants. Scout out interview venues. Finalise the interview schedule. As noted in the Introduction, I had originally decided on Madagascar because all of the available signs suggested that it was a budding democracy; I (naively) expected the streets to be teaming with fledgling democrats clambering to share their experiences with me. Where were they? Patience. A researcher cannot simply "drop himself among an alien people like a man from Mars" to collect data (Wax 1971: 15, also see Rachel 1996: 123). As the analytical chapters that follow demonstrate, I did encounter many would-be democrats eager to have their voices heard. Before they would reveal themselves, however, I had to earn their trust. The tense, though not overtly heated, political climate in Madagascar during the period of my fieldwork coupled with the blatantly political theme of my research may have increased people's reservations about answering a stranger's questions. After several weeks "wandering about" I gradually gained the trust of a handful of individuals who facilitated the wider access necessary for completing my research (Wax 1971: 17).

The initial reluctance of people to be interviewed and the increasingly ethnographic approach I took to fieldwork resulted in a marked shift in how I perceived the interview process and, consequently, the methods I used. Communicative conventions inherent in standard interview and survey techniques are learned and can be misinterpreted when transferred to a new setting (Pittenger, Hockett, and Danehy 1960: 4). Eggert, for instance, found that asking direct questions was considered rude by local Malagasy standards, admitting: "my questions were endured as the yammering of someone lacking sense enough to know how to speak politely" (2001: 317). Farnworth encountered similar setbacks while completing fieldwork in Madagascar, recounting how respondents were hesitant to mark an *x* on paper in order to fill out a survey (2008b). Inappropriate methods can reinforce the barriers a researcher invariably faces when making contact with a new community.

Faced with the stark realisation that mainstream research techniques were inappropriate for this particular research context and unlikely to yield data of the quality I desired, I turned to modified Thematic Apperception Tests in the hope that this new method would encourage people "to say what they think is relevant" (Bray 2008: 310). Ordinary people "know more about their own lives than a visiting researcher can ever hope to;" convincing them to collaborate in my research necessitated that I find a method that was already somewhat familiar and could facilitate cooperation (Banks 2001: 178-179). Malagasy culture has a strong oral tradition, making the modified Thematic Apperception Test, discussed at length below, a particularly suitable interview technique.

## Embracing Eclecticism

> The thrill found in a photograph comes from the onrush of memory. This is obvious when it's a picture of something we once knew. That house we lived in. Mother when young.
>
> But in another sense, we once knew everything we recognise in any photo. That's grass growing. Tiles on a roof get wet like that, don't they. Here is one of the seven ways in which bosses smile. This is a woman's shoulder, not a man's. Just the way snow melts.
>
> Memory is a strange faculty. The sharper and more isolated the stimulus memory receives, the more it remembers; the more comprehensive the stimulus, the less it remembers. This is perhaps why black-and-white photography is paradoxically more evocative than colour photography. It stimulates a faster onrush of memories because less has been given, more has been left out… (Berger 1991: 192-193)

The development of rigorous image-based research has been one casualty of the futile pursuit of a social science. Photo elicitation, for instance, was introduced in the 1950s to much fanfare but remains "a waif on the margins" over half a century later (Harper 2002: 15); visual anthropology has likewise struggled to secure more than marginal acceptance (Ruby 1989: 9). The predominance of language-based tools in the social sciences (e.g. interviews, surveys, written reports) has made us suspicious of images: "As Alice noted before she disappeared down the rabbit hole, the absence of pictures denotes the intended adult readership of a book" (Banks 2001: 9). 'Serious' newspapers and journals are likewise devoid of pictures, while the tabloid press and glossy magazines are seen as less substantial; as, if you will, childlike. Meanwhile, the predominance of language-based research tools has resulted in suspicion of images and image-based research. Despite the growing number of researchers venturing to dabble with visual methods, they remain largely segregated by their disciplines. Consequently, the abundant potential of visual research techniques, poetically described by Berger above, remains largely unrecognised (Harper 2002, Pink 2007, Prosser 1998). This effective banishment from mainstream social science research has been detrimental to the integrated development of visual research techniques, largely obscuring their abundant potential.

Collaborative and respondent-led visual research methods largely avoid an inherent difficulty with surveys and word-based interviews whereby the answers provided to questions mean substantially different things to interviewer and interviewee (Mattes and Bratton 2007: 193, Gilley 2009: 118, Theiss-Morse et al. 1991: 16). Visual methods, by contrast, are "anchored in an image" that invites research participants to identify what is meaningful and important while simultaneously imposing order on the information being gathered (Harper 2002: 20, also see Bray 2008: 310). Although the researcher and research participant may initially interpret an image quite differently, over the course of the interview they should be able to reach a common understanding as "fellow travellers" in the research process (Tully 1995: 23). The physical presence of the image can also aid in developing rapport with research participants (Clark-Ibáñez 2007, Gold 2007: 145, Samuels 2007). Despite the growing number of researchers venturing to dabble in

visual methods, they remain segregated by their disciplines.[36] The methodology developed in this chapter is, therefore, eclectic in that it draws together information and experiences from otherwise disconnected literatures.

Visual approaches to research are largely foreign to political science.[37] Even so, mainstream acceptance of the study of discourse, with its patent interest in storylines, lends credence to the possibility of a vigorous story-based research methodology (Dryzek 1990, Ferguson 2002, Gee 2005, Hinds 2008, Howarth, Norval, and Stavrakakis 2000, Jørgensen 2002). Though still considered outcasts (Gold 2007, Harper 2002, Prosser 1998), image-based research methods are experiencing something of a revival and have demonstrated "significant untapped potential and vigour across a broader scope of disciplines" (Stanczak 2007: 3). Visual research methods including photo elicitation (Banks 2007, Clark-Ibáñez 2004, Clark-Ibáñez 2007, Harper 2002, Samuels 2004, Samuels 2007), participatory mapping (Maman et al. 2009, Margolis 1990, Medley and Kalibo 2005), photovoice (Wang and Burris 1997, Wang et al. 2004), and FotoDialogo (Ramos 1999, Ramos 2007) are breaking new ground in other research disciplines ranging from sociology and anthropology to health science and education studies. In addition to widespread adoption and adaptation within its native field of psychology (Aronow, Weiss, and Reznikoff 2001, Dana 1999, McClelland 1999), the Thematic Apperception Test has previously been modified for social science research projects in both the Philippines (Nazarea et al. 1998) and Madagascar (Farnworth 2007). Therefore, although this particular method remains an eclectic – and underdeveloped – tool available to social science researchers, the potential of visual research techniques is well documented.

Adapting a research technique from psychology also fits neatly within my research framework. As defined in Chapter Two, political culture is a cognitive phenomenon, indicating the ways in which members of a society understand and develop expectations for political encounters (also see, for example, Almond 1989: 26, Hyden 2010: 11). It is based on the understanding that people act on their own subjective agency at least partially independent of the institutional rules theorised by

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[36] I discuss this issue at length in a forthcoming article to appear in *Field Methods*.

[37] For a provocative discussion of interdisciplinarity and political science, see Greaves and Grant (2010).

political scientists (Theiss-Morse et al. 1991: 93). The Thematic Apperception Test was originally developed to measure individual cognition and is, therefore, likewise appropriate for researching the subjective ways in which people "name and frame" their socio-political environment (Schön and Rein 1994: 26). Moreover, because subjective perspectives are largely unconscious, it is difficult for people to "fake" their answers, a known weakness of survey methods that collaborative research techniques also largely avoid (Elkins and Simeon 1979: 137).

**(Modified) Thematic Apperception Tests: The Evolution of a Method**

The Thematic Apperception Test (henceforth TAT) is a mode of personality assessment based on the premise that projection is "the best way of learning about somebody next to his being aware and anxious to tell you" (Anderson 1999: 26). A modified version of this procedure proved to be an invaluable research tool, both for learning how people interpret commonplace socio-political situations and for creating an environment in which they felt safe to speak openly. Not only did the modified TAT become my primary research tool, I suspect that I would not have been able to access the information required by this research project without it.

*The Thematic Apperception Test: A Brief History[38]*

Henry Murray and Christina Morgan developed the TAT throughout the 1930s and early 1940s at the Harvard Psychological Clinic.[39] They built the technique around the notion of apperception: "the process by which new experience is assimilated to and transformed by the residuum of past experience of any individual to form a new whole" (Bellak 1975: 15). In other words, apperception denotes the way in which people meaningfully interpret new perceptions of their environment or, in the case of the TAT, an abstract image. Projective techniques like the TAT work because what we perceive in the present is invariably influenced by past perception and experience organised and stored in our memories. Contemporary accounts of historical events may likewise reflect a person's current condition or "how they

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[38] I would like to thank Professor Richard Dana for generously aiding my research into this methodology.

[39] Though adapted from clinical psychology, use of the modified TAT should not imply that I sought to identify signs of pathology.

presently construe the past to have been" (Eggert 2001: 310). Even if an account does not match the accepted historical record of events, it nonetheless belies potentially useful information about the person telling the story (Pittenger, Hockett, and Danehy 1960: 3). When subjects are asked to tell a story about an abstract image in the course of a TAT procedure, they naturally construct narratives derived from their own personality traits and unique experiences. The test in clinical usage examines personality "as it manifests itself in interpersonal relations and in the apperception of meaningful interpretation of the environment" (Bellak 1975: 39). This general premise resulted in a very versatile research tool that has been widely used and modified within psychology, and served as Murray's compass throughout his career.

The 'official' TAT, published in 1943, consists of 31 black and white, hand drawn images or "plates" that can be broken down into four 20-plate tests; one each for men, women, boys, and girls. It was thought that each picture included in a test should contain at least one figure with whom the patient could identify both in terms of age and gender. That said, four exceptions were made to include plates that demonstrate exceptional stimulative power in all four tests (Anderson 1999: 30-33). This version of the TAT, referred to henceforth as the 1943 TAT, is still in use today and commonly considered the standard set of images. There is reason to believe, however, that happenstance had much to do with which images were included in the 1943 TAT. In 1943 Murray left his position at Harvard, apparently deciding to publish the TAT as it existed at that time (Anderson 1999: 32).

Nevertheless, the TAT remained a work in progress. For Murray "there was no set way to use or interpret the TAT and, for that matter, no set TAT" (Murray 1999: xi). Over the course of his career, Murray developed several versions of the test, each with its own set of plates, based on such disparate themes as Jungian archetypes, the New Testament, and Ethiopian personality traits. Clearly, innovation is in the very spirit of the method and Murray's wife commented that he would "be thrilled" to know that the tool has been used in so many different contexts (Murray 1999: ix). The common thread that binds all successful TAT procedures is their effectiveness as a stimulus, "a method of eliciting and gathering information in a nonthreatening manner" (Gieser and Stein 1999: 6).

Murray's experimental procedure has been widely adapted within psychology, providing researchers and clinicians alike with a template from which they can create bespoke procedures tailored to particular avenues of inquiry. Well known modifications of the TAT include the Children's Apperception Test (CAT), which uses full-colour images of animals (Bellak 1975), and the Senior Apperception Technique (SAT), designed specifically for use with elderly patients to address issues such as illness and loneliness (Aronow, Weiss, and Reznikoff 2001: 62). The TAT has also been modified in several instances for the purposes of cross-cultural research (Aronow, Weiss, and Reznikoff 2001: 2, also see Dana 1999, Dana 2006, Nazarea et al. 1998, Retief 1987, Sherwood 1957). The relative ease with which the procedure can be modified for use in a wide array of projects and pursuits has been attributed to the innate ambiguity of the method (Gieser and Stein 1999: 7). All variations of the TAT share a common conviction, however, that careful analysis of a subject's spontaneous thought can provide insights that would likely not have emerged from more self-conscious responses (McClelland 1999: 173).

Although the psychometrically oriented branch of psychology never fully accepted the TAT, this scepticism has neither diluted its appeal to clinical psychologists nor banished it to the realms of pseudo-science. Quite the opposite, the TAT is commonly cited as one of the top four or five tests that should be included in a psychologist's repertoire (Aronow, Weiss, and Reznikoff 2001: 32, Gieser and Stein 1999: 6). The most common critique of the TAT is its uncertain validity as a psychological "test," a fault it shares with Rorschach's popular Inkblot test. However, many clinicians within psychology find this scepticism a blessing that enables them to downplay the evaluative connotation of the method, providing the possibility of establishing a more relaxed or non-threatening relationship with their patients. This perspective seems in line with that of Murray, who preferred to call the procedure an "educator" or a "technique," as opposed to a "test" (Gieser and Stein 1999: 6). Of more importance, surely, than its status as a "test" is whether the method succeeds in soliciting useful information; according to Murray: "When [a procedure] works, it works…and [it] tells you something you didn't get any other way" (Anderson 1999: 28). In this regard, the TAT has fewer sceptics.

*Developing a TAT*

Before discussing various modifications of the method for use in social science research, it is necessary to expound briefly on the general technique. This section provides an overview of three stages common to the development of all TAT procedures: deciding on a number of plates, choosing images, and selecting a system of scoring or analysis.

The first step in developing a TAT is deciding how many plates or images to use and over how many sessions. The 1943 TAT specifies that 20 plates should be used: 10 plates over the course of each of two one-hour long sessions (Murray 1943). According to Aronow, Weiss, and Reznikoff, application of the TAT in contemporary psychology generally consists of 10-14 plates; although, they suggest that fewer may be used "in the interests of practicality" (2001: 16). Bellak is of the similar opinion that "an optimum of material" can be collected using between 10 and 12 pictures (1975: 47). The Apperceptive Personality Test (APT) uses only eight images (Holmstrom, Silber, and Karp 1990). Murray, however, was sceptical of research that relied on fewer than 20 plates, complaining: "They run through six or eight cards in 50 minutes and let it go at that" (Anderson 1999: 36). While it may be true that the type of psychological research that most interested Murray required more plates, it is also reasonable to conceive that different types of research taking place under other conditions and with disparate research objectives might necessitate fewer (or more) images.

The second task for all TAT practitioners is choosing the images that will be used throughout the procedure. For Murray and Morgan, this process took years and resulted in numerous instances of pictures being altered or removed altogether. In other cases, considerably less time is allocated to this stage (see the discussion of Farnworth's modifications below, for example). Regardless of how exactly images are chosen, the guiding principle for making selections must be an image's ability to stimulate storytelling through its depiction of characters and contexts relevant to the people interviewed (Aronow, Weiss, and Reznikoff 2001: 67). When the subject can both identify and identify with the scene depicted in a TAT plate, s/he will tell a story reflective of his or her own experience and emotions (Aronow, Weiss, and Reznikoff 2001: 13). In the realm of personality and other psychological research, it is this insight into the patient's subjective reality that is valuable to the researcher; the

objectives of other types of research vary, but generally share an interest in subjective beliefs and attitudes.

In addition to being provocative, other criteria for selecting TAT images include: the depiction of a "critical situation," ambiguity, and at least one character with whom the storyteller can identify (Anderson 1999: 30-33, Collier and Collier 1986: 125). For instance, Wesley G. Morgan (1995), of no relation to Murray's collaborator Christina Morgan, points out that in the process of selecting images for the 1943 TAT Murray and Morgan often edited or reproduced images to make them more ambiguous. Indeed, Murray thought that one of the most successful images was one in which the figure is so abstract that out of a sample of 50 male respondents 44% were sure that it was a boy, 50% were sure that it was a girl and only 6% of respondents remained undecided (Anderson 1999: 31). Clear images, on the other hand, would likely elicit responses bogged down in the identification of particular whos, whats, and when's "instead of [interviewees] identifying with the scenes and projecting their own wishes and self-conceptions" (Nazarea et al. 1999b: 348). Anderson also points out that an often unacknowledged factor in the development of TAT picture sets is the psychologist's (or researcher's) own personality. He goes on to attribute the dark character of many of the 1943 images to Murray's own depressive character, a suggestion that Murray did not deny (Anderson 1999: 32).

While Murray conceded that the exercise would probably work without images, he concluded that the pictures "force the subject to deal, in their own way, with certain classical human situations" (1943: 2). Certainly storytelling more generally has been acknowledged as a useful device for learning about how people order the world and what they consider possible (Nuijten 2003: 12). This type of research has the potential to yield important findings about the way non-elites – particularly low-literacy level groups – perceive their social reality (Ramos 1999, Wang and Burris 1997). Visual tools can, likewise, be particularly useful when doing research in "other language cultures" (Farnworth 2008a). The ability to 'read' a photograph or other visual image transcends educational and, to a point, linguistic barriers because it does not depend on fluency in a particular language or knowledge

of grammatical rules.[40] Whereas reading and interpreting a text involves deciphering the particular meaning inherent in the words on the page, reading an image in the context of visual research methods enables mutual understanding between the researcher and research participants (Banks 2001: 9-10). Feelings, opinions, and the research participant's perceptions of reality are all displaced onto the image, further facilitating the discussion of complex or sensitive material. While the researcher chooses the images, and often the circumstances of their viewing, the properties of the images – what subjects will read into the visual stimuli – are not fixed (Banks 2001: 11).

Finally, having determined the number of images to be used, selected those images, and administered the TAT, the researcher must decide how to assess or analyse the stories collected. One feature that distinguishes the TAT from other tests and, I believe, makes it particularly open to innovation is the lack of a standardised, universally adopted scoring system. The unwieldy and cumbersome nature of Murray's interpretive scoring system prevented it from being widely adopted by other early TAT practitioners.[41] As a general rule, researchers must develop a method for systematically examining "corroboration among stories and among different areas of interpretation" (Aronow, Weiss, and Reznikoff 2001: 27). Two methods of analysis, including my own, are introduced below.

*Modifications for Use in Social Science Research*

The versatility of the TAT led not only to its use for cross-cultural research within psychology, but also to its application in anthropological research as early as the mid-1940s (Dana 1999: 178). This trend appears to have been short-lived, however. McClelland, for instance, laments that the TAT has not been adopted more widely by cultural anthropologists in particular, insisting that "the method has important applications for the study of culture…[and] is much less labour intensive than national public opinion polls for explaining key characteristics of culture" (1999:

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[40] What any particular individual reads into an image and, indeed, the very creation of images, depend on perspectives and conventions that may be culturally bound. This is not so different, however, from diversity of interpretations possible for literary works.

[41] For a comprehensive discussion of alternative scoring techniques that have been used in conjunction with various TAT procedures see, for example, Jenkins (2007) and Winter (1999).

170). He goes on to suggest that the TAT has opened the door for psychological contributions to other disciplines including economics, history, political science, international relations, and sociology, although this opportunity has yet to be fully exploited (McClelland 1999: 173). Although TATs remain relatively unknown to mainstream social science research, some better-established methods bear an uncanny resemblance; photo elicitation techniques are particularly similar.[42] While some would argue with McClelland's description of the TAT as "much less labour intensive" than other, more common research methods (Farnworth 2008a), its applicability to social science research is decidedly underappreciated.

Nazarea (1998) and Farnworth (2007) are two contemporary social scientists who have pioneered the use of modified TATs beyond the traditional boundaries set by psychology (see Table 3). Nazarea and her research team used the method in conjunction with oral history analysis and close ethnographic observation to research indigenous understandings of internally defined standards of sustainability and quality of life in the Manupali Watershed in the Bukidnon province of the Philippines.[43] Their modifications to the 1943 TAT were largely limited to changing the images used. The team replaced the 1943 images with 20 photographs taken by Nazarea "of scenes from around the Manupali Watershed…[to] elicit people's perceptions of different environmental features and agricultural practices" (Nazarea et al. 1998: 159). Their sample, consisting of 51 interviewees from three research sites around the watershed, was selected to ensure equal representation by gender, ethnicity, and age (Nazarea et al. 1998: 162). Both tape-recorded interviews and transcription were conducted in the interviewees' native dialect and then translated into English by researchers from three different national backgrounds and academic disciplines in an effort to avoid mistranslation and bias. The team then performed

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[42] Photo elicitation is a research technique developed by sociologists that uses photographs to provoke discussion in the context of a semi-structured interview. I would like to thank Lucy Mayblin and Steve Birks for bringing this method to my attention at Breaking Boundaries 2009. For more information on this particular technique see Banks (2001), Banks (2007), Collier and Collier (1986), Stanczak (2007).

[43] Nazarea (2009) has also supervised a kind of reverse TAT, known as photovoice (Wang and Burris 1997, Wang et. al. 2004). In this procedure, interviewees are given the camera to take pictures that they think best represent the concepts that the researcher is interested in. This is similar to a twist on photo elicitation developed by van der Does et. al. (1992).

**Table 3: Comparison of (Modified) TATs**

|  | **1943 TAT** | **Nazarea** | **Farnworth** | **Hinthorne** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Location** | USA | The Philippines | Madagascar | Madagascar |
| **Number of plates** | 20 | 20 | 8 | 5 |
| **Type of plates** | Hand drawn | Photograph | Photograph | Hand drawn |
| **Length of interview** | 2 hours | No data available | Up to one hour | 30 minutes (average) |
| **Number of respondents** | Individual testing | 51 | 4 | 51 |
| **Method of recording** | Written notes | Tape-recorded | Tape-recorded | Tape-recorded |
| **Triangulation** | No data available | Semi-structured interviews, oral history, observation | Semi-structured interviews, mapping exercises, observation | Semi-structured & written interviews, observation |
| **Method of analysis** | Interpretive scoring | Quantitative scoring | Qualitative | Qualitative: Framework, network analysis |

statistical analysis based on a scoring system that identified 32 themes in four categories (Nazarea et al. 1998: 163).

This slightly modified TAT procedure enabled the team to identify "contextually sensitive indicators" of sustainability and quality of life that they concluded differ significantly from indicators in common usage. More specifically:

> …the results demonstrate that the quantitative indicators of sustainability and quality of life or end states used in development planning are not co-terminus with the indicators that the local community, or sectors thereof, consider relevant and significant. (Nazarea et. al. 1998: 166)

The modified TAT was particularly useful, for instance, in identifying how local people evaluated "opportunities and constraints" that help define their understanding of natural resources (Nazarea et. al. 1999a: 219). These researchers further believe that the variations uncovered by their modified TAT could be used tohelp establish common ground between international standards of development and those that resonate with local people (Nazarea et. al. 1998: 160).

This research is not without critics. First, Marlor, Barsh and Dyhaylungsod are quick to point out that public opinion is not the same as scientific expertise (1999a: 217). Nazarea et. al. concede this point, but insist that, while studying expert accounts is a reasonable pursuit, it was not the objective of their research (1999a). They go on to suggest that Marlor, Barsh and Dyhaylungsod have "misread" the methodology, and persist that there is intrinsic merit in giving voice to marginalized populations unlikely to participate in more formal research practices (e.g. surveys, focus groups). Secondly, Marlor, Barsh and Dyhaylungsod are quite critical of Nazarea et. al.'s sampling techniques, which relied largely on "whether informants were known to the researchers and readily available and willing to participate in the study" (1999a: 217) and, consequently, fail to "investigate systematic reasons for nonparticipation" (1999b: 347). Importantly, none of these criticisms is directed at the modified TAT itself, but rather at the assertions made by Nazarea and her team about the meaning and significance of their findings. The real dispute between these research teams lies in identifying whose knowledge counts and how this knowledge might be used in the identification of culturally sensitive indicators.

Of more serious concern is the TAT's proneness to the "attitude-behaviour problem;" what people say they did or will do may not in fact correspond with their

actions (Procter 2001: 139, Theiss-Morse et al. 1991: 92). The difficulty of making inferences about behaviour from limited data is also common, however, to accepted research methods including interviews and surveys (Bellak 1975: 2) and is less relevant to research into belief or perception patterns. Moreover, the way in which an individual interprets a given situation will surely influence if not constrain the range of appropriate behavioural responses (Ramos 2007: 215). Therefore, a grounded understanding of how people are likely to perceive or interpret events can yield meaningful clues about how they would most likely act in response.

Farnworth (2007) used a similarly modified TAT while conducting her respondent-led research on the effects of participation in international organic food chains on the quality of life of farmers in eastern Madagascar. She adopted Nazarea's research model for the TAT with one significant exception: she reduced the number of images from 20 to 8 to avoid tiring her interviewees (Farnworth 2007: 283).[44] Like Nazarea, the images Farnworth used were photographs of the local environment (e.g. a school, a market scene) taken from an unusual angle "to capture everyday, yet slightly defamiliarised, scenes in a familiar landscape" (2008a). Images were selected over a period of two weeks. Despite having reduced the number of images, Farnworth (2008b) found the TAT to be a very time consuming and "arduous" method. This could be attributed, at least in part, to the interview format. Following the procedure outlined by Murray, interviewees were shown the pictures and asked to respond "by themselves, with a tape-recorder running, in the presence of a silent facilitator" for up to an hour (Farnworth 2008b). It was, therefore, necessary to have established a rapport with interviewees before conducting the TAT and Farnworth did not start using this method until several weeks after she arrived on site. Like Nazarea's team, Farnworth used the modified TAT in conjunction with other qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interviews and participatory mapping exercises.

It is significant that Farnworth conducted her research using a modified TAT in the Antsinanana region of Madagascar not far from my own fieldwork site. Not only did Farnworth's experience instruct my own modifications to the TAT, her

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[44] Farnworth's small sample size prevented her from adopting Nazarea et. al.'s quantitative data analysis technique.

observations also prepared me for the sorts of encounters I was likely to experience. Farnworth's interviewees, for instance, came from a similar demographic to many of my own, specifically: working class, poorly educated, non-elites. She notes that all of her respondents were illiterate and hesitant to put an *x* on a piece of paper in case they were signing away their land (Farnworth 2008b). Her experience warned against research methods (e.g. surveys) that pose direct questions and require respondents to leave a mark on papers that they neither trust nor understand. In contrast, modified TATs are entirely spoken, can be recorded (ideally verbatim) in a way that is acceptable to the respondent (either electronically or by taking notes manually), and do not pose any specific questions but rather prompt interviewees to respond to themes evident in the images. Farnworth is quick to point out that the TAT was a "particularly useful method…which produced some of the fieldwork's richest and most finely-tuned data" and suggests that one reason for this could be the strong oral tradition that exists within Malagasy society (Farnworth 2007: 276, Farnworth 2008b).

It is worth noting that in both of these cases the researchers waited to select the images for their modified TATs until they arrived in the field. Writing about photo elicitation, Banks reasons that if one reason for choosing visual research methods "is to increase the degree of intimacy between researcher and subject, then arbitrary images, removed from one context and deployed in another, would seem unlikely to promote this" (2001: 94). This is an important point, particularly when the research subject is sensitive or controversial. As noted above, one strength of visual research methods is that the image can act to de-formalise the interview by, for instance, transforming the interview process from an interrogation to a more congenial story-telling exercise or providing an escape route from awkward silences (Clark-Ibáñez 2004: 1512, Samuels 2004: 1547). The presence of the image means that there is always something to talk about (Collier and Collier 1986: 105-107). As I stated earlier, however, the ability of an image to fulfil this role and, indeed, to generate any data at all, depends on its accessibility to the interviewee. Both Nazarea and Farnworth ensured that their TAT images would be familiar, though not too familiar, to interviewees by taking photos of their daily surroundings from an unusual angle. Clearly an image taken of a nature preserve in the United States or a market scene in Germany would not have had the same effect on interviewees in the Philippines or Madagascar.

*Using a Modified TAT to Elicit Local Perceptions of Democracy*

The principal strength of the TAT and similar image-based research methods is their ability to draw out information that could not be gathered through direct questioning (Anderson 1999: 36, Banks 2007: 4, Farnworth 2008a, Stanczak 2007: 8). My experience with this method in Madagascar verifies this claim. Although Madagascar ranked relatively well on many democracy indices, upon my arrival in 2008 I found that freedom of speech and expression was severely curtailed. Whether this was due to actual restrictions or self-censorship is insignificant – most people were not prepared to discuss overtly political subject matter. The abstract nature of the TAT enabled me to approach political themes in a nonthreatening, roundabout way that was acceptable to most research participants and resulted in the collection of data that would not have been accessible via more direct questioning. The images create settings in which research participants can explain the meaning behind different types of socio-political interaction, thereby enabling the identification of political culture(s) within the social contexts that give rise to them (Keesing 1974: 90). It also resulted in an informal collaboration between myself and the people I interviewed that, while guided by my broad research themes, reflects local perceptions of democracy and the genuine concerns people have about their country's political future.

The number of images that I used was primarily determined by two factors. Firstly, Farnworth used eight images for her modified TAT in Madagascar and concluded: "this seemed to be the right number" (2008a). However, even with this reduced number of images, she still found the method a time-consuming and challenging exercise for interviewees and the research team alike. Drawing on Farnworth's experience, I decided early on not to use more than eight pictures, and possibly fewer as I had a larger target sample. The second factor in determining the number of pictures I used was the time it took to collect them. Like Nazarea's team and Farnworth, I had initially intended to use photographs. Not only had photographs been used in the other modified versions of the TAT, I suspected that they would be readily available by tapping sources such as newspaper archives. Soon after my arrival in Madagascar, I gave the task of finding a wide selection of photographs to a research assistant who had come highly recommended and whom I knew had access to newspaper archives. A considerable amount of time was lost

waiting for this research assistant to assemble a collection of newspaper photographs that I ultimately decided were not appropriate prompts.[45] Fortunately fieldwork has a proclivity for serendipitous encounters. Not long after rejecting the photographs, I met a young artist who agreed to draw cartoons for me. Having commissioned the images, I had to allow time for the artist to draw them. Five pictures encompassing the themes we had discussed were complete by the time I absolutely had to start conducting interviews. In retrospect, I believe that this was an appropriate number of images.[46]

Due to the difficulty of obtaining appropriate images, my image selection process did not conform to the process employed by both Nazarea's team and Farnworth. As I was commissioning the images, I was able to discuss the general themes that interested me with the artist (e.g. elections, political authority, freedom of speech, etc.); she was then at liberty to interpret these themes in a way that was appropriate to the local context. This collaborative process resulted in a set of sketches that are contextually relevant and could be interpreted by the people I interviewed relatively easily. Sketches and cartoons, for that matter, are often used to make complex material easier to understand. Madagascar's constitution was recently translated into a comic book for distribution among citizens with low levels of literacy (KMF-CNOE and Nova Stella 2009); likewise, comic strips have been printed on food packaging in Venezuela to educate people on parts of that country's constitution.[47] The fact that my images are cartoons also helped to disarm research participants; most people immediately accepted that I was not going to probe into their perceptions of particular events or political figures (also see Clark-Ibáñez 2007, Gold 2007, Samuels 2007).

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[45] After a month, it became evident that this researcher was unreliable and the pictures that he eventually provided (e.g. cockfights, cityscapes) did not meet the criteria that we had discussed.

[46] If I were to use the method again, I would opt for a set of ten images to use over the course of two interview sessions. Initially, research participants were prone to descriptive accounts of the pictures; however, the quality of stories improved as they grew in confidence. I expect that a second interview session would yield more interesting stories because research participants would be accustomed to the method and likely more comfortable with the researcher.

[47] I would like to thank Craig Wirt for bringing this to my attention.

It could be argued that my images are not particularly abstract or ambiguous in that they were drawn to elicit responses on particular themes relevant to democracy. While it is true that my images are more obviously themed than the 1943 TAT plates, this is not necessarily inappropriate. I address this here in part because Nazarea et. al.'s process of image selection was one stumbling block that Marlor, Barsh and Dyhaylungsod never got over. In their second response to Nazarea et. al., these critics say that they have difficulty understanding how the images could be both ambiguous and grounded in ethnographic observation, and go on to question how images "deliberately chosen to avoid specifics such as 'who? where? and when?'" could possibly lead to the identification of specific indicators (Marlor, Barsh, and Duhaylungsod 1999b). Nazarea et. al. defend their choice of photographs, explaining:

> Ethnographic grounding helped us identify scenes that had a higher likelihood of evoking a response; there was no preconception about who among the local informants would respond, or in what length, with what depth, and in what direction they will respond…As every impressionist painter knew, haziness has its value. (1999b)

Likewise, although my images were created to provoke responses on particular themes, I had no way of knowing how individual research participants would respond to or interpret them. Indeed, there is considerable variation in how people interpreted the same image (see Figure 5).

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**Figure 5: Examples of Ambiguity in TAT Images**

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**Picture A**                                    **Picture B**



**Identified as**: a businessman, the president, a professor, a mayor, a dictator, interesting, boring

**Identified as:** old, young, angry, eager, confused, confident, decided

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**Table 4: Sample Demographic Details**

| | Male | Female | Voted | Did not vote | Under 18 | 18-30 | 31-45 | 46-60 | 60+ | Upper | Middle | Lower | Religious |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urban | 21 | 19 | 24 | 16 | 2 | 9 | 19 | 8 | 2 | 8 | 24 | 3 | 5 |
| Rural | 6 | 5 | 8 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 9 | 0 |
| **Total** | 27 | 24 | 32 | 19 | 2 | 12 | 22 | 13 | 2 | 8 | 26 | 12 | 5 |

A brief word on sampling is also in order. As the TAT was originally developed for use with individual patients in a clinical setting, sample selection is not included in Murray's method. I interviewed 51 people (27 men, 24 women) from two sites: one rural and one urban (see Table 4). All research participants were non-elites of various backgrounds and professions. Conscious that class (Farnworth 2007) and age (Dina 2001, Sharp 2002) remain two particularly persistent social cleavages, I was careful to collect a sample broadly representative on these grounds. That said, it was difficult to know exactly how to judge the economic class of research participants. In the end, I developed a four-tier class structure for the purposes of analysis. I classified research participants as "lower class" if they were day labourers or on a meagre subsistence income. "Middle class" for the purposes of this research refers to people who have a steady income, generally providing some sort of service (e.g. hotel receptionist, secretary, waiter). Although all of the people consulted for this research are non-elites, I decided to classify those as "upper class" who had a post-graduate degree, were government bureaucrats, or owned a business employing non-family members. Finally, I decided to classify members of religious orders as belonging to their own socio-economic class because, despite their simple lifestyle, they have a standard of economic security not experienced by most people.

My sampling strategy was similar to that of Nazarea et. al., counting initially on the participation of individuals known to my research assistants or myself.[48] This reliance on known contacts gave way to snowball sampling, with research participants recommending other people that we should speak to. Although 51 people is not a large sample by some standards, I was keenly aware in the early stages of fieldwork planning of the trade-off between large and small target samples. I decided that the sort of information I needed requires "studying a smaller sample more intensely" and it was a struggle to meet my target of 50 modified TAT interviews in the time remaining once the commissioned images were delivered (Arber 2001: 59).

The tense political climate in Madagascar also precluded random sampling techniques. Many people were not comfortable talking about political issues openly with a stranger. Moreover, although I was told by the Embassy of Madagascar in London that a research permit was not required and my lack of a permit was never an issue during the three-month-long process of validating my visa, my urban research assistant was still worried that the police might stop us if we were not careful about both who we spoke to and where interviews took place. Being able to approach potential research participants by saying that someone they knew and trusted thought they might like to participate in this research noticeably improved the likelihood that someone would agree to be interviewed (also see Burnham et al. 2004: 91, Lewis-Beck, Bryman, and Liao 2004: 1044). The handful of people that we approached without any personal connection sent us away. While this sampling method does prevent me from carrying out systematic analysis as to why people may have opted out of participating (Marlor, Barsh, and Dyhaylungsod 1999a), I am convinced that it was the only way of collecting a reasonable amount of authentic data with the limited time and resources available.

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[48] I terminated my relationship with the first research assistant after he failed to deliver suitable photographs in a timely manner and found two new research assistants who I was able to work with much more productively. Theresa, my rural research assistant, provided much needed introductions to both the village president and people to interview. She also provided simultaneous translation from the local Malagasy dialect to French during TAT interviews. Urmine, my urban research assistant, similarly provided introductions and acted as a translator when necessary, although I conducted most urban interviews in French. I would like to thank both of them for their encouragement and perseverance; this project would not have been possible without them.

Having made my modifications to the TAT, the interview process was relatively straightforward. The 1943 TAT includes these instructions to read to patients before beginning the procedure:

> This is a test of imagination, one form of intelligence. I am going to show you some pictures, one at a time; and your task will be to make up as dramatic a story as you can for each. Tell what has led up to the event shown in the picture, describe what is happening at the moment, what the characters are feeling and thinking; and then give the outcome. Speak your thoughts as they come to your mind. Do you understand? Since you have fifty minutes for ten pictures, you can devote about five minutes to each story. Here is the first picture. (Murray 1943: 3-4)

Although these instructions sound quite stiff and formal, Murray was aware that the creativity on which the TAT depends "can not be forced to flourish in a stiff, frigid, intellectually superior, or otherwise uncongenial atmosphere;" it is important, he continues, "that the subject have good reason to feel the environment as sympathetic and to anticipate receptivity, goodwill and appreciation from the examiner" (1943: 3). The success of any interview depends on the quality of engagement between interviewer and interviewee, and a modified TAT can only enhance this relationship if the researcher allows it to (Pittenger, Hockett, and Danehy 1960: 3).

More specifically, the directions offered at the outset indicate the cultural credibility of the examiner and, according to Dana (2009) "markedly influence compliance [thereby] rendering the stories useful for the intended purposes, or not if rapport and cooperation have been minimal." Nazarea and her team began TAT interviews with the simple instruction "Please tell me what you see" or "Tell me a story about what you see;" no follow-up questions were asked (Nazarea 2009).[49] Farnworth likewise stuck quite closely to Murray's prescription that the interviewer remains silent. I, however, often engaged with research participants by asking what had led up to the event they had described or seeking clarification if something said was unclear, probing for their meaning. Crucially, neither my research assistants nor I ever attempted to correct anything that was said during a TAT interview. I can understand why it may not be advisable to give feedback in a clinical setting, but

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[49] Nazarea (2009) notes that while interviewees in the Philippines had no problem telling stories in response to the TAT images, in China and Ecuador people insisted that the researchers tell them more about the photos, for instance who the people are and where the photos were taken. She suggests that perhaps the instruction to simply make up a story about an image is culture-bound.

maintain that this was an appropriate modification to make in my particular research context.

When encountering visual research methods for the first time, people commonly begin to assess an image descriptively, applying labels to the things that they most confidently recognise (Banks 2001: 3, Bellak 1975: 7). Many of my research participants likewise began by identifying what was familiar in the pictures. I noticed, however, that they often grew in confidence as the interview progressed, sometimes returning to an image at the end to expand on his or her original story.[50] I attribute this gradual change in attitude to informal feedback exchanged throughout the interview. Interviews lasted around 30 minutes on average, with stories about each image taking approximately 5 minutes to tell. Very occasionally interviews lasted between 45 minutes and an hour, usually because the research participant went off on a tangent. In these rare circumstances, I decided against cutting the story off or trying to re-direct the response because I did not want to interrupt the flow of the interview. In retrospect, however, I probably should have intervened when people rambled for an exceptionally long while, as these stories did not yield better data than shorter stories.[51]

Murray concluded the instruction booklet for the 1943 TAT by warning that "the conclusions that are reached by an analysis of TAT stories must be regarded as good 'leads' or working hypotheses to be verified by other methods, rather than as proved facts" (1943: 14). Indeed, the modified TAT piloted here could be easily integrated with other research techniques, adding depth to data collected using more conventional means. Restraints set by time and circumstances, however, limited my

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[50] Research participants were not encouraged to tell stories about the Images in any particular order. I would hand each research participant the stack of sketches at the beginning of the interview and s/he was then free to choose his/her own sequence for discussing them.

[51] In two cases, the tangents of research participants substantially detracted from their TAT stories. In response to the image depicting a newspaper vendor, Voary spoke at length about the need for better public-service announcements warning people of the dangers posed by the illegal production of rum. The interview was then abruptly terminated when her baby woke up from his nap; consequently, she did not tell a story for several of the images. Michel likewise neglected to tell TAT stories about several images, preferring instead to explain the continued significance of Merina royalty for social cohesion among the Merina. He was the only person to participate in this research who did not respond well to the modified TAT technique.

opportunity for rigorous triangulation.[52] In addition to the modified TATs, I conducted semi-structured interviews with senior project managers from CARE and KMF-CNOE, an indigenous NGO that focuses on electoral monitoring and civic education. Structured follow-up interviews were completed with ten key non-elite research participants. Most of these "interviews" were agreed to on the condition that I provided a list of questions that could be answered by anonymous, written response.[53] I also took extensive ethnographic field notes and maintained consistent email contact with several primary contacts as I engaged in data analysis. The conclusions drawn in the chapters that follow do provide fodder for deeper hypotheses about why democracy assistance and assessment policies have not been as effective as they perhaps could have been. That said, the data extracted from TAT stories does provide a compelling portrait of how typical Malagasy in one region of Madagascar perceive democracy and politics, original data of value in itself. The remainder of this chapter discusses the method of analysis I used to interpret TAT stories and generate my findings.

## Visual Data Analysis Techniques

How do you transparently extract meaningful data from 244 short stories? Trying to access other people's conceptual worlds has been compared elsewhere to walking along a hall of mirrors; careful steps are required (Barth 2000: 34). I found that translation provides a useful metaphor for data analysis: in both cases the

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[52] While Samuels (2004) agrees that visual research methods like photo elicitation should be combined with other techniques (e.g. interviews, ethnographic observation) Clark-Ibáñez (2004) has successfully used photo-elicitation as a stand-alone method.

[53] I modelled my written interview questions after some of those included in International IDEA's country-led democracy assessment framework. Although some written responses to these questions do corroborate the themes I identified in TAT stories, others are simple "yes" or "no" answers. My inability to monitor the quality of written interview responses proved to be a significant shortcoming of this approach. Two additional methods that I had initially anticipated using – focus groups and cognitive mapping – proved unworkable. Focus groups were quickly eliminated from my toolbox since people were generally suspicious of talking openly about political topics with others they did not know. Although Farnworth had been successful at encouraging her interviewees to engage in mapping exercises, I found this method to be too abstract; instead of producing 'maps' of how people perceived the political arena identifying sources of power and pathways for getting things done, trials with a few research participants resulted in linear diagrams of social and class structures. While useful to a point, early on I decided that this method was not providing the sort of information I sought and focused instead on refining my modified TAT. One likely explanation for the different experiences Farnworth and I had with mapping exercises is that her research topic (i.e. fair trade farming) has an overtly geographical sub-text which democracy does not.

product is a provisional solution for making something previously indecipherable or foreign newly comprehensible (Benjamin 2000). The result is an independent interpretation that, if done well, accurately echoes the original (Basit 2003: 146, Keesing 1974: 92).

In Fabrication, Neville brilliantly achieves this objective while researching assorted modes of creation. Intricate, incomprehensible processes for manufacturing globes and extracting pure vanilla become clear and immediate. Recounting the manufacturing process for veneer, Neville recounts:

> Two and a half million square feet a day, the pale logs are loaded on a machine that runs on rails, so when you're standing on the catwalk it's like looking down onto subway tracks, with that same rush of the train, only this time it's a log that rushes toward you on the tracks, with red laser beams pointing out where the log is to be cut and a sawyer sitting in a room above you. As if he were playing a video game, he points the laser and then there's the horrible sound of the blade squaring the log. It all happens so quickly, with so much sound and violence, and you're standing on the edge and right below you is this enormous blade and the wood and the tracks and you think of Anna Karenina and subway suicides and you just want out of there. (Neville 2001: 86)

Even the initial stages of fabricating veneer make perfect sense with the help of references to trains and Tolstoy. (Although I doubt that either of these references would make the process any clearer to my research participants in Madagascar.)

In the context of this research, the underlying objective is to find a means of identifying and understanding one way of seeing things (i.e. non-elite perspectives of Madagascar's socio-political environment) and then intelligibly transferring this particular worldview to academic and policy debates, an altogether different venue. Verbatim, word-by-word transcription is unlikely to prove effective, lacking the tone and nuance that surely contribute to the meaning of the original text or experience. Instead, a researcher may be better served by remaining intuitively faithful to the internal logic and emotion of the research experience. *With that same rush of the train, only this time it's a log that rushes toward you on the tracks.* "Rendering the sense" of a day labourer in Madagascar's socio-political worldview similarly requires not only attention to linguistic detail in transcribing the interview but also appreciation for the previously imperceptible parallels between his experience and that of someone living in the United States or Europe (Benjamin 2000: 21).

Having met the myriad challenges posed by fieldwork, I confronted the even more daunting task of data analysis with this idea of translation in mind. The primary objective of the analysis process was to build a schematic framework or model capable of accurately describing local political logic and how this might become manifest in political behaviour. This was achieved using a three-stage analysis strategy entailing: (1) systematic deconstruction of TAT stories into thematic text segments (i.e. data extrapolation); (2) exploration of pervasive themes and theme clusters (i.e. identification of perceptual lenses); and (3) interpretation and analysis of the information (see Figure 6). Data analysis, in other words, entails a creative process of describing trends, identifying relationships, and interpreting meaning (Basit 2003). In so doing, this process examines the concepts that 'normal' people actually use to interpret their political environment. It should also shed light on how concepts associated with democracy (e.g. elections, political competition) are re-appropriated in new settings.

A researcher's "interpretations are always partial, in both senses of the word, and provisional; they are not 'true' " (Marsh and Furlong 2002: 19, also see Spencer, Ritchie, and O'Connor 2003: 199). This, however, is no bad thing. Self-conscious

**Figure 6: Stages of Analysis**



Analsysis Stage A
- **Breakdown of Text (Framework)**
- Disect text into thematic fragments
- Identify competences and dispositions

Analysis Stage B
- **Exploration of Text (Thematic Networks)**
- Select and arrange basic and organising themes to identify global themes
- Create, verify and refine the network(s)

Analysis Stage C
- **Interpretation of Exploration (Chapters Four through Six)**
- Describe and summarise the thematic network(s)
- Interpret patterns

subjectivity allows the researcher to draw from his/her unique "appreciation of the enormity, contingency, and fragility" of the qualitative data when making interpretations, nuances that may be lost on someone else reading the data cold (Attride-Stirling 2001: 403). I do not, therefore, claim that my analysis of TAT stories is absolute, or even complete, but do believe that the analytical process I utilised is reliable because it remains grounded in the TAT stories themselves. My desire to stay as close to the original stories as possible also resulted in an acute awareness of the need for transparency in establishing clear links between thematic conclusions and what individuals actually said. This is all easier said than done, of course. For a start, the challenge of conceptualising "the elements of political culture, and their inter-relationships" has been pushed to one side, largely neglected by scholars trying to make sense of democracy's third wave (Dalton 1996: 341). Lacking a cohesive framework on which to build, I would have to cobble one together myself. The result is an eclectic analytical process that synthesises Framework (Spencer, Ritchie, and O'Connor 2003) with thematic networks (Attride-Stirling 2001), enabling the construction of conceptual schema that reflect likely perceptual lenses adopted by people living in the Antsinanana region of eastern Madagascar.

*Data Organisation: Framework*

Before data analysis could begin in earnest, TAT interviews required transcription and organisation. Having collected nearly 250 TAT stories, data reduction proved a crucial first step in making sense of what I had learned (Attride-Stirling 2001, Lee and Fielding 1996). This section explains how breaking up the mass of transcribed text using Framework helped me to identify broad clusters of themes. Although these initial theme clusters were still too abstract for detailed analysis of potential perceptual lenses, this initial process of breaking the TAT stories down into more manageable chunks was crucial before undertaking the second, more nuanced stage of analysis.

Framework is an interactive data management technique that uses matrices to organise data by case and theme (National Centre for Social Research 2007, Ritchie, Spencer, and O'Connor 2003). While specialist software is available (such as FrameWork), I achieved the same result using a series of Excel spreadsheets. A Framework consists of a set of thematic charts (or matrices); each chart is dedicated to a unique theme, which is then broken down into sub-themes. All charts conform

to a standard format (i.e. row height, column width, number of rows and columns per page) and while the themes across the horizontal header of each chart are different, the vertical location of cases (or research participants) remains consistent across all charts. This format allows the researcher to analyse data either by case (by looking at the same row across charts) or theme (by looking at all rows on a single chart). My Framework consisted of six charts: a central chart, identifying research participants by number and corresponding demographic information (i.e. interview number, sex, age, occupation, education, urban/rural, did they vote in the previous presidential election) and one chart for each of the five images. Each chart had eight columns; in addition to columns dedicated to appropriate sub-themes, each chart based on a thematic image included columns labelled "identifier" (i.e. interview number), "interpretation of scene", and "other" (for interpretive notes).

Having established the uniform chart format, I began to sort through TAT stories to determine how best to organise their contents. Data is typically entered into a Framework either by theme (if data is coded) or directly from interview transcripts (National Centre for Social Research 2007). The words that we use "define and delimit our world in important ways" that require careful, contextual interpretation rather than literal transcription (Pitkin 1967: 1, also see Keesing 1974: 92). Wary of moving away form the original language used by research participants too soon in the analysis process, I made the unconventional decision of entering quotes from TAT stories directly into the Framework verbatim rather than summarising or relying on a pre-determined coding system. TAT stories were generally told and recorded in French; when a research participant preferred to tell his or her stories in the local dialect, a research assistant provided simultaneous translation to French. In an effort to remain true to the original stories for as long as possible, I completed this initial stage of data organisation in French.

In the spirit of "data-driven" coding, I began to fill in each chart by reading a random selection of transcribed TAT stories about each image, usually around 10, looking for common ideas or explanations (Gibbs 2007: 45). I would then sort through the remaining stories about that image to fill in the chart, returning to the original stories at the end to make sure that the original analysis remained consistent (Gibbs 2007: 98). This meticulous sifting process resulted in the identification of key terms and ideas inherent in the data itself that may have gone unnoticed had I

approached the stories with a preconceived list of codes in mind (Frake 1962: 54). I should reiterate that this first stage of coding using Framework was more for general data sorting than in-depth data analysis. Consequently, I prefer to call the categories identified at this point "sub-themes" rather than "codes," a term I use with specific meaning in the context of constructing thematic networks below.

To illustrate, I identified the following sub-themes in TAT stories about the image depicting people in a voting queue: practice/procedure, transparency, political parties/opposition, democracy, and corruption. TAT story excerpts classified under these headings might contain contradictory competences and dispositions about, for example, voting procedure. Moreover, the same story snippet could be classified under multiple headings; if someone said that the voting procedure is transparent, that clip from the story was filed under both practice/procedure and transparency. This data sorting process led to the creation of a "conceptual scheme" grounded in the data itself and providing the foundation for more complex data analysis (Basit 2003: 144). All sub-themes demonstrate a clear and immediate connection with the TAT stories: "it makes no sense trying to explain something that is there by means of something that proves not to be there" (Barth 1993: 165, also see National Centre for Social Research 2007).

I found filling in Framework charts to be an organic process; something that I learned by doing. Though overwhelming at first, the process of sifting through the 244 unique TAT stories became less daunting once I began to look at them one at a time, temporarily forgetting about the rest. Although I initially identified sub-themes from a rather small selection of TAT stories, these categories were prone to modification as I methodically pieced data from the remaining stories into the Framework. To briefly illustrate, in the case of the image of people in a voting queue, above, the political parties sub-theme was eventually broadened to include discussions of the political opposition, which were too rare to warrant their own column. Likewise, I added the corruption sub-theme rather late after it emerged more often in TAT stories than I had anticipated. I then went back through all of the stories I had already completed to pick-out the excerpts newly identified as relevant. When a TAT story did not include reference to a particular sub-theme, that cell in the chart was left blank.

After TAT stories had been organised in the Framework, they were analysed for competences and dispositions (see Chapter Two). While this could have been achieved on the computer (using the highlighter tool, for example), I printed all 78 A3 pages of Framework charts and circled competences and dispositions manually with coloured markers. The classification of a word or phrase as a competence or disposition was not arbitrary, but rather reflects the context of this particular theme within its TAT story. I distinguished, for example, between whether research participants indicated that they could do something (i.e. a competence) or that they wanted to do it (i.e. a disposition). Saying that people can take part in protests (i.e. a competence) is not the same as indicating that people want to protest (i.e. a disposition) but are not actually able to. The competences and dispositions identified as pertaining to the various sub-themes then became codes for my first order or "basic" themes.

At this point, I decided that I needed a tool other than Framework that could better illustrate the texture and nuance of competences and dispositions included in TAT stories both as independent codes and interdependent themes. While Framework facilitated data-sorting and the identification of meanings commonly attributed by research participants to various socio-political interactions and contexts, I found it to be of only limited use for interpreting – for translating – these meanings into perceptual lenses that could be compared to the expectations and criteria of the international democracy assistance industry (Basit 2003: 144). Thematic networks achieve this second aim, providing a visual blueprint of the characteristic contours of various perceptual lenses. Linking the language used by research participants to more abstract analytical themes, the thematic networks described in Chapters Four through Six transparently interpret the perspectives from which different social groups in the Antsinanana region of Madagascar likely view the political sphere.

*Data Analysis: Thematic Networks*

Thematic networks, which emphasise the interactive and non-linear aspects of themes, are useful for organising competences and dispositions identified through the Framework procedure into visual analytical representations of likely perceptual lenses. The process of creating thematic networks, described in detail below, was designed specifically to "unravel the mass of textual data and make sense of others' sense-making, using more than intuition" (Attride-Stirling 2001: 402). The result is a

visual model that transparently links abstract analysis to the original, primary-source data. The thematic networks created in undertaking this research therefore provide an approximate map of the logic used by ordinary Malagasy in the Antsinanana region of Madagascar to interpret their political environment. Admittedly imperfect, these maps nevertheless provide new depth of insight into how the familiar ideas and language commonly associated with democracy can be re-appropriated by local actors.

Thematic networks are especially well suited to the analysis of perceptual lenses because any form of cultural description is always an "abstracted composite" (Keesing 1974: 89, also see Simpson et al. 1961: 522). Likewise, research into cognitive reasoning suggests that thought processes rely on "clumped networks of signification" not conducive to linear modelling (Bloch 1992: 128). In which case, it makes sense that culture has been described elsewhere as a "cognitive map" (Almond 1989: 27, Thompson, Thianthai and Hidayana 2007: 270) and a "mental map" (Simpson et al. 1961: 523), metaphors that signify the complex intermingling of routes and topography encountered between Point A and Point B. Finding a way of visually approximating this map, as thematic networks do, seems like a worthwhile undertaking. The story told by thematic networks is, however, more than a simple aggregation of individual points of view. For example, the relative sizes of basic themes are proportional to their frequency among the group of research participants whose TAT stories contribute to any particular thematic network, suggesting how variations among individual perspectives relate to common themes (Keating 2008: 114-115, Simpson et. al. 1961: 522).

"One of the main challenges in qualitative reporting," note White, Woodfield, and Ritchie "is to find ways of telling the 'story' of the research in a clear and cogent way" (2003: 301). Accurate translation of elusive field material, as described above, depends on a delicate balance of description and interpretation. By capturing the data's "subtlety, richness, and detail" it becomes intelligible to a new audience with its integrity still intact (White, Woodfield, and Ritchie 2003: 301). Thematic networks achieve this balance between description and interpretation by creating a web of interconnected themes of varying orders of abstraction. The sample thematic network in Figure 7 illustrates the interconnectedness between raw data (i.e. basic themes) and underlying patterns of meaning (i.e. organising and global

**Figure 7: Sample Thematic Network**
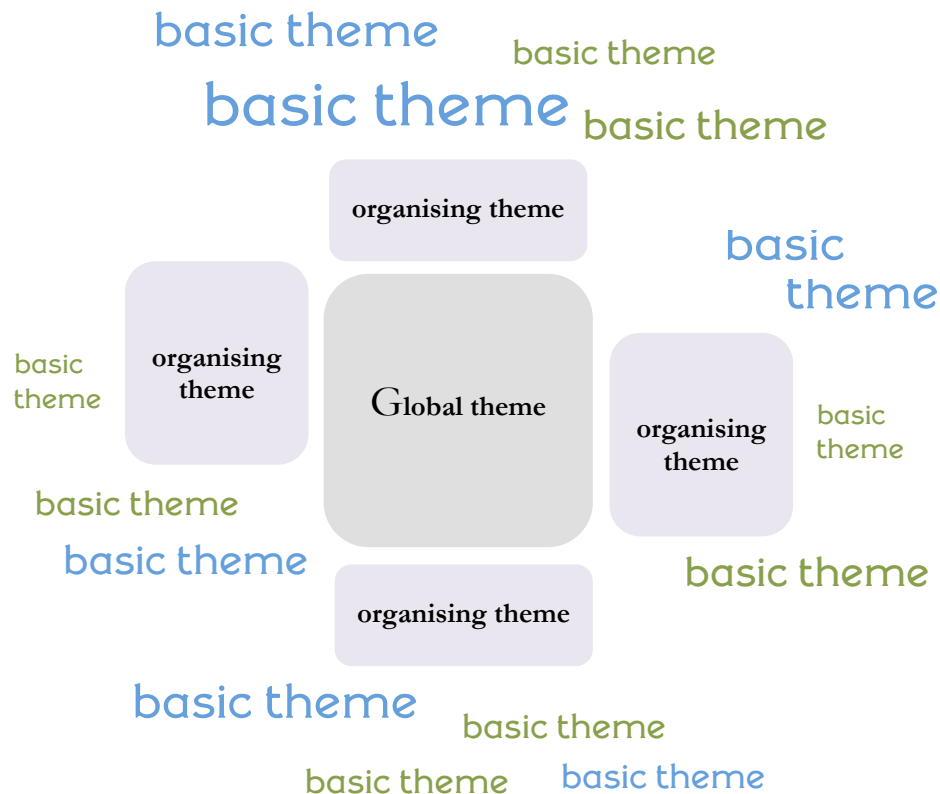


themes). Although this particular diagram structure may look unfamiliar, the rationale behind it is not dissimilar to the levels of classification and abstraction common to many coding procedures (e.g. 'code families' and 'Network Views' in Atlas.ti.).

Basic themes are extracted directly from the primary-source data; in the case of this research, they are the competences and dispositions identified using Framework, the original words or phrases used by research participants in French.[54] While the number of basic themes included in a thematic network is at the discretion of the researcher, Attride-Stirling warns that more than 15 may become unwieldy in later stages of analysis while fewer than 4 risks oversimplifying the data (2001: 392). On their own, basic themes tell us very little. When similar basic themes are grouped together, however, more abstract ideas or principles – organising themes – begin to emanate from the original text. They reveal patterns in the raw data that may not have been immediately apparent in the narratives of individual TAT stories (Collier

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[54] Translation from the original French is included in the interpretation and analysis of individual thematic networks in Chapters Four through Six.

and Collier 1986: 195). Organising themes also provide the basis for making over-arching claims about what the data means.

Finally, super-ordinate global themes "group organising themes to present an argument," "concluding tenet," or "principle metaphor" of the text (Attride-Stirling 2001: 388-389).[55] Each thematic network has a single global theme at its core. Analysis of a text may, therefore, yield several thematic networks. While some competences and dispositions are widely prominent across the sample, others are attributable to a narrower group of research participants. These groupings, observable in the data, provided the basis for organising themes and distinct global themes, each reflecting a distinct frame of reference with regard to the various scenarios depicted in the images. In the end, my analysis of the 244 TAT stories resulted in 10 discrete thematic networks, each suggesting a different political lens or point of view on three specific themes pertaining to democracy. Unlike basic themes, I have entered organising and global themes into the thematic networks in English. Thematic networks therefore provide a transparent transition from original source data to abstract themes as well as a seamless shift from French to English.

The basic themes in the model thematic network above (see Figure 7), like those found in subsequent chapters, are different sizes and colours. Blue basic themes indicate competences while green basic themes signify dispositions. This distinction between beliefs and capabilities was sometimes blurred in individual TAT stories. As a general rule, things that people believed they could do were classified as competences, whereas dispositions are linked to emotions. The basic themes are also of various sizes, reflecting the frequency with which a particular competence or disposition appeared in TAT stories. Word size, determined using Wordle,[56] accurately portrays the relative distribution or prevalence of a particular idea or emotion among those research participants whose TAT stories are indicative of a

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[55] The hierarchy of basic, organising and global themes used here mirrors that of codes, categories, and themes/concepts used by Saldaña (2009: 12).

[56] Wordle (www. wordle.net) is a free, web-based tool for creating "word clouds" from a text. Words that appear more frequently in the text are displayed proportionally larger than words cited less often. Using Wordle Advanced, I entered competences and dispositions weighted for their frequency into the programme. I then cut the re-sized competences from the resultant word cloud and pasted them into the thematic networks. This is similar to the notion of "groundedness" in standard coding procedures, including Atlas.ti., whereby a code is considered more or less grounded depending on the number of quotations it applies to.

particular perceptual lens (i.e. aggregated in that thematic network) without resorting to numerical frequencies. The extent to which frequency should be reported alongside qualitative analysis has been described elsewhere as "irksome" because the scale and design of qualitative research methods do not support statistical analysis (White, Woodfield, and Ritchie 2003: 311). This visual representation of frequency strikes a balance between forthright reporting and distinctly qualitative explication.

Figure 8, illustrates the multi-step process used here for translating individual TAT stories into aggregate perceptual lenses. This nine-step approach was completed five times, once for each image. For the sake of clarity, I refer to Image 1 in this description of the analytical process, but it applies equally to the analysis of each of the other four images. The first two steps are relatively straightforward: listen to and transcribe each TAT story told about Image 1. The next step was to enter text fragments into my Image 1 Framework spreadsheet; described in some detail above. It was then possible to identify specific competences and dispositions.

Step four is where the process begins to get complicated. An index card was made for each research participant and labelled with his or her pseudonym. Using the Framework spreadsheet as a reference, the competences and dispositions contained

**Figure 8: Translating TAT Stories**



**TAT Story**

1) Listen to recorded TAT story

2) Transcribe TAT story (in French)

**Framework**

3) Identify **competences** and **dispositions**

4) List all competences and dispositions on a notecard

5) Look for dominant competences and dispositions shared by multiple research participants; group those people (i.e. note-cards) together

**Thematic Network**

6) Count the frequencies of each competence and disposition (i.e. **basic theme**) for each group from Step 5

7) Enter frequencies in Wordle

8) Group basic themes into clusters to form **organising themes**

9) Identify a single **global theme** for the thematic network

in each person's TAT story about Image 1 were then listed on his or her note card. Whereas the position of research participants on the Framework spreadsheet is permanently fixed, the note cards allowed me to move people around, compare individual lists of competences and dispositions side by side, and eventually identify groups of research participants who shared several competences and dispositions in response to Image 1. During this comparative process, two or three competences or dispositions generally emerged as particularly dominant (i.e. shared exclusively by a reasonably large number of people). The dominant dispositions for Image 1 depicting a polling place, for example, were: (i) some people are happy to vote and (ii) voting is not worth the trouble (see Chapter Four). On the rare occasion when a research participant's TAT story did not include one of the dominant basic themes, that research participant was included in the thematic network (i.e. perceptual lens group) that resulted in the best fit based on the competences and dispositions that were present in the TAT story; this often, though not always, was the most loosely defined thematic network for that particular image. The table in Appendix 1 includes the demographic details of each research participant as well as which thematic networks (i.e. perceptual lenses) his or her TAT stories contribute to.

Having identified like-minded groups of research participants for Image 1, the frequency of each competence and disposition was counted and entered into Wordle, described above. I then cut apart the word clouds produced by Wordle and re-grouped the variably sized competences and dispositions into clusters revealing organising themes. In the final step, a single global theme is identified for each thematic network.[57]

This account of my translation process should not suggest that there is a simple or exact fit between the perceptions of individuals and the analytical representation of perceptual lenses in thematic networks (Gibbs 2007: 93). Consistent with Elkins and Simeon's prediction, some perceptual lenses have themes that are "highly consistent and strongly interrelated" while others "encompass a wide range" of only loosely connected competences and dispositions (1979: 128).

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[57] Ideally, I would have liked to discuss the thematic networks that I constructed with research participants to verify their validity (Lewis and Ritchie 2003). Unfortunately, financial restraints prevented me from making a second trip to the field.

Furthermore, the boundaries between perceptual lenses are sometimes vague and there are instances in the chapters that follow where two perceptual lenses share common basic and even organising themes (Keating 2008: 113). At the same time, however, not every research participant whose TAT story is included in a particular thematic network exhibited exactly the same competences and dispositions in his or her TAT story, as the different sizes of basic themes clearly illustrates (Keesing 1974: 89). Nor, for that matter, did research participants telling similar TAT stories about Image 1, for example, necessarily share similar common perceptions of the other images.

As the following empirical chapters demonstrate, thematic networks provide a "robust and highly sensitive" tool capable of illuminating the "meaning, richness, and magnitude of the subjective experience of social life" (Attride-Stirling 2001: 385, 403). The thematic networks included in Chapters Four through Six each represents a particular perceptual lens through which certain research participants view and interpret certain sorts of socio-political situations (i.e. voting, protest, etc.). The TAT stories told by research participants are incredibly rich in their diversity and thematic networks are capable of not only reflecting this complexity but also explaining it in an intelligible way (Gibbs 2007: 93). In Chapter Seven, I will suggest that some perceptual lenses tend to overlap, resulting in a more complex analysis of how different groups of people in this region of Madagascar identify and understand democracy. Though deduced from a relatively small sample, interpretation of perceptual lenses in light of the 2009 political crisis suggests that this analysis can be scaled up to predict patterns of response to evolving political events (Saldaña 2009: 13).

Throughout the course of this in-depth qualitative analysis, the thematic networks facilitate empirical interpretation of the data by disclosing observations and higher level concepts constructed by the researcher while simultaneously providing a visual reference or map for the reader (Attride-Stirling 2001: 389-390). While the adoption of this sort of diagram is, perhaps, unusual, it is not unknown (White, Woodfield, and Ritchie 2003: 314-315). The thematic networks are a model, a tool, an imperfect approximation that nevertheless help to make sense of the non-elite perceptions that contribute to political culture, a notoriously complex phenomenon. The method of analysis as described here can doubtless be refined with further use.

Collectively, the empirical chapters that follow provide one example of how this innovative, visual analysis technique can be practically applied.

One final note of methodological clarification is in order. The original purpose of TATs, as for all methods of personality assessment, was to establish criteria that applied to identifiable groups of people: "Mr Jones perceives in such a way that he must be considered a schizophrenic…or an engineer" (Bellak 1975: 2). This does not preclude recognition of the uniqueness of each individual. Instead, it recognises that meanings, though not identical, are shared within a community. Far from hypothetical, this "magic" results from "the collective application of the general to the particular, the private to the social" (Keesing 1974: 90-91). It is, therefore, possible to discern collective patterns of meaning from individual interpretations of socio-political events, or scenes in the case of modified TATs here. The thematic networks support this process of establishing likely systems of perception and meaning by illustrating the interpretive patterns underlying various political points of view common within the community where research was conducted. They demonstrate the credible presence of shared meanings by providing evidence for certain general perceptions commonly applied to particular experiences (e.g. voting, encounters with the police) by identifiable groups of people.

**Conclusion**

> "Then you should say what you mean," the March Hare went on.
>
> "I do," Alice hastily replied; "at least – at least I mean what I say – that's the same thing you know."
>
> "Not the same thing a bit!" said the Hatter. (Carroll 2000: 69).

It is not my intent here to suggest that visual research methods are somehow superior to mainstream techniques or even that all research projects would benefit from the inclusion of image-based research tools. I do, however, believe that research based on data collected using visual methods like the modified TAT does have much to contribute – particularly with regard to better understanding how people make sense of their own lives. When tactfully created and adroitly introduced, images can create an atmosphere in which research participants feel at ease to mean what they say and the researcher can be confident that s/he understands what they mean.

The most challenging aspect of fieldwork – particularly the first time one is in a particular location – is surely adapting to the existing environment and conditions. We prepare ourselves for the physical and psychological demands of living and working someplace new, reading up on the history and culture, buying equipment like mosquito nets and practical shoes that we would never use at home. It is assumed that we will automatically adapt once we get there, making adjustments necessitated by circumstance. Extending this sensibility to methodology requires an open mind and genuine commitment to the original research questions. Circumstances on the ground may be vastly different to those we anticipate and unsuited to the armament of methods with which we have equipped ourselves. When such challenges arise, the researcher has two options: Change the focus of the research to fit the data retrievable by conventional means, or have faith in the original mission and acquire the requisite knowledge using uncommon – even untested – methods. For social science researchers of the second persuasion, eclectic approaches can prove particularly useful not only for producing distinctive insights, but also encouraging communication between segregated research communities (Clark and Zimmer 2001: 325, Murray and Overton 2003: 34, Sil 2004: 322-323).

# Part II

Why Madagascar? As I suggested in the Introduction, I could have investigated the perceptions and beliefs of ordinary people toward democracy anywhere. Over the course of completing this research it has occurred to me that it would, for instance, be interesting to conduct a similar study in the United States, particularly in the wake of the so-called tea party movement. Interest in the efficacy of democracy assistance policy narrowed the realm of possible fieldwork locations somewhat, but still afforded a great deal of choice. So, "Why Madagascar?" is a reasonable question. In this short preface, I will explain my choice of case study and lay the scene for the empirical chapters that follow.

**The Short Answer**

Madagascar is one of the few countries in the world that remains a mystery to outsiders. In fact, despite being the fourth largest island in the world,[58] a fact that was not appreciated until the Second World War (Feeley-Harnik 2001: 59), it remains largely invisible.[59] In my experience, people most commonly associate the word "Madagascar" with the successful animated film and the lemurs (occasionally penguins!) it popularised. On a more serious note, Madagascar is sometimes quite literally 'off the map'. The Canadian Association of African Studies once left the island off its logo, for example (Lambek 2001: 301). Madagascar is likewise conspicuously absent from the logo of the NGO Partnership Africa Canada as well as the outline of Africa that graces the cover of *Strategies of Democratization* (Vanhanen 1992), despite ample room in the lower, right-hand corner. Moreover, although Madagascar was the first country to receive Millennium Development Account funding, in comparison with other developing countries the political sphere in Madagascar remains largely understudied (Millennium Challenge Corporation 2005).

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[58] To put the size of the island into perspective, it is roughly the size of Oregon *and* California, or France *and* Belgium (Kaufmann 2001: 3).

[59] Sharp goes one step further, and characterises it as "neglected" (2002: 6).

The sparse information available (particularly in English) made it a bit difficult to research this country from the United Kingdom in the early stages of research; even so, the prospect of exploring a relatively unknown country appealed to me.

**The Longer Answer**

The more practical explanation for conducting this research in Madagascar is founded on the country's performance on a number of the democracy indices discussed at some length in Chapter One. As the scatter plots in Figure 9 indicate, Madagascar consistently stands among the leading least developed countries (LDCs)[60] with regard to democratic development, despite being one of the poorest.[61] For instance, in 2008 Madagascar qualified as having achieved an 'advanced' political transformation on the Bertelsmann Transformation Index with a score of 7.45 out of 10.[62] Likewise, a combined political rights and civil liberties score of 3.5 places Madagascar towards the upper half of Freedom House's "partly free" category and among the top third of LDCs. Indeed, the only country to score better than Madagascar on all three indices is the tiny West African country of Benin.

This finding is relevant because, as discussed in Chapter One, democratic development is often associated with economic development. As Madagascar remains one of the poorest countries in the world, it stands to reason that economic growth is not a significant factor in its apparent democratic accomplishments. Indeed, since 1990 per capita GDP has remained below the $1,000 threshold for

[60] The UN identifies least developed countries using measures of low income, weak human capital, and economic vulnerability. In 2009, the United Nations included 49 countries on its list of LDCs. The following countries are not included in Figure 9 because they do not appear on the BTI index: Comoros, Djibouti, Gambia, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kiribati, Lesotho, Maldives, Samoa, São Tomé and Principe, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu, Vanuatu. Additionally, per capita purchasing power parity gross national income (PPP GNI) figures are not available for Afghanistan or Somalia, so they are not included in the scatter plots either.

[61] Although PPP GNI alone gives only a partial account of a country's economic development, it is the method favoured by the World Bank for measuring poverty and personal wellbeing. While national wealth (measured as GNI in US$ using the Atlas method) can indicate the ability of the state to provide vital services (e.g. education, basic infrastructure), Inglehart and Welzel have linked individual financial security to increased emphasis on human autonomy and democratic free choice. PPP GNI is, therefore, the more appropriate indicator of economic development in relation to democracy assessment.

[62] Madagascar's 2008 combined score for political and economic transformations is somewhat lower at 6.23.

**Figure 9: LDC Democracy Rankings**
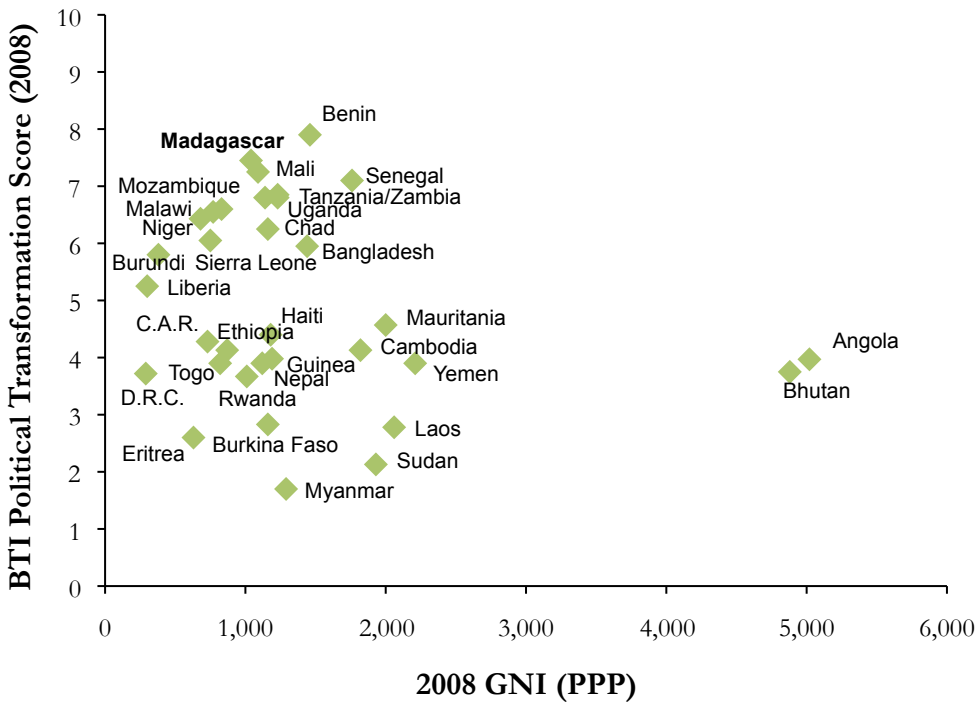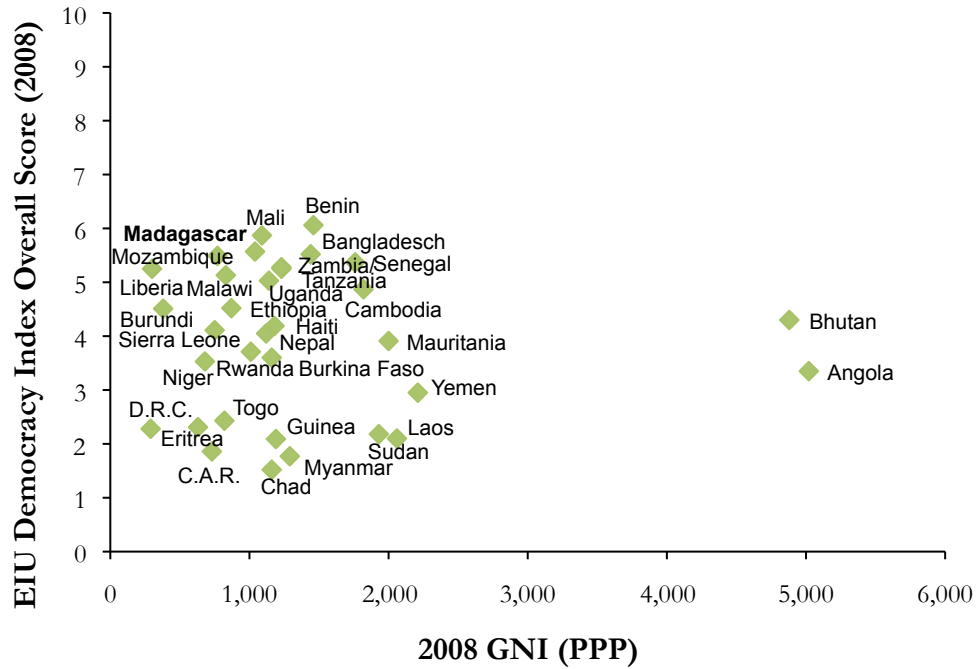
**Figure 9 (Continued): LDC Democracy Rankings**
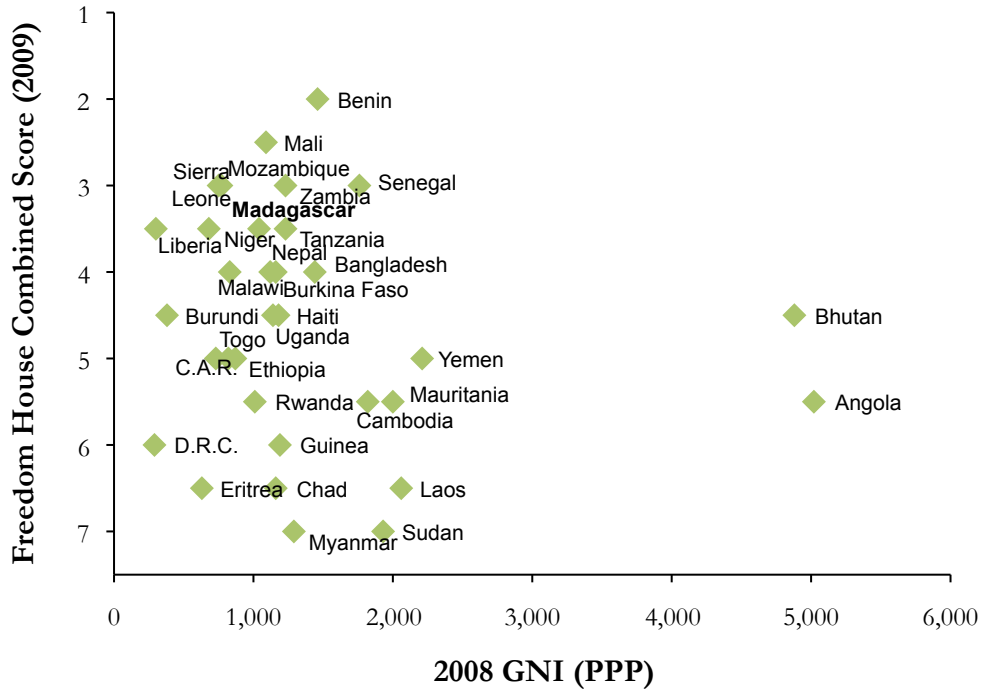


democratic survival identified by Przeworski, Cheibub and Limogi (1998).[63] Nor does it seem likely that Madagascar's standout performance could be attributable to urbanisation or 'human development', two additional variables sometimes associated with democracy (see Figure 10).

With the usual suspects accounted for, Madagascar seemed a logical place to investigate a possible correlation between local political culture(s) and democratic development. To be clear, although Madagascar ranks relatively well on several democracy indices, my intent in going to Madagascar was never predicated on the presumption that I would find "democracy" as defined by the international

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[63] Approximately 85% of people in Madagascar live on less than $2 per day (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2007: 2, Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 32). In recent years, there has been an influx of private capital to the mining sector, most notably by Rio Tinto and Sherritt. It is too soon, however, to know whether this private investment will trickle down to ordinary people and what effects it may have on Madagascar's political trajectory.

**Figure 10: Charting Madagascar's Development**

### HDI Country Rank†



### Urbanisation‡



### GDP per Capita*
### (PPP in constant 2007 international $)



━━━ Przeworski's Minimum    ━●━ Madagascar
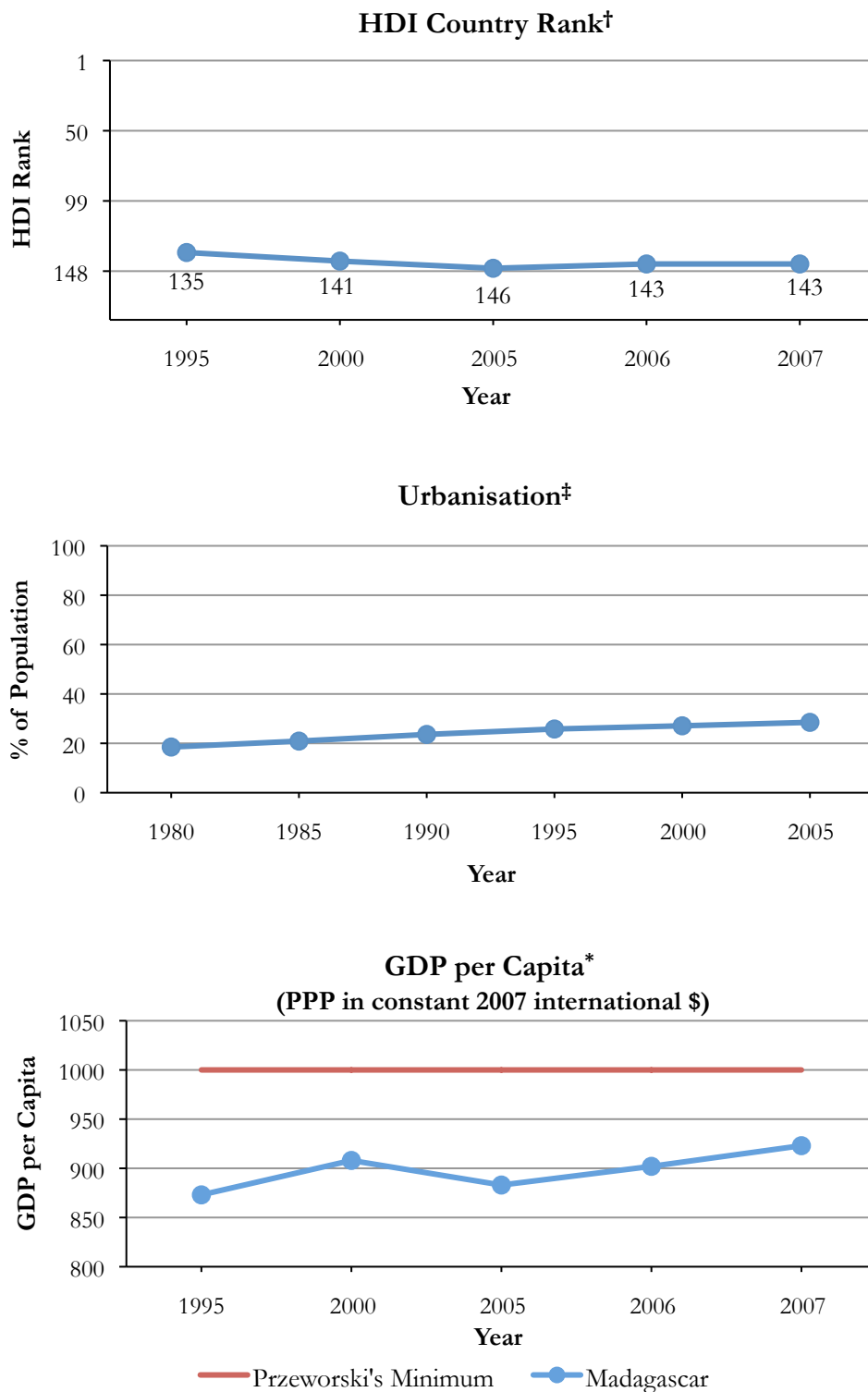
† *Source:* World Bank Human Development Reports 1990-2008
‡ *Source:* World Urbanisation Prospects – United Nations Population Division [Available at http://esa.un.org/unup/p2k0data.asp]
* *Source:* World Bank Human Development Report 2009

democracy assistance industry (see Chapter One). Rather, I set out to discover the political predispositions of ordinary people living in Madagascar and how these compare to the model of democracy that is everywhere advocated by democracy assistance practitioners. It has been argued elsewhere that "where democratisation has strong domestic foundations, pro-democracy policies can serve to assist and deepen democracy" (Grugel 2002: 136). I reasoned, therefore, that Madagascar's internationally sanctioned democratic credentials might be attributable to a combination of democracy assistance efforts and domestic commitment to the democratic norms identified in Chapter One (i.e. electoral participation, freedom of expression, rule of law).

The plausibility of this hypothesis increased as I proceeded with preliminary, pre-fieldwork reading. One Malagasy scholar stresses, for instance: "there exists in Madagascar a history of political and popular democratic culture;" before adding that democratic ideals have been "betrayed...by independence" (Randrianja 1999: 185). Survey data collected by Afrobarometer throughout the first decade of the 21st century appears to confirm Randrianja's assertion. The 2005 Afrobarometer survey found, for instance, that 65.8% of urban Malagasy supported democracy; that figure rises to 88.8% among respondents who had completed secondary school. The same survey also found, however, that about half of those questioned could not explain what 'democracy' means and that only a quarter of people sampled were satisfied with how well democracy works in their country.[64] Therefore, although this research could have been conducted anywhere, in practice a solid rationale underpinned my decision to go to Madagascar.

A brief word is also in order on why I chose to conduct this research in the Antsinanana region. Prior to my arrival in Madagascar, I had anticipated conducting a comparative study of two urban areas: Antananarivo and another urban centre. In addition to being more accessible than rural areas, urban centres seemed like reasonable places to look for democratic ambitions because "all major changes which

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[64] The most recent survey results, compiled in 2008, are slightly less optimistic. These surveys, conducted at roughly the same time as my own field research, reveal that 58% of urban residents and 33% of rural residents think that democracy is the most preferable form of governance; 28% of those interviewed said that they did not know (Afrobarometer 2009).

have characterized Madagascar's political history were initiated in the cities" (Randrianja 1999: 183). The Antsinanana region likewise seemed like a sensible starting point. Located on the eastern coast of the island, it is home to the country's largest shipping port and on the "route of longtime [*sic*] Malagasy exchange between the interior and the coast…[which is also] the route of persistent efforts of Europeans to take over Madagascar and Malagasy efforts to block them..." (Feeley-Harnik 2001: 69). As I pointed out in the Introduction, however, upon my arrival it became clear that I lacked the time and resources necessary to complete thorough research in two discrete regions. Moreover, conducting this research required that I gain people's trust but my finite timeframe necessitated that I get to work quickly. In the end, staying in the Antsinanana region was a practical choice: I had better contacts on the coast and generally found the people there to be more welcoming. I reasoned, therefore, that I had a better chance of meeting my research objectives by concentrating my efforts in the costal area rather than the capital.

The Antsinanana region has particular historical significance. Not only has it served as a historical point of entry to the country – for people, goods, and ideas alike – it is also the ancestral region of former President Didier Ratsiraka. As I discuss at some length below, Ratsiraka has played a leading role throughout much of Madagascar's contemporary political history. Moreover, during the 2001-2002 political crisis Ratsiraka attempted to shore up his political power by transferring the seat of government to the regional capital, Toamasina. It is, therefore, possible that the political perspectives and expectations of people living in this region may be coloured not only by their unique experience but also by regional or ethnic allegiance to a particular political elite; the region is predominantly *côtier* and Catholic. That said, the urban community that I encountered was a veritable melting pot. Included among research participants are both long-time residents of the region and relative newcomers, Merina and *côtier*, Catholics, Protestants and even a Mormon. Furthermore, Malagasy society is known to be "fundamentally incorporative" (Lambek 2001: 134), conducive to the development of "pluri-identities" that shift with the changing context (Alvarez 1995: 82, also see Kent 1962: 156-157). Therefore, although the region has particular historical significance, this experience is remembered and reconstructed by inhabitants in a multitude of ways (see, for example, Cole 2001).

**Nine Hundred Years of International Influence (In a Nutshell)**

Madagascar has a long history of international engagement dating back to the Mesopotamian slave trade in the twelfth century (Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 54-55). Portuguese traders first arrived in Madagascar in the early 16th century; Europeans of various nationalities soon followed, establishing semi-permanent trading posts. Along with international trade came exposure to Christianity. The first Catholic missionaries arrived on the island over 400 years ago, and the country has been influenced by followers of all religious denominations ever since (Randiranja and Ellis 2009).

French and British influence in the Indian Ocean amplified throughout the early 19th century. Though officially annexed as a French protectorate in 1895, the English presence remained strong for a further five years while the two countries determined their respective spheres of influence in the region (Randiranja and Ellis 2009: 150-152). All told, Madagascar was a French colony for less than 70 years, and was temporarily under Allied control after France fell to Germany during World War II. Bearing in mind that Madagascar has "never been insulated from world history" – whether experienced as intercontinental trade, the Napoleonic wars, the Second World War, or changes in global capitalism (Bloch 2001: 294) – scholars are at odds about the extent to which the French colonial period deserves special attention (see, for example, Cole 2001, Covell 1987: 7, Farnworth 2007: 273, Feeley-Harnik 2001: 35, Kaufmann 2001: 5, Randiranja and Ellis 2009: 12, Sharp 2001: 208). Other groups, including the Arabs, the East Indians and the Chinese, have been similarly influential on the island's long-term development (Eggert 2001: 311).

More to the point, it has been suggested elsewhere that the Malagasy themselves – particularly those born since the departure of France in 1960 – are inclined to look forward rather than dwell on the colonial past, a position also attributed to Ravalomanana (Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 187). Indeed, neither the colonial past nor its legacy was ever alluded to by research participants in their TAT stories and is not, therefore, subject to analysis in the chapters that follow. While linguistic[65] and architectural remnants of the French occupation remain, precisely

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[65] It has been argued that "…reality for each society is constructed to a significant degree out of the *specific* qualities of its language and symbols" (Greenblatt 1990: 32, emphasis original). Indeed,

how these and other vestiges of the colonial past are integrated with contemporary experience is extremely complex and beyond the scope of this research.[66] Without denying the significance of Madagascar's multifaceted engagement with various foreign powers and the influence this continues to have on the people who live there, the chapters that follow remain tightly focused on contemporary perceptions and experiences of politics and democracy without trying to guess their origins. Accordingly, I will confine my overview of the country's political history that follows to the past two decades and Madagascar's participation in the infamous third wave of democratization.

**The Political Back Story**

Technical assessments of Madagascar's commitment to good (or at least better) governance and democracy were augmented in recent years by the international community's faith in the man forging the way. Despite a contentious rise to power in 2002, President Marc Ravalomanana's international reputation as a reformer was secured in April 2005 with the announcement that Madagascar would be the first country to receive development assistance from the new Millennium Challenge Corporation. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Ravalomanana has been described as a "firm favourite" of the Bush Administration (Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 208). Both the World Bank and IMF likewise heralded him as a "good guy" in recognition of his stated political agenda of fostering democratic participation alongside economic reforms (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2007: 22; also see Valette 2005: 5-6). The proliferation of media outlets in recent years has likewise been interpreted as an indicator of democratic change and a facilitator of political accountability (Andriantsoa et. al. 2005).

However, these recent accolades mask a tumultuous political history. Like many of its continental neighbours, Madagascar has been engaged in the process of democratisation since the early 1990s. In the ensuing years, the country's political

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Schaffer (1998) has written at length on the discrepancies in meaning between Western democracy and *demokaraasi* in Senegal. This thesis, by contrast, focuses on local meanings identified through the collaborative research process discussed in Chapter Three; technical linguistics and the role that language plays in culture are beyond its remit.

[66] For an anthropological study of this sort, see Cole 2001.

experience has been punctuated by a series of "disguised coups and attempted coups and rapid swings of political fortune" (Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 187). Meanwhile, Bertelsmann Stiftung has described the country's approach to democratic reform as "disparate, asynchronous, and haltingly pursued" (2007b: 3). Should the characteristic lurching of democratic reform be attributed to domestic political turmoil? Or, conversely, has illusory commitment to democracy on the part of political elites instigated the scenes of social unrest? I will not attempt to answer these questions fully here. I will, however, illustrate that the 2009 political crisis provides a tragic example of history repeating itself.

*Return of the Admiral*

Madagascar's post-colonial history has been divided into four distinct periods: the First Republic (1960-1975) during which President Tsiranana retained close ties with France; the Second Republic (1975-1992) known primarily for Didier Ratsiraka's commitment to a disastrous socialist experiment; the short-lived Third Republic (1993-1997) brought an end to the country's "self-imposed isolation" (Sharp 2002: 10) but concluded with the impeachment of President Zafy in 1996; and the Fourth Republic (1997-Present), which has already witnessed considerable turmoil. The brief account of the Third and Fourth Republics that follows is only meant to introduce the context in which empirical research was conducted.

In the summer of 1991, months of mass demonstrations and general strikes effectively toppled the already fragile regime of Admiral Ratsiraka. Emboldened by the autocrat's visible loss of control, opposition leader Albert Zafy established a shadow government and declared himself Prime Minister (Marcus 2004, Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 201). This brazen move eventually forced Ratsiraka to concede to demands for the creation of a transitional government and subsequent constitutional convention, heralding the beginning of a nearly two-year-long democratic transition (Marcus 2004, United States Department of State 2009).[67] Importantly, throughout the protracted democratic transition and "despite pleas from both sides to intervene," the military remained neutral (Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 201).

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[67] For a general account of the National Conference phenomenon that spread throughout much of Francophone Africa in the early 1990s and played a part in instigating the social unrest that ultimately unseated Ratsiraka, see Clark (1994) and Robinson (1994).

presidential run-off elections in February 1993 pitted Ratsiraka squarely against Zafy, but the incumbent only managed to secure 33% of the vote and was forced into exile (Marcus 2004).

Zafy's political reign was short-lived, however. Although his coalition of opposition parties gained a majority in Parliament, his administration was plagued by infighting and political rivalries (Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 203). Accused of corruption and overstepping the constitutional bounds of his office, the National Assembly voted to impeach Zafy in July 1996; the High Constitutional Court ratified his impeachment that autumn (Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 204, United States Department of State 2009). Despite scandal and disgrace, Zafy was not barred from running to reclaim the Presidency, and in 1997 once again faced Ratsiraka in a presidential run-off. This time, however, the people voted for the "reformed" military leader. Marcus has characterised this turn of political fortune as "a case of Zafy Albert losing the election rather than Ratsiraka winning it" (Marcus 2004).

Ratsiraka wasted little time in consolidating power, holding a constitutional referendum in the spring of 1998. This move notably won him the right to appoint not only the Prime Minister, but also the Council of Ministers and an unclear number of Senators (Marcus 2004, United States Department of State 2009). Marcus (2004) also notes that by the summer of 2001 Ratsiraka had consolidated power in the executive and was able to pass his legislative agenda "effortlessly;" he had also established an extensive patronage network with handpicked associates in key positions across the public and private sectors. With firm control of the state apparatus and the opposition fragmented, the December 2001 presidential election appeared to pose little threat to Ratsiraka's renewed hegemony (Marcus and Razafindrakoto 2003: 31).

*Enter the Self-Made Millionaire*

The first round of presidential polling in December 2001 attracted unusually high voter turnout (67%), although the voting itself proceeded uneventfully (Marcus 2003: 218, Randrianja 2003: 315). Although six candidates contested the election, only two accounted for almost 86% of the vote: incumbent Didier Ratsiraka and the former Mayor of Antananarivo Marc Ravalomanana (Randrianja 2003: 315). Prior to running for President, Ravalomanana's political experience remained limited to the

three years he had served as Mayor, and he remained relatively unknown outside the capital city. Ravalomanana was able mobilise the resources of his dairy empire not only to campaign but also – crucially – to collect final voting records from polling stations, a task normally carried out only by the Interior Ministry (Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 207-208). Significant differences between the official results and those generated by Ravalomanana's team paired with distrust of the High Constitutional Court (to which Ratsiraka had made new appointments just before the election) sparked what would become six months of political upheaval.

Over a month transpired between election day and the proclamation of final, official results by the High Constitutional Court. As the dispute wore on, Ravalomanana's supporters organised daily demonstrations in all of Madagascar's main cities as well as a general strike that crippled the government. Once again, the army remained neutral (Randrianja 2003: 317). Then on 22 February 2002, amidst preparations for a second round of voting, Ravalomanana declared himself President insisting that he had won the first round outright. Mirroring the strategy employed by Zafy a decade previously, Ravalomanana's supporters peacefully proceeded to take over government buildings (Marcus and Razafindrakoto 2003: 39, Randrianja 2003: 318). This prompted Ratsiraka to play the 'ethnic card' as he attempted to transfer the seat of government from Antananarivo to his stronghold, Toamasina (Randrianja 2003: 318). Retrospectively, this manoeuvre may have signalled his downfall, which was only hastened by the desperate measures of overzealous supporters (i.e. erecting barricades, blowing-up bridges). It has also been reported that Ratsiraka hired mercenaries (Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 208) and "told supporters to pretend they were Merina and threaten coastal groups with the hope of inciting ethnic conflict" (Marcus 2003: 219). Fortunately, these ploys were unsuccessful. In fact, Randrianja points out that, political rhetoric aside, there were few signs "of a radical split in political opinion along ethnic lines" and asserts that Ravalomanana had support not just in the capital and highlands, but also in the some of the provinces (2003: 318, also see Bertelsmann Stiftung 2007).

By April, the country "was heading down a blind alley" and the international community finally started to take notice (Randrianja 2003: 319). The intricacies of international manoeuvring during this period are beyond the scope of this summary and have been documented elsewhere (Marcus 2003, Randrianja 2003). The eventual

outcome of often-opaque foreign gestures, however, was a noticeable shift in the balance of power. When it reconvened on 29 April, a newly constituted High Constitutional Court announced that a recount indicated Ravalomanana had won 51% of the vote compared to Ratsiraka's 36% (Randrianja 2003: 324). On 6 May 2002, Ravalomanana was legally inaugurated President. Unrest gradually ebbed, and the crisis finally ended when Ratsiraka fled to France for a second time in mid-June. Ravalomanana's TIM party went on to win a clear majority in the 2003 National Assembly elections and he won re-election to the Presidency on 3 December 2006 with a strong majority.[68]

By the end of 2008, however, conflation of public and private sector interests had begun to cause concerns both domestically and at the international level. When he came to power in 2002, Ravalomanana was already the richest man in Madagascar. His "business-style" approach to running the country (The Africa Report 2007: 134) earned him the nickname "CEO of the republic" (Iloniaina 2009a). In November 2008, details began to surface of a recently negotiated contract with the South Korean firm Daewoo Logistics in which the Government, without conducting any public consultation, had conceded a 99-year lease over nearly half of the country's arable land (Burgis 2009).[69] Daewoo Logistics paid nothing for the contract and openly intends to ship all food produced from agricultural cultivation abroad, but argues that the jobs created will be beneficial to the local economy (Jung-a 2008). Mounting evidence of corruption provoked the EU and World Bank to suspend budgetary support to Madagascar in December 2008, in stark contrast to the "unflagging international support" international donors had previously offered President Ravalomanana (IRIN 2009b). In spite of these developments, however, Ravalomanana's hold on political power seemed secure.

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[68] Ravalomanana won 54.8% of the vote. None of his main opponents could claim more than 10% of votes cast, an indication of the severely fragmented party system (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2007: 20).

[69] This deal did not become public until shortly before I left Madagascar and the handful of people I asked specifically about it either had not yet heard about it or had not yet formed an opinion. It would not, therefore, have influenced the perceptions and expectations expressed in TAT stories. That said, it is not surprising that word would have spread in the weeks that followed, and that details of the deal – either real or rumoured – could have contributed to the malaise evident in the public unrest that followed in early 2009.

*Postlude –The Media Mogul*

I returned to the United Kingdom (post-fieldwork) in December 2008. The events outlined briefly below obviously did not, therefore, influence my decision to go to Madagascar or colour my experience there. The political crisis that unfolded in the early months of 2009 began just as I sat down to tackle data analysis. As I sifted through TAT stories collected just a few short months earlier, I could not help but reflect on current events in light of what research participants had revealed. While the largest demonstrations took place in Antananarivo, protests were not restricted to the capital. Indeed, several research participants emailed me during this period with reports of local unrest and looting; one even wrote to say that he feared for his life. It seems reasonable, therefore, that perceptual lenses identified in the Antsinanana region could have interpretive relevance to the political crisis. Therefore, although I do not address the most recent political upheaval in relation to my research findings in any detail until Chapter Seven, it makes narrative sense to briefly recount Andry Rajoelina's meteoric rise to power here.

In December 2008, an interview with former President Ratsiraka (still in exile in France) was broadcast on the private television station owned by Andry Rajoelina, Mayor of Antananarivo. State security forces promptly moved to shut down the television station. While some interpreted this response by the government as a blatant attack on free speech rights (Lough 2009b), it can also be interpreted as President Ravalomanana jockeying for position ahead of a potential rival. Remember, Ravalomanana likewise launched his political career by holding the capital's mayoral office. Moreover, after his unexpected victory over the candidate supported by the President in the 2007 race for Mayor, Rajoelina became one of Ravalomanana's most outspoken critics (AFP 2009a, Lough 2009a, Bearak 2009c, IRIN 2009a).

In public addresses to his supporters, Rajoelina accused Ravalomanana of being a dictator who was more interested in self-enrichment than fulfilling his duties as the country's President (Bearak 2009a). After more than 100 people were killed during protests and looting,[70] Rajoelina announced that he was filing "a request for

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[70] Marc Ravalomanana, presently in exile in South Africa, was convicted of murder in absentia in August 2010 and sentenced to life in prison with hard labour. Although this occurred after the original submission of this thesis and does not bear on the analysis that follows, it will

the immediate resignation of the President" with Parliament (Bearak 2009a, Iloniaina and Maina 2009). Ravalomanana promptly responded by firing his rival from his position as Mayor, citing failure to fulfil the obligations of his post (Bearak 2009c).[71] Although high-ranking army officials remained neutral, tensions rose still further when guards at the Presidential Palace opened fire on advancing protesters (Berger 2009, Hogg 2009).

Mirroring the actions of past opposition leaders – including Ravalomanana – Rajoelina established a shadow administration the following week and his supporters took control of four government ministries (Iloniaina 2009a). The hijacking of government offices was short lived, opposition supporters were evicted within hours, but Rajoelina had made his point and Ravalomanana's miscalculated response would prove decisive. On 17 March, after several rounds of failed negotiations between entrenched parties, Ravalomanana announced that he had decided to dissolve the government and hand power over to the military so that a new government could be formed (Lough 2009c). This move strayed from constitutional convention, which stipulates that the leader of the Senate takes over in the event of a presidential resignation. More to the point, Ravalomanana had misjudged his support within the military, which passed the Presidency hot-potato-style to the last man standing – Rajoelina (Corbett and McGreal 2009).

Despite labelling his administration a "transitional authority" rather than a Presidency and promising new elections within two years, Rajoelina has been shunned on the international stage. The Africa Union, the Southern African Development Community, the United States, the European Union, and Norway all condemned the unconstitutional transfer of power as a coup and non-emergency aid

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undoubtedly affect any future electoral contest aimed at normalising relations between Madagascar and the international community.

[71] This accusation rings of irony. Following his candidate's defeat to Rajoelina, Ravalomanana suspended financing of garbage collection services in Antananarivo so that "the opposition inherited a garbage-filled capital" (Lindijer 2009). While I was in Madagascar, I also heard accusations that the building designated as the mayor's office kept being changed, effectively undermining Rajoelina's ability to address more serious problems.

has been suspended (BBC News 2009c, Iloniaina 2009e, Tighe 2009).[72] Further analysis of this most recent political crisis can be found in Chapter Seven.

**Conclusion: Five Observations**

The brief sketch of contemporary Malagasy political competition above is not intended to provide a complete picture of the country's quasi-democratic system. It does, however, illustrate the contours of five recurrent themes that likely contribute to the back-story in which ordinary people contextualise their political experience.

*1. A Divided Society*

Much is made in the literature on Madagascar of it being a divided society that continues to grapple with historically salient socio-ethnic divisions. From this perspective, in one corner you have the Merina who have traditionally occupied the highlands around the capital Antananarivo. In the other corner are the 17 other ethnic groups commonly referred to collectively as *côtier*, a catch-all term that literally translates to "coastal people" despite the fact that many *côtier* live nowhere near the coast (Covell 1987: 13, Marcus and Razafindrakoto 2003: 34, Marcus and Ratsimbaharison 2005: 498, Polity IV Project 2007: 3). Moreover, the term *côtier* is used primarily by people living in the highlands, while the '*côtier*' themselves only use the word in an "anti-Merina sense" (Alvarez 1995: 70). Likewise, not only Merina live in the highlands. In fact, the word *Merina* actually originates from the dynasty of a particular ruler, as opposed to any homogenous cultural or tribal group; it has always been – and continues to be – a potent *political* label (Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 112, 150-151).

That said, competition between Merina and *côtier* remains a topical issue. Transcending the political sphere (Covell 1987: 13), it has been suggested that this ethnic struggle represents a "conflict over access to modernity" with complex implications of the relationship between state and society (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2007: 18). Covell traces this trend to colonial practices that initially perpetuated regional disparities in, for example, access to education (1987: 19). More recently,

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[72] There are conflicting reports about the extent to which aid has been cut (Iloniaina 2009c).

perceived inequality of development has become a popular campaign issue for aspiring politicians (Randiranja and Ellis 2009: 230). It is worth noting, however, that sensitivity to underdevelopment is not limited to people living in the periphery; Alvarez observes that "from the perspective of the Malagasy state, outside the capital is the desert, the *brousse*, intellectually, economically, and socially impoverished" (1995: 76). The chapters that follow illustrate how social, economic, and political inequalities are intricately interwoven and contribute to complex assessments of socio-political reality.

However, while much has been made of the Merina-*côtier* divide, to view Malagasy politics along such narrow lines risks oversimplification. Indeed, Bloch powerfully warns against hastily jumping to ethnic conclusions and the reification this engenders (2001: 298, also see Kaufmann 2001: 88-89, Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 42). The undesirable consequence, he argues, is that ethnic terms gradually gain acceptance as an "innocent description" rather than one of many possible exploratory frameworks (Bloch 2001: 296-297). To illustrate, Ravalomanana (a Merina) received a plurality of votes in six of the country's seven provinces when he ran against incumbent Ratsiraka (a *côtier*) in the 2001 presidential election (Marcus and Razafindrakoto 2003: 43). Both contenders for the executive in the 2009 political crisis, moreover, were ethnic Merina; although some have speculated that Rajoelina may have received backing from Ratsiraka's political allies (IRIN 2009c). This sort of political intrigue has led some observers to conclude that ethnic rivalry is the currency of political entrepreneurs (Alvarez 1995: 71, Dina 2001: 13, Lambek 2001: 305, Marcus and Razafindrakoto 2003: 40, Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 201, Southall 1986: 425-426). There may be some truth to this; however, the evidence above suggests to me that political disquiet has resulted in all three instances from perceptions of executive abuse of power rather than ethnic bias.

Further frustrating attempts to identify clear ethnic boundaries, each of the 18 recognised ethnic groups is subject to additional, internal subdivisions (Covell 1987: 12, Randiranja and Ellis 2009: 224). Indigenous Malagasy have a complex mixed heritage emanating from Southeast and South Asia, East and Central Africa, and the Arabian peninsula (Sharp 2002: 7). Over the centuries, new immigration to the island, the slave trade, and domestic migration have all contributed to racial heterogeneity (Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 136-137). Distinctions between

descendents of nobles and commoners, freemen and slaves result in complex systems of social stratification that vary from region to region (Covell 1987: 13, Bloch 1986a).[73] Randrianja and Ellis also comment on the historically porous nature of the so-called ethnic groups, explaining how "buffer groups" on the margins easily move from one group to another (2009: 222). Indeed, anthropologists have concluded that Malagasy ethnic groups cannot be identified by distinct genetic differences (Bloch 1986b: 12, Dewar and Wright 1993), leading some researchers to conclude that ethnic labels are meaningless (Alvarez 1995, Covell 1987: 81, Esoavelomandroso 2001, Lambek 2001, Southall 1986).

The Merina/*côtier* schism is also commonly portrayed as a religious clash between Protestants (Merina) and Catholics (*côtier*). However, as with ethnicity, it would be remiss to jump to conclusions about religious dualism. Indeed, religion has often played a conciliatory role in contemporary Malagasy politics. Like ethnicity, formal religion in Madagascar is intertwined with indigenous customs that venerate family, ancestors and nature (Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 94-95). A persistent connection dating back to the 1860s also exists between organised religion, education, and politics. Since the 1980s, bible quotations and religious services have gradually replaced secular public debate, a development that Randrianja and Ellis attribute in part to a decline in the quality of Madagascar's universities (2009: 203). Given these circumstances, it becomes relevant that Ravalomanana was national vice-President of the country's largest Protestant church at the time of his election (Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 206). Not only did this position endow him with additional authority, it provided a vast social network for mobilising a national campaign strategy. Meanwhile, the Council of Christian Churches in Madagascar (FFKM), an umbrella organisation that unites all Christian denominations on the island and boasts approximately 3 million followers, has played an "essential" role in moderating politics during the period under review, particularly with regard to the 2001-2002 political crisis (Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 201-202, also see Mukonoweshuro 1990: 393, Valette 2005: 3).

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[73] Ties of kinship are closely related to traditional ancestral lands; Sharp explains: "To ask who one is, and therefore where one comes from, one typically poses the question, 'Where is your ancestral land?' That is, 'Where are your most valued ancestors entombed?'" (2001: 109, also see Walsh 2001: 252).

Aware of the Merina/*côtier* cleavage, I watched for expressions of ethnic and religious tension or division as I analysed TAT stories. The chapters that follow demonstrate that, while some research participants did identify ethnic tension or conflict in one or more of the images, this was hardly pervasive.

## 2. Consolidation of Resources

Without delving into the minutia of constitutional reform, it is clearly evident from the account above that successive political elites have done what they could to consolidate political power in the executive. While there is little notable about this fact in and of itself, what is striking is that legal channels appear to have been followed throughout this process. In the case of Ratsiraka's political resurrection, for instance, he regained the Presidency via the ballot box, secured constitutional changes through a popular referendum, and "solidified his power base in the other instruments of governance through decidedly constitutional processes" (Marcus and Razafindrakoto 2003: 31). Ravalomanana's move to oust his political rival from the powerful mayor's office likewise followed constitutional protocol (Bearak 2009c).

The problem, as Marcus and Razafindrakoto see it, "is that the constitution, never a stellar document, has been so manipulated over the past decade that it no longer acts as a guarantor of institutional independence" (2003: 31). In other words, while political elites may stick to the letter of the law, democratic checks and balances are substantively absent. Perceptions of the Presidency and political accountability more generally are discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

## 3. The Limited Role of Political Parties

In Chapter One I suggested that the international democracy assistance industry identifies a particular role for political parties in the democratic process. However, political parties have had little, if anything, to do with Madagascar's contemporary democratic experience. Personal loyalties, as opposed to political ideology, remain central to the country's politics (Alvarez 1995: 67, Covell 1987: 23, Marcus 2003: 218).[74] Indeed, both AREMA and TIM were created by Ratsiraka and

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[74] Personal loyalty and individuality have always characterised Malagasy electoral practices. Covell notes how in the earliest elections candidates ran *sans partis* (i.e. as individuals as opposed to party affiliates) (1987: 29).

Ravalomanana respectively *after* each man became President. It is less clear when Rajoelina founded his TGV party.[75] Nevertheless, Zafy, Ratsiraka, Ravalomanana, and Rajoelina have all acted as lightning rods for mass public disillusionment; they have all served a term as President of the 'anyone but --- club'. Public perceptions of political parties are discussed at some length in Chapters Four and Seven.

*4. Military Neutrality*

Ratsiraka (an Admiral) aside, the military has consistently resisted the allure of political power (Covell 1987, Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 201). In the midst of the most recent political crisis, one army general was quoted as saying: "We are trying to avoid violence between the two sides by using moral power of persuasion, not guns…This is not Africa, our culture is much more like Asia. We will negotiate to the last, because the people of Madagascar are one big family" (Lindijer 2009). Consequently, the military does not appear to pose a threat to democracy in Madagascar and has, one might say, buttressed the political process in times of crisis by maintaining its resolve. Although the military eventually backed Rajoelina in the spring of 2009, this was the direct result of Ravalomanana's own breach of constitutional protocol and is better classified as a *force majeure* than a military coup.

While it could be argued that the military has actually played a critical role in Madagascar's democratic development (i.e. by staying resolutely in the barracks), at no time does it appear to have been an instigator of political events. Consequently, public perceptions of the military did not factor into my research.

*5. Shadow Governments*

It was not until I read about the 1991, 2001-2002 and 2009 political crises in parallel that I recognised the significant role that shadow governments have played in Madagascar's contemporary political history. Fierke notes that one way of changing a situation is to act as if the situation has changed already (2001: 135-136). As the brief history above demonstrates, on several occasions opposition movements have prematurely assumed the mantle of authority (i.e. declaring shadow governments,

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[75] Rajoelina had also gained the backing of other opposition parties by the end of January 2009 (Maina 2009).

taking over government offices). Moreover, by acting "as if" the authorities are forced to respond, often by overreacting to quotidian acts (e.g. holding a political rally, broadcasting a television interview). This overreaction brings "the implicit violence of the structure into the open, making it impossible to maintain the veneer of moral justification" (Fierke 135-136). It appears that this logic has historically come to fruition in Madagascar: in all three cases where a shadow government has been declared, that government has eventually assumed office.

It is also significant that all parties in the various political upheavals have tried to frame their actions with democratic rhetoric. In 2001-2002, for instance, Ratsiraka claimed to follow the letter of the law while Ravalomanana asserted that it was the people's democratic right to protest. In 2009, there was a notable reversal of roles; Ravalomanana, now the incumbent, appealed for calm, saying: "We have to obey the law in Madagascar" (Bearak 2009a) while his challenger Rajoelina defiantly proclaimed: "We are here because we refuse to be gagged" (AFP 2009a). Though simplified, this synopsis highlights the gap identified by Marcus and Razafindrakoto "between Madagascar's liberal democratic populace and its minimally democratic government" (2003: 43). Additional evidence for this characterisation of Madagascar's contemporary political context is provided in Chapters Four through Seven, leading me to suggest that finding a way of strategically addressing this void should be a primary concern of future democracy assistance efforts.

It is worth pointing out that the recent spate of shadow governments might have roots in the competing spheres of influence and patterns of resistance that have historically governed political life on the island. Middleton notes that prior to the colonial era, Malagasy kingdoms were identifiable by their core zones of power rather than defined boundaries (2001: 175). Centuries of aversion to outside intrusion has resulted in "a rejection of state structures external to the local community" and contributed to a defensive strategy that deliberately eschewed the construction of roads (Covell 1987: 7, 9). In attempting to move the seat of state power from Antananarivo to Toamasina in 2002, the besieged Ratsiraka was attempting to shore up his own sphere of influence in his ancestral homeland. The bombing of bridges could be interpreted as an attempt to sever this core zone from that of his rival.

Randrianja and Ellis attribute enduring patterns of resistance to Madagascar's size, which has both caused people to congregate "for sustenance and self-

protection" and enabled their "escape" (Randrianja and Eills 2009: 7). They explain this phenomenon using the metaphor of the traditional Malagasy board game *fanarona*. In this game of strategy and skill, victory "is obtained not by occupying the opponent's position, nor in removing his pieces from the board entirely…but rather by restricting the opponent's freedom of movement by steady approach, through turning the enemy into an ally." They add that "only a poor fanarona player attempts to eliminate the adversary entirely" (Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 7). Play of this game is characterised by patience, give-and-take, and farsighted strategy. Withdrawal and avoidance are integrated with subtle manoeuvring until the time is right to pounce. Sometimes misinterpreted by outsiders as docility (Covell 1987), avoidance resistance of external intrusion is in fact coupled with strategic, localised engagement (Kaufmann 2001).

CHAPTER FOUR: ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

> *Like Lincoln, I would like to believe that the ballot*
> *is stronger than the bullet. Then again,*
> *he said that before he got shot.*
> *(Vowell 2006: 7)*

Elections are the contemporary sine qua non of democracy. As Chapter One demonstrates, this simple truth has become deeply ingrained in how we think about – and evaluate – democratic practice in developing countries. Both development practitioners and democracy theorists commonly cite the regular execution of free and fair elections as the minimal condition under which democracy can be said to exist (Bratton 1998: 52, Chazan 1979: 136, Collier 2007: 146, Schedler 2001: 7, Schmitter and Karl 1991: 78, UNDP n.d., USAID n.d., *Democracy and Governance*). That elections are observable and, therefore, quantifiable (e.g. frequency, voter turnout, the presence of opposition parties) surely contributes to the appeal of electoral indicators. Other reasons for studying elections range from the belief that the strength of a country's democracy can be assessed at least in part by the level of public participation in that country's politics[76] (Barber 2003, Dahl 1971, Pateman 1970, Zakaria 2003) to the presumption that even sub-standard elections, when held at regular intervals, contribute to democratic deepening (Brown and Kaiser 2007: 1144). While elections do not necessarily lead to democracy, it is almost inconceivable that a country could be considered democratic without them.

Democratic means (e.g. elections, political parties) do not, however, always lead to democratic ends (e.g. representation, domestic political legitimacy). The evolutionary process that eventually led to universal suffrage in the West has been turned on its head for third wave democracies. This "interesting reversal," though irregularly acknowledged, has been evident since the middle of the last century when Organski, among others, observed: "the franchise [in developing countries] does not expand in response to the increase of political consciousness, as in the West, but

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[76] For a thorough critique of this logic see Parry and Moyser (1994).

precedes and helps expand that consciousness…Thus the meaning and the effects of the political institutions in new nations are not the same as in the old" (1965: 42, also see Bates 2001, Nayyar 1998, Ware 1986). The pervasiveness of illiberal democracy (Bratton 1998, Zakaria 1997) and the masking of autocratic rule by elections (Merkel 2004: 55, Price 2009: 164), provide two, well documented examples of this observable reality. While it is arguably true that electoral procedure and universal suffrage preceded democratic (though not political) consciousness in many of today's developing democracies, the extent to which elections have expanded democratic consciousness through meaningful political participation and effective representation is less clear.

This chapter provides empirical evidence to illustrate how non-elites in an eastern, coastal region of Madagascar perceive electoral processes, their role in those processes, and their own political agency. I conclude by arguing that this evidence from the field raises serious doubts about notions of political participation and representation that underwrite Western reliance on elections as a reliable indicator of democracy. This finding leads me to further question whether the democracy literature and multi-billion dollar democracy assistance agenda place undue emphasis on electoral process, perhaps to the detriment of other aspects of substantive democracy (e.g. free speech, rule of law).

**What Do Elections Mean in Eastern Madagascar?**

Although the reasons for promoting elections may vary, democracy assistance organisations, assessment indices, and theorists all agree that the electoral process is a defining ingredient of modern democracy (see Chapter One). But do non-elites in Madagascar value electoral participation and believe that electoral outcomes are genuinely representative? In order to better understand what elections mean to ordinary people, I commissioned an image that would prompt TAT stories indicative of people's attitudes toward and expectations for electoral processes. The artist drew a scene recognisable as the interior of a polling place (see Figure 11). Candid responses to this image, coupled with information about whether or not research participants had voted in the most recent presidential election provide unique insight into how people in the Antsinanana region of Madagascar perceive elections and interpret their role in the electoral process.

**Figure 11: Image 1**



The TAT stories told by research participants revealed the possible presence of four distinct, though somewhat overlapping, perceptual lenses with regard to elections and electoral participation. A clear dichotomy emerged between people who indicated that they held a generally affirmative view of voting in response to Image 1, conceptualised throughout this thesis as **the positive lens**, and those who were more pessimistic about electoral processes in Madagascar, evoking **the tedious lens**.[77] Two additional perceptual lenses emerged in a more holistic fashion. **The pluralist lens** is characterised by support for an element of political opposition while **the local lens** is notable for the primary interest demonstrated by these research participants in distinctly local issues. There is considerable overlap between some perceptual lenses, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the complex ways in which people living in this region of Madagascar understand politics and their own political agency. That said, the positive and tedious lenses are mutually exclusive – people either demonstrated positive dispositions towards elections or they did not.

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[77] Three out of 51 research participants chose not to tell a TAT story about Image 1.

**The Positive Lens**

The prevalent disposition that people are generally happy to vote delineates the positive perceptual lens. In their TAT stories, these research participants described people who think of voting as a responsibility and demonstrate a reasonable understanding of electoral procedure beyond simply marking a ballot paper. Several people, for instance, initially identified the scene by the ballot box and went on to talk about candidates and the electoral campaign. Others indicated that people reflect on their choice before casting their vote. Only very infrequently, however, did any of these TAT stories refer to multiple political parties. The belief that most people view voting positively was often supported in these TAT stories by other competences and dispositions suggestive of a wider theme that people are generally confident in the electoral process. That two thirds of people telling this sort of TAT story said that they had voted in the previous presidential election suggests that this positive perception of elections may correspond with a proclivity to vote.

*Demographic Trends*

Roughly one third of research participants from both the rural and urban samples told TAT stories exhibiting signs of this perceptual lens (see Table 5). Men were noticeably more likely to tell TAT stories including this particular cluster of basic themes; remarkably, no rural women are included in this group. While results

**Table 5: Positive Lens Demographic Details**

|  | Male | Female | Voted | Did not vote | Under 18 | 18-30 | 31-45 | 46-60 | 60+ | Upper | Middle | Lower | Religious |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urban | 8 (21)* | 6 (19) | 10 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 7 | 0 | 3 |
| Rural | 4 (6) | 0 (5) | 1 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| **Total** | 12 (27) | 6 (24) | 11 | 7 | 1 | 3 | 8 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 8 | 3 | 3 |

*Numbers in parentheses denote the total number of men and women included in the sample.

from this sample are necessarily inconclusive, this clear distinction between rural men and women in particular may suggest an interesting point of departure for further research. Apart from sex, however, no other demographic characteristic stood out amongst people whose TAT stories displayed signs of the positive perceptual lens. Accordingly, research participants whose stories are analysed in this section represent all age groups, although the 31-45 year-old age group was marginally over-represented in relation to the demographic composition of the entire sample (see Table 4 in Chapter Three). These TAT stories were similarly told by a cross-section of social classes and represent a wide array of educational backgrounds roughly proportionate with the sample.

*Positive Lens Analysis*

The overwhelmingly dominant disposition of this perceptual lens is that some people are happy to vote (*quelques gens sont contents de voter*), as demonstrated in the thematic network (see Figure 12). This belief was supported in TAT stories by other competences and dispositions suggestive of a wider theme that people are

**Figure 12: Positive Lens Thematic Network**
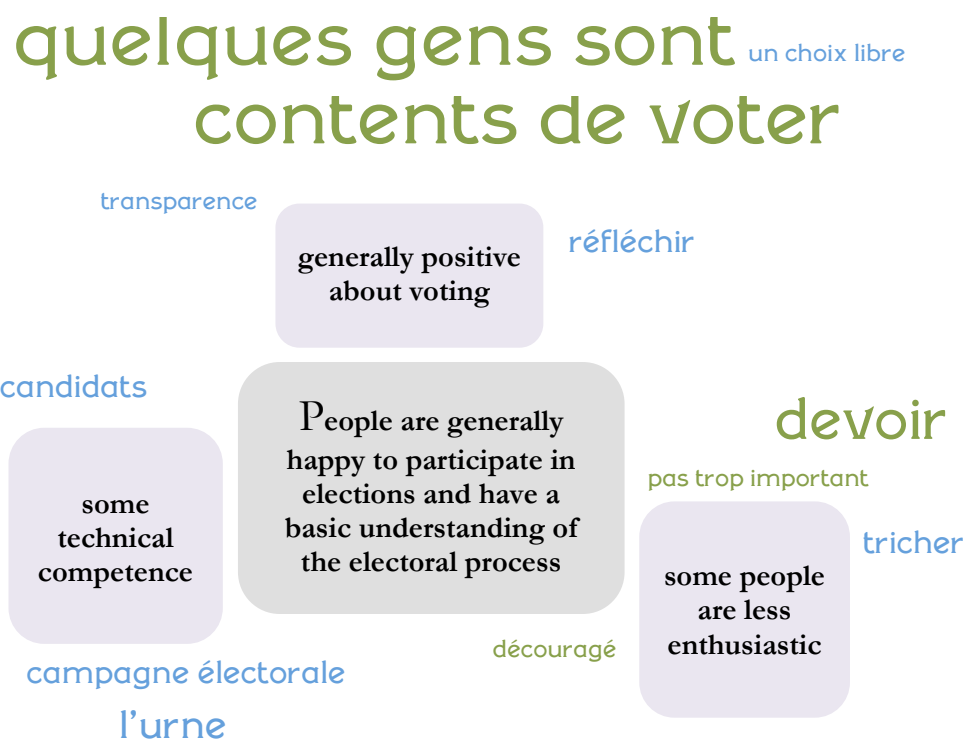
generally positive about voting and confident in electoral outcomes. Occasionally these research participants specified that people reflect (*réfléchir*) on their choice before casting their vote, indirectly implying that the names of multiple candidates appear on the ballot.

> Julie: During the elections we have democracy. The people are free to choose their candidate. Here, many parties are free [to participate]. To vote is to exercise free choice.
>
> Jo: Voting is the power to change things because often there are different candidates and everyone is free to choose who they like.

While less common, it is still significant that some TAT stories also included the competences that elections are transparent (*transparence*) and voting constitutes a free choice (*un choix libre*). These basic themes suggest the likelihood that at least some people positively predisposed toward voting are also confident in electoral results.

Familiarity with elections coupled with an urge to participate reflects the sort of attitude anticipated by both democracy assistance policies and the vast literature on democratic development (see Chapter One). Some have even dared to speculate that this sort of public affinity for elections could eventually lead to "an African derived formula for constructive political participation" (Bratton and van de Walle 1997: 141, also see Chazan 1979). This implies, however, that people not only embrace the chance to partake in periodic polls, but that they imbue them with meaning. In this regard, the positive lens is somewhat less encouraging, however, as these research participants rarely associated the formal practice of voting with the ability to influence political decisions that affect their daily lives. It would seem that some Malagasy voters, though of a positive disposition toward elections in general, have become habituated to participating without also adopting a critical position on either the issues or the candidates. This scenario may be partially accounted for by the theory that African voters primarily value participation. Ake, for instance, suspects that in Africa "[m]ore often than not, it is the involvement in the process rather than the acceptability of the end decision which satisfies the need to participate" (1993: 243). Participation, when viewed from this perspective, puts greater emphasis on the act of taking part (e.g. showing up at the polls) than any eventual outcome (e.g. which candidate gets elected).

People who told generally positive TAT stories about elections also commonly described voting as a duty (*devoir*). The particular connotation of this word was occasionally difficult to ascertain, however, as some of these research participants oscillated between describing voting as a right and an obligation; this trend recurs more prominently in TAT stories indicative of the tedious perceptual lens, discussed below.[78] Reflecting a typical partial-response in this vein, Jo continued: "People have to vote, it is how they fulfil their duty as citizens." On the whole, however, classifying voting as a duty coincided with a diminishment of enthusiasm. While these research participants rarely indicated that all three people depicted in Image 1 thought of voting as a duty, those described in this way were usually also attributed with other more sceptical dispositions as well. For instance, these research participants sometimes singled out one person in the voting queue as less enthusiastic than the others. In the TAT story about Image 1 told by Daniel, the woman (second in the queue) was very enthusiastic about voting. The man wearing a hat behind her, however, thinks that voting is not very important (*pas trop important*), an infrequent – though not insignificant – theme to emerge from TAT stories analysed in this section. Interestingly, none of the three people in the image was singled out more consistently than either of the others, negating the likelihood that something particular about Image 1 provoked these descriptions. Some people who told TAT stories indicative of the positive perceptual lens described the man at the front of the queue as excited to vote while others said that he was not taking his responsibility seriously (see Figure 11).

One frequent explanation offered for these mixed feelings, discouragement (*découragé*) in particular, is suspicion of electoral fraud or cheating (*tricher*).

| | |
|---|---|
| Guillaume: | People have various reactions to elections. When there are elections, there is always cheating. That's why some people are discouraged. |
| Serge: | After the elections, the elections we have here, the people don't want to participate anymore because of all of the problems. |

---

[78] Further complicating this point, the words *droit* (*n.* right) and *doit* (*v.* to have to, conjugation of *devoir*) sound remarkably similar. I often asked research participants for clarification only to learn either that they could not decide whether voting was a right or an obligation, or that they did not see a significant difference between the two words and could use them almost interchangeably. For an example of detailed linguistic analysis of words associated with democracy see Schaffer (1998).

These dispositions, though far less prevalent than the notion that most people willingly take part in the electoral process, nevertheless cast a shadow of doubt over the degree of importance that some people attribute to elections. Consequently, we must at least temporarily entertain the notion that electoral process may be a less reliable indicator of domestic democratic legitimacy than democracy experts regularly anticipate.

The TAT stories of several research participants included in this group additionally addressed technical aspects of the voting process, demonstrating a reasonable understanding of the procedural aspects of voting beyond simply marking a ballot paper. Some people, for instance, initially identified the scene by the ballot box (*l'urne*) and went on to talk about candidates (*candidats*) and the electoral campaign (*campagne électorale*).

| | |
|---|---|
| Lalao: | There is a ballot box and people have formed a queue to vote. They have already gone past the entrance because they have their envelopes. |
| Moravelo: | There is a ballot box in front of the voters. Usually someone guards it. Before you get your envelope [ballot], the members of the voting office check your identity card and all that. |

The evidence of discouragement above, however, provides reason to question whether this technical fluency masks lingering uncertainty about what elections are actually for. This is particularly true if endemic fraud prevents electoral results from accurately reflecting the choice of voters.

Remarkably, very few research participants who told TAT stories about people positively predisposed toward voting suggested that elections are interesting. Indeed, this disposition does not appear in the positive lens thematic network because its proportional size would be illegibly small.

| | |
|---|---|
| Todilahy: | There are many voters who have come, and they aren't the first [indicating that there are already envelopes in the ballot box]. They reflect before voting, but when they think about their choice, do they really have the information that they need to decide? Even if you think about it, if you don't have the necessary information, it means nothing. |
| Kamisy: | The first person is very happy to vote. The others need to think a bit first. The one at the back is trying to decide what to do by watching the others. He doesn't know who to vote for. |

TAT stories like these raise the prospect that, although many people are genuinely amenable towards voting they may simply be going though practiced motions when showing up at the polls. This speculation is shared by a Malagasy political observer who notes that "voting is like flipping a coin for most people" (Raharizatovo 2008: 10). The evidence above suggests that some voters, though of a generally positive disposition toward elections in general, have been habituated to participating without also adopting a critical position on either the issues or the candidates. Moreover, they remain uncertain whether electoral outcomes always reflect the choice of voters.

*Positive Lens Voting Patterns*

As I explained in Chapter Three, projective research techniques presume that people will self-identify with at least one figure depicted in the abstract prompt. Exploring whether competences and dispositions evident in TAT stories are reflected in the behaviour patterns of research participants can provisionally verify the reliability of this claim. While it is beyond the scope of this research to perform a thorough assessment of people's behaviour patterns, I did ask people who agreed to take part in this research a series of basic questions about themselves after they had told their final TAT story, including: Did you vote in the last presidential election? In addition to broadly confirming the method's reliability, responses to this question also raise some unexpected concerns about the role of elections in buttressing developing democracies.

Most research participants whose TAT stories contained the clusters of basic themes indicative of the positive lens (roughly two-thirds) also confirmed that they had indeed voted in the previous presidential election (see Figure 13). An overwhelming majority of these people also indicated that they were familiar with KMF-CNOE, a national NGO that focuses principally on civic education and electoral monitoring. That said, some people in this group who said that they did not vote where also aware of KMF-CNOE, somewhat obscuring any connection between the work of this organisation, a tendency for people to vote and the positive outlook people have towards voting. Additionally, it was sometimes unclear whether rural research participants responding in the affirmative to the question "Did you vote in the previous presidential election?" meant instead that they had participated in elections for their village president (*président fokontany*). This possible inconsistency, however, is not particularly important for the discussion here, as the real issue is

**Figure 13: Voter Turnout by Perceptual Lens**
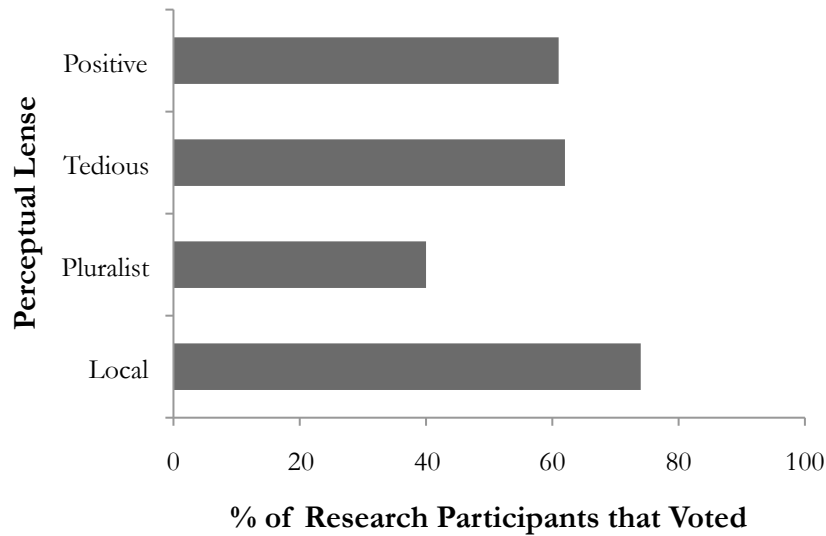


whether or not people are habituated to voting and familiar with the process.

Perhaps the most interesting group of research participants discussed in this section (approximately one-third of people included in the positive perceptual lens group, evenly split between rural and urban research participants) revealed that, despite telling TAT stories about people who are generally positively inclined toward voting, they themselves did not vote in the previous presidential election. This inconsistency is somewhat surprising and could suggest a number of things. It may indicate, for instance, that the TAT stories do not accurately represent the sentiments of storytellers. It is possible, for example, that research participants told TAT stories characterised by generally positive competences and dispositions because they thought that was the 'right' response. Without rejecting this possibility outright, I reiterate that participatory, imaged-based research methods are less prone to this sort of distortion than traditional, language-based research methods (see Chapter Three). A more compelling explanation for this discrepancy between attitude and action is that some research participants may have self-identified with the person in the story who they singled out as less positive about voting but thought themselves in the minority when explaining that other people take part in elections without reservation. Alternatively, some people may have been prevented from voting by extenuating circumstances (e.g. ill-health, time constraints). Many rural research participants, for

example, struggle to meet their basic subsistence needs and may have had more pressing concerns on election day than casting a vote.

Finally, that some people did not vote could indicate that, although they are generally positive about voting, their attachment to electoral participation remains minimal. Dispositions including discouragement and lack of importance, though cited infrequently in the TAT stories analysed here, may nevertheless prove relevant if afforded closer scrutiny. It is, therefore, entirely possible that some people who continue to have relatively good faith in electoral processes remain somewhat indifferent to their right to vote. Some may even consider it little more than an obligation or duty that must be fulfilled. Suspicion of cheating and acknowledgment that elections can be rigged, though not prominent among this group of research participants, could still deter some people from voting, particularly those faced with more pressing obligations.

I must also acknowledge that one research participant who told a TAT story indicative of the positive perceptual lens did not vote because he is under the legal voting age (see Table 5). Age may likewise have prevented other young people included in my research sample from voting at the time of the last presidential election. There are no clear demographic connections (i.e. sex, age, class, education) between people who told TAT stories indicative of the positive lens and yet did not vote themselves.

**The Tedious Lens**

The majority of people who agreed to take part in this research indicated that they are disenchanted with the electoral process and do not believe that their vote matters, suggesting the likely existence of a second perceptual lens. Whereas the positive lens, above, was identified rather narrowly by the common disposition that people are generally agreeable toward voting, I identified the tedious lens from a plurality of interrelated basic themes that all characterise voting as a waste of time and election results as unreliable. Many of the TAT stories analysed in this section also illustrate how voting can become a burden when people begin to doubt that casting a ballot will make any difference to their daily life. This assessment seems to be particularly relevant when people are only just managing to survive. It is also noteworthy that fewer of these TAT stories contained a procedural account of the

voting process than those indicative of the positive perceptual lens and the technical issues they raised also differ somewhat. Analysis of whether or not the people who told TAT stories reflective of the tedious lens admitted to participating in the previous presidential election reveals the unexpected trend that even though some people say they do not find voting worthwhile, they still tend to turn out on election day.

*Demographic Trends*

Roughly two-thirds of all TAT stories about Image 1 contained clusters of basic themes suggesting the tedious lens (see Table 6). Women were more likely to associate the voting scene depicted in Image 1 with voter fatigue and electoral fraud than their male counterparts. While this trend is clear for both the urban and rural samples, it is slightly more pronounced among rural women. People who told these TAT stories do not appear to share any of the other demographic traits considered here. Research participants whose TAT stories are analysed in this section are representative of all age groups and economic classes roughly proportional with the overall sample. These people also come from a wide sweep of educational backgrounds, ranging from very little formal education to a masters degree.

**Table 6: Tedious Lens Demographic Details**

| | Male | Female | Voted | Did not vote | Under 18 | 18-30 | 31-45 | 46-60 | 60+ | Upper | Middle | Lower | Religious |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urban | 12 (21)* | 12 (19) | 13 | 11 | 1 | 7 | 11 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 17 | 2 | 2 |
| Rural | 2 (6) | 4 (5) | 6 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 0 |
| **Total** | 14 (27) | 16 (24) | 19 | 11 | 1 | 8 | 13 | 7 | 1 | 3 | 18 | 7 | 2 |

*Numbers in parentheses denote the total number of men and women included in the sample.

*Tedious Lens Analysis*

TAT stories representative of the tedious perceptual lens characteristically depict voting as a wearisome exercise and indicate extensive voter fatigue. A common disposition attributed by these research participants to one or more people in Image 1 is that they are tired (*fatigué*) (see Figure 14). Many of these research participants similarly described the people in Image 1 as discouraged (*découragé*), saying that when they go to the polls it is not in their heart (*pas dans leurs cœurs*).

| | |
|---|---|
| Andoniaina: | It isn't in their heart [to vote] because they know that the results will be changed by the party in power. |
| Hantanirina: | The people are tired but it is their duty; they are obliged to go and vote. |
| Lezoma: | It's always elections, all the time. It's tiring. The people [in the picture] are tired. The first one is angry or fed up. |

**Figure 14: Tedious Lens Thematic Network**

The onerous tone of these TAT stories contrasts starkly with the more positive outlook characteristic of the positive lens discussed in the previous section.

Another factor contributing to this organising theme that voting is tedious is the considerable uncertainty within TAT stories as to whether voting is a right (*droit*) or an obligation (*obligé, devoir*), as the thematic network in Figure 14 illustrates. The ambiguity of this language coupled with the fact that all three words were used often enough to stand out as basic themes suggests greater uncertainty over whether voting is a right or obligation than was evident for the positive perceptual lens.

| Amélie: | They are there because it is their right, or rather because they have to [vote]. |
| Rose: | It's something they have to do. Voting is a right, so they have to do it. |
| Stéphane: | Everyone has the right to vote, but it's crazy. They are all tired but they don't have any choice. |

The prevalence of TAT stories like these suggests that many people may understand the concept of rights in a way that is somewhat counter-intuitive to Western logic. The right to do something to a liberal, Western mind, implies a guaranteed privilege that cannot, under normal circumstances, be taken away. Nor, however, is it forced.[79] By contrast, the idea that you have to do something or that it is obligatory suggests an element of coercion. Moreover, the presence of the disposition crazy (*fou*) in the thematic network, though small, demonstrates that Stéphane is not entirely alone in his assessment.

For many research participants whose TAT stories suggest that they perceive elections through the tedious lens, the monotony of voting is augmented by a clear conviction that elections in their country are neither free nor fair. These research participants often told stories indicating their suspicions of electoral fraud; Léa, for example, explained Image 1 this way: "A lot of people are discouraged. There is always cheating during elections." Furthermore, the thematic network illustrates several commonly cited dispositions and one competence supportive of this conclusion. Most blatantly, both the competence of cheating (*tricher*) and the

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[79] For example, the right to bear arms guaranteed by the second amendment of the American Constitution does not mean that every American citizen *must* own and carry a weapon.

disposition that elections do not present voters with a real choice (*pas un choix*) were included in most of the TAT stories analysed here.

What distinguishes many TAT stories about cheating told by this group of research participants, though, is the elaborate detail used to describe exactly how electoral outcomes in this region of Madagascar are manipulated. I have classified cheating as a competence (i.e. a behaviour, even though the storyteller is not the person engaged in it) instead of a disposition (i.e. an attitude or suspicion) because of this technical understanding and ability to give specific examples. The most prominently cited method for fixing elections discussed by research participants was withholding voter registration cards (*carte électorale*) from known opposition supporters. Soazy explained: "There are people who don't have voter registration cards or identity cards, so they can't vote." Indeed, a handful of people who participated in this research said that they personally do not vote for precisely this reason.[80] They speculated that the government, meaning leaders of the ruling party, ask local loyalists for the names of people known to oppose the regime or support alternative candidates. Even if these research participants register to vote, they insist that either they never receive their registration card or their name does not show up on the electoral roll at the polling station.[81] Whether or not this is what actually happens is, for the purposes of this study, irrelevant. In the minds of these people it is the truth. Moreover, this conviction shapes their behaviour (e.g. they stop bothering to turn up at the polls), values (e.g. voting is not worthwhile), and attitudes (e.g. the ruling party is autocratic).

People without such specific ideas about how elections might be fixed similarly voiced scepticism about electoral transparency (*pas de transparence*) and the subsequent reliability of results remarkably often. Concern over transparency was particularly common among research participants with a university education.

> Rose:      It's an election with a transparent ballot box. But the election is not transparent; I mean the results.

---

[80] Marcus and Razafindrakoto have similarly identified problems with voter registration cards as a significant defect of recent electoral processes in Madagascar (2003: 37).

[81] An anonymous response to the written interview questions similarly noted: "Everyone has the right to vote, but manipulations exclude a lot of people."

> Mahefa: You can't guarantee the transparency of elections because there are too many government obstacles.

According to some of these research participants, lack of transparency facilitates cheating; as a result, the party in power always wins (*le pouvoir gagne toujours*). The irony of the transparent ballot box is not lost on people like Rose and Mahefa who remain unconvinced that elections are anything other than a show for the benefit of election monitors and the ruling political elite. When viewed though this lens, the contribution that elections theoretically make to democratic governance is severely muted.

The common conviction that elections are not free and fair was often further accentuated by the disposition that, since it does not change anything (*ne changer rien*), voting is not worth the trouble (*pas de la peine*). Many research participants whose TAT stories included this theme described the people depicted in Image 1 as unconvinced (*pas convaincu*) or as having doubts about the elections. These basic themes contribute to the conclusion that voting, though sometimes perceived as required, is not really worth the trouble.

> Julien: Every time there are elections, you have to go vote but the result is already decided. It's always the same story. In my opinion, the President is a dictator: it's the government that decides, not the people.
>
> Nathalie: Everyone thinks "even if I vote, he [the President] will always win."
>
> Kalo: Elections don't change anything.
>
> Severiny: They think that it is always the same. Even if someone new gets elected, it is always the same thing.

The common attitude running through many TAT stories analysed in this section is that electoral results are of little significance. These research participants anticipated that the ruling party would automatically win any electoral contest, but were equally discouraged by the conviction that all political leaders behave the same way once in office regardless of party affiliation.

Moreover, voting takes time out from the working day, something that people barely scraping together a subsistence living can ill-afford (*c'est difficile quand les gens sont pauvres*) and are unlikely to value when casting a ballot will do nothing to improve their lives. Only very infrequently did any of these research participants

associate voting with improving their lives. Mamisoa, for example, described Image 1 as "an election of equals: the Chinese, the Indians, the rich Malagasy. On the other hand there are people who don't know what to eat." Notably, research participants whose TAT stories contain the themes indicative of the tedious lens often attributed dispositions to "everyone," whereas the TAT stories analysed in the previous section were much more likely to depict "some people" as feeling or acting in a particular way. These research participants perceive the fundamental flaws in Madagascar's electoral system as obvious and seem to expect that everyone else must be aware of them as well. It is also worth noting that a significant proportion of these people did, however, indicate that they think protest is an appropriate way of demanding change (see Chapter Five).

Like research participants who told TAT stories indicative of the positive perceptual lens, the people whose stores are analysed in this section occasionally referred to or described technical aspects of the voting process. This indicates that, regardless of how they feel about elections, Malagasy citizens usually have some awareness of the technical aspects of voting. However, whereas TAT stories suggestive of the positive perceptual lens described procedural aspects of voting like the ballot box or the candidates in a neutral if not positive light, the TAT stories discussed in this section referred to these competences rather less often and in a noticeably different manner. Election cards (*carte électorale*), for example, were brought up in the context of fraudulent elections, as explained above. Election results (*annonce des résultats*) were similarly degraded in these TAT stories, as research participants believed that the official results were decided long before a single vote had been cast. A few of these people also referred to the law (*la loi*) in order to explain that voting is required.[82] Lastly, some TAT stories included descriptions of electoral campaigns (*campagne électorale*). This is perhaps the most encouraging of the technical competences evoked by this group of research participants, as it suggests that they may perceive an element of debate or discussion prior to elections even if the electoral process itself is hopelessly flawed. Alternatively, election campaigns in developing countries like Madagascar often gain a high profile domestically not for

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[82] Voting in Madagascar is not compulsory. Why these research participants were under the impression that it is remains unclear.

the calibre of their political discourse, but rather the freebees on offer. It was not uncommon, for example, to see day labourers wearing t-shirts with a photograph of President Ravalomanana printed on the front, surely a pre-election offering. Even so, people often identified the scene in Image 2 (see Figure 15, below) as an electoral campaign despite the absence of any gifts.

*Tedious Lens Voting Patterns*

As indicated in Figure 13 above, roughly two-thirds of people whose stories reflected this perceptual lens said that they had voted in the most recent presidential elections. This indicates that lack of faith in electoral procedures and accompanying pretences of transparency do not automatically preclude people from voting. As the discussion above suggests, one partial explanation for this surprising trend might be the perception that people are obliged to vote rather than understanding voting as a matter of choice or personal conviction. The TAT stories discussed here appear to undermine the reliability of voter turnout as an indicator of democratic quality if many people who turn up at the polling station have little confidence in the electoral process. People whose TAT stories provide evidence of this political lens and did nevertheless vote come from both urban and rural backgrounds, demonstrate a wide range of educational achievement and represent all social classes. Interestingly, all of the people who did not vote were urban and relatively well educated. Some urban research participants also insisted that they were prevented from voting by the party in power. This may indicate that rural people feel greater pressure or obligation to vote if they harbour suspicions about the process, whereas urban people may come under less pressure and are, therefore, more likely to abstain. Neither age nor gender appears to contribute to the likelihood that someone would choose to vote.

Sthella aptly summed-up the view of the political sphere through the tedious perceptual lens this way: "They're crazy, elections!" Crazy in this context was clearly intended to denote foolishness or instability, as opposed to excitement or invigoration. The above analysis of this rather pervasive perceptual lens gives credence to Clapham and Wiseman's analysis that "[t]he assumption that democratic government will lead to measures that favour the long-term interests of the mass of the population is undermined by the continued electoral influence of political bosses" (1995: 228). Indeed, as discussed further in the following section, the dominant political party seems to function more like a political machine adept at

winning elections than as the vehicle of political representation advocated by democracy assistance agencies. Machine politics further skews the representative role of political parties, contributing to the diminished political legitimacy clearly evident in these TAT stories.

**The Pluralist Lens**

As discussed in Chapter One, democracy assistance agencies, assessment indices and theorists alike have concluded that political parties have a role to play in democratic governance. Practically, however, the ability of political parties to fulfil this function in some developing democracies remains highly questionable. During data analysis, a distinction emerged between TAT stories that included a role for opposition parties – or even simply "the opposition" – and those that did not even allude to an element of political opposition. TAT stories that specifically address or acknowledge the presence of an element of political opposition shared enough common basic themes to suggest the presence of a unique perceptual lens broadly supportive of political pluralism and an often-undefined element of opposition. Moreover, these TAT stories consistently paint the opposition in a positive (if ineffectual) light that contrasts sharply with expressions of open distrust of President Ravalomanana and his TIM party. The overt suspicion of autocracy present in many of these TAT stories coupled with ambiguity as to what "the opposition" stands for tends to suggest that these research participants support the opposition as an alternative to the President or ruling party rather than for substantive policy reasons.

I distinguish here between political opposition and political competition, a distinction evident in the TAT stories themselves. Research participants like Julie, quoted above in the discussion of the positive perceptual lens, said that there exists in Madagascar a plurality of political parties and candidates that offer voters a choice come election day. This point of view recognises electoral competition without reference to political opposition to the party in power. This sort of competition without opposition is grounded in Madagascar's contemporary political experience. Between 1975 and 1990, for example, President Ratsiraka allowed nominal multi-party electoral competition on the condition that all parties joined the National Front for the Defence of the Revolution (FNDR), an umbrella organisation closely monitored by the regime; political organisation against the regime was illegal (Mukonoweshuro 1990: 387, Mukonoweshuro 1994: 364). People who told TAT

stories specifically about the political opposition, by contrast, invariably argued that opposition parties and candidates are suppressed. In this view, voters are denied pluralistic political debate or, worse, are left unaware of the positions held by opposition candidates who would offer genuine choice even if multiple names appear on the ballot paper come election time.

Before proceeding to the perceptual lens analysis, a brief methodological note is in order. I specified above that the pluralist and local perceptual lenses emerged from a more holistic analysis of TAT stories that were often told in response to more than one image. While some stories in response to Image 1 featured electoral campaigns, insinuating at least the existence of multiple candidates, evidence of support for the opposition most often emerged from TAT stories told in response to Image 2 (see Figure 15).[83] TAT stories specifically about opposition parties – and the themes that characterise them – were neither solicited nor a pre-determined focus of this research. Instead, they emerged from information spontaneously volunteered by research participants. I have no way of knowing if other people may have also told

**Figure 15: Image 2**



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[83] Some of these research participants told one continuous story bridging Images 1 and 2.

TAT stories indicative of this perceptual lens had I intentionally researched it in a systematic way. That said, people who candidly told TAT stories about the opposition spoke with intense conviction, if not always hope.

*Demographic Trends*

There are several demographic trends evident for people whose TAT stories indicated support for the opposition. TAT stories about the opposition or inclusive of an element of political opposition were far more prevalent among urban research participants than their rural counterparts, accounting for roughly half of the urban sample (see Table 7). While approximately equal numbers of urban men and women chose to talk about the political opposition, support for the opposition was disproportionately strong among research participants aged 45 and younger.

Perhaps the most interesting demographic fact about this particular group of research participants is that they came from all socio-economic classes. One possible explanation for the discrepancy between urban and rural research participants is that rural people were predominantly concerned with local issues immediately relevant to their community, a tendency discussed further in the next section. It would be presumptuous to speculate what a locally appropriate role for the political opposition is or might be in a rural context without conducting additional research in rural communities. A second consideration is that urban research participants may have

**Table 7: Pluralist Lens Demographic Details**

| | Male | Female | Voted | Did not vote | Under 18 | 18-30 | 31-45 | 46-60 | 60+ | Upper | Middle | Lower | Religious |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urban | 11 (21)* | 9 (19) | 8 | 12 | 1 | 7 | 8 | 4 | 0 | 4 | 10 | 3 | 3 |
| Rural | 0 (6) | 0 (5) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | 11 (27) | 9 (24) | 8 | 12 | 1 | 7 | 8 | 4 | 0 | 4 | 10 | 3 | 3 |

*Numbers in parentheses denote the total number of men and women included in the sample.

been more comfortable talking about the opposition because their TAT interviews took place in more discrete locations, most often in private homes or offices where there was little chance of being overheard. Rural interviews, by contrast, took place in huts – often the research participant's place of business – that offered considerably less privacy; people casually passing by could easily hear the discussion taking place inside. This could be relevant because many people who took part in this research were afraid of political imprisonment or other possible consequences of speaking out against the regime (also see Chapter Five).

*Pluralist Lens Analysis*

Some research participants told TAT stories that overtly advocated political pluralism. Indeed, what initially distinguishes the thematic network resulting from these TAT stories – and, indeed, this perceptual lens – from the others discussed above is the clear presence of some element of opposition (*l'opposition*), depicted in Figure 16. Faramalala explained in one of her TAT stories that there are two political

**Figure 16: Pluralist Lens Thematic Network**
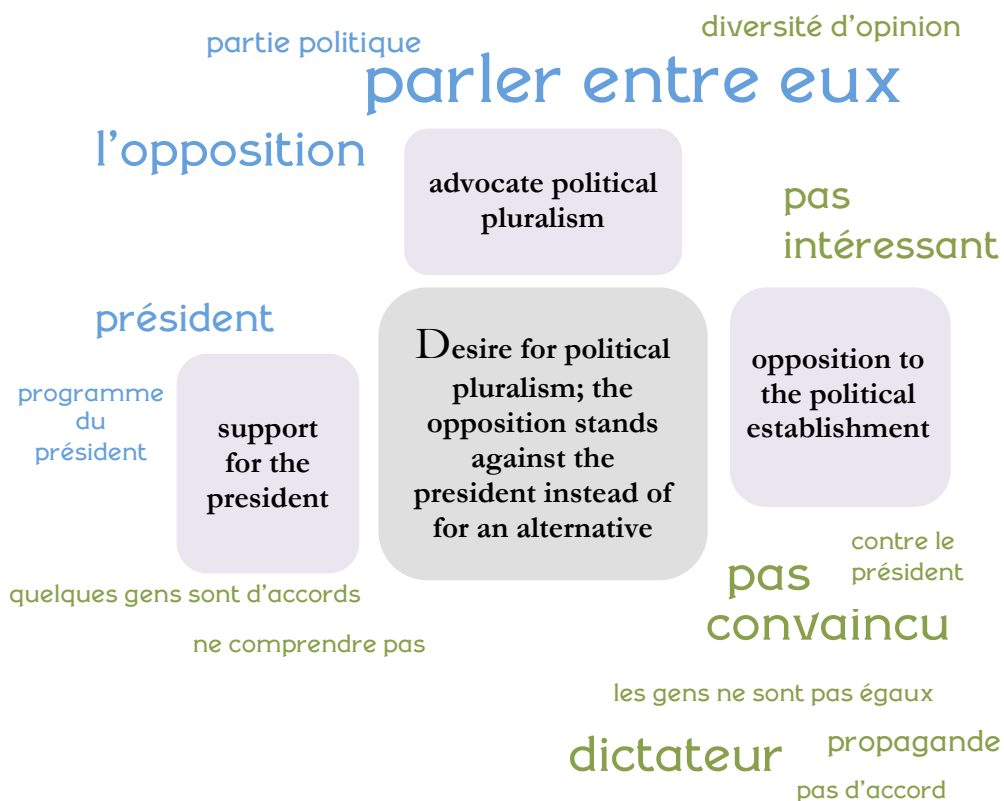
parties in Madagascar: "There are those for the mandate[84] and those against it." By distinguishing between the party in power and a nebulous opposition in the context of a mandate or political programme, this woman suggests party distinction along ideological or policy lines. The infrequency of accounts like this, however, raises the possibility that this may be a distinction lost on most people. Moreover, this woman speaks of the existence of only two political parties when over 160 parties are officially registered in the country. While many of these are doubtless small, regional parties, it seems remarkable that candidates from only two parties would be on the ballot in the region where my research was conducted. While these research participants spoke clearly of opposition political parties (*partie politique*) or (less frequently) candidates, most people whose TAT stories demonstrated support for "the opposition" never conceptualised it in an organised manner, but rather described it in a vague and unarticulated way.

While TAT stories inclusive of an element of political opposition first caught my attention, it gradually became apparent that what actually defines these TAT stories and a few others that do not explicitly refer to the opposition directly is a clear inclination toward discussion and debate, indicated by the size of the competence to talk amongst themselves (*parler entre eux*) and the slightly less frequently cited disposition of diversity of opinion (*diversité d'opinion*). In a small minority of TAT stories, it was unclear whether people described as talking amongst themselves in Image 2 indicated aptitude for discussion or, rather, conveyed disrespect for the political leader at the podium. Occasionally someone telling this sort of TAT story would explain that the people in the audience were talking amongst themselves because the man at the podium was only repeating stale propaganda (*propagande*). In most cases, however, these research participants specified that the audience was intently discussing the proposals made by the man before them.

A decisive split emerged, however, among descriptions of the authority figure stood at the podium speaking to the crowd. As demonstrated by the size of the basic themes dictator (*dictateur*), not convinced (*pas convaincu, pas d'accord*) and not interesting

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[84] It is unclear what exactly Faramalala meant here by the word "mandate;" contextually, it makes the most sense to interpret her meaning as political agenda or proposed programme.

(*pas intéressant*) in the thematic network, a significant proportion of these research participants distinguished the opposition as standing against the political establishment. Only a few actually said that the opposition is against the President, however (*contre le président*). Moreover, although the opposition is seen to oppose the ruling party, these research participants do not believe that it represents a viable alternative. Indeed, the pessimism with which they described the inability of opposition candidates and their supporters to openly participate in the political arena is striking given Madagascar's applauded performance on democracy indices.[85]

> Mamisoa: There is only one political party in Madagascar. The party of the President, the party in power – the TIM party. The party in power does not want to discuss things, it doesn't want to work together. There is an opposition party too, but they can't do anything because they are oppressed by the party in power. They don't have the right to call meetings, to organise themselves, to vote for themselves.
>
> Velohasina: There are people who are opposed to the party in power who would like to run in elections, but they don't manage to gain permission…this is not a democracy because people must be able to discuss ideas both for and against, but now that isn't possible.

After his TAT interview ended, Fabrice similarly expressed concern that people wanting to form an opposition party are prevented from meeting by the police. He asked how the country could be considered a democracy when people are not allowed to discuss their ideas openly. These TAT stories also plainly exhibit the disposition that people are not equal (*les gens ne sont pas égaux*). While inclination toward discussion and debate could lead to a more vibrant democracy, many of these TAT stories indicated that support for the opposition resulted from distrust of the party system and an acute suspicion of autocracy.

It is somewhat surprising, therefore, that very few stories including references to the opposition also contained descriptions of electoral fraud or cheating. One

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[85] Likewise, an anonymous, written response to structured interview questions disclosed that "The notion of political equality does not exist in Madagascar because only the party in power can function normally and at the same time it can influence the media. The opposition parties, by contrast, always come up against obstacles like censors and sabotage." Another anonymous research participant similarly observed: "At present, many political parties don't work well because their leaders are intimidated by the state or their supporters are discouraged from political participation," while a third anonymous response simply stated: "Political parties work so long as you aren't against the party in power."

reason for this could be that efforts to exclude opposition parties and candidates from elections (e.g. not allowing them to organise or hold meetings) would occur well before election day and, consequently, not be identified as cheating at the polls. While too few research participants spoke overtly about censorship in the context of the opposition for it to appear in this thematic network, it was often implied. As Chapter Five illustrates, many research participants seem to take pervasive censorship for granted.

Although research participants telling these TAT stories gave the impression that they identified with opposition supporters depicted in the crowd in Image 2, it was not uncommon for their stories to include an element of support for the President or ruling regime as well. The man standing at the podium, though sometimes identified as a dictator, was also described as the President (*président*) making an address or explaining his political agenda (*programme du président*). While the basic themes dominating the pluralist lens thematic network indicate that research participants telling these stories tended to make negative associations with the President's speech, some occasionally conceded that there are some people who do agree with him (*quelques gens sont d'accords*). Just as often, however, they suggested that those supporting the President or the regime did not understand (*ne comprendre pas*).

Despite the infrequency with which rural research participants told TAT stories that referred to the opposition, two stories did attempt to explain the status of the opposition in rural villages. Speaking about the opposition presence in rural areas, Kotomaro explained, "Sometimes in the villages, opposition candidates are intimidated. So, even if there are several candidates it is always the President's candidate who wins." While this position harks back to the discussion of ruling party dominance of elections above, it says little about how a rural voter might respond to opposition candidates. Echoing a description told from the tedious perspective lens, Nathalie pointed out that:

> …people prefer to stay home than to vote for the opposition because when you vote for them you're scared. There is always cheating, so it isn't worth the trouble. In the last election, the problem was that they [the ruling party] asked the *présidents fokontanys* [village Presidents] which people [in their villages] were for the opposition and then they didn't give those people their voter registration cards. So…[the TAT story ends here]

There is no way of knowing whether this story results from the perceptions of an urban woman about village life or if, more likely, it recounts a situation that occurred

in a village familiar to her. This second scenario seems probable since many people who live in urban centres maintain close ties with their families residing in the surrounding towns and villages.

*Pluralist Lens Voting Patterns*

The pluralist perceptual lens is the only lens identified here that demonstrates a clear, though not statistically relevant, negative correlation with voting. Relatively low voter turnout among research participants who advocate political pluralism and indicate support for the opposition further emphasises their detachment from the electoral process (see Figure 13). Not surprisingly, perhaps, over half of the people, both men and women, whose TAT stories exhibited signs of this perceptual lens also told stories about people who find voting tedious. Although a high proportion of people who told TAT stories about the opposition were familiar with KMF-CNOE, this does not appear to have increased their inclination to take part in elections. There does seem to be some correspondence, however, between voting and income. Research participants who did not vote tended to be either on subsistence incomes or members of religious orders. In contrast, those who suggested that they supported the opposition and did vote were likely to be members of the middle and upper classes. Age and gender do not appear to have been consequential demographic factors here.

**The Local Lens**

A final perceptual lens that speaks directly to people's values, attitudes, expectations, and behaviour with regard to elections and electoral participation is characterised by a predilection for local politics and deference to authority. Stories about local political leaders corresponded with a distinct interest in local issues that directly impact people's daily lives (e.g. education, taxes, security). The analysis below suggests that respect for local political leaders stems from the belief held by these research participants that local authority figures have the power to improve their lives and will represent their interests. The high voter turnout among this group of research participants supports the truism that all politics is local.

**Table 8: Local Lens Demographic Details**

| | Male | Female | Voted | Did not vote | Under 18 | 18-30 | 31-45 | 46-60 | 60+ | Upper | Middle | Lower | Religious |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urban | 9 (21)* | 9 (19) | 14 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 10 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 13 | 0 | 2 |
| Rural | 6 (6) | 3 (5) | 6 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 0 |
| **Total** | 15 (27) | 12 (24) | 20 | 7 | 1 | 3 | 13 | 8 | 2 | 3 | 14 | 8 | 2 |

*Numbers in parentheses denote the total number of men and women included in the sample.

*Demographic Trends*

As demonstrated in Table 8, a clear majority of rural research participants told TAT stories that had a distinctly local flavour compared to a rather smaller, though still relevant proportion of urban research participants. The relatively high proportion of lower class research participants included in this group can be attributed in part to the large contingent of rural people whose TAT stories provided evidence of this perceptual lens. This demographic group similarly helps to account for the disproportionately high number of TAT stories told by people with only a basic education. Finally, the local perceptual lens emerged from TAT stories told by people in every age bracket and does not appear to be particularly common among any single age group.

*Local Lens Analysis*

In contrast to the TAT stories described in the previous section, the stories about Image 2 analysed here were unanimous in their portrayal of an interested and deferent crowd (*écouter l'autorité*) as the thematic network in Figure 17 clearly illustrates. Kamisy told a fairly typical TAT story indicative of this perceptual lens: "It is a meeting with the *président fokontany*. The people accept what he says. He's the authority so they have to accept everything he says." While these research participants sometimes said that people are not equal (*les gens ne sont pas égaux*), this was stated as a banal matter of fact instead of an accusation of dictatorship, as was

**Figure 17: Local Lens Thematic Network**



the case for people whose stories contained theme clusters reflective of the pluralist perceptual lens.

> Claudia:       The Mayor is telling the people what he will do in the future and what he has already accomplished. There is always someone who is higher than the others. The people are always at the bottom. There is no equality between people.
>
> Pierre:        In life, equality doesn't exist. The President or the leader is always above his subordinates.

When I asked these research participants how they felt about this inequality, they replied that it was just the way the world was and did not give any indication of being particularly troubled by it.

During data analysis, I was first alerted to the possible presence of this distinct perceptual lens when I noticed that several research participants identified

the man at the podium in Image 2 as a local political leader, either the Mayor (*maire de la commune*) or village President (*président fokontany*). Only occasionally did someone included in this group identify this figure simply as "the President" (*président*) (see Figure 17). I then began to discern other shared themes among TAT stories in which these political figures were identified. For instance, the dispositions that these research participants relied on to account for the response of the crowd contrast sharply with those identified in the previous section. The notion that the people in the audience would be talking amongst themselves (*parler entre eux*), for instance, is only of a moderate size in this thematic network, whereas it dominated the thematic network discussed in the section immediately above. Instead, the dominant disposition here is that some people agree (*quelques gens sont d'accords*) with the man at the podium and his agenda (*programme*). According to Lucien: "There are some people who believe everything that the President tells them. For some others, they aren't happy [about what the President says] but I don't know why." A minority of these research participants similarly said that the members of the audience were convinced (*convaincu*) while a few suggested that the speech was just electoral propaganda (*propagande*).

These TAT stories often recalled a situation in which the Mayor or village President is giving important information to the community that could have ramifications for people's daily lives. Setraniaina provided a common example of this type of story, beginning: "The village President is making a speech. He is giving important information to the people about the laws of the village." Often these public meetings were said to be on at least one of three topics: education (*éducation*), taxes (*il faut payer des impôts*) or the law (*la loi, droits*). These concerns were, however, sometimes conflated. For example, several rural people told TAT stories that raised the issue of illiterate people's right to education. Other local issues, by contrast, were more narrowly defined. One common storyline, for instance, involved the village President holding a meeting to discuss security (*sécurité du village*) because, as Tidahy explained, "there are thieves in every village." In these TAT stories, paying attention to proclamations by local leaders was described to be especially important when the topic under discussion has direct repercussions on daily life.

*Local Lens Voting Patterns*

A striking majority of people whose TAT stories focused on local issues and political leadership said that they had voted in the previous presidential election (see Figure 13). In fact, research participants who told TAT stories indicative of the local lens were more likely to vote than people associated with any of the other perceptual lenses described in this chapter. This could indicate that the basic theme clusters common to the local perceptual lens may be particularly relevant to understanding why ordinary people in Madagascar would choose to vote. This trend also contrasts sharply with the relatively low voter turnout among people whose TAT stories demonstrated support for the opposition and deep-rooted scepticism that their preferred candidate could actually be elected.

This exceptionally high voter turnout is particularly notable given the high proportion of rural people in this category for whom voting likely entails a considerable opportunity cost. It was not uncommon for TAT stories about elections told by rural people to describe voting as a hardship; this excerpt from Felana's TAT story is typical: "In villages the people are poor, and every day they need to find something to eat. Voting in elections takes time." The propensity of people who talked about local politics to vote further contributes to the notion that all politics is local. It makes sense that where people either personally know the candidates vying for a position (as is undoubtedly true at the village level) or think that decisions made by elected authorities will affect their lives (e.g. issues of security, educational opportunities) they are more likely to vote. Indeed, of the people I spoke with while conducting this research, the rural poor affirmed that they had voted in the most recent presidential election much more frequently than the urban poor, perhaps in part because of their more direct connection to local politics.

**Beware the Fallacy of Electoralism**

Three of the four perceptual lenses analysed in this chapter cast doubt on the reliability of elections as a meaningful or reliable indicator of democratic development. Having deemed Madagascar's December 2006 presidential elections free and fair, the international community happily concluded that incumbent President Ravalomanana had received a clear mandate from the people when he won the election with approximately 55% of the vote. The empirical evidence above

suggests, to the contrary, that a reasonable proportion of the population may be resigned to the ruling party's "inevitable dominance" (Bratton 1998: 65). This raises serious questions about the true nature of electoral participation in Madagascar and whether even multi-party elections actually result in political representation. Contrary to much of the established literature and the aspirations of those working in the democracy assistance industry (see Chapter One), the act of voting appears to have little or nothing to do with political legitimacy in the minds of most of the people I interviewed.

Over a decade ago, Terry Lynn Karl famously articulated concern about the "fallacy of electoralism" (1995: 73, also see Diamond 1996: 21-22). This assertion sparked a vibrant debate about how much we can reasonably expect from elections in developing democracies, and duly influenced the ways in which contemporary analysts and practitioners talk about their work. Recall, for instance, that the UK Minister for International Development insisted that elections in Afghanistan made his job easier, but that he had never expected them to be perfect (Gray 2009). Nor, for that matter, does DFID or any other democracy assistance organisation discussed in the context of this research explicitly equate democracy with elections. Despite the increasingly nuanced nature of the democracy discourse in recent years, the empirical evidence from eastern Madagascar suggests that a very wide gulf still separates the way ordinary people evaluate elections in their country and the conclusions drawn from those same election results by outside observers.

*Are Elections a Reasonable Indicator of Democracy?*

Although the above analysis is representative of the views of a rather small sample of people in one region of Madagascar, the empirical data raises suspicions about the accuracy of democracy assessment indices that place too much emphasis on quantifiable electoral statistics such as voter turnout. Freedom House, for instance, has consistently labelled Madagascar an electoral democracy since the publication of its 1993/1994 *Freedom in the World* Report. Granted, this organisation only classifies Madagascar as "partly free," a rating that reflects persistent limitations to political rights and civil liberties as well as only superficial political pluralism. Even this assessment, however, fails to accurately reflect the majority position of research participants who perceive their basic right to vote as meaningless (i.e. the tedious lens) and an absence of political pluralism (i.e. the pluralist lens). The Bertelsmann

Transformation Index presents, perhaps, the most encouraging assessment of the quality of electoral processes in Madagascar, giving the country a score of 8 out of 10 for both the "free elections" and "democracy performs" categories in the 2008 assessment. Scores of 6 through 8 indicate that:

> General elections are held and accepted in principle as the means of filling leadership positions. However, there are some constraints on the principle of equality. These may include withholding suffrage or the right to campaign for office de jure or de facto from part of the population, inconsistent assurance of free and fair elections, unelected officeholders, or elections that have perceptible but only minor influence on political outcomes. (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2009: 18)

That Madagascar ranks at the top-end of this scale, however, should indicate that elections in this country are subject to very few of these serious constraints. While this may be the view from the perch of international observers, the perspective from the ground is quite different. I do not deny the possibility that assessments made of some countries will correspond more closely with reality than the recent scores for Madagascar appear to. Even so, the fissure between internal and external assessments of elections in this country deserves closer inspection.

One critical factor contributing to free and fair elections is the ability – both legal right and logistical opportunity – to vote. Therefore, it is not surprising that high voter turnout is often cited in statements declaring elections – especially those taking place in developing democracies – free and fair. It occurs to me, however, that statistics on voter turnout are similar to statistics on unemployment. Unemployment figures are generally calculated based on the number of people actively seeking work and are often criticized for their omission of people who are under-employed and those unemployed who have ceased looking for employment (and are not claiming benefits). I suggest that a similar phenomenon might exist with electoral statistics, where some groups of people repeatedly slip under the radar.

Specifically, voter turnout is calculated based on the number of registered voters who turn up at the polls and does not reflect the number of people who are not registered. Consequently, the potential for unrepresentative voter turnout figures is particularly high in developing democracies where attaining both legal citizenship and voter registration can prove prohibitively onerous. Reported voter turnout in Madagascar is consistently registered at or above 60%. However, this figure does not take into account disenfranchised segments of society (e.g. third and fourth

generation immigrants, people in remote areas) who are not registered voters or do not have official birth certificates. Another group of non-voters I encountered were people who had registered to vote but who, for whatever reason, routinely fail to show up on voter registers and have consequently stopped bothering to show up at the polls altogether.

Problems such as these may not be widely recognized outside of a particular community or region but I found them to be very influential in shaping the contours of the perceptual lenses described above. The positive and tedious perceptual lenses both indicate that even people who do vote readily admit that electoral irregularities cast a shadow over their assessment of Madagascar's democratic credentials. This scepticism is, I anticipate, a contributing factor to the creation of alternative definitions of democracy that make more sense to communities who have started to lose faith in electoral processes (see Chapter Seven). More research would need to be done in order to fully explore whether the way in which voter turnout is calculated has significant effects on calculations used to determine whether elections are 'free and fair'.

Confusion as to whether voting is a right or an obligation blurs both the positive and tedious lenses, further diluting the significance that can reasonably be attributed to voter turnout.

| Botozaza: | In poor countries we are always told that it is your duty to vote, but in other countries it is your right. I think that democracy from this point of view is different here. We are a little bit obliged to vote." |
| Serge: | Actually, the only way that people experience democracy is through elections. Other than that, everything is closed. There aren't other opportunities to voice your ideas. |

And yet, the informal data on voter turnout collected directly from research participants clearly indicates that, despite these reservations, people continue to show up at the polls (see Figure 13). While it might seem paradoxical that people so disenchanted with the electoral process would continue to vote, it should be remembered that at least some of these people interpret voting as an obligation or

something they have to do, while others suspect that they may face repercussions if they fail to participate.[86]

It is possible, though improbable, that electoral deficits described by participants in this research are the exception to the rule. Critical analysis of elections in other developing democracies paints a remarkably similar picture. Of the 40 multiparty elections carried out in sub-Saharan Africa between the beginning of the third wave in 1989 and 1997, Brown and Kaiser found that only 15 were "significantly free and fair" and that a change of leadership resulted approximately one third of the time (2007: 1143). Chege similarly observes that "the assumption that a semi-honest election is better than no election at all" has resulted in external observers endorsing imperfect polls after which "autocratic rulers have subsequently tightened the screws of repression and sought to divide and intimidate legitimate opposition movements" (1995: 47). Where real prospects for political representation do not already exist, elections alone are unlikely to fill the void (di Palma 1990). Seriously flawed elections, furthermore, have the potential to strip future electoral processes of public legitimacy, as TAT stories indicative of the tedious and pluralist lenses clearly demonstrated. In some contexts, elections may signal little more than the illusion of choice, contributing only to a "parody of democracy" that should not be hurriedly mistaken for the real thing (Collier 2007: 147).

*Do Elections Provide a Forum for Political Representation?*

In Chapter One, I pointed out that many organisations engaged in democracy assistance couch their support for elections in language supportive of multi-party competition and political representation. The ability of alternative political parties to legally compete in the political arena is said to demonstrate the presence of a "somewhat real and independent opposition," at least enough to distinguish hybrid regimes from non-democracies (Diamond 1999: 16). Often admittedly imperfect – far from perfect, even – the regularisation of political competition is expected to mature over time into an indigenously appropriate model

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[86] Research participants had mixed opinions of the likely consequences for not voting. Some said that there would not be a consequence, or that the consequence would be the party in power announcing a landslide victory. Others, however, anticipated a more draconian punishment, such as having applications for official documents denied.

of representation (Chazan 1979: 153). In the mean time, even underdeveloped political parties can make a start at mobilizing voters, formulating policies, and aggregating public interests (Ware 1986: 130). This rationale makes logical sense and offers some credibility to the ritual rubber-stamping of flawed electoral processes by international observers. I do not take issue with the indicator itself, but rather the way opportunities for political representation via electoral processes (and political parties) are assessed by democracy experts.

Although the international democracy assistance industry widely regards political parties as an important mechanism for generating representative electoral outcomes, the analysis above should spark suspicions that external assessments of Madagascar's party system may not coincide with local evaluations. To briefly cite just one example, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index for 2008 gave Madagascar a score of 9 out of 10 in the category *Association and Assembly Rights*; this means: "The freedom of association and assembly is unrestricted within the basic demographic order." Experts would argue that multi-party politics are not foreign to Madagascar, tracing their existence back to the 1960s and the early days of independence. In the early 1990s, after more than two decades of either military rule or a one-party state, multi-party politics returned to the country and within a year Madagascar had more than 120 registered political parties (Marcus and Ratsimbaharison 2005: 496). The Bertelsmann Stiftung BTI 2008 country report likewise documented that there are currently around 160 registered political parties and "a large bloc of independents" crowding the political landscape.[87] But is formal electoral competition a reasonable guarantee of political inclusion and representation (Hawthorn 1993: 343-344)?

TAT stories indicative of the pluralist lens paint a very different picture, one in which opposition parties are prevented by authorities of the state from organising.[88] While the pluralist lens may not accurately represent the experience of opposition parties throughout the country, the 2008 BTI score does not seem to accurately reflect the experience of people in one of the country's urban centres. The

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[87] Independent candidates have long featured in Madagascar's elections. Covell notes how in the earliest elections candidates ran *sans partie* (i.e. without party affiliation) (1987: 29).

[88] This phenomenon is not unique to Madagascar; Forje similarly illustrates in the case of Cameroon that the legalisation of over 100 political parties should not be taken as an indicator of democratic participation in that country (1997: 317).

meta-analysis in Chapter Seven further illustrates how electoral representation advocated by democracy experts can face resistance from local communities. The local perceptual lens, by contrast, seems to suggest that it may be possible to achieve more meaningful political representation, for the time being anyway, outside of elections at the local or community level. Public meetings that allow people to discuss priorities like education and taxes without recourse to political parties have the potential to encourage informal participation that results in policy decisions representative of locally identified needs.[89] The empirical data analysed above may not be representative of the entire country; even so, that roughly half of urban people participating in this research believe that the opposition is barred from organising should trigger alarm bells.

Another important factor to consider is that political parties in Madagascar tend to rise and fall with the fortunes of their leaders; the analysis above illustrates that this disarray is not lost on Malagasy society (see Appendix 2). Many of the people taking part in this research lamented that political parties do not work, or at least not well. Indeed, the President's dominant Tiako i Madagasikara (TIM, *I Love Madagascar*) party was created after he came to power in 2002 and "is only as strong and autonomous as he allows it to be" (Marcus and Razafindrakoto 2003: 44, Marcus and Ratsimbaharison 2005: 307).[90] Cammack, Pool and Tordoff call these "parties of the state" and note that they are at high risk of being dominated by the executive rather than representing constituent interests in any practical way (1993: 95). With vast state resources at their disposal, opposition to such parties of the state becomes a hopeless cause and the long-term prospects for democratic governance grow dim (Cammack, Pool, and Tordoff 1993: 95, Chazan 1979: 136, Ng 1997: 21-22, Sørensen 2000: 298). Rakner, Menocal, and Fritz likewise identify political parties as "one of the weakest links in democratic development" in many emerging democracies around the world  (2007: 48). More sophisticated measurements better

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[89] According to a programme coordinator working in CARE's regional office, community development plans have successfully encouraged public participation in decision-making processes while helping donors and programme developers anticipate – and avoid – potential blockages (Interview, 4 August 2008).

[90] This was not, however, the first time that a President had established his political party *after* being elected. Ratsiraka likewise founded his ruling AREMA party after winning the executive in 1975 (Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 194).

able to distinguish "democracy without choices" are therefore needed before multi-party competition and elections can be reliably used as an indicator of political representation (Krastev 2007: 61, Pitkin 1967: 230).

*Is Democratic Participation a Human Right?*

As noted above, one line of reasoning within the literature on democratic development lends credence to this position, suspecting that African voters value the act of participating over any eventual electoral outcome (Ake 1993: 243). Participation, when viewed from this perspective, emphasises the act of showing up at the polls and taking part in the electoral process rather than the perceived desirability of electing one particular candidate over the others. The dominant competences and dispositions of the positive perceptual lens discussed above broadly reaffirm Ake's suspicion. These research participants demonstrated a clear understanding of voting procedures and affinity for the process; yet betray a lack of knowledge about candidates and certain disregard for the results. Only one person, for instance, brought up the announcement of election results in his TAT story about elections. That said, the political crisis that erupted in response to controversial election results in December 2001 casts some doubt on how pervasive this perceptual lens might be across the country as a whole. Alternatively, it is also possible that the positive perceptual lens yields to more dominant points of view in times of uncertainty or all-out crisis when more aggrieved emotions and patterns of behaviour become widespread.

While the perceptual lenses identified in this chapter suggest that elections in Madagascar may not meet people's participatory standards, TAT stories provided ample evidence that Malagasy citizens do value political participation. Sometimes equating participation and free speech with democracy, research participants whose TAT stories provided evidence of the tedious and pluralist lenses stated repeatedly that meaningful political participation was not possible in Madagascar at the time of my fieldwork. Although elections do not provide these people with the participatory outlets they crave, some research participants did provide clues about how they quell their democratic desires. As the next chapter illustrates, "when opposition views do not find a platform in government, they often find an outlet in the streets" (Price 2009: 164). Alternatively, the rural women I interviewed often told TAT stories suggesting that they did not find voting in elections worthwhile, yet some of their

stories about Image 2 indicate that they value contact with local political leaders (e.g. attending meetings).

While TAT stories indicative of the local and pluralist perceptual lenses suggest that the people telling them value political participation, it was less clear how highly these same people valued voting as an expression of political participation. Specifically, it was common for research participants telling TAT stories reflecting the positive or tedious perceptual lens to describe voting as a duty or an obligation, something that they were required to do whether they wanted to or not. The linguistic ambiguity between rights and duties characteristic of many TAT stories about voting suggests that although people value political participation as a human right, additional research would be required to determine whether people in the Antsinanana region of Madagascar make the same association between political participation and voting that international democracy experts are prone to endorse (see Chapter One).

The original contribution of these findings is that they reaffirm the idea that democratic participation is a human right even while simultaneously negating the accuracy of electoral indicators. It has been widely acknowledged that "African-style democracy," particularly at the local level, has a distinctly communal flavour, in juxtaposition to the individual interest articulation promoted by liberal democratic electoral processes (Bradley 2005: 418, also see Adar 1999, Ake 1993, Hawthorn 1993: 345). This communal political dynamic can, however, be a double-edged sword. The local perceptual lens analysis above suggests that locally focused politics can contribute to greater and more meaningful political participation. Some worry, however, that it can also lead to competition among communities rather than the establishment of ideologically driven political parties (Bradley 2005, Joseph 1997). If the relationship between the individual and the collective is indicative of the character democracy is likely to take in a society (Ake 1993: 243), knowing what people think about local politics, how they participate, and what this participation means may be useful starting points for understanding democratic dynamics at the national level. More to the point, if local politics, particularly local level democracy, can be demonstrated to function relatively well in a country like Madagascar where national politics remain little short of dysfunctional, it may represent an opportunity

for more innovative bottom-up approaches to democracy assistance that capitalise on the willing engagement of ordinary citizens.

**Conclusion**

The speculation that public affinity for electoral participation and consistent, if flawed, electoral contests might eventually yield a distinctly African model of political participation implies that people not only embrace the chance to partake in periodic polls, but that they imbue them with meaning. In order for this vision to come to fruition, however, elections must become more than ceremonial. The local evidence from eastern Madagascar presented in this chapter raises doubts about the prospects of this transpiring in Madagascar any time soon. Both the positive and tedious lenses identified from TAT stories about electoral processes indicate that Malagasy citizens understand technical electoral processes; it remains less certain that they find electoral participation either engaging or meaningful. One reason for this dearth of meaning identified by research participants whose TAT stories align with the pluralist perceptual lens is that they perceive the political arena as off limits to anyone who does not support the ruling regime (i.e. opposition parties, candidates, and supporters). Formal political competition is not the same thing as meaningful political opposition that offers voters a genuine choice. This has not prevented some research participants, both urban and rural, from engaging in alternative forms of political participation at the local or community level, however, as the local perceptual lens analysis above demonstrates.

Taken together, these four perceptual lenses suggest that purely electoral indicators of democracy may fail to accurately reflect local perceptions of political representation. Moreover, the international democracy assistance industry puts a premium on electoral participation while failing to recognise prohibitive conditions at the local level (e.g. voter registration irregularities, belief that elections are a waste of time) and, more importantly, alternative avenues for political participation that people may find more rewarding than voting (e.g. community meetings).

The generally high scores that Madagascar received from democracy indices prior to the outbreak of political unrest in the spring of 2009 contradict the local interpretations of Madagascar's electoral process discussed above. This raises the distinct possibility that an outwardly democratic electoral system may in effect mask

the absence or insufficiency of other basic democratic rights (Cammack, Pool, and Tordoff 1993: 131). Form, in other words, deviates drastically from function (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith: 2005: 199, Quigley 1997: 565). The following chapter follows through on this theme by investigating how people in the Antsinanana region of Madagascar interpret freedom of expression and their ability to access information necessary for making political choices. Despite the continued popularity of electoral indicators, we must not lose sight of the fact that "there is life after elections, especially for the people who live there" (Zakaria 1997: 40). How people experience politics and democracy between election cycles adds depth to assessments of a country's longer-term democratic prospects beyond formal electoral procedures.

# CHAPTER FIVE: FREE SPEECH AND INFORMAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

*Before there can be freedom to act, protest, or legislate,*
*there must be freedom to think*
*and then freedom to speak.*
*(Wolf 2008: 92)*

Although considerable attention is paid by the international community to the assessments made by election observers and whether or not they bestow their much-coveted stamp of approval, the interim period between election cycles is when democracy is really tested. Periods of public apathy and withdrawal from politics intermittently punctuated by intense, often violent outbursts of extreme discontent have defined Madagascar's post-independence history (Mukonoweshuro 1990). Growing pains commonly associated with modernisation could account for this cyclical pattern of social turbulence (Eisenstadt 1964: 352). The most recent political crisis, for instance, has been variously attributed to market fluctuations in the price of rice, the social impact of large-scale mining projects and a "tightening" of civil liberties (AFP 2009b, Bobb 2009, IRIN 2009b). Even so, this explanation, while accounting for the existence of grievances, fails to adequately resolve why a seemingly docile public would suddenly take to the street in protest.

Where the formal political arena remains closed to the general public, reliable information about policy decisions is sparse and free speech is suppressed, people may eventually resort to surrogate forms of participation outside of formal politics (Bratton and van de Walle 1997: 142-143). As the previous chapter demonstrated, short-term policies that focus narrowly on supporting electoral procedure risk failing to address the latent political grievances capable of undermining sustained democratic development in the longer term. Although some people interviewed for this research did find participation in elections meaningful, others indicated that electoral competition and participation in Madagascar are little more than a charade. Research participants of the second persuasion ardently pointed out, moreover, that most people lack the information required to make a meaningful or informed choice on election day, in part because the political opposition cannot organise or offer a

viable political alternative, as identification of the pluralist lens in the previous chapter demonstrated. The empirical evidence presented in this chapter largely supports Bratton and van de Walle's (1997) expectation that people primed for political participation by the institutionalisation of regular, if unsatisfactory, elections will eventually begin to look for alternative venues in which they can exercise their political voice.

Chapter One identified three prominent reasons why key democracy assistance agencies (e.g. UNDP, the Ford Foundation, International IDEA) continue to prioritise initiatives aimed at strengthening free speech, namely: (i) it enables political participation, (ii) it makes a fundamental contribution to the process of preference formation and (iii) it is essential for ensuring political accountability. In short, electoral participation and democratic governance more generally hinge on the ability of people to access relevant information and openly discuss political preferences between election cycles. Indeed democratic control and accountability have been characterised as necessary long-term accompaniments to short-term electoral processes. Before people can express their approval or discontent, they must be able to identify their own preferences and use these partialities to pass judgment on decisions taken by elected officials. This process of preference formation is not possible without access to relevant information, gleaned both from media outlets and open conversations with fellow citizens. Consequently, the free and independent media plays a vital role in monitoring the behaviour of elected officials (Whitehead 2002: 118). In addition to exerting control over the state apparatus and advancing the public interest, democratic governments must be responsive to the demands of the people (Pitkin 1967: 232). The informal participation of ordinary citizens in ongoing political dialogue, whether through the media or other forums (e.g. civil society groups) is essential in ensuring democratic accountability.

The perceptual lenses analysed in this chapter go some way in validating the theory that unsatisfactory elections can incite disgruntled citizens to endorse alternative brands of participation. They also provide a partial explanation as to why some people think displays of social unrest (e.g. protests) are legitimate or even necessary while others do not. These varying points of view have poignant

consequences for how ordinary citizens perceive democracy and democratic development locally.

## How Do Ordinary Malagasy Perceive Free Speech Rights and Informal Political Participation?

Although an intuitive connection exists between freedom of speech and access to information, I opted to treat these concepts as distinct topics of inquiry in TAT interviews. While it is true that a free press relies on the ability of journalists and commentators to openly discuss topical issues of their choosing without fear of persecution or censorship, I hoped to ascertain whether prevalent differences distinguish non-elite perceptions of an individual's right to free speech from the ability of the media to report on political issues and current affairs. It has been noted elsewhere that freedom of expression is sometimes considered a luxury in societies "where the majority of people are both poor and illiterate" (Smith and Loudiy 2005: 1114). Does this theory hold among non-elites in Madagascar, or are free speech and informal political participation within reach of even the poorest citizens? The interconnected reasons given by democracy assistance agencies for encouraging freedom of expression and a pluralistic media in developing democracies are relatively straightforward. Open political communication is itself a form of informal participation that enables citizens to form preferences and convey these preferences to their elected representatives. Does this logic hold in Madagascar? And, if so, do ordinary people believe that they are able to engage in the political sphere in this way?

I commissioned two images to solicit information pertaining to how people understand freedom of speech and political participation outside of elections. The first aimed to portray ordinary citizens speaking out about or protesting against something, while the second depicts a newspaper vendor (see Figure 18). This research did not enquire about alternative media outlets (i.e. radio, television, the internet). In retrospect, it could have been interesting to have had an additional image depicting radio communication to see if differences emerged in perceptions of different media outlets.

Having thus distinguished between free speech and access to information as discrete avenues for informal participation during the interview process, the three

**Figure 18: Images 3 and 4**

**Image 3**



**Image 4**

perceptual lenses that emerged during analysis demonstrate that these concepts are commonly conflated in the context of daily life. TAT stories indicate that both individuals and the media are prone to censorship, for example. That this might be the case is neither surprising nor unreasonable given that a free press depends on protected freedom of expression for journalists. Likewise, the ability of individuals to express political views relies in part on their ability to access relevant information. The analysis of tacit perceptual lenses in this chapter provides empirical evidence of an interconnected relationship between free speech, access to information and informal political participation.

Analysis of TAT stories revealed the possible presence of three discrete perceptual lenses with regard to free speech and access to information among people participating in this research. A clear schism emerged between those who indicated that protest – revolt even – is justifiable on the one hand, and those who believe that public demonstrations are either sometimes or always undesirable on the other. Underlying these embedded perceptions, however, rest more nuanced notions of free speech, with salient repercussions for how people seemed to construe democracy and their political environment at the time fieldwork was conducted. Careful consideration of these perceptual lenses also suggests some possible alternative interpretations of the country's most recent political unrest.

**The dissident lens**[91] emerged from stories suggesting that people value freedom of speech as a means of evoking change and improving their quality of life. These research participants were often acutely aware, however, of barriers to free speech and restrictions limiting their access to information. Others associated political speech and competition with perceived social – particularly religious – divisions and identified poverty as the most significant barrier obstructing their access to relevant information; I have labelled this point of view **the social divisions lens**. Finally, **the passivist lens** refers to the position voiced by a clear minority of research participants who indicated that they primarily associate free speech with learning about current affairs, particularly in the run-up to elections. While all of these perceptual lenses are treated as mutually exclusive in the following analysis,

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[91] Two of the 51 research participants opted out of telling a story about TAT Image 3 (see footnote 51); only Voary did not tell a TAT story about Image 3 or Image 4.

they do demonstrate some notable similarities (e.g. concern about censorship, interest in current affairs).

**The Dissident Lens**

The dissident perceptual lens suggests that some people view public protest – revolt even – as a way of instigating change and improving their lives. People who view the world through this particular lens also consistently expressed interest in current affairs but appear split over whether newspapers provide reliable information. Moreover, while they may be inclined to discuss current events, these research participants also suggested that people in positions of authority or power do not listen to the views of ordinary citizens. A small number of people who told TAT stories indicative of the dissident lens said during their TAT interviews that they were afraid to speak openly for fear of political imprisonment; many more voiced similar concerns after the recorder had been turned off.

*Demographic Trends*

It was relatively common for urban research participants to tell TAT stories evoking the basic themes discussed here, accounting for roughly half of my urban sample of both men and women. By contrast, a relatively small proportion of TAT stories told by rural men reflect this perceptual lens and no rural women told stories indicating this particular cluster of themes (see Table 9). Research participants who

**Table 9: Dissident Lens Demographic Details**

| | Male | Female | Voted | Did not vote | Under 18 | 18-30 | 31-45 | 46-60 | 60+ | Upper | Middle | Lower | Religious |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urban | 9 (21)* | 10 (19) | 11 | 8 | 1 | 5 | 8 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 13 | 0 | 3 |
| Rural | 2 (6) | 0 (5) | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| **Total** | **11 (27)** | **10 (24)** | **11** | **10** | **1** | **5** | **9** | **5** | **1** | **3** | **13** | **2** | **3** |

*Numbers in parentheses denote the total number of men and women included in the sample.

told TAT stories indicative of this point of view represent all age groups. People I would classify as middle class most often told TAT stories suggestive of this perceptual lens, a finding partially attributable to this group's urban bias.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that over half of the people who told TAT stories reflective of these themes had at least some university education and nearly all of them had finished high school. They were also, for the most part, familiar with the work of KMF-CNOE. Even so, these research participants indicated that they were less likely to vote than people whose TAT stories reflected the other perceptual lenses discussed in this chapter, resulting in the highest proportion of people from any perceptual lens category to be familiar with the work of KMF-CNOE and yet abstain from voting in the previous presidential election.

*Dissident Lens Analysis*

TAT stories indicative of the dissident perceptual lens highlighted underlying tensions between common perceptions of free speech as a desirable democratic right and practical, structural constraints on this freedom regularly experienced by research participants. The thematic network in Figure 19 illustrates the recurrent themes around which these research participants from the Antsinanana region conceptualise their ability to engage in informal political discourse between election cycles. These ideas cluster around three principal organising themes: interest in current affairs, aspiration to improve one's circumstances and prevalent obstacles preventing effective participation and political debate. The evidence provided by these TAT stories reinforces the important role that freedom of speech plays in informal participation and democratic accountability while simultaneously highlighting practical challenges to its implementation. In other words, free speech and access to information emerged as key points of contention between this group of research participants and (what they perceive as) an overbearing ruling regime.

That people are capable of changing things (*changer des choses*) immediately stands out in the thematic network for the dissident perceptual lens (see Figure 19), contributing to the broader organising theme that people want to improve their lives. A distinguishing feature salient in this point of view is the recurrent theme that public protest and even revolt (*révolter*) are reasonable methods of instigating that desired change. In their TAT stories, these research participants often described the

**Figure 19: Dissident Lens Thematic Network**

révolter

contre le pouvoir

améliorer la vie

changer des choses

n'a pas de l'argent
d'acheter
un
journal

l'autorité
n'écoute
pas

aspiration to
improve life
circumstances

restricted
access to
information

Freedom of speech
is valued as a way of
improving one's life
but is restricted by
censorship and
poverty

barriers
to free
speech

censeurs

analphabète

pauvre

des grèves sont interdits

emprisonnement politique

general interest
in current affairs

les journaux ne sont pas intéressants

la vérité

les journaux sont intéressants

discuter de
nouvelles

doit réfléchir

motivation of the people in Image 3 as desire to improve their quality of life (*améliorer la vie*). Public protest, therefore, is closely associated with social change in the eyes of these research participants. Their TAT stories further demonstrated recognition of the often unmistakeably political consequences of this position:

| | |
|---|---|
| Claudia: | They want to improve their life, that's why they've organised a demonstration – for change. That's why there is a revolution; we don't have any other choice. |
| Kamisy: | It's not a strike, but a social coup. The adults, the children, even the chickens are there! |
| Andoniaina: | It is a strike because of inflation; the price of rice keeps rising. Or maybe it is against the President. |

Only a small proportion of people whose TAT stories indicated the thematic trends discussed here, however, overtly stated that the protestors in Image 3 were

demonstrating against the political establishment (*contre le pouvoir*), as indicated by the relatively small size of this basic theme in the thematic network.[92]

Aspiration – the belief that their lives could be better – was a central theme to emerge from TAT stories indicative of the dissident lens. The historical pattern of periodic unrest in Madagascar reflects this position while suggesting a tentative connection between dispositions broadly supportive of demonstrations and the act of protest itself. Student protests in May 1972 (Covell 1987: 1, Randrianja and Ellis 2009: 190-191, Sharp 2002: 35). Food riots in May 1978 (Mukonoweshuro 1990: 384). Student riots lasting from December 1980 through February 1981 (Mukonoweshuro 1990: 392). Hundreds of thousands of people taking to the streets in support of a crippling general strike in June 1991 (Mukonoweshuro 1994: 365, Robinson 1994: 576). The debilitating general strike accompanying the 2001-2002 political crisis (Randrianja 2003). While by no means identical, these events nevertheless highlight the chronic pattern of often-violent political protest characteristic of contemporary Malagasy politics (Covell 1987, Mukonoweshuro 1990, Mukonoweshuro 1994). Chazan (1993) identifies a similar pattern of reactionary protest across Africa, juxtaposing this often-destructive unrest with constructive participation in formal democratic processes. It may be true that ordinary Malagasy have historically resorted to protest rather than pursuing institutional avenues to participation and change. What this collection of TAT stories clearly indicates, however, is that some people see protest as their only option for meaningfully voicing discontent, particularly over nocuous economic policies. This conclusion is somewhat less startling when further contextualised by the similar conclusion reached by some research participants that elections are inconsequential, a perspective discussed at length in Chapter Four.

Moreover, although research participants who told TAT stories reflective of the dissident lens strongly suggested that they associate free speech with change, roughly half of them believed that elected politicians or other people in positions of

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[92] I suspect, though cannot be certain, that the link between protest and grievances against the government might be stronger than indicated here. Not only does this have historical salience in the context of past political demonstrations, it is also reflected in the 2009 protests that eventually unseated President Ravalomanana. Additionally, despite assurances of confidentiality, many research participants remained afraid of speaking too freely and I expect that some may have tempered their positions in their TAT stories for this reason.

power do not listen to their views or grievances (*l'autorité n'écoute pas*). "They have the right to speak," Hantanirina explained, "but we don't know if the authorities will listen or not. But they do have the right." Observations such as this raise the prickly question of whether international organisations and democracy monitors could be mistaken to habitually associate political accountability so closely with formal free speech rights. Could formal free speech rights, under some circumstances, paradoxically make it more difficult for ordinary citizens to hold feckless elites to account? By providing a smokescreen between the outward illusion of accountability and unresponsiveness to internal, grassroots criticism, formal guarantees of free speech and access to information may serve to simultaneously deceive external observers and frustrate local people.

Religious organisations have historically played the role of arbiter between state and society in Madagascar. Although political regimes may have severely curtailed individual free speech, they could ill afford to suppress or ignore criticisms voiced by the Council of Christian Churches in Madagascar and its approximately 3 million followers (Mukonoweshuro 1990: 393). While TAT stories analyzed in the context of the social divisions and passivist perceptual lenses below indicated that 'the church'[93] still plays an important role in politics, there is reason to believe that the influence of the church on some sectors of Malagasy society might be waning. By way of illustration, in his story about TAT Image 3, Botozaza bluntly stated: "The people turn their backs on the church. That is to say that it isn't like before. In the past the church was always very important." Whereas the church once provided a powerful check on government, these research participants seem to have lost faith even in the church's ability to counter secular seats of power.[94]

In addition to the suggestion that political elites do not listen to ordinary citizens, recurrent concern about barriers to freedom of speech and expression are

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[93] In their TAT stories research participants almost never specified which church (i.e. Protestant, Catholic, Mormon, etc.) they belong to. The Council of Christian Churches in Madagascar includes, as the name suggests, all of the Christian churches in Madagascar under a single umbrella organisation; consequently, when some research participants spoke about "the church" they may have meant the Christian churches as a collective, as opposed to any single denomination.

[94] It is worth noting that the during the 2009 political crisis, the Rajoelina camp opposed negotiations mediated by church leaders, arguing they lacked credibility (BBC News 2009a).

immediately evident in TAT stories indicative of the dissident perceptual lens. Surprising, though, is the lack of a single, or even dominant, explanation for this organising theme. The most common source of anxiety, discussed further below in the context of the free press, was censorship (*censeurs*). A minority of these people also indicated that they feared politically motivated imprisonment (*emprisonnement politique*) for saying the wrong thing or speaking out too strongly against the regime. Although relatively few people included this disposition in their TAT stories, concern about politically motivated arrest or imprisonment often came up outside the formal interview (i.e. before the recorder had been switched on or after I had turned it off). A final recurrent disposition reflective of perceived barriers to free speech is that strikes and demonstrations are forbidden anyway (*des grèves sont interdits*), so discussions of their utility or, indeed, possible consequences are immaterial. A few research participants included in this group pointed out that concern about censors and imprisonment are irrelevant because most people do not have the opportunity to publically criticise the government in the first place. To illustrate, Velohasina lamented: "They want to [protest]. They feel that it's their right, but how can they go about it? That's the problem. You don't dare. People can change things like that, but we can't organise demonstrations now. It's forbidden."

Although many of these research participants interpreted Image 3 literally and told stories overtly about political protest, the competences and dispositions contained within these stories nevertheless reveal perceived limitations to freedom of speech more generally. While people who have adopted this point of view may harbour desires to speak out, the evidence provided in these TAT stories suggests that they are unlikely to take the risk, particularly given that they paint the government as disinterested and unresponsive. These TAT stories, therefore, suggest a rupture between, on one hand, people's desire to enact or even demand change and, on the other, their tendency to believe that government sanctioned restrictions on free speech (e.g. censors, political imprisonment, elite indifference) obstruct meaningful access to the political domain.

Active interest in current affairs represents another common characteristic of the dissident perceptual lens. Most research participants whose TAT stories about Images 3 and 4 included these clusters of basic themes said that the people in Image 4 found newspapers interesting (*les journaux sont intéressants*). A plurality of these TAT

stories also described a discussion taking place about current affairs between the vendor and the man stood next to him (*discuter de nouvelles*), indicating that people discuss what they read in the newspaper with people other than just friends and family. While some of these research participants believe that what they read in print is the truth (*la vérité*), the thematic network illustrates that a similar proportion expressed that you have to reflect on what you read and make up your mind for yourself (*doit réfléchir*):

> Olivier: Some of what is in the newspaper is true, of course. But sometimes there is also propaganda to cover up [the government's] misdeeds. Even so, it's important to read newspapers.
>
> Severiny: The newspapers are censored. We can't speak the whole truth.
>
> Julien: Newspapers aren't interesting. They're always censored so it isn't worth the trouble [to read them]…It's dangerous. If you talk too much you're put in prison. It's a dictatorship. Even the newspapers can't do anything [about it]. [Making a connection between Images 3 and 4.]

Interpretations like these suggest deep-seated scepticism among some Malagasy about the reliability of the media, evidenced by accusations of censorship or government propaganda. While most of these research participants said that they find current events interesting, they simultaneously voiced scepticism that they can rely on newspapers to present unbiased or complete accounts of current affairs. This explains the apparent contradiction in some TAT stories that articulated both curiosity about current affairs and the opinion that newspapers are not interesting (*les journaux ne sont pas intéressants*).

Once again the clear competence (i.e. 'factual' knowledge) of censorship raises serious questions about the depth of freedom of speech in Madagascar. Through the dissident perceptual lens, people see a political landscape in which freedom of expression exists on the surface; there are several newspapers and radio stations, for example. Behind this facade, however, sources of information are known to be stifled by government censorship. The instinct demonstrated by these research participants for self-censorship appears to further exacerbate speculation that other people, including journalists, limit what they say as well. As I explained in Chapter Three, general reluctance to speak openly about politics and democracy prompted my adoption of alternative research methods. Furthermore, the National Coordinator of KMF-CNOE, Voahangy Raveloson, and the Public Relations

Director, Jean Fidèle, confirmed that people have to exercise caution when speaking about politics, making the work of organisations advocating political reform considerably more difficult.[95] It is not for me to say whether the fear that prompts people to self-censor is justified. The fact remains that a significant proportion of people who took part in this research indicated that they interpret their political environment through a lens coloured by fear and suspicion, which has direct bearing on their behaviour (i.e. they are afraid to speak openly about political topics, including their discontent with the current regime).

A final concern voiced by a significant minority of research participants whose TAT stories fit the general thematic pattern of the dissident perceptual lens was restricted access to information. Several people said that the man talking to the newspaper vendor in Image 4 (see Figure 20) was either illiterate (*analphabète*) or did not have enough money to buy a newspaper (*pas de l'argent d'acheter un journal*). Indeed, poverty (*pauvre*) was a recurring theme throughout these TAT stories. This is somewhat surprising given that, as noted above, the research participants prone to telling the sorts of TAT stories analysed in this section tended to be relatively well educated and most likely earn a decent income by local standards. Claudia explained, for instance, that newspapers are too expensive for most people to buy every day, indicating that they are a little luxury even for people with a steady income. That said, while conducting urban interviews it was not uncommon to see *pousse-pousse* drivers

**Figure 20: Magnification of Image 4**



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[95] Interview conducted at the Antananarivo office of KMF-CNOE on 29 September 2008.

193

reclined on their rickshaws flicking through tattered newspapers. This suggests that even though it may not be within most people's means to purchase a newspaper daily, old copies are recycled and passed from person to person. Therefore, that the urban poor are uninformed may be a common misperception. On the whole, I suspect that the descriptions these research participants offered of illiteracy and poverty likely reflect their perceptions of society, while their positive disposition toward protest and palpable frustration at their inability to effectively speak truth to power reflects their higher level of education.

The global theme uniting this particular point of view, therefore, is the perceived importance of freedom of expression as a tool for improving one's life coupled with dissatisfaction over current standards of both free speech and access to information. The common perception that freedom of speech is restricted has significant consequences for how people subscribing to the dissident perceptual lens understand democracy and their own political agency. Velohasina succinctly summarised this point of view when he concluded: "There's no freedom of expression. Voilà! What is democracy? It's freedom of expression." Curtailment of free speech – by both the government and self-censorship – contributes to the perception of a democratic deficit, which is then refracted as positive dispositions toward the forbidden act of protest. The TAT stories discussed here indicate that these research participants understand demonstrations to be an act of last resort in combating malign policies and exercising their democratic rights. Possible conclusions about the state of democracy in Madagascar that can be drawn from this research are discussed at length in Chapter Seven.

While the interpretation of Image 3 as a revolution or social movement was widespread among this collection of TAT stories, such heated emotion was not characteristic of all TAT stories told about this particular image, as analysis of the social divisions and passivist perceptual lenses, below, demonstrates. This striking differentiation of tone lends credence to the likely existence of multiple perceptual lenses, each conducive to a unique interpretation of both reasonable and available avenues for personal expression and political voice. It also confirms the relative ambiguity of the image: although the picture is clearly of some sort of protest, research participants attributed very different meanings to the scene depicted.

**The Social Divisions Lens**

The social divisions lens shares the disposition that protest can be acceptable or even worthwhile with the political worldview described in the previous section. This distinct point of view, however, attributes greater significance to the influences of religion and poverty on the capacity of people to access information and express their (political) views. In particular, this group of research participants was quick to associate public protest with socio-religious division, an impression that contributed to their reluctance to endorse strikes or demonstrations despite agreeing with the importance of free speech in principle. These TAT stories similarly appear to indicate that persistent social and religious divisions may influence the way in which some people perceive the press and other mainstream information outlets (e.g. television, radio).

*Demographic Trends*

The social divisions perceptual lens is representative of a roughly similar proportion of research participants to the dissident lens, although the demographic characteristics of these two groups of people differ somewhat. Evidence of this particular political worldview was deduced from the TAT stories told by most rural men and a rural woman as well as approximately one third of the urban sample (see Table 10). While this group of research participants suggests that the social

**Table 10: Social Divisions Lens Demographic Details**

| | Male | Female | Voted | Did not vote | Under 18 | 18-30 | 31-45 | 46-60 | 60+ | Upper | Middle | Lower | Religious |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urban | 10 (21)* | 5 (19) | 8 | 7 | 1 | 3 | 8 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 8 | 3 | 1 |
| Rural | 4 (6) | 1 (5) | 4 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 |
| **Total** | 14 (27) | 6 (24) | 12 | 8 | 1 | 5 | 8 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 10 | 6 | 1 |

*Numbers in parentheses denote the total number of men and women included in the sample.

divisions lens might be more pervasive among men than women, establishing this trend would require additional research with a larger sample. Like the dissident lens, this particular perceptual lens is broadly representative of the age demographics for the overall sample. It tended to be less representative, however, of religious orders.

It is worth noting that most urban research participants who told stories reflecting this point of view and said that they had voted in the previous presidential election also generally indicated that they were familiar with KMF-CNOE. Urban research participants included in this group who said that they had not voted, by contrast, most often said that they did not know about this organisation and its civic education efforts. All but one rural research participant said that they had voted in the previous presidential election; only one of these people, however, recognised the name of KMF-CNOE. Unlike the dissident perceptual lens, which reflects the perspective of highly educated research participants, no educational trend emerged for people whose TAT stories reflect the social divisions perceptual lens. The academic background of these research participants ranges from no formal education to a masters degree; the median educational achievement is roughly the end of secondary school.

*Social Divisions Lens Analysis*

Outsiders and Malagasy alike commonly describe the schism between Merina and *côtier* as 'ethnic'. This colloquialism, however, hides subtler and, it would seem, equally explosive causes of social tension identified in the Preface to Part II. Even so, Mukonoweshuro observes that the Merina-*côtier* divide has "assumed an ideological character, with distinct bases of support" (1990: 389). TAT stories displaying characteristics of the social divisions perceptual lens reflect this point of view, but pointedly associate social division with religious tension more often than 'ethnic' rivalry. For these research participants, the competition between Catholics and Protestants is an identifiable social fissure. Moreover, the Merina-*côtier* schism, though convenient, lumps all non-Merina into a single category whereas the people I spoke to were more likely to describe themselves as belonging to their regional ethnic group. Therefore, whereas ethnic labels and classifications can be quite complicated, religious affiliation seems to be a more easily identifiable point of rupture for these research participants. While religious differences may be little more than a proxy for ethnic rivalry, the language used by people telling TAT stories analysed in this section

is distinctly that of religion, so that is the language used in examining the TAT stories as well. The image of a protest in Image 3 raised uneasy questions for individuals who both advocate the advance of their own social group and retain genuine concerns that religious division could escalate into widespread social conflict. Careful analysis of these TAT stories likewise demonstrates that perceived socio-religious divisions have permeated how these research participants access information about current events.

One principal, unifying characteristic of these TAT stories is a commonly identified link between social unrest and religious division. The basic theme division between Catholics and Protestants (*division entre les catholiques et les protestants*) appears relatively large in relation to other competences and dispositions in the thematic network, and thus characterised a plurality of these TAT stories (see Figure21, below). People who recognised this social division in Image 3 sometimes focused on the presence of the priest/pastor in the lower left-hand corner (see Image 3 in Figure 18, above).[96] Less common but still notable was the inclination for a minority of these research participants to state outright that "the church" (either Catholic, Protestant or of an unspecified denomination) is active in the political domain (*l'église est active au niveau politique*):

> Volatiana: The religious [orders] are very active in politics here. It's good because they have a lot of influence over people.
>
> Tidahy: The Christian community in Madagascar is divided. The Catholics and Protestants often argue among themselves over political issues.

In pronounced contrast to the dissident perceptual lens above, this political worldview still recognises the powerful influence of the church. That said, not all

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[96] While it is possible that the presence of this figure in the image influenced the content of these TAT stories, it was still up to individual research participants whether and how to interpret him. Aware of a possible socio-religious cleavage, I wanted one of the TAT Images to include a religious figure and conveyed this to the artist when I commissioned the images. The undeniable variation amongst stories about Image 3 convincingly demonstrates that the image itself does not cue a particular response. Not all research participants attributed the same level of importance to the priest/pastor; if, indeed, they singled him out for description at all. While the stories discussed in this section do broadly conform to Merina-*côtier*-cleavage stereotypes, analysis of the dissident lens, above, suggests that, for some people at least, religious influence is not as strong or important as it once was, while the discussion of TAT stories in the section that follows demonstrates that other research participants identify religion as a moderating influence.

**Figure 21: Social Divisions Thematic Network**

contre le président

division entre les catholiques
et les protestants    l'église est active au niveau politique

des grèves sont bonnes parfois

**link between religious division and social unrest**

analphabète

pauvre

les gens
veulent savoir
des nouvelles

Perceived religious and social divisions colour attitudes toward the press and interpretations of public protest

**moderate interest in current affairs**

la
vérité

**restricted access to information**

les journaux sont
intéressants a quelques
gens

n'a pas de
l'argent
d'acheter
un journal

**somewhat sceptical of press reliability**

il y a des
journaux pour
et contre l'état

censeurs

doit
réfléchir    pas vrai

research participants who thought that strikes were sometimes appropriate linked this position to the message of the church; the disproportionate sizes of these themes in the thematic network visually demonstrates this differentiation.

Despite the common perception of religious division among people who told TAT stories suggestive of the social divisions perceptual lens, there was no agreement among these research participants as to whether the church condoned or condemned the strike. While it is significant that some people made a connection between the church's involvement in politics and the strike depicted in Image 3, others attributed the unrest to socio-religious tension, but were sceptical as to whether the priest/pastor endorsed it. Only rarely did research participants who likely view the political landscape through this particular perceptual lens explicitly

state that the strike was against the President (*contre le président*). This too, however, could be interpreted as a sign of religious division. Although they were hesitant to say so when the recorder was running, some of these research participants were openly resentful that a Protestant Merina was President; by virtue of my research location, people available to take part in this study were predominantly *côtier* and Catholic. Consequently, one possible interpretation of the themes analysed here could be that strikes are sometimes permissible, particularly when they promote the objectives of one's own (religious) community.

The idea that strikes are ok when they support the position of a particular group or community is also reflected in the dominant disposition in Figure 21 that strikes are sometimes justified (*des grèves sont bonnes parfois*). The qualification "sometimes" distinguishes this collection of TAT stories from the rest. Whereas other research participants stated definitively that protests were either an acceptable form of self-expression (the dissident lens) or never acceptable (the passivist lens), the people who told TAT stories suggestive of social divisions remained decidedly uncommitted. It is also notable that people included in this group most commonly identified the scene in Image 3 as a strike, in contrast to the language of protests and coups characteristic of the dissident lens above.

I suggest that the dissident and social divisions perceptual lenses overlap somewhat, as TAT stories indicative of both worldviews portrayed demonstrations or strikes as a reasonable way of making a point to otherwise aloof political elites, at least under certain circumstances. Likewise, people attuned to both perspectives believe that it is possible to improve their lives by protesting. Herilaza, for instance, first described Image 3 as a general strike before going on to explain: "the people think that they can change their situation, so they will carry on striking." This TAT story excerpt sounds remarkably similar to some of those discussed above in the context of the dissident lens, while the remainder of his story better fits the clusters of basic themes discussed here. Like the dissident lens, the social divisions perceptual lens is tinted by disillusionment that public displays of disquiet are not tolerated by the political regime. Serge, for example, expressed frustration that it was no longer possible to organise protests, attributing their prohibition to "the mentality of the President." That these perceptual lenses overlap is not surprising nor does it necessarily suggest a merely superficial distinction between them. Perceptual lenses,

as defined in Chapter Two, are amorphous and it is entirely reasonable that otherwise divergent worldviews could share some common competences and dispositions that condition people to interpret certain situations in similar ways.

As stated above, one such distinguishing feature of this point of view is the notion of social division, which permeates perceptions of the media as well as social relations more generally. For instance, some research participants whose TAT stories indicated the social divisions perceptual lens pointed out that there are newspapers both for and against the state (*il y a des journaux pour et contre l'état*). Their TAT stories about Image 4 also tended to suggest a moderate interest in current affairs (*les gens veulent savoir des nouvelles, les journaux sont intéressants a quelques gens*); although, a comparison of the respective thematic networks indicates that this disposition may not be as strong here as it was for the dissident perceptual lens. Furthermore, most people who told TAT stories conforming to the social divisions lens indicated that they thought newspapers told the truth (*la vérité*) and were rather less likely to suggest that people have to think for themselves when reading about current affairs. One possible reason for this trend is that these research participants chose to read newspapers known to reflect their own point of view. Rose, for example, acknowledged that the only newspaper she read and trusted was a bi-weekly publication circulated by a Catholic publisher.

Widespread confidence in at least some media outlets is partially precluded by suspicion of censorship (*censeurs*). While Rose thought that there was still room for newspapers to criticise the President, she said that such scrutiny is no longer possible on television or the radio. She went on to cite the example of a local radio station that she believed had recently been closed by the government. It is, perhaps, no coincidence that protesters took to the streets in the early months of 2009 after President Ravalomanana (a Protestant Merina) temporarily closed a rival's television station for broadcasting an interview with the exiled former President (and Catholic *côtier*) Ratsiraka (AFP 2009a, Lough 2009b, Bearak 2009b). Likewise, a smaller though still notable group of these research participants said that newspaper content was either not true (*pas vrai*) or required reflection (*doit réfléchir*):

> Moravelo: Despite the efforts of journalists, there are censors and some information can't be distributed.

> Pierre: In a democratic country, people should read the newspaper; it is necessary to know what is going on in their community…We talk about freedom of the press, but there are bureaucrats who forbid you to write about things. If you ignore them, your newspaper will be confiscated [by the government].

Pierre was also quick to point out, however, that journalists are not to blame for weaknesses in their reporting because they are denied the information and tools necessary to uncover the truth. Whereas research participants who told TAT stories indicative of the dissident perceptual lens regarded censorship as a form of suppression, the connotation in the context of the social divisions lens is that censorship and bias in the media further fracture an already divided society. Projecting the stance of the government (i.e. Protestant Merina) as the truth, for instance, only serves to further raise suspicions of Catholic *côtiers*.

Finally, as the competences and dispositions clustered around the organising theme restricted access to information demonstrate, people telling these stories almost universally identify the cost of newspapers as a barrier to knowledge of current events. Most people who told TAT stories inclusive of these basic themes said, for instance, that the man speaking to the newspaper vendor in Figure 20 above could not afford to buy a newspaper (*n'a pas de l'argent d'acheter un journal*). Other less frequently cited obstacles preventing ordinary people from accessing information include poverty (*pauvre*) and illiteracy (*analphabète*). It was typical for research participants telling these TAT stories to include comments such as:

> Tidahy: Most Malagasy people are not literate yet, and even those who are struggle to find enough money for their daily life.

> Volatiana: Some people want to buy newspapers but they can't because they don't have any money. They want to, but they can't. In Madagascar, the majority of people are very poor. Newspapers aren't very expensive, only 200Ar (approximately 10 cents or 6 pence), but eating is the priority.

As I suggested in the context of the dissident perceptual lens, given that many research participants whose TAT stories voiced concern over illiteracy are, once again, reasonably well educated, descriptions of illiteracy may be a reflection on society as opposed to a statement of personal competence. As illustrated in the following section, illiteracy surprisingly did not surface as a concern for some of the least-educated participants in this research.

In closing, the social divisions perceptual lens has at least two possible analytical interpretations.[97] On one hand, the people who told these TAT stories are distinctly aware of religious, social, and political division and are of a generally positive disposition toward freedom of expression and information, particularly when it supports their own point of view or social group. Their reservations about strikes could, moreover, be attributed to deep social divisions and memories of previous conflicts. The 2001-2002 conflict, which paralysed the country's economy for months, divided Malagasy society along political and socio-religious lines. Alternatively, despite awareness of entrenched social divisions, these TAT stories may nonetheless indicate the existence of a pluralistic and relatively vibrant media (i.e. newspapers for and against the state), requiring at least a modest tolerance of freedom of expression. Indeed, some research participants pointed to the free press as a necessary feature of democracy and were critical in their TAT stories of politically motivated attempts to stifle it. In this interpretation, protest becomes a more viable option when resorted to in defence of this basic democratic right.

The global theme encompassing the social divisions perceptual lens, then, is that social and religious cleavages influence perceptions of both the press and public protest. This dominant perspective has repercussions for characteristic attitudes towards freedom of expression (e.g. the qualification that strikes are sometimes acceptable) and access to information (e.g. publications known to support ones own position are trustworthy). While this perceptual lens by no means explains the political crisis that erupted in February and March of 2009, identification of this point of view among my sample of ordinary Malagasy provides much-needed context for the protests that broke out in response to President Ravalomanana's forced closure of an independent television station.

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[97] Alternatively, it is possible that the various points of view expressed in these TAT stories could be indicative of a plurality of different perceptive lenses. Confirming this, however, would require additional research with a much larger sample. Two salient features, moreover, unify the TAT stories analysed in this section. First, these research participants interpret protest as indicative of socio-religious division. And second, they do not state definitively that strikes or protests are either worthwhile (the dissident lens) or inappropriate (the passivist lens).

**The Passivist Lens**

The passivist perceptual lens is distinct as the only point of view discussed here to emerge from TAT stories in which strikes and demonstrations were unconditionally described as wrong or bad. It is also the only perceptual lens evident in the TAT stories I collected in which poverty and illiteracy were not key themes to emerge with regard to newspapers or access to information. Although relatively few people from my sample told TAT stories indicative of this particular worldview, the distinct features of these stories made it illogical to include them in either of the two thematic networks already discussed in this chapter. Consequently, they indicate the likely presence of a third distinct perspective on free speech and access to information in the Antsinanana region of Madagascar.

*Demographic Trends*

Noticeably fewer people from my sample appear to subscribe to this perceptual lens than either of the others discussed in this chapter (see Table 11). However, as this point of view was shared by most of the rural women who responded to this image,[98] it is reasonable to predict that this perspective might be

**Table 11: Passivist Lens Demographic Details**

| | Male | Female | Voted | Did not vote | Under 18 | 18-30 | 31-45 | 46-60 | 60+ | Upper | Middle | Lower | Religious |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urban | 2 (21)* | 4 (19) | 5 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 1 |
| Rural | 0 (6) | 3 (5) | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| **Total** | 2 (27) | 7 (24) | 8 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 1 |

*Numbers in parentheses denote the total number of men and women included in the sample.

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[98] One of the other rural women told a TAT story reflective of the social divisions lens and the other did not tell TAT stories about these Images.

more prominent than the results from my relatively small sample would suggest. Most Malagasy live in rural areas, so it stands to reason that this perceptual lens would be more pervasive in a sample that more accurately represented the country's rural population. Likewise, urban women also appear more likely to tell stories containing this particular cluster of themes than their male counterparts. Finally, it is notable that the passivist perceptual lens appears to be most common among people over the age of 30, suggesting that younger citizens may be more likely than their elders to resort to protest.

The research participants whose TAT stories are discussed in this section were more likely to vote and rather less likely to be familiar with the work of KMF-CNOE than people whose TAT stories conformed more closely to either of the perspectives discussed above. Those not familiar with KMF-CNOE, both rural and urban, had not finished high school, while the four people who said that they did know the work of this organisation were all urban and had completed at least some higher education.

*Passivist Lens Analysis*

Although the passivist perceptual lens was less common among people included in this sample than the other lenses discussed in this chapter, it represents a unique point of view that likely yields alternative behaviour patterns to those described above. The accounts offered by these research participants painted protest in an unequivocally negative light. Instead, all disputes or controversies should, these people say, be discussed face-to-face and settled peacefully. As the thematic network in Figure 22 also demonstrates, these research participants similarly rely on interpersonal communication to access information. Despite having considerably less formal education than people who told stories exhibiting trends of the other perceptual lenses, the research participants whose TAT stories are discussed here generally did not cite poverty or illiteracy as obstacles to learning about current events. Perhaps the least developed of the perspectives analysed in this chapter, the passivist perceptual lens nevertheless surely warrants consideration.

As the thematic network demonstrates, the TAT stories from which this perceptual lens was extracted were somewhat less diverse in content than the others discussed above (see Figure 22). The dominant disposition in the thematic network

**Figure 22: Passivist Lens Thematic Network**

l'église a beaucoup d'influence

les grèves ne sont pas bonnes

n'a pas de l'argent d'acheter un journal

la propagande électorale

la publicité

the church promotes calm

$V$alue discussion both as a way of obtaining information and mediating social conflict

general interest in current affairs

les journaux sont intéressants

acquire information though discussion

discuter de nouvelles

les gens veulent savoir des nouvelles

– and the principal unifying theme of this point of view – is that strikes are not good (*les grèves ne sont pas bonnes*). Indeed, this common conviction distinguishes these TAT stories from those suggestive of the other two perceptual lenses outlined above. An older woman named Soazy was typical of people in this group in saying that strikes are not good because they risk augmenting the problem. Some of these research participants, like Felana, went on to say that it is preferable to discuss problems in a less provocative way: "In general, strikes are not good. It is better to talk face-to-face to explain what doesn't work." These TAT stories were similarly prone to the disposition that the church is influential (*l'église a beaucoup d'influence*). However, in contrast to the social divisions perceptual lens that sees religion as socially divisive, research participants subscribing to the passivist lens regard religion as a moderating force that encourages people to show restraint and work out their problems peacefully. To illustrate, Mahefa interpreted Image 3 this way: "There is a strike. The priest intervenes because he is against strikes and the people turn towards him." Although Mahefa did not elaborate any further, the insinuation was clearly that the priest would successfully disperse the crowd.

Like both of the perceptual lenses discussed previously in this chapter, the evidence provided by these TAT stories demonstrated interest in current affairs (*les*

*gens veulent savoir des nouvelles*) and most of these research participants said that newspapers are interesting (*les journaux sont intéressants*). Unlike the research participants discussed in previous sections, however, these people tended to associate newspapers either with advertising (*la publicité*) or electoral propaganda (*la propagande électorale*) rather than current affairs. This could suggest that these research participants tend to access newspapers primarily in the run-up to an electoral contest, which would not be entirely surprising given that many of them are on subsistence incomes with limited education. Indeed, Lalao specifically stated that people often read the newspaper in the run-up to elections. She also interpreted the notice boards behind the man reading a newspaper in Image 4 as political posters, saying: "Each candidate puts his advertisement on the notice board and as the election approaches everyone looks at it."

This does not necessarily imply, however, that these research participants' access to information is prohibitively restricted. In rural settings, news is more likely to spread by either word of mouth or radio than print media, if for no other reason than the inherent problems posed by physical distribution in a country with limited infrastructure. Therefore, even if someone cannot afford to buy a newspaper (*n'a pas de l'argent d'acheter un journal*), s/he can still discuss current events with someone else who is better informed (*discuter de nouvelles*). Niry, for instance, said that the man speaking to the newspaper vendor in Figure 20 above could not afford to buy his own newspaper, but went on to describe a situation in which this man asks the vendor what is in the paper that day. Alternatively, Niry explained, the poor man could approach the man on the right side of the image reading the newspaper and ask him for the day's news. The stories told by these research participants further indicate that even people with only a minimal education are keen to know about current affairs and feel that they can meaningfully participate in public discourse, at least locally.

This perceptual lens may have less to say about the nature of the free press in the Antsinanana region than the perceptual lenses analysed above; however, it still adds to our understanding of who has access to information and how people communicate. Although censorship was not a basic theme to emerge from these TAT stories, Telovavy earnestly pointed out that "there is only one national radio [station] in this country, so it is easy for the party in power to manipulate people in

the villages because [that radio station] is their only source of information."[99] That they associate newspapers with electoral campaigns could nevertheless demonstrate that people who view the landscape through this perceptual lens are interested in political affairs, an idea substantiated by their particularly high voter turnout in comparison with the other perceptual lenses discussed in this chapter.

Apart from indicating that public demonstrations or strikes are not good, the TAT stories included here reveal little about perceptions of individual free speech. These research participants were only moderately more concerned about freedom of the press. Although Todilahy asserted: "one of the pillars of democracy is access to information – freedom of expression with regard to the press." It may also be that, for this group of people, free speech is not an immediately pressing issue. In particular, the rural women whose stories reflected this point of view live in a small village where everyone knows everyone else. Roughly half of the people who told these stories also told TAT stories about other images that focused on local issues and local politics, suggesting that they are willing and able to participate in the discussion of locally relevant issues. This does not seem to be the case, by contrast, for urban dwellers who feel voiceless and indicated that their grievances are of a different nature (i.e. the perceived suppression of opposition parties or constitutional rights like freedoms of speech and association). The global theme for the passivist perceptual lens, therefore, is that people sharing this perspective are interested in current events and value discussion. Their vigour is tempered, however, by religious influence and interest in primarily local affairs that they can resolve on a personal or community level.

**Free Speech or Just Noise?**

Whereas the perceptual lenses identified in Chapter Four generally cast doubt over whether elections are a reliable indicator of democracy, the three perceptual lenses here all affirm that free speech and access to information are important democratic assets. The analysis above also highlights, however, that people living within the same community can have very different understandings of and

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[99] Marcus and Razafindrakoto similarly observe how President Ratsiraka was able to use his control of state radio to "condition" voters in the period preceding the controversial 2001 Presidential elections (2003: 30).

expectations for free speech as a tool for political participation. Those who see the world through the dissident lens, for instance think that public protest and social unrest, dependent on free speech rights, are the only way to get the attention of political elites and change one's life for the better. Research participants whose TAT stories in response to Images 3 and 4 indicate the passivist perceptual lens, by contrast, value free speech as a mechanism for dialogue and resolving issues peacefully. Most research participants seemed to agree that people should be aware of what is going on in their country and that newspapers and other media outlets were an important source of information.

Therefore, the general hypothesis of the global democracy assistance industry – that free speech is necessary for political participation – seems to resonate with the various perspectives of research participants. Expected correlations with preference formation and political accountability, however, remain less certain. Moreover, initiatives that promote free speech without regard for local perceptions and context (i.e. socio-religious division, widespread censorship, fear of political reprisals) may encounter resistance.

*Are Free Speech and Access to Information Essential to Political Preference Formation?*

The empirical data presented above broadly endorses the hypothesis that freedom of speech and access to information are important factors in political participation and the formation of political preferences. For Todilahy, whose TAT stories reflected the passivist lens, access to information is one of the "pillars of democracy." Mamisoa, whose TAT stories suggested the dissident lens, likewise expressed the opinion that "Our democracy here in Madagascar isn't real democracy [because] there are always censors at every level [of society]." What is most striking about these two statements is that they both define democracy in terms of freedom of expression, despite holding very different views about the implications of this position for identifying Madagascar as a nascent democracy. While some research participants, particularly those whose TAT stories were indicative of the passivist perceptual lens, suggested that access to information (i.e. newspapers) was particularly important in the run-up to elections, the majority of people I spoke to demonstrated a far-ranging interest in current affairs. This could bode well for democratic development in Madagascar from the standpoint that citizens, at least in

the Antsinanana region, portray themselves as willing participants in the political debate.

Though not currently at the forefront of research on either democratic development or democracy assistance policy, the evidence provided here suggests that notions of preference formation and articulation deserve further study. This much-underestimated adjunct to freedom of expression has salient consequences for democratic practice. At the most basic level, to prefer something,

> …implies knowledge of two or more possible ways of resolving a public problem or issue, and knowledge that one favours one option over others for reasons. To have knowledge of two or more ways of resolving issues, there needs to be public acknowledgement that different sources of information must be allowed to operate, and open processes of persuasion facilitated. (Saward 1998: 89-90)

As discussed above, however, general consensus in the Antsinanana region, among urban research participants in particular, seems to be that alternative and reliable sources of information can be hard to come by. In fact, it has been noted elsewhere that then-President Ratsiraka handpicked the only journalists allowed to report on the 2001 presidential race, an observation that would seem to confirm the suspicions of research participants (Marcus and Razafindrakoto 2003: 36).

Research participants also demonstrated very mixed opinions on the most appropriate processes of persuasion, the second point raised by Saward, above. The dissident lens, on one hand, suggests that some people perceive public protest (including strikes and, for a minority, rebellion) as a reasonable means of persuasion. On the other hand, stories depicting the passivist lens demonstrated abhorrence for strikes and a strong preference for discussing issues face-to-face, likely at the local level. An implied need for persuasion drifts through the undercurrent of these respective TAT stories; the stark differences in how this need is realised, however, has considerable consequences for resulting conceptualisations of democracy. Differences such as these may not be widely recognized outside of a particular community or region but I found them to be very influential in shaping the contours of the perceptual lenses described above. Moreover, there is evidence of a positive correlation between a high percentage of the population preferring gradual social reform and democratic development (Muller and Seligson 1994: 647). Conversely, identifying exactly how prevalent the dissident lens is within Malagasy society could provide a better barometer for democratic weakness than the presence or absence of

formal laws or media outlets. While the area of preference formation and articulation deserves greater consideration, establishing what these ideas mean in the local context should be the first step in any democracy assistance project developed to address them.

The evidence from TAT stories concurrently suggests, however, that the ability of people to meaningfully fulfil this role remains stunted by real or perceived censorship. As I noted above, fear of political imprisonment for saying the wrong thing or speaking out against the government was rife among people I spoke with, although few included this disposition in their TAT stories. Fabrice, whose TAT stories indicated the dissident perceptual lens, wanted to know, for example, how the West can consider Madagascar a democracy when people there are not allowed to meet for the purposes of either discussing political issues or forming new political parties: "If you want to have a political meeting you need a permit. If you manage to get a permit, you won't be allowed to meet. If you do try to meet, you'll likely be arrested." The ability of ordinary Malagasy to express their opinions openly and in a way they find meaningful should not, therefore, be taken for granted by international observers. Crucially, however, it is not just the government that censors free speech (if, indeed, it does), but individuals themselves who self-censor out of fear. Warburton warns that it is this inability to "criticise and challenge" political representatives that leads to democratic degeneration (2009: 2).

*Free Speech Rights: The Conduit to Political Accountability?*

Whereas relatively little time or resources are currently devoted to studying processes of interest formation in developing countries, accountability has been a magic word of the democracy and good governance debate for some time. Established in 1996, *Voice and Accountability* is one of the World Bank's six governance indicators. Democracy assistance organisations ranging from the United Nations Development Program to the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs likewise trumpet the virtues of accountability in the context of democratic development. The question remains, however: Do formal free speech rights and access to information enable citizens to hold their (elected) officials to account in practice?

The evidence presented in this chapter is inconclusive. Research participants expressed widely divergent views as to whether or not free speech rights of individuals and the media are protected (i.e. the passivist perceptual lens) or, conversely, under siege (i.e. the dissident perceptual lens). Accountability, in theory anyway, bridges the gap between electoral contests by encouraging governance responsive to public evaluation and reaction (see, for instance, Merkel 2004, O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, Santiso 2000). The free press plays an integral role in encouraging dialogue between political elites and their constituents, notifying the public of policy options and outcomes and providing a forum for their response (Saward 1998: 90). Claudia, however, was not alone among people I spoke with in saying that it is necessary for newspapers in particular to always be on the side of the government or risk closure. As noted earlier, Hantanirina similarly pointed out that people have the right to free speech, but that does not mean that the government will listen to what they have to say. Under such circumstances, can newspapers or ordinary citizens fulfil the roles ascribed to them by democratic theorists? The experience of these research participants suggests perhaps not.

Government suppression of free speech and access to information is not the only barrier to improved accountability in eastern Madagascar. The evidence above convincingly illustrates that self-censorship also prevents ordinary people from criticising political elites and holding governments to account, thereby contributing to a country's uncertain political trajectory (Warburton 2009: 2). The alarming frequency with which people told me they were afraid to speak openly about politics or overtly political issues raises the possibility that self-censorship, though not a theme to emerge directly from TAT stories, may contribute to weak political accountability in Madagascar. Despite feeling powerless to speak out against the ruling regime, however, TAT stories indicative of the dissident perceptual lens illustrate that some people in the Antsinanana region do recognise such criticism as their democratic right, even if they question their ability to use it without retribution (also see Pitkin 1967: 226, Schauer 1982: 39).

What all three perceptual lenses analysed here indicate with clarity is that people are generally engaged and want to participate in politics. At one end of the spectrum, the passivist lens suggests that some people still perceive opportunities for this sort of participation and limited political critique at the local level. While these

TAT stories do not address issues of accountability outright, the fact that these research participants believe that disputes can be aired and settled through dialogue could indicate that the cycles of social unrest described in the introduction to this chapter need not be perpetual. At the other end of the spectrum, however, the grievances voiced by some research participants who apparently see their world though the dissident perceptual lens suggest that current safeguards for free speech and an independent media are not capable of securing elite accountability and may indirectly contribute to future conflagrations.

As is so often the case, it all comes down to those people sitting on the fence, as it were, who come down on one side or the other at the last moment or because of a particular turn of events. Adherents to the social divisions lens in this case. Social malaise, whether attributable to economic inflation, political repression or some other cause entirely, can be enhanced by the conviction that the regime stifles meaningful participation in political decisions that directly effect their lives. It may be significant that protests first broke out when President Ravalomanana temporarily closed Rajoelina's TV station after it broadcast an interview with exiled former President Ratsiraka. The ensuing protests may have been interpreted as a democratic opening, a rare opportunity to voice pent-up dissatisfaction. The analysis above points to the likelihood that some people who see the world through the dissident or social divisions perceptual lens may have reasonably interpreted these events as an unexpected opening in an otherwise closed political system. People who were afraid of speaking out against the government on their own may have been encouraged by the sight of others taking to the streets, causing the numbers of people turning up at rallies to escalate.

This is not to say that the events as they unfolded in the early months of 2009 were rationally calculated. Quite the contrary, the competences and dispositions that emerged from TAT stories told in the months immediately preceding the crisis indicate that the interpretations of events only briefly sketched here could have been obvious to some sectors of society, tacitly pointing to protest as an appropriate – and now suddenly available – avenue for addressing democratic grievances against an oppressive regime. Democracy experts sometimes point to the absence of protest or dissent as a sign of political legitimacy, if not necessarily accountability. When constraints on free speech are breached, however, the distinct possibility emerges

that "the so-called peace and consensus were, at best, part of an imposed armistice" (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 49).

## Conclusion

"Freedom of speech," wrote Frankel, "serves a useful purpose even if it does nothing more than give men the chance to release their feelings by sending sounds out into the air" (1962: 36). In a country like Madagascar, so accustomed to sporadic outbursts of social unrest, there might be something to this. One theme to run through TAT stories about both elections and free speech is frustration. Frustration that your vote does not count. Frustration that you cannot speak your mind. Frustration that life is not getting any better. Even if they do not achieve anything else, protests like those that shook the country in the early months of 2009 give people the opportunity to release some of their frustration. While the situation may have quieted down, this lull is likely to be only temporary unless other pressure valves are established for releasing pent-up dissatisfaction.

The intrinsic difficulty of pinning down exactly what political culture explains has persistently restrained scholars from using this concept in an analytical way (Diamond 1993: 15). The analysis of various perceptions of freedom of expression in this chapter however, clearly illustrates the possible political consequences of repressed dissatisfaction with merely formal democracy. The evidence provided by dissident lens TAT stories does not predict the political firestorm that overwhelmed the country in 2009. It does, however, provide context for interpreting people's actions, and suggests that what international observers have described as undemocratic behaviour may actually represent frustration at the sustained denial of basic democratic rights and inability to demand political accountability in any other way. Similarly,  "[t]here is a tendency to conceive freedom of expression and other human rights as luxuries, rather than as priorities in societies where the majority of people are both poor and illiterate" (Smith and Loudiy 2005: 1114). However, some of the poorest, least educated people to take part in this research actually demonstrated through their TAT stories that they are among the most prepared to participate in local political forums (i.e. the passivist lens). This finding suggests that perhaps more should be done to promote political dialogue and debate that engages ordinary – even poor and illiterate – citizens at the most local levels of governance.

To many people consulted for this research, freedom of expression is democracy itself. They cannot conceive of one without the other. Consequently, those who perceive free speech as under threat question the reliability of their country's so called democratic credentials. Freedoms of speech and the press are both enshrined in Madagascar's constitution, and yet evidence of these protections in TAT stories was sparse at best. In the next chapter, I examine more closely research participants' impressions of the rule of law and checks on the abuse of political power.

*In framing a government which is to be administered*
*by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this:*
*you must first enable the government to control the governed;*
*and in the next place oblige it to control itself.*
*(Madison, Hamilton, and Jay 1987: 320)*

Despite the intuitive inkling that rule of law must in some way contribute to democracy, the establishment of a definitive relationship between these two concepts remains enigmatic. Are constitutionalism and rule of law starting points of democratic governance (see, for example, Brinks 2006, Diamond 2008b, Mattes and Bratton 2007, O'Donnell 2004, Przeworski 1991)? Or does it make more sense to think of these concepts as distinct from (though conducive to) democracy (see, for example, Becker 1999, Zakaria 2003)? Indeed, Barber argues that democracy "fought for and won" creates the constitution and the rights codified therein, not visa versa (1996: 146). This chapter starts from the premise that rule of law and democracy can – and should – be studied in tandem. Without effective rule of law to safeguard democratic freedoms and underwrite democratic processes, citizenship can swiftly degenerate into subjugation. Diamond similarly warns that where rule of law is segregated from democracy, the result is too often "constitutions, but not constitutionalism" (2008a: 38, also see Ng 1997, Rogers 2004). The analysis below illustrates, however, that a wide gulf separates principled recognition of common "democratic" laws (e.g. universal suffrage, freedom of expression) and the formal adoption of a written constitution (Hinds 2008: 404).

As Chapter One illustrates, the academic literature establishes clear expectations for the relationship between an impartial rule of law and democratic citizens. Democracy assistance organisations have widely adopted these standards, developing projects and initiatives that aim to make reality more closely mirror this ideal. In a democratic context, rule of law is meant to constrain the arbitrary use of power by establishing an impartial legal framework enforced by an independent judiciary. That no citizen – including the executive – is above the law distinguishes democracy from other forms of political rule. By guaranteeing civil and political

rights, including the power to vote elected officials out of office, democratic constitutions empower citizens, at least in theory, to hold their governments accountable (Brown and Kaiser 2007, Wahiu and Tesfagiorgis 2009). The evidence from TAT stories analysed below, however, illustrates that local expectations for rule of law in the Antsinanana region appear to diverge somewhat from these established Western norms.

The perceptual lenses analysed in this chapter indicate a schism between those research participants who believe that the rule of law is applied impartially in Madagascar and those who question police motives. In a departure from previous chapters, following the discussion of perceptual lenses deduced from TAT stories the concluding analysis of rule of law as perceived by ordinary Malagasy in the Antsinanana region will be augmented by relevant illustrations from the two previous empirical chapters. This comprehensive analysis illustrates how distinguishable aspects of democracy intermingle, and concludes that developing democracy requires an integrated approach to the problems posed by, for example, weak rule of law or electoral reform.

## How Do Citizens in the Antsinanana Region Perceive Rule of Law?

Exactly how non-elites in less developed states perceive and interpret their country's legal systems and constitutions is less well documented than the theoretical expectations for how rule of law should function and why. Do ordinary people know their rights, for example? More importantly, perhaps, do they feel that those rights are adequately protected? Although many people will have little personal experience of the judicial system, it is likely that they will have encountered the police in some capacity. Consequently, in this research I sought to uncover how ordinary people perceive these street-level custodians of the law and the ramifications of correlating behavioural norms for local democracy. If, for instance, people staunchly believe that the police engage in petty extortion, money will almost certainly be proffered regardless of whether a particular policeman expects a bribe or not. For this reason, it is worth examining the multiple ways in which ordinary people perceive not only the law but also those individuals tasked with enforcing and protecting it. Understanding the myriad ways in which common citizens interpret the rule of law and its everyday application could contribute nuance to theoretically driven assessments of democratic deficiencies.

With the intention of prompting TAT stories indicative of people's attitudes toward rule of law and the perceived prominence of corruption, I commissioned an image of someone talking to a police officer (see Figure 23). On reflection, this turned out to be the least successful of the images used in this research. Seven research participants, three of whom were members of religious orders, opted out of telling a TAT story about this particular image. Recalling that only four people consulted for this research preferred not to tell TAT stories about the images discussed in Chapter Four and just two abstained from explaining the images reviewed in Chapter Five, the relative reluctance of research participants to discuss this particular image is somewhat puzzling. Those who opted out were evenly split between men and women; six of the seven were urban and most had a university education. These last two characteristics, however, are partly accounted for by the members of religious orders. I can only speculate as to why this image worked less well as a prompt than the others. It is possible that the obvious portrayal of a government official (i.e. a policeman) increased the perceived risk associated with interpreting this image. Alternatively, this image contains fewer characters with which people might identify as part of the projective exercise.

**Figure 23: Image 5**
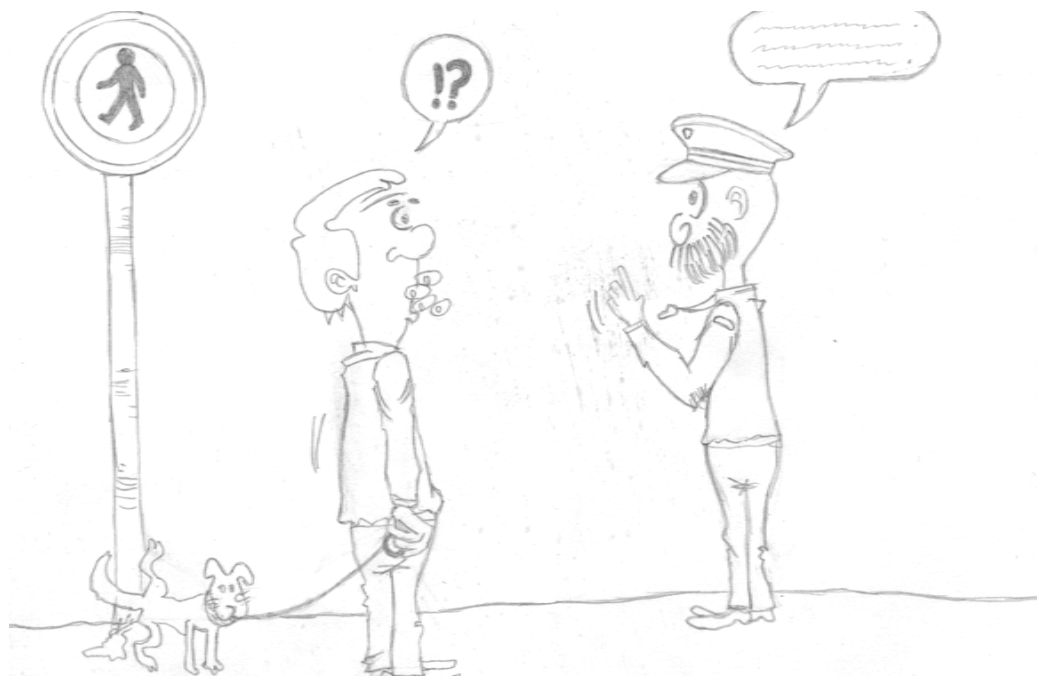
TAT stories told by research participants who did respond to this image also tended to be less detailed or complicated than those told about other images. Even so, they revealed the likely presence of two perceptual lenses offering contrasting interpretations of how the law is applied in this eastern region of Madagascar. An ostensible dichotomy seems to exist between those TAT stories that depicted the policeman as even-handed – **the impartial lens** – and those protesting that the man had been stopped without cause – **the crooked lens**. Additional clues about the perceived status of rule of law in the Antsinanana region are hidden within TAT stories discussed in previous chapters. I identify and discuss this supplemental evidence in the concluding analysis at the end of the chapter.

**The Impartial Lens**

TAT stories suggestive of the impartial perceptual lens share the common expectation that the police only stop people legitimately and with due cause. These research participants tend to agree, moreover, that when a police officer issues a fine you are obliged to pay it. In other words, these stories were characteristically adamant that the law is the law: citizens must obey it and the police must enforce it. No questions asked. Only a very small proportion of people telling this sort of TAT story indicated even passing suspicion that a police officer might manipulate the law for personal gain. The law, from this point of view, is both well respected and impartially applied.

*Demographic Trends*

It is notable that few TAT stories told by people living in the rural village showed signs of this perceptual lens, and that all of those that did were told by men (see Table 12). Indeed, just over half of all men interviewed for this research told TAT stories indicative of the impartial perceptual lens, compared with less than one third of women interviewed. This potential gender bias could provide an interesting point of departure for additional research on how people perceive the rule of law. For instance, do (rural) women experience the law differently from men? And, if so, *why*? Age does not seem to have been a determining factor in how people interviewed for this research perceive the rule of law, although slightly fewer 18-30 year olds did tell TAT stories included here than I might have expected from the sample demographics. Finally, both members of religious orders who told TAT

**Table 12: Impartial Lens Demographic Details**

| | Male | Female | Voted | Did not vote | Under 18 | 18-30 | 31-45 | 46-60 | 60+ | Upper | Middle | Lower | Religious |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urban | 11 (21)* | 7 (19) | 12 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 10 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 10 | 2 | 2 |
| Rural | 3 (6) | 0 (5) | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| **Total** | 14 (27) | 7 (24) | 14 | 7 | 1 | 3 | 11 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 11 | 4 | 2 |

*Numbers in parentheses denote the total number of men and women included in the sample.

stories about Image 5 are included in this group. While the inclusion of both of these research participants here may be noteworthy, it is impossible to draw substantiated inferences as to what this might mean.

*Impartial Lens Analysis*

That the policeman legitimately stopped the man walking his dog (*arrêter légitimement*) unites all TAT stories indicative of this perceptual lens; see Figure 24. Having presumed that the policeman stopped the man for a valid reason, these research participants then searched for what that reason might be in the image, most often identifying something to do with the dog (e.g. dogs are not allowed in that area, the dog was behaving badly). This position was reinforced in many TAT stories about Image 5 by the similar disposition that the law is the same for everyone (*la loi est pour tout la monde*).

> Hery: The law is the law. It isn't for the police [to decide], it's for everyone.
>
> Volatiana: Even rich people have to accept the law.

Statements such as these suggest that, from this point of view, rule of law in Madagascar (or at least the Antsinanana region) is reasonably strong and is applied impartially. Similarly, research participants telling this sort of TAT story occasionally pointed out that it is the responsibility of the police to uphold the law. For example, Todilahy explained in his TAT story that without the police to enforce the law

**Figure 24: Impartial Lens Thematic Network**



"everyone would do whatever they wanted. In a democracy you can't just do whatever you want." Although this disposition, that the police uphold the law *(la police garde la loi)*, was only explicitly stated in a minority of TAT stories, the connotation was more widespread, as the TAT story excerpts above illustrate.

As indicated in the thematic network, these TAT stories also demonstrate a common respect for the police. In accordance with the belief that the police stop people only when they have a legitimate cause, these research participants also tended to agree that police officers should be respected *(respecter la police)* and people must comply with whatever sanctions (e.g. fines) the police issue *(on doit payer l'amende)*:

> Guillaume: The man [with the dog] respects the policeman, even though the policeman is angry with him.
>
> Léa: The man just looks at the policeman and doesn't have anything to say because he knows he is at fault. He knows that he has to accept the fine. He accepts the law of the police.
>
> Serge: The man with the dog knows that he will have to pay the fine.

Although these research participants commonly asserted in their TAT stories that the man walking his dog respects the policeman, it remains unclear whether this

deference alludes to respect for the rule of law or if, perhaps, it is due to the policeman personally as a recognised authority figure. The excerpt from Léa's story above, for instance, clearly states that the man "accepts the law of the police." Therefore, do people think that the police make the law, rather than simply enforce it? While it is impossible to know exactly what this woman meant when she made that particular comment, it does raise additional questions about the perceived relationship between the police and the rule of law that might be worth pursuing elsewhere.

Identification of "the law of the police" may indicate that rule of law can take a rather different shape in local contexts from what external democracy assistance professionals expect, even in places where local people perceive the rule of law to be strong. According to the Round IV Afrobarometer survey, for instance, 60% of Malagasy respondents answered that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "The police always have the right to make people obey the law" (Afrobarometer 2008). Only 19%, by contrast, said that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed.[100] While both the Afrobarometer data and the qualitative analysis of TAT interviews could indicate that many people perceive rule of law in Madagascar as relatively strong, the more nuanced information provided in the TAT stories raises questions about how ordinary people understand the law in relation to the police. While Afrobarometer may have asked this question to gauge whether people think the law should be applied impartially, I suspect that people taking part in this research would have interpreted this question rather differently from the one intended, and subsequently analysed.

One possible explanation for why some people told TAT stories indicative of a strong rule of law is "the tacit normative idea that government stands in the same relationship to its citizens as a father does to his children," which Schatzberg identifies as a linchpin of political legitimacy in much of sub-Saharan Africa (1993: 455). While it is difficult to gauge from the relatively limited sample of TAT stories I gathered how pervasive this disposition is in eastern Madagascar, Lucien observed: "the police are like parents. If a child does something that is not right, his parents

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[100] An additional 15% of respondents said that they neither agreed nor disagreed and 6% said that they did not know.

must talk to him about it."[101] In this context, the police, and authority figures more generally, are seen as a guiding influence instead of the punitive force more common among stories indicative of the crooked perceptual lens discussed below.

Finally, TAT stories indicative of the impartial perceptual lens only rarely included an element of bribery or manipulation, as the thematic network clearly illustrates. Some of these research participants made off-hand or side remarks tangential to their main TAT stories, similar to these excerpts:

Lucien: The police take advantage of people. Even if your papers are in order, they will always try to find something problematic so that they can demand money.

Stéphane: The man with the dog is afraid. He is afraid that he will have to pay a fine.

Even so, the small sizes of the phrases police take advantage of people (*la police profite des gens*) and fear (*peur*) reveal that both of these dispositions, though relevant, are not characteristic of the plurality of TAT stories analysed here. Moreover, as Stéphane's comment above demonstrates, some of these research participants spoke of fear in the context of poverty and dreading to pay a fine, rather than fear of the police officer himself. This distinction is important, and contributes to the differentiation between the impartial and crooked perceptual lenses.

In summary, the impartial perceptual lens is distinguishable by the global theme that some people expect the law to be applied evenly and justly, particularly across economic classes. Moreover, people who maintain this point of view respect the police as the official keepers of public order. On the whole, this perspective coincides with the theory laid out by democracy theorists and prioritised by the democracy assistance industry. Granted, these TAT stories tell us little about how political elites or the judiciary behave in relation to established law. That these research participants expected the police officer to apply the law impartially would, however, generally bode well for the anticipated behaviour of other custodians of the law as well. Therefore, it is possible to tentatively deduce that the impartial perceptual lens frames a political worldview in which democratic freedoms are not

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[101] One anonymous response to the written interview questions likewise explained: "the people are considered children and the officials play the role of parents who must be obeyed."

generally under threat from overbearing representatives of the state and people of all social classes expect to be treated equally under the law.

**The Crooked Lens**

The crooked perceptual lens has an altogether different tint to that discussed above. In brief, the TAT stories analysed in this section almost universally suggest that the police abuse their power to extort money from people. A second organising theme to emerge from these stories is that the law is neither impartial nor applied evenly across society. As the analysis below demonstrates, there was widespread suspicion amongst this group of research participants that people able to give the police money will not be charged with any crime whether or not they have committed an offense. Finally, in their TAT stories these people widely suggested that the man walking his dog in Image 5 did not know what the law was; a potentially worrying trend. Taken together, these themes reflect entrenched mistrust of the police and serious misgivings about not only how the law is applied but, crucially, what it stipulates.

*Demographic Trends*

While the number of research participants who seemingly subscribe to this point of view is roughly similar to that adhering to the impartial lens above, these two groups of people have distinct demographic characteristics. Whereas TAT stories told by male research participants most often exhibited signs of the impartial lens, the crooked lens emerged slightly more often from TAT stories told by women, particularly those living in the rural village (see Table 13). Of the people included in this sample, rural participants tended to tell TAT stories with more fearful or suspicious overtones, dispositions that may be at least partially attributed to the fact that rural people are likely less accustomed to a formal police presence. In contrast, it was not uncommon to see police officers standing on street corners or patrolling busy areas in the city.

It is impossible to tell from this sample whether age is a distinguishing demographic feature among research participants who told this type of TAT story. While slightly more 18-30 year olds told TAT stories analysed here than in the previous section, similar numbers of research participants from the 31-45 and 45-60 years old age groups also told TAT stories about Image 5 suggestive of the crooked

**Table 13: Crooked Lens Demographic Details**

| | Male | Female | Voted | Did not vote | Under 18 | 18-30 | 31-45 | 46-60 | 60+ | Upper | Middle | Lower | Religious |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urban | 7 (21)* | 9 (19) | 8 | 8 | 0 | 7 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 12 | 1 | 0 |
| Rural | 3 (6) | 4 (5) | 5 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 |
| **Total** | **10** (27) | **13** (24) | **13** | **10** | **0** | **9** | **7** | **6** | **1** | **3** | **13** | **7** | **0** |

*Numbers in parentheses denote the total number of men and women included in the sample.

lens. This perceptual lens was particularly evident amongst both male and female university students (five of the six I interviewed), which accounts for over half of the 18-30 year olds in this group. I cannot speculate as to why university students were particularly prone to telling stories featuring a weak rule of law. It is worth noting, however, that their stories illustrated examples of police corruption or the law being enforced unevenly rather than ignorance or uncertainty regarding the content of the law.

*Crooked Lens Analysis*

Nearly all of the research participants in this group interpreted the policeman in Image 5 in a predatory way, explaining that the police take advantage of people (*la police profite des gens*); this disposition is prominently displayed in the thematic network (see Figure 25). Many of these TAT stories went on to describe a situation in which the police officer's actions were primarily motivated by money. The general plot of most of these TAT stories began with a man out walking his dog; then the police officer stops the man for no apparent reason. If he pays what the policeman asks (*amande*), the man will be allowed to go on he way. If not, he will be charged with some minor infraction.

> Soazy: Everyone is afraid of the police because oftentimes they take advantage of people. Even if this man [with the dog] hasn't done anything wrong, the policeman will try to demand money from him.

224

**Figure 25: Crooked Lens Thematic Network**

corrompu

amende    arrêter pour
aucune raison

la police profite des gens

suspicious of
police motives

peer

uncertainty
about the
law

The police are out
to make a profit and
rich people can do
as they like

the law is
not
applied
neutrally

la loi
n'existe
pas pour
les riches

ne
connaît
pas la loi

le policier demande de
l'argent

emprisonnement politique

c'est fini si on
paye la police

| Mariamo: | Everyone is afraid of the police. They try to get money from you even when you haven't done anything wrong. |
| Mirana: | It is difficult for chauffeurs because they need to keep all of their papers with them. But because the police are always looking for ways to get money, they try to find problems with the chauffeurs' papers. |
| Kalo: | In my opinion, the policeman only wants money. |

A theme common among TAT stories discussed here, plainly evident in the excerpts above, is that the man walking his dog was possibly – probably – stopped for no valid reason at all (*arrêter pour aucune raison*). Although few of these research participants stated this outright (e.g. the police officer only wants money), as indicated by the small size of this disposition in the thematic network, it was commonly implied. Deviating from the image, Mirana and Kotomaro specifically pointed out that this causes particular problems for drivers (e.g. taxi drivers, minibus drivers) who are required to carry dossiers of paperwork. When several people take

shifts using the same vehicle, it is not difficult to see how papers might get lost, making these sorts of drivers easy targets for predatory police officers.[102]

It is initially striking that these research participants only used the word corrupt (*corrompu*) very infrequently (see Figure 25). The characterisation of corruption proffered by Huntington is typical of the literature; he defines corruption as "behaviour of public officials which deviates from accepted norms in order to serve private ends" (1968: 59). It is revealing that Botozaza, who works for BIANCO – the President's anti-corruption body – told the TAT story most concerned about "corruption."[103] To this man, the "accepted norm" is for police officers to be impartial enforcers of the law. Taking money from a civilian, whether they have broken the law or not, in exchange for not reporting the supposed offense constitutes deviation from this norm for personal enrichment. More interesting, however, is that this is apparently not the way most of these research participants understand such an exchange. Quite the contrary, the accepted norm in most TAT stories seems to be that the police would demand money. That people disagree with or do not like this norm does not necessarily mean that they do not accept it. Consequently, the behaviour of the policeman is not understood as being "corrupt" but just the way things are. Indeed, Huntington concedes that, in developing states, corruption as he has defined it is "not so much the result of the deviance of behaviour from accepted norms as it is the deviance of norms from the established patterns of behaviour" (1968: 60). But where the norms at issue are not internalised by local people or recognisable through their perceptual lens, assessing behaviour in terms of "corruption" may be a temptation best avoided.

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[102] I experienced this once during fieldwork. A policeman randomly stopped my taxi driver and asked for his dossier. One of the papers was missing, which the driver had apparently left at home. Someone had to bring the paper to us (which took about an hour) before we were allowed to leave. After everything was in order, the driver slipped the policeman some money. I had used this driver before, and he explained once we were back on our way that it was necessary for him to pay the policeman like that if he did not want to have more problems later.

[103] Transparency International published its 2008 country rankings just before I interviewed the BIANCO employee. Newspaper headlines universally heralded Madagascar's progress at tackling corruption. When I met with the BIANCO employee, however, he asked me who Transparency International is, how they collect their data, and how they calculate country rankings. He put little faith in their assessment of Madagascar, speculating that approximately half of any project budget gets siphoned off through bribery and patronage.

When research participants included in this perceptual lens group spoke about deviations from the rule of law and the policeman's personalistic behaviour, the word corruption was only used very infrequently and no one used the word 'bribery' even when, from my perspective, that was what the story was about. Instead, it makes more sense to address deviations in the rule of law in a manner similar to that of local people, in this case exchanging the language of corruption for that of manipulation. The difference in connotation, though slight, has significant ramifications. In the first instance, the law is broken but the infraction is ignored. In the second instance, however, the rules are bent to serve individual interests. Accounting for approximately half the people I spoke with, these research participants routinely suggested in their TAT stories that rule of law is weak and easily manipulated by people with power (i.e. the police) or money (i.e. rich people). This has stark implications for democracy assistance policies that seek to prop-up a weak rule of law with technical support. Buttressing the legal framework alone will not prevent the sort of uneven application of the law described in these TAT stories. It is not necessarily the laws that need strengthened, but the way in which they are applied and interpreted at street-level, something for which there are no standardised solutions.

Another perception commonly voiced in these TAT stories is that application of the law is far from impartial. The competence that an encounter with the police will end once you pay up (*c'est fini si on paye la police*) dominates the lower right-hand corner of the thematic network for this perceptual lens. It was commonly understood among these research participants that if a person paid the police, the charge (deserved or malicious) would be forgotten. This expectation, however, was attributed in some TAT stories to the police officer and in others to the pedestrian. First, following on from the belief that the police are only motivated by money, some TAT stories attributed the expectation that any charge can be dropped for the right price to the police officer:

| | |
|---|---|
| Faramalala: | The policeman could fine him. Or, he could simply ask for a bit of money and after that everything is fine. |
| Severiny: | The man knows that if he gives some money to the policeman he won't be punished and that if he doesn't, he will. |
| Voary: | The police always look for problems so that they can demand money from people. If someone who has done something bad pays |

the police quickly, it's all finished. It is money that counts for the police.

In all of these excerpts, the policeman expects to be paid (*la police demande de l'argent*). The pedestrian knows this, but is not seen by these research participants to instigate the exchange.

This point of view is somewhat different, however, from that of other people whose TAT stories similarly suggest that they perceive police behaviour through the crooked lens and likewise believe that the encounter will be over once the policeman is paid. This second group of research participants, however, told TAT stories in which the man walking his dog is described as "rich." The ensuing TAT stories generally presumed that the man was guilty of some minor infraction and explained how he could essentially buy-off the policeman:

Botozaza: So, the man walking his dog pretends that he doesn't know the rule and that's why I think that he will bribe the police. I think that he is an intellectual or he is rich and that he has an easy life.

Sthella: The law doesn't exist for this rich man.

The pervasive disposition in these stories is that the law does not apply to rich people (*la loi n'existe pas pour les riches*).[104] Julien read beyond the image and applied this assessment to the courts in addition to the police. Recalling a compensation hearing for the families of victims who had died when an overcrowded passenger ferry sank, he said: "Even the judges are corrupt. They discriminate between the rich and the poor. People who knew someone at the court were given much more [compensation] than people who didn't know anyone." While both scenarios depict the rule of law as weak, disagreement emerges over who is culpable for this: rich people or the police.

Finally, most TAT stories indicative of the crooked perceptual lens included an element of uncertainty about the law, occasionally explaining that the man walking his dog did not know the law or understand why he had been stopped by the police officer (*ne connaît pas la loi*). If people do not know the law or their rights, breaking the law becomes like playing a game of Russian roulette – it is only a matter of time

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[104] "There is an aspect of tyranny to the regime in power," one written interview response concluded, "because the laws only apply to the masses and the dominant class do what they like."

before you are bound to get into trouble. Reiterating the not uncommon perception among research participants that the police determine the law; Ralay explained: "It is often like that here. The police say that there is a law but the people don't know what it is or why." This uncertainty about the law was often accompanied in these TAT stories by fear (*peur*). Sometimes these people indicated that the pedestrian was afraid because he knew he would have to pay the policeman, while others, like Kamisy, offered other explanations such as lack of an identity card. A minority of people I spoke to suggested that the man was afraid he would be arrested for politically motivated reasons (*emprisonnement politique*). This disposition harks back to TAT stories about elections analysed in Chapter Four in which research participants similarly suggested that the ruling political party could manipulate the law to punish dissenters or members of opposition parties. I return to the idea of politically motivated imprisonment again at the end of this chapter.

While it is possible that the '?' in Image 5 may have influenced the direction of some of these TAT stories, the evidence suggests that this is unlikely (see Figure 23). Common emotions attributed to this character in TAT stories included astonishment and shock as well as confusion. Consequently, there is sufficient reason to be confident that people who told TAT stories in which the man did not know the law were projecting their own insecurity onto that character. This could suggest either that these people do not think that they are sufficiently familiar with the law or, alternatively, that they think it is reasonably likely that an ordinary person would not be. Putting a slight twist on this logic, Botozaza was certain that the man did know the law and was only pretending to be confused.

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that perceptions are as true as facts. With regard to the TAT stories discussed in this section, I have additional reason to believe that the competences and dispositions expressed by these research participants likely reflect actual occurrences. Returning to Madagascar after a short trip to Reunion, a French NGO worker I met in the field got stopped at the border; her visa was about to expire. The immigration officer bluntly asked what she could offer him. In the end, she traded a bottle of rum for her entry clearance. I acknowledge the possibility that foreigners and local people may receive different treatment; even so, this anecdote provides circumstantial evidence generally supportive of the perceptions expressed by this group of research participants. In

2008, Diamond identified strengthening the rule of law as the "most urgent imperative" of democracy assistance (2008b: 46). The crooked perceptual lens provides additional grounds for his conclusion.

## What Hope for Democracy?

Forcefully criticising the unconstitutional power transfer in Madagascar, Wahiu and Tesfagiorgis (2009) assert that constitutions provide "the real African choice for regime change." Constitutions, they claim, intrinsically empower citizens to hold their governments accountable. For example, by requiring that changes to presidential term limits adhere to a legal procedure, constitutions alert people to the danger posed by over-zealous elites (Brown and Kaiser 2007: 1146, Wahiu and Tesfagiorgis 2009).[105] Fixation on the existence of formal constitutional order can, however, be a distraction, blinding outside observers to substantive democratic deficiencies. As Hinds (2008) illustrates in the Caribbean context, the absence of coups does not necessarily indicate democratic vigour or, I would argue, functioning constitutional order.

The original research presented in Chapters Four through Six warns against divorcing democratic form from democratic content. Prior to the 2009 political upheaval, Madagascar's formal constitution had proven rather durable.[106] Established in 1992, the constitution was amended in 1995, 1998 and 2007 following the established legal procedure. But to what extent do these written rules protect democratic freedoms, promote political equality and harness elected political officials, the executive in particular, in practice? While it is difficult to judge the prevalence of attacks on constitutional rights, the evidence provided in TAT stories

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[105] There seemed to be some confusion among people I spoke with about what the 2007 constitutional amendment actually entailed. That Ravalomanana had changed the constitution to enable him to run for a third term was a recurrent belief among people I spoke to. In reality, the 1992 constitution in place at the time research was conducted still maintained that the President may only hold office for two consecutive terms (Article 45). The Round 4 Afrobarometer survey found that 47% of Malagasy agreed that the constitution should limit the president to serving a maximum of two terms in office while 35% thought that there should be no constitutional limit on how long the president can serve. 14% of those interviewed did not know and 4% said that they did not agree with either statement (2009a: 8).

[106] At the time of writing, the country is in a state of constitutional crisis. It remains to be seen whether the constitution that existed prior to the political turbulence will be retained or whether ongoing, though intermittent, negotiations will result in a new document.

suggests that Ravalomanana's polished international image concealed a flawed domestic reputation.

Formal defence of rule of law must be substantiated by informal self-monitoring and restraint (Whitehead 2002: 118). Although not representative of the positions taken by all research participants, "the government," "the ruling party," and "the President" were all accused of abusing their power in TAT stories subtly indicative of constitutional breaches or at the very least providing reason to question whether constitutional provisos are capable of effectively constraining the executive. Contrary to the professional assessment made by Wahiu and Tesfagiorgis (2009) that there must be an "immediate restoration of the legitimate constitutional and democratic institutions," TAT stories indicative of the crooked lens suggest that many people in Madagascar may question the democratic merits of simply restoring the old order, having only intermittently experienced or perceived a government constrained by rule of law themselves (O'Donnell 2004: 42, Rogers 2004: 120). From this vantage point, international calls to simultaneously restore the old order and reinstate democracy may strike an inconsistent or hypocritical tone.

Fabrice expressed particular frustration with this constitutional dualism. "All of the democratic institutions exist in Madagascar," he conceded, "but they are detached from the people." The international democracy assistance industry promotes rule of law as a mechanism for protecting democratic freedoms and creating a predictable political environment (Rakner, Menocal, and Fritz 2007: 36). But is this claim substantiated by practical experience? Freedoms of expression and the press as well as freedom to form political parties are all enshrined in Madagascar's 1992 constitution (see Figure 26). Even so, we would do well to

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**Figure 26: Excerpts from Madagascar's 1992 Constitution**

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*The freedoms of opinion and expression, communication, the press, association, assembly, movement, conscience, and religion are guaranteed to all and may only be limited with respect to the rights and liberties of others or in the interest of maintaining public order.*

– **Article 10**

*Every person has the right to freely organise with others to form associations insofar as such organisations conform to the law.*

*This right also applies to the creation of political parties.*

– **Article 14**

remember that laws "do not exist in isolation" but are indelibly linked to "a larger, more complex normative universe" (Werhan 2001: 898).

Each of the perceptual lenses identified through this research provides a limited glimpse into the normative worldviews of research participants, providing insight into the complex relationship between constitutional rights and the ways in which ordinary people actually experience politics. As Chapter Seven clearly illustrates, some research participants explicitly defined democracy in terms of rights, particularly the right to free speech (also see Chapter Five). These people regularly questioned whether Madagascar could be considered a democracy when ordinary people are denied basic democratic rights. It was not uncommon for TAT stories to suggest inequality of citizenship, whether by descriptions of social hierarchy, accounts of denied voting rights, or indications of police manipulating the law for personal gain. The remainder of this chapter compares rights enshrined in the 1992 constitution with the perspectives recounted in TAT stories, and considers the possible ramifications for Madagascar's ongoing democratic development.

*Constitutional Assurance of Electoral Process*

Elections are by nature a technical and legalistic process. In evaluating a country's electoral procedures, democracy assessment measures often look for formal legal and constitutional safeguards. Freedom House (2009) rankings depend in part, for instance, on whether a country's electoral laws are deemed free and fair. The Economist Intelligence Unit similarly examines laws regulating political campaigns and gives high marks if "clear, established and accepted" constitutional mechanisms are in place for transferring power once electoral results have been declared (2008: 20). These technical measures, though quite capable of tracking quantitative changes in electoral turnout and competition, tell us very little about the quality of electoral experiences as perceived by a country's citizens. Do people believe that their votes are of equal value, for instance, or are some sub-groups perceived to benefit unfairly from extra-constitutional arrangements? Furthermore, does voting actually provide people with the opportunity to constrain – or eject – an overzealous executive?

Madagascar's 1992 constitution provides reasonable, technical affirmation that the country's political leaders (i.e. the President of the Republic and members of

the National Assembly) are chosen through free and fair elections. In recent years, the international community has generally accepted electoral contests in Madagascar as free and fair in adherence to constitutionally mandated procedures (SADC 2006, United States Department of State 2007). Also noteworthy, however, is the significant omission from the 1992 constitution of any distinguishable Article that specifically ensures universal adult suffrage. Instead, this right is identified in conjunction with the legal organisation of the state. Article 45, for instance, states that the President is elected by direct universal adult suffrage for a five-year term. Article 67 likewise states that members of the National Assembly are elected through direct universal adult suffrage.

Given the authority credited to constitutional provisions by democracy assistance and assessment policies, whether local people attribute similar strength to their constitutionally guaranteed rights warrants consideration. While the perceptual lenses identified in Chapters Four through Six provide only a partial glimpse into local worldviews, recalling how research participants interpreted elections adds depth to the analysis of local perceptions of rule of law. In this section I consider how ordinary people taking part in this research suggested they perceive political competition and representation, two provisions implicit in democratic rights to vote, organise political parties, and run for political office (Saward 1998: 62).

Political competition

To what extent do constitutional provisions granting people freedom to organise political parties actually facilitate genuine political and electoral competition? The evidence provided by TAT stories in Chapter Four suggests that political competition in the Antsinanana region remains limited. While support for a pluralist political party structure appears to exist among ordinary citizens, many of the people I spoke to voiced concerns that the ruling party prevents other parties from mounting a genuine opposition (see Chapter Four). The right to freely organise political parties is specifically guaranteed under Article 14 of Madagascar's 1992 constitution (see Figure 26, above). Research participants seem remarkably detached, however, from the approximately 160 political parties registered across the country, generally identifying just two options – either for or against the ruling regime – in their TAT stories. If people think that their only options are to vote for or against

the party in power, the mere existence of multiple political parties may not actually offer voters genuine choice.

Moreover, the role and identity of the political opposition remains unclear for most people who took part in this research. One theme common to both the positive and tedious perceptual lenses is that electoral competition provides choice without real significance. While making no overt reference to political competition or opposition parties, TAT stories indicative of the positive lens sometimes indicated that people exercise free choice when voting. This implies the presence of multiple candidates on the ballot paper but raises suspicions about whether these research participants find political competition meaningful. The tedious lens similarly indicates that research participants struggled to distinguish the political objectives of one party from those of any other. These people concluded that voting does not provide a significant choice because no matter who wins the election, the outcome will always be the same. This general consensus among people taking part in this research substantiates the analogy made by a Malagasy journalist comparing voting to flipping a coin (Raharizatovo 2008: 10).

It is of interest that TAT stories indicative of the pluralist lens distinguished between political competition and political opposition. While most of these research participants acknowledged the presence of political competition in Madagascar (i.e. that more than one candidate appears on the ballot) some were sceptical that it was possible to mount a genuine political opposition to the party in power. People whose TAT stories suggested the pluralist lens often adamantly declared that potential opposition candidates are prevented from organising their supporters or holding meetings to discuss their views. That known opposition supporters would be denied their voter registration cards was common knowledge among research participants whose stories suggested the pluralist perceptual lens. Indeed, Velohasina questioned Madagascar's status as a democracy specifically because people are not allowed to openly compete over conflicting political agendas. The constitutional right to organise a political party counts for little if that party is then effectively denied entry to the political domain (Ng, 1997: 21, Saward 1998: 52). Consequently, from this perspective constitutional provisions for political competition fail to secure pluralistic political debate, leaving voters unaware of the positions held by opposition candidates who would offer them a genuine choice. It is also worth noting that there

**Figure 27: Distribution of Electoral Process and Rule of Law Perceptual Lenses**
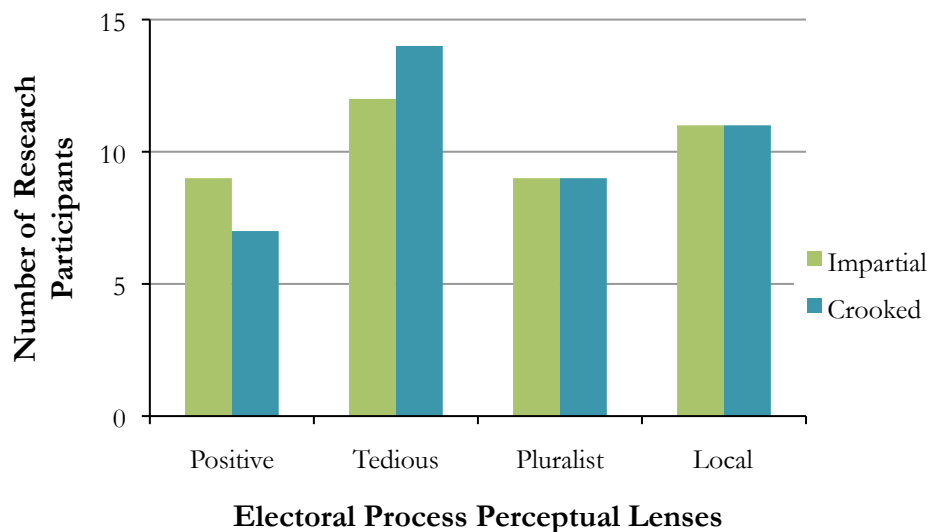


was little correlation between how research participants described elections and how they portrayed the rule of law in response to Image 5 (see Figure 27). Although people whose TAT stories reflected the pluralist perceptual lens generally thought that the political opposition was treated unfairly, this did not necessarily appear to influence their perception of the police and the rule of law more generally.

Despite Madagascar's constitutional provision that people are free to organise political parties, the evidence provided by TAT stories clearly suggests that Malagasy in the Antsinanana region perceive a political landscape characterised by one party dominance. Accusations that opposition supporters are prevented from meeting indicate that, in the eyes of at least some Malagasy voters, the ruling party stands above the law and uses its hold on power to suppress dissent, a blatant "violation of the basic grounds" on which democracy is founded (Saward 1998: 62). Bertelsmann Stiftung counted over 160 political parties when conducting its 2008 democracy assessment, providing clear evidence of "generic equality" to organise political parties; however, potential candidates find themselves in a position of "sharp de-facto inequality" from the point of view of people interpreting elections through the dissident or pluralist perceptual lens (O'Donnell 2004: 38-39). Denying opposition supporters equal opportunity to vote for alternative candidates gives the incumbent party an unfair advantage and violates a basic tenet of democratic

governance, namely that each citizen has equal voice (Saward 1998, Schmitter and Karl 1991: 82). The constitutional provision of a multi-party political system may not, therefore, accurately indicate the depth of political competition. As I concluded in Chapter Four, there appears to be little resonance of genuine political competition at the level of the electorate despite widespread acknowledgment that several names are generally included on electoral ballots.

<u>Political representation</u>

As noted above, the 1992 constitution specifies that the President and members of the National Assembly be elected by universal adult suffrage. Articles 45 and 67 of the constitution may stand Madagascar in good stead with international democracy monitors, but do these voting rights lead to representative governance from the point of view of the electorate? The TAT stories in Chapter Four suggest that people may be divided over whether they can make their voice heard in the political arena. In particular, the evidence suggests that research participants primarily concerned with local issues are more likely to believe that political decisions made by elected representatives represent their interests. Urban Malagasy, however, were more likely to question whether their vote would have any practical consequence.

Political representation should denote some semblance of citizen control over government decisions and corresponding capacity to reprimand (i.e. vote out) offending political officials (Pitkin 1967, Wedeen 2004). The 1992 constitution clearly specifies that members of the National Assembly fill this role in Madagascar. Political representation should not however, be reduced to the election of officials (Wedeen 2004: 278). As noted above, serious questions remain about the integrity of Madagascar's electoral competition and the parties that take part in it. Moreover, a distinction must be made between decisions representative of the will of citizens and those taken on their behalf (Weale 2007: 188). Though not everyone can be pleased (or appeased) all of the time, only when political decisions reflect the general will of the people can a government be described as representative. Ravalomanana's negotiation of a 99-year lease over 3.2 million acres of land with the South Korean firm Daewoo Logistics, by contrast, was a decision made on behalf of the people but without their consent (Blas 2008, Spencer 2008, Walt 2008). Handing over half of the country's arable land to a foreign company for free surely qualifies as the "distortion of purpose" Weale (2007) warns against (also see Jung-a, Oliver, and Burgis 2008).

Theoretically, elections provide a forum for interest articulation, offering the electorate the opportunity to express their collective priorities (Ake 1993, Bradley 2005, International IDEA n.d.). The local perceptual lens suggests that some research participants did indeed think that they could make their interests known at the local level. Pervasive deference to authority also permeated these TAT stories, however, diminishing to some extent the likelihood that ordinary people will assert themselves in the presence of political officials. The tedious perceptual lens, on the other hand, made it quite clear that people find voting burdensome when it does not provide a genuine opportunity for improving their circumstances. Although the 1992 constitution gives people the right to vote for their political representatives, research participants whose TAT stories depicted the tedious perceptual lens suggested resignation that voting will not result in policies representative of their interests. Formal guarantees of electoral competition do not alone necessarily enable the opposition to mount an effective challenge to the political establishment (Ng 1997: 22, Rogers 2004: 16).

Although the people I interviewed expressed a plurality of views with regard to voting and elections, the various TAT stories all seem to warn against misconceiving constitutional provisions as solid guarantees of electoral rigour. The TAT stories about electoral competition and participation fully analysed in Chapter Four and reviewed again here indicate that rights enshrined in the 1992 constitution are only weakly and irregularly experienced by some sectors of society. Electoral participation without political representation was a common premise underlying TAT stories told about elections, those reflective of the local perceptual lens providing the notable exceptions to this rule. Some research participants, largely those whose TAT stories reflected the positive lens, gave no indication that they were particularly troubled by this lack of political accountability. People whose stories contained theme clusters in line with the tedious and pluralist points of view, however, were more likely to tell TAT stories tinged with frustration.

*Constitutional Protection for Free Speech Rights*

In Chapter Five I argued that many Malagasy closely associate freedom of expression and access to information with democracy, an impression that seemed to weigh on reflections of their own political experience. The analysis in that chapter also established, however, that although people may be generally (and genuinely)

inclined to engage in political debate, censorship severely curtails their ability to do so. This assessment is reiterated above in the discussion of restrictions experienced by the political opposition. There seems to be a perception running through the TAT stories of some research participants that dissident voices are silenced by the ruling regime. In this section, I jointly assess common perceptions of freedom of speech and rule of law to unravel the contribution that these variables make to the standard of democracy experienced by ordinary Malagasy in the Antsinanana region.

Substantive democracy requires a subtle balance between protecting civil rights and maintaining the rule of law (Merkel 2004: 39). Which is not to say that these two objectives are always at cross-purposes: civil rights soon fall victim to autocratic impulses when not protected by the rule of law. Excessive concern for public order, however, can result in the suppression of basic civil rights including, for example, freedoms of speech and association. Recognising this delicate balance, Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights specifies that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression (also see Warburton 2009: 2). Eager to conform to international standards, at least in writing, Article 10 of Madagascar's 1992 constitution similarly enshrines freedoms of opinion, expression, and the press in law (see Figure 26).

Although these civil liberties are etched into the 1992 constitution, TAT stories analysed in Chapter Five portray a political landscape dominated by concern for public order to the detriment of individual rights. Many research participants seemed inclined to self-censor, stifled by fear of being overheard saying the wrong thing. Patrick, for instance, adamantly stated: "sometimes people who say things against the government are put in jail." Mamisoa, a young priest, was more specific: "Because of the political crisis in 2000, there are a lot of political prisoners still in jail now who have been imprisoned by the state. The authorities and the tribunals," he continued, "they can't say anything against the government. Against the President." Although political imprisonment was not a dominant theme to emerge from TAT stories, the expectation that ordinary people could be jailed for saying the wrong thing, often based on hearsay rather than personal experience, came up surprisingly often in casual conversation. Most people had a story to tell about someone who had been unjustly imprisoned for speaking out. Even if these stories are little more than rumour and speculation, they nonetheless directly influence how people behave. My

urban research assistant, for instance, was fearful of being arrested if someone in authority became suspicious of my research. Similar apprehension on the part of research participants likewise influenced my snowball sampling and need to ensure the anonymity of people who agreed to take part in this research (see Chapters Three and Five). Despite constitutional protection for free speech, many research participants were not confident that they could exercise this right in practice, at least not if they were talking about politics.

Moreover, some research participants explained how suppression of free speech could likewise persuade members of the ruling party to tow the party line. Stéphanie, for instance, said that "even people high on the ladder [bureaucrats, civil servants] who don't agree [with the ruling party or President] say that they do agree to keep their jobs," indicating a clear perception that dissenters will be punished. Claudia said simply: "It is always necessary to be on the side of the government." Again, party unity and order take priority over individual free speech rights. The scenarios described by research participants contrast starkly with the evaluation made by the Economist Intelligence Unit that "all citizens are free to express themselves on all political issues" (2008: 15). While constitutional provisos embed freedom of expression in national law, reality, it would seem, falls far short of the ideal.

Media censorship was also common knowledge among people I interviewed and was an obvious basic theme for both the dissident and ambiguous perceptual lenses analysed in Chapter Five. In a democracy, freedom of information is necessary for "citizen awareness;" in order for a government to be representative, citizens must know what it is doing and be able to influence decisions (Saward 1998: 63). However, research participants whose TAT stories contained clusters of basic themes common to the social divisions perceptual lens were largely resigned to censorship, particularly of the press. They sometimes insisted, though, that misinformation should not be attributed to the journalists themselves, as they lack the tools necessary to uncover the truth, but rather to the tightly controlled nature of the political arena.

While the evidence provided by TAT stories reflective of the dissident perceptual lens reinforced the notion that freedom of speech and access to information are valued democratic rights, they also highlighted practical challenges to the everyday practice of these rights. According to the 1992 constitution, the rights

**Figure 28: Distribution of Freedom of Expression and Rule of Law Perceptual Lenses**
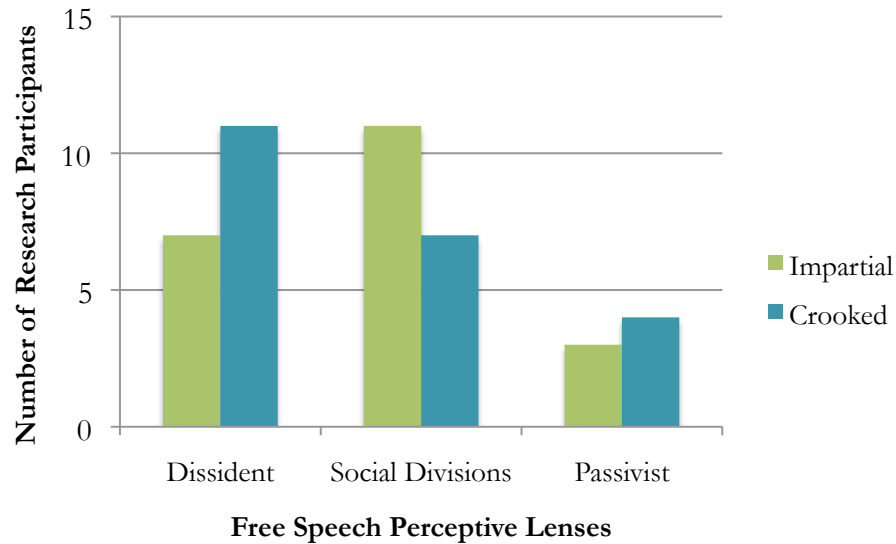


guaranteed under Article 10 can be limited in the interest of maintaining public order. This condition is reflected in TAT stories indicative of both the dissident and social divisions perceptual lenses in Chapter Five. In dissident TAT stories, free speech and access to information become key points of political contention. While the government is often portrayed as having the upper hand, research participants whose stories suggested the dissident lens clearly thought that ordinary people could reassert their authority by taking to the streets. Some of these people also lamented, however, that public demonstrations were forbidden under Ravalomanana. It is perhaps not surprising that people whose TAT stories reflected the dissident lens were slightly more likely to also suggest that Madagascar's laws are easily manipulated, as Figure 28 illustrates. Research participants whose TAT stories indicated the social divisions lens, by contrast, were more likely to stress the importance of maintaining social order, as the analysis in Chapter Five suggested. Extremely conscious of pervasive socio-religious divisions, these people were generally less critical of restrictions on individual free speech and somewhat more inclined to believe that Madagascar has a robust rule of law.

**Conclusion**

"Many individuals are citizens with respect to political rights," O'Donnell observes, "but not in terms of civil rights. Indeed, they are as poor legally as they are materially" (2004: 42). This reflection is particularly apt in the case of Madagascar. One of the poorest countries in the world, many of the people I interviewed demonstrated an incisive awareness that they are routinely denied their basic democratic rights. Chapter Four affirmed that political rights in Madagascar remained largely intact at the time research was conducted. Although some research participants clearly indicated that they do not find voting worthwhile and a few charged that they are denied their voting rights altogether, most of the people I spoke to did say that they had voted in the previous presidential election. The existence of over 160 officially registered political parties likewise attests to the fact that people are able to organise political parties, even if these parties are unable to mount an effective opposition. There is evidence in Chapter Five, however, that free speech rights have come under sustained attack. These political worldviews identified from TAT stories foreshadow the fiery public response to Ravalomanana's closure of a rival's television station in January 2009.

Although not characteristic of the majority of TAT stories, there were two instances when people, both urban and well educated, explained their understandings of democracy specifically in terms of the rule of law. First, Todilahy suggested: "When you are in a democracy, you can't just do whatever you want. There are laws to follow." He continued, "It is always necessary to have police to enforce the law. If not, everyone would do what they wanted." Julie similarly explained "Democracy means limits. Everyone can't do what they want." A bit later in her TAT story she went on to say, "There are a lot of people who don't understand democracy. Democracy is not the same for everyone. It is different for ordinary people than for the people in power. There is a hierarchy." While both of these accounts suggest that rule of law is a necessary component of democracy, they differ significantly in their accounts of how the rule of law should be applied. Whereas Todilahy seems to interpret rule of law as an even-handed mechanism for maintaining order, Julie clearly indicates that there are different rules for elites and ordinary people.

While the 244 TAT stories that I collected during field research clearly indicate that people I spoke with in eastern Madagascar want to believe in

democracy, important divisions emerged over what democracy means and how it can best be secured. Some research participants like Julie acknowledge and accept that ordinary people and political elites are subject to different rules, but maintain that this de facto inequality is justified because democracy requires order. Others, however, told TAT stories suggesting that average citizens see little problem with using undemocratic means (e.g. strikes, protests) to unseat political elites who abuse their power and withhold or suspend constitutional liberties. As the next chapter demonstrates, although this rationale does not adhere to standards set by the international community, it does surface in the literature on democratic development. Mungiu-Pippidi, for instance, warns that "the unaccountable behaviour of rulers legitimates unlawful behaviour by citizens" (2006: 90). Whether or not unlawful behaviour is ever legitimate is not a question considered in this thesis. The evidence above does illustrate, however, how formal constitutional rules can become detached from lived political experience.

The evidence presented here suggests that democracy assistance projects that focus too closely on formal legal processes may not be seeing the whole picture. Technical quick fixes to perceived constitutional shortcomings can work in some instances but are unlikely, on their own, to alter the commonplace experiences of ordinary people. The comparative analysis above of formal constitutional safeguards and how ordinary Malagasy perceive them forcefully demonstrates that formal rules, while important, do not indubitably guarantee democratic rights. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine a full range of democracy promotion projects in minute detail. The general policy positions cited in Chapter One, however, appear to emphasise legal protection for individual rights, particularly insofar as they shore up elections, while ignoring informal social norms. Evidence from the Antsinanana region substantiates the hypothesis that this can result in "an atmosphere of institutionalised crisis" in which norms espoused by elites and ordinary people alike become resistant to reform (Rogers 2004: 114). Rather than safeguarding the most basic features of democracy, policies that bolster constitutions without carefully considering local norms and expectations may only serve to further discredit nominally democratic politics.

The indicators and criteria that provide the contours for contemporary attempts to assist and assess democratic development are useful for promoting

formal, quantifiable changes in governance. The empirical analysis in Chapters Four through Six suggests that the themes adopted by the global democracy assistance industry are appropriate. People in Madagascar understood, albeit in various ways, that electoral process, freedom of expression, and rule of law all related in some way to democratic practice. The experiences and expectations related through TAT stories suggested, however, that the ways in which external experts apply these indicators through various initiatives remains inadequate (also see Karl 1990). The evidence has consistently demonstrated that Western, expert assessments of Madagascar's democratic credentials conflict with the experience of ordinary people. More promising, however, is the indication that despite rampant political cynicism aspirations for more democratic governance remain intact. Initiatives to assist future democratic development in Madagascar could tap into these indigenous democratic ambitions; doing so, however, will require a different approach – one that acknowledges that democracy assistance professionals may not always know best. In the next chapter, I advocate an alternative way of thinking about democracy assistance that integrates international objectives with local perceptions of appropriate political behaviour.

*A style does not go out of style as long as it
adapts itself to its period. When there is an
incompatibility between the style and a certain state of mind,
it is never the style that triumphs.*
*(Coco Chanel, cited in Icon Group 2008: 2)*

Historically, democracy assistance and assessment have been largely Western projects based on technical blueprints with little reference to individual country contexts and socio-political conditions (Bradley 2005: 410, Grugel 2002: 139, Kaplan 2008a: 18, Rakner, Menocal, and Fritz 2007: 48). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that a wealth of research has been compiled on the supply-side of democracy assistance while the "functioning effects" (Leininger 2010: 76) or "democracy dividend" (Price 2009: 169) of this global effort remains less certain (also see Carothers 2002: 8, Diamond 2008a: 315). Even democracy indices purporting to measure trends in democratic development give only a very limited indication of how democracy works locally, based as they are on discrete Western criteria and assessments. This preoccupation with supply-side objectives rather than substantial results has generated an abundance of democracy initiatives that suffer "from unrealistic visions that feed unreal expectations, or go too much against the grain of the system, or lack persistence and commitment" (de Lange 2010: 25). Some projects intended to strengthen democracy have instead only served to further undermine it (Mwenda 2007, Sunstein 1993: 352). "Intentional plans are always important, but," Ferguson cautions, "never in quite the way the planners imagined" (2002: 402).

Although it is generally recognised that democracy will likely struggle to take root where it is not supported by the host society, political culture has been largely regarded as too ambiguous – too fuzzy – to be integrated into mainstream analysis of democratic development. Where indigenous culture has been acknowledged, its inclusion has remained superficial. The Economist Intelligence Unit's political culture indicator, for example, focuses narrowly on perceptions of political leadership and whether or not democracy is capable of maintaining social order and economic growth. None of these factors tell us anything about what people expect from their

government or how they interpret political behaviour and events. Hyden's 2010 working paper on political accountability in Africa provides one recent exception to this general rule that might signal a promising trend for forthcoming and future research.

Identifying how ordinary people interpret not only their country's political system but also the objectives of democracy assistance initiatives can help redress the current imbalance between the ambitions of the democracy assistance industry and those of their supposed beneficiaries. Doing so, however, requires that more attention be paid to local concerns and particularities, exactly the sort of "fuzzy norms" that Huntington insists "do not yield useful analysis" (1991: 9). The original data collected on political culture(s) in the Antsinanana region of Madagascar and analysed in Chapters Four through Six demonstrates, to the contrary, that political culture can be studied in a pragmatic and meaningful way when conceptualised as perceptual lenses and investigated using collaborative research methods.

This chapter brings together the nine distinct perceptual lenses identified in previous chapters to assess how local, non-elite interpretations of both democracy and Madagascar's democratic development compare to those of international experts. The chapter begins, however, with a brief account of one USAID democracy assistance initiative in Madagascar, identifying both stated objectives and persistent difficulties encountered in their implementation. I provide interpretive context for these project setbacks using evidence from the perceptual lenses identified in previous chapters. The area where I conducted fieldwork is a USAID "priority zone" and this particular policy initiative was implemented there. I go on to draw inferences about how people in the Antsinanana region interpret democracy from both TAT stories and explanations of democracy offered by research participants. Although three different interpretations of democracy result from this analysis, only one of these bears any real resemblance to that promoted by the international democracy assistance industry. This analysis leads me to conclude that a distinction must be made between the doctrinal approach to democracy assistance that currently dominates policymaking and a more strategic course of action that incorporates context sensitive knowledge.

**MISONGA: A 60-Second Case Study**

In 2004, USAID launched Managing Information and Strengthening Organisations for Networked Governance Approaches (MISONGA), an $8.2 million project designed to supplement the good governance strategy already outlined in President Ravalomanana's Madagascar Action Plan (MAP).[107] PACT and Catholic Relief Services, both organisations with past experience working in Madagascar and existing field offices, were contracted to implement the project between 2004 and 2006. At the outset, these organisations identified civil society participation and effectiveness as "[t]he greatest challenge [to] building a more democratic society" in Madagascar (Pact Inc. and Catholic Relief Services 2006: 5). MISONGA's three strategic objectives – strengthening civil society, improving access to information, and improving government responsiveness – aimed to address this shortcoming (Pact Inc. and Catholic Relief Services, 2004); reducing corruption was later added as a fourth objective (Pact Inc. and Catholic Relief Services 2006).

The close proximity of these strategic objectives with the formulaic democracy assistance priorities identified in Chapter One (i.e. electoral process, freedom of expression, rule of law) is illustrated in Figure 29. Together, these priority areas establish political participation, political representation, and political accountability as three pillars of the democracy assistance agenda. MISONGA proposed to strengthen these pillars of democracy by "providing technical support in the areas of institutional development, organisational development, advocacy, financial management, and strategic management" (Pact Inc. and Catholic Relief Services-Madagascar 2004: 3). The three original objectives identified by MISONGA planners (i.e. strengthening civil society, improving access to information and improving government responsiveness) all fall well within the established parameters of technical democracy assistance, focusing primarily on capacity building (e.g. ICT and advocacy training) and the creation of infrastructure (e.g. radio broadcasting and ICT facilities).[108] Additionally, organisations receiving MISONGA training and

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[107] The Madagascar Action Plan is another name for the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

[108] Rakner, Menocal, and Fritz identify support for independent media outlets, including journalism training and equipment provision, as the second most funded priority of democracy assistance (2007: 44).

**Figure 29: Three Pillars of Democracy Assistance**

| Political Participation | Political Representation | Political Accountability |
|---|---|---|
| electoral participation as a human right **Electoral Process** | electoral representation **Electoral Process** | accountability via freedom of expression and a pluralistic media **Freedom of Expression** |
| political participation via freedom of expression **Freedom of Expression** | preference formation **Freedom of Expression** | constraints on the executive **Rule of Law** |
| a protected democratic freedom **Rule of Law** | strengthening civil society **MISONGA** | improving government effectiveness **MISONGA** |
| improving access to information **MISONGA** | | reducing corruption **MISONGA** |

resources were encouraged to create a national coalition, contributing to USAID Madagascar's aim of improving good governance and democracy across the country (Pact Inc. and Catholic Relief Services-Madagascar 2004: 3). President Ravalomanana's participation in the national launch of MISONGA was interpreted by project organisers as "assur[ing] the Malagasy people and all interested partners that MISONGA was the missing link to promoting good governance and a liberal democracy in Madagascar" (Pact Inc. and Catholic Relief Services-Madagascar 2004: 4).

Originally anticipated to run through 2008, USAID terminated the project two years early citing "lack of funding" (Pact Inc. and Catholic Relief Services 2006: 6). The substantial difficulties encountered while implementing project objectives

suggest that several dimensions of the project (e.g. e-governance, promoting political advocacy) simply proved untenable. The grand ambitions of the project led to unrealistic expectations; that it would be possible to establish a sustainable e-governance platform in a country more accustomed to carbon paper than computers, for instance. Indeed, the appropriation of the project's meaning by local people indicates the degree to which project objectives remained disconnected from the people they were intended to inspire. In Malagasy, the word *misonga* means "scaling up;" however, the project was commonly referred to as *misamonga* meaning "joke" because of it's failure to recognise local culture and practices (Ferguson 2007). Animosity directed toward President Ravalomanana in TAT stories further suggests that project coordinators may have been mistaken to assume that the President's support "assured" the general population of his commitment to liberal democracy.

In the end, MISONGA experienced a mix of successes and failures. Community and regional leaders did participate in skills training and several civil society organisations, including Transparency International and l'Association des Femmes Maires de Madagascar (the Association of Women Mayors of Madagascar), received small grants for budget support and organisational development (Pact Inc. and Catholic Relief Services-Madagascar 2004: 6-7). Advocacy training and strategic development assistance were also trumpeted as successes in the final report (Pact Inc. and Catholic Relief Services 2006). Disproportionate reliance on the expertise and objectives of USAID and its partners, however, resulted in several "challenges" only briefly addressed by project coordinators. The strategic objective of fostering advocacy among civil society organisations, for example, proved particularly flawed because "the political environment was not favourable to this type of action" (Pact Inc. and Catholic Relief Services 2006: 16). Establishing an e-governance platform likewise proved largely unworkable because "local personnel lack[ed] technical skills making it difficult to transfer competencies" (Pact Inc. and Catholic Relief Services 2006: 24). To paraphrase Dryzek, purveyors of democratic "hardware" should not presume that supportive local attitudes will immediately emerge in response to highly technocratic efforts (1996: 122). Had policy developers paid slightly less reverence to industry fashion and looked rather more closely at local circumstances, some of these difficulties could have been foreseen and, perhaps, avoided.

MISONGA was formulated after, and perhaps in response to, the political crisis that paralysed Madagascar for six months between 2001 and 2002. When initially implemented in 2004, policy makers identified Madagascar's most pressing challenge to building a more democratic society as "increase[ing] participation and effectiveness of civil society in developing solutions to address social and economic issues, as well as, natural resource depletion" (Pact Inc. and Catholic Relief Services 2006). Just over eight years later, Madagascar is again faced with political turmoil resulting from a presidential legitimacy crisis. More effective civil society movements and increased participation in politics more generally are still necessary precursors to substantive democratic governance in this country. Crucially, however, although democracy assistance organizations have appropriately identified these problem areas, policy efforts to date – MISONGA among them – have underestimated the complexity of the relationship between civil society and democratic development (Grugel 2002: 115, Quigley 1997: 565). It is, perhaps, not entirely surprising then that they have done little to fill the void.

Expectations and perceptions of ordinary citizens take on new significance in light of the practical problems and resistance encountered by MISONGA coordinators. Although USAID cited lack of funding as its official reason for terminating the project half way though, it is difficult to imagine that the project's lacklustre mid-term results would not have contributed to this decision. Project organisers acknowledged that the objective of improving advocacy by civil society[109] organisations failed to gain traction because local organisations worried about being perceived by the political establishment as mounting an opposition movement (Pact Inc. and Catholic Relief Services 2006: 16).[110] Ambitious project objectives that work at cross-purposes with local beliefs and expectations will likely encounter resistance, as this example illustrates (Dryzek 1990: 135). There is, consequently, practical value in coming to terms with different and "unofficial" versions of reality; that the existing political environment is not conducive to overt competition in this case

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[109] For a discussion of the contested boundaries and scope of "civil society" in the context of democratic development, see Pankhurst (2000).

[110] Sørensen pointedly questions the efficacy of democracy assistance targeting civil society groups, arguing that even with substantial assistance they remain too small to meaningfully challenge powerful regimes (2000: 304).

(Nazarea et al. 1999a: 219). External policy support cannot foster democratic practices where they do not complement existing political expectations and accepted behaviour patterns (Grugel 2002: 135). As Mintzberg points out, failure to implement a policy effectively must also point to a deficiency in policy formation (2000: 25). In the following section, I examine whether local understandings of democracy and appropriate political behaviour identified from TAT stories can help suggest where MISONGA may have gone wrong.

## What Does Democracy Mean Here? (A Partial Answer)

The TAT stories told by research participants provide unique insight into how ordinary people in eastern Madagascar interpret electoral processes, opportunities for political participation and impartiality of the rule of law. As anticipated in Chapter Two, individual perceptions of the political sphere identified from TAT stories do not overlap or correspond perfectly. There are, however, some pronounced trends in the types of stories people told about elections, protests, and police encounters, suggesting the possibility that three distinct conceptualisations of democracy may exist in the Antsinanana region. Among people consulted for this research, democracy was generally conceptualised as (i) an ambiguous aspiration, (ii) a particular set of rules, or (iii) (impossible without) freedom of expression. While rules-based understandings of democracy broadly coincide with Western expectations, it appears as though processes of redefinition are also at work (Dagnino 2007: 549). Although research participants occasionally associated democracy with political life in Madagascar, they more often contrasted a democratic ideal with their own, less satisfactory political experience.

### *Democracy is a Big Question Mark*

A plurality of people consulted for this research never took a definitive position on either the value of elections or freedom of expression in their TAT stories, instead saying that elections are generally worthwhile (the positive lens) and protests are sometimes justified (the social divisions lens). This raises the prospect that some Malagasy may have a rather ambivalent or uncertain take on contemporary political events and their country's democratic trajectory. Although these research participants may not have expressed a definitive opinion about either the quality or inclusiveness of national politics, they often indicated that they took an interest in

distinctly local issues that have an immediate effect on their daily lives. Likewise, TAT stories often indicated that research participants with this outlook were inclined to engage in political debate at the local level (the local lens). This position is similarly reflected in the general interest these research participants expressed in current events, even if they were sometimes unable to access newspapers or other sources of information on a regular basis. This combination of perceptual lenses, suggests the presence of a political culture that remains hopeful for Madagascar's democratic prospects even if people are unable to pinpoint what 'real democracy' might look like (Grugel 2002: 87). Claudia aptly summed up this position when she concluded: "democracy is a big question mark." Even so, she remained optimistic that "little by little Madagascar is moving toward real democracy."

Indeed, one could say that people with this worldview are wearing bifocals. Particular circumstances (e.g. how well elections are organised, who is protesting) help determine whether they perceive the political sphere broadly speaking – and democracy in particular – in a positive or negative light.[111] With regard to elections, for example, these research participants repeatedly suggested that people were generally inclined to vote and looked on the act of voting favourably. From these responses, I suspect that a simple poll or survey of these research participants would likely have generated a high quantitative score for the value that respondents attribute to elections and political participation. Probing deeper, however, TAT stories revealed that some people, though positively predisposed toward elections, thought of voting as a duty or obligation rather than a free choice. Some voiced uncertainty about whether people could be punished for not voting and suggested that they voted to protect themselves against possible retribution for abstaining. In a similar vein, an anonymous written interview confided: "The political structure in Madagascar is very fragile because the labouring masses are reduced to poverty. The people are so destitute, the only thing left to sell is their vote." It would be mistaken, therefore, to presume that people value their vote ideologically as a way of participating in the political process or showing dissatisfaction with elected officials who have failed to meet public expectations. Instead, these research participants

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[111] For an examination of how and why people switch between alternative cognitive frames (i.e. perceptive lenses), see Oberschall (2000).

expressed an altogether more pragmatic understanding of the voting process that focused either on a) immediate benefits associated with voting for a particular candidate, or b) trying to avoid future penalties associated with voting for the 'wrong' candidate (or abstention).

These TAT stories further suggested the distinct possibility that many Malagasy, though knowledgeable of technical voting procedures, may actually vote out of routine or a feeling of obligation instead of any expectation that their vote will make a difference to national political outcomes or the actual representation of their interests. To illustrate, another anonymous written interview specified: "In Madagascar, we have democracy of the strong, but it excludes the weak and the opposition. Most people remain mute and unable to act." Even so, as the graph of voter turnout among research participants in Chapter Four illustrates, most people said that they had voted in the previous presidential election (see Figure 13). This adds to the uncertainty with which we can claim that elections provide Malagasy voters with a meaningful venue for political participation, indicating instead a game of musical chairs among political elites (Whitehead 2001: 453). Likewise, the extent to which these people interpret electoral processes as an opportunity for securing political representation – especially at the national level – remains ambiguous. Many TAT stories indicative of the positive lens included, remember, an element of ambiguity about what elections are for despite the clear inclination of research participants to take part (see Chapter Four).

Research participants who seemed rather unsure about the real purpose of elections often also seemed somewhat unsure about what constitutes appropriate boundaries for personal freedom of expression. As Chapter Five revealed, TAT stories told by research participants indicative of the social divisions lens shared a common theme that strikes or demonstrations, while not desirable, are sometimes necessary. The analysis of this perceptual lens in Chapter Five also illustrated that these research participants exhibited a moderate interest in current affairs only infrequently punctured by scepticism about press reliability. Some research participants additionally described poverty and illiteracy as barriers that may deter some people from accessing information, at least via newspapers. Though inconclusive, the competences and dispositions volunteered by these research participants in response to the images suggest little more than a tenuous link between

political participation and freedom of expression. That said, general interest in current affairs indicates that these research participants may put greater value on freedom of expression (and freedom of the press) as a tool for gaining information and forming (political) preferences. There is little evidence from TAT stories, however, that these research participants associate a pluralistic media with the ability to hold elected officials accountable in the way that democracy assistance experts generally do.

Although it is impossible to say with any certainty, thematic patterns contained in these TAT stories suggest that people who understand democracy in an ambiguous way – as a big question mark – would likely have responded well to several of MISONGA's initiatives, particularly those aimed at improving access to information and increasing government responsiveness at the local level. Research participants seemed genuinely interested in current events indicating that MISONGA efforts to improve radio broadcasting capabilities, particularly in rural areas, would have been met with appreciation. I further suspect that it is unlikely that people subscribing to this particular political culture would have called the project misamonga (a joke); at least not at the outset. Although it seems unlikely that these research participants share the expectations for political participation, representation, and accountability adhered to by the democracy assistance industry, the combination of participation and restraint characteristic of their TAT stories suggests that they may nevertheless respond reasonably well to democracy assistance efforts.

*Rules-Based Democracy*

A significant minority of those interviewed for this research indicated, by contrast, that they understand democracy as a particular set of rules or a prescribed way of doing things. As Todilahy pointed out: "In a democracy people can't just do whatever they want. There are rules." An anonymous written interview similarly opined "Democracy is the voice of many people; it is necessary to accept the majority [position]." Dispositions characteristic of the positive, passivist, and impartial perceptual lenses analysed in previous chapters suggest that these rules likely include: (i) citizens should vote, (ii) disputes should be settled through discussion and (iii) the law applies to everyone without prejudice. This point of view has much in common with that characteristic of the international democracy assistance industry, as I illustrate below.

Where elections are concerned, these democratic rules include taking part in transparent electoral processes, although none of the people taking part in this research ever spoke about electoral participation as a human right. Julie, of instance, was very enthusiastic that: "During the elections we have democracy. The people are free to choose their candidate. Here, the opposition party is free [to participate]. To vote is to exercise free choice." Interestingly, Mattes and Bratton found that positive assessments of democracy among Africans were most often offered by people who supported the winning political party (2007: 203) It is worth mentioning, therefore, that Julie was not bashful about her support for President Ravalomanana, although it is impossible to know what proportion of research participants who told TAT stories indicative of rules-based democracy likewise supported the President. In any case, this confidence in electoral transparency bears little resemblance to the uncertainty expressed by research participants whose TAT stories provided evidence of alternative perceptions of electoral processes in Madagascar. Moreover, people adopting this worldview seem likely not only to perceive electoral processes as transparent but also to interpret national politics as transparent by association: "Democracy is how you make politics transparent," another person wrote in an anonymous interview. As Chapter Four explained, familiarity with elections coupled with an urge to participate reflects the sort of attitude anticipated by both democracy assistance policies and the vast literature on democratic development. The meaning associated with participation in democratic elections here seems to be political transparency, although it remains unclear from this analysis exactly how transparency in this context relates to political representation or elite accountability.

Research participants telling TAT stories indicative of a broad conceptualisation of rules-based democracy did not interpret political protest as an appropriate course of action (see Chapter Five) and indicated that the law is applied impartially (see Chapter Six). Notably, research participants consistently affirmed that people need to obey the law regardless of social class. In the words of Hery, "The law is the law…it's for everyone." As analysis of the impartial perceptual lens in Chapter Six demonstrated, some research participants likewise asserted that even rich people have to obey the law. Presumably, this position extends to people in positions of power, although TAT stories indicative of the impartial lens did not identify the man walking his dog in Image 5 as a powerful person. Furthermore, though not stated explicitly in TAT stories indicative of the passivist perceptual lens, it was not

uncommon for other research participants to suggest that political protests are illegal. If this is indeed a common perception, it seems logical that people adhering to a rules-based notion of democracy would identify protest as an unreasonable form of freedom of expression because it is against the law.

That said, people who told TAT stories apparently supportive of rules-based democracy clearly indicated that they value freedom of expression as a tool for both preference formation and political participation. Research participants who told TAT stories indicative of the passivist lens often indicated their categorical disapproval of open protest, arguing that it is always better to talk about problems or disagreements calmly. This position seems to reaffirm, moreover, the apparent proclivity of research participants to participate in local politics (e.g. by attending community meetings) where issues of common concern like taxes, security, and education can be discussed and resolved collectively (see Chapter Four). Positive dispositions toward political discussion like these indicate that some people may indeed identify speaking about local issues with meaningful political participation. It was likewise common for people telling TAT stories indicative of rules-based democracy to express interest in current events. While people could have various reasons for wanting to read the newspaper, some research participants who told TAT stories indicative of the passivist perceptual lens said that it is particularly important to read newspapers in the run-up to elections. This position provides additional evidence that freedom of expression is related to preference formation and, by extension, political representation.

The three pillars of democracy assistance in Figure 29 identify the interrelated expectations for electoral processes, freedom of expression, and rule of law ingrained in democracy assistance efforts like MISONGA. I expect that people who have adopted a rules-based understanding of democracy would broadly agree with the emphasis democracy assistance places on electoral process, freedom of expression, and rule of law. It is rather unlikely that most research participants whose TAT stories indicated this particular political culture would be familiar with the democratic standards set by international organizations or foreign academics. That said, the liberal, rules-based definition of democracy maintained by the international democracy assistance industry is nevertheless largely compatible with this local point of view. The positions outlined in TAT stories lead me to believe that MISONGA

efforts to buttress political participation and representation through improving access to information and strengthening civil society organisations would resonate with people subscribing to this political culture. What is less clear, however, is how these research participants would have interpreted MISONGA's anti-corruption initiatives. On one had, targeting corruption strengthens the rule of law; on the other, the impartial perceptual lens did not identify corruption as a problem.

*Democracy Cannot Exist Without Freedom of Speech*

Finally, at the opposite end of the spectrum, roughly one-third of people whose TAT stories strongly indicated support for political protest (the dissident lens) also indicated that they had little or no faith in elections (the tedious lens) or the impartiality of police (the crooked lens). Moreover, slightly under half of the people I spoke to either strongly indicated that democracy cannot exist without freedom of speech or else explicitly defined democracy as freedom of speech. While there is not enough data to draw statistically relevant conclusions, the apparent association between democracy and free speech made by some research participants clearly suggests a third possible political culture.[112] This particular worldview has little faith in electoral processes or the impartiality of the law. That research participants telling these sorts of TAT stories depicted protest as the only remaining way to make their voices heard might help explain why they perceive democracy as (impossible without) free speech. It also offers an interpretation for why they failed to understand how Western observers could think Madagascar was a democracy at all.

Extreme voter fatigue generally characterised TAT stories indicative of this point of view. What is the point of voting, research participants asked, if the party in power decides the results long before election day? This sentiment common among TAT stories indicative of the tedious lens contrasts sharply with the more positive accounts of voting discussed above. It also runs counter to the expectations of democracy assistance providers, who associate voting in elections with political participation. The diagram in Figure 29 illustrates how the rule of law theoretically

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[112] Survey data collected by Marcus a decade ago likewise indicates that, for many Malagasy, democracy has less to do with formal state functions than "the personal freedoms it offers" (Marcus, Mease, and Ottemoeller 2001: 130).

enhances political participation by protecting electoral participation. An anonymous written interview response revealed, however, that "everyone has the right to vote but manipulations exclude a lot of people;" examples of these "manipulations" are discussed in Chapter Four. Although the majority of people expressing this point of view also often indicated that they had voted in the previous presidential election, their certainty that electoral results are manipulated raises questions about the reliability of elections as indicators of political representation or, indeed, meaningful political participation.

In contrast to their descriptions of hollow elections, research participants expressing signs of a political cultural worldview that closely associates democracy with free speech believed that political protest could make a difference. It is this interpretation of protest as legitimate political action, coupled with the belief that democracy cannot exist where freedom of expression is stifled, that distinguishes this point of view from the other two discussed above. "Public participation in political decisions is possible when there are protests against the people in power," one person stated in an anonymous written interview. Other research participants similarly lamented that the only way for normal people to experience democracy and exercise their political voice is voting, despite putting little faith in the electoral system (see Chapter Four). Indeed, Pierre thought that people had no choice but to protest if they wanted to improve their lives, finding electoral participation ineffective and a waste of time. This point of view contrasts sharply with the expectations of democracy experts, who perceive electoral processes as a means of both political participation and political representation.

Tellingly, people who defined democracy in this way also tended to say that they had never experienced democracy or that democracy does not exist in Madagascar, citing pervasive censorship. Not only did people who told these sorts of TAT stories suggest that the press was unreliable and cowed by the government,[113] rumours of political imprisonment were rampant and caused palpable anxiety. As I pointed out in Chapter Five, a small number of research participants who told TAT

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[113] The 2008 Bertelsmann Stiftung Madagascar country report concurs that journalists and editors "are sometimes too hesitant" to fully exercise their freedoms and that censorship is not unheard of (2007: 6-7).

stories vehemently supportive of free speech rights said during their TAT interviews that they were afraid to speak openly for fear of being overheard. Others voiced similar concerns after the recorder had been switched off, fears substantiated in an interview with national representatives of Madagascar's largest civil society organisation, KMF-CNOE. Indicative of this point of view, one anonymous respondent to the written interview questions expressed his/her dissatisfaction with Malagasy politics by writing: "In my opinion, democracy is the combination of freedom and truth. Power comes with freedom, the power to speak the truth." This helps explain why so many of these research participants expressed feelings of powerlessness and voicelessness in the political domain, whether because of pervasive censorship, the illegality of political protest, or the futility of voting.

From this analysis, it seems reasonable to assume that people with this political cultural outlook may have appreciated MISONGA's intention to improve access to information and, by association, promote political participation. The competences and dispositions contained in TAT stories lead me to suspect, however, that people who define democracy as freedom of expression would have been immediately suspicious of the project's motives when President Ravalomanana appeared alongside project organisers at the national launch. Contrary to the assessment made by PACT and Catholic Relief Services that the President's association with the project would add to its legitimacy, the suspicion of President Ravalomanana expressed in some TAT stories contributing to the identification of this particular worldview indicate that his involvement may have discredited the project from the beginning; although, it is impossible to gauge from this sample exactly how damaging this may have been. "The notion of political equality is virtually nonexistent in Madagascar," one anonymous written interview disclosed, "Only the party in power can function normally and at the same time it influences the media. The opposition, by contrast, always come up against obstacles like censors and sabotage." While it is impossible to know the extent to which this perspective is based in fact, people nevertheless perceive this as true with very real consequences (Thomas and Thomas 1928: 572). Given that this political cultural perspective identifies the regime in power as the instigator of both media and self-censorship, it is not difficult to understand why some people may have interpreted outside efforts endorsed by President Ravalomanana to improve access to information and increase government responsiveness as little more than a joke.

It is not entirely surprising that democracy, when viewed through this composite lens, is more abstract – and thought by some to be unattainable. According to Velohasina,

> The President says 'democracy this' and 'democracy that' but the reality doesn't match. The problem is that the President and other ministers go abroad and say things that bear no relation to life here, real life in Madagascar. Real democracy is when power is in the hands of the people. Here, people talk about democracy but we have never experienced it.

Julien similarly explained: "In my opinion, democracy is the right to express yourself. People have the right to criticise their leaders when they have done something wrong. The people and the workers have the right to strike and reclaim their rights." These people distinguish freedom as elemental to democracy, including the freedom to vote in a transparent election and freedom to voice opinions in opposition to the ruling party, principles not incongruous with those outlined in Figure 29. It is more difficult, however, to reconcile the sorts political behaviour endorsed by democracy assistance policies with those depicted in TAT stories indicative of the tedious and dissident perceptual lenses. Research participants who defined democracy as freedom of expression identified opting not to participate in flawed electoral processes and taking part in political protests as appropriate responses to what they perceived as Madagascar's democratic deficit.

Through this composite perceptual lens, the existing political system prevents genuine democratic development by denying ordinary people the freedom to publically disagree with decisions made by powerful elites. This has distinct consequences for the quality of the participatory relationship between citizens and democracy because the perceived socio-political context influences the sorts of political behaviour people think they are capable of (Dryzek and Holmes 2002). Their desire to participate in a meaningful discussion about what sort of political system they want to be members of and inability to do so contributes to the dissatisfaction voiced by people who perceive democracy as freedom of expression (Dagnino 2007: 552). As I suggest below, attempts to mediate the current political stalemate that propose holding new elections without addressing – or even recognising – these grievances will likely prove short-sighted.

**Democratic Crisis or Crisis of Confidence?**

It is not difficult to understand why outside observers were surprised by the violence and discontent that gripped Madagascar in the early months of 2009. While almost anyone would admit that the political system was far from perfect, the country seemed to be charting a slow-but-steady course toward democracy. Moreover, the results from Afrobarometer's most recent survey, conducted in June and July 2008, indicate widespread support for Ravalomanana. So where did it all go wrong? I have sought to demonstrate here that the tools we commonly rely on to assess democracy in developing countries are useful but insufficient and, crucially, may fail to take into account how local people perceive their own political environment (also see Koelble and Lipuma 2010). The flattering portrait of Madagascar painted by democracy indices in Chapter One seems to bear only a partial resemblance to the country as viewed through the eyes of its own citizens. The results of my qualitative study are neither as statistically representative nor as conclusive as conventional datasets; nevertheless, they provide a more nuanced basis for interpreting the 2009 political crisis than existing democracy metrics.

One month into the crisis, a Malagasy journalist offered this observation: "the people in the capital, Antananarivo and all over the Madagascar [*sic*] are divided into two. Some of them are really for Marc Ravalomanana, and some of them are also for Andry Rajoelina, and there is also another part that stays on quiet [*sic*] and on the fence" (Clottey 2009). This observation largely coincides with the three political cultures regarding democracy identified above: people who describe democracy as rules-based are likely to support Ravalomanana[114], those who define democracy as freedom of expression probably side with Rajoelina, and research participants for whom democracy is a big question mark are the "fence sitters."

The analysis above demonstrates that some people (i.e. those who perceive democracy as rules-based) were likely broadly supportive of the existing political system prior to January 2009 when the first signs of unrest became apparent. People whose political outlook conforms at least somewhat to international expectations of

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[114] As illustrated in the Preface to Part II, during the 2009 political crisis Ravalomanana relied on rules-based rhetoric while Rajoelina's political message had a distinct freedom of expression element.

democracy seem likely to accept the international assessment that the country is in the midst of a democratic crisis as well as subsequent mediation efforts and the new elections they endorse. Likewise, Malagasy citizens who remain unsure of what democracy means might reasonably go along with international mediation efforts despite any lingering reservations about the political status-quo prior to the most recent upheaval. Based on the analysis above, I suspect that neither of these groups, accounting for slightly over half of the people I interviewed, is likely to be convinced by the unilateral claims to legitimacy made by Rajoelina's High Transitional Authority.

People who see the world through the tedious and dissident perceptual lenses, by contrast, clearly expressed their disillusionment with President Ravalomanana's unfulfilled promises of democracy. This malaise can be attributed to at least two distinct causes. First, people for whom democracy means freedom of speech remain unconvinced by electoral processes and are unlikely to be persuaded by official election results. In the eyes of these research participants, President Ravalomanana's legitimacy had long since been called into question. Secondly, this dissatisfaction was enhanced by the conviction that the regime stifled political speech and meaningful participation through censorship and, albeit to a lesser extent, by banning political protest.[115] It may be significant, therefore, that protests first broke out when President Ravalomanana temporarily closed Rajoelina's TV station after it broadcast an interview with exiled former President Ratsiraka. This could have been interpreted by some people as a final hypocritical assault on democratic freedoms. In which case, the protests that ensued may have been perceived as a democratic opening – a rare opportunity to voice pent-up dissatisfaction.[116]

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[115] After the crisis broke out, a former minister was quoted as saying "The current crisis is caused by violations of democratic values…There may be several newspapers, public and private radio and television channels…But the people's aspirations are not being taken into account" (AFP 2009b). Six opposition leaders were also arrested in early February, purportedly for organising a public meeting without permission (Associated Press 2009). These reports lend credibility to the accusations of censorship and politically motivated arrest voiced by some research participants, suggesting that their perceptions may have indeed been based on actual events rather than hearsay or fabrication.

[116] It would be interesting to dissect Madagascar's 2009 political crisis in terms of "rightful resistance," although it is beyond the scope of this analysis to do so in any detail. In brief, rightful resistance operates on the edge of the law to expose hypocrisy by exploiting divisions among elites; it is "invariably noisy, public, and open" (O'Brien 1996: 33-34). From the sparse

Crucially, people who interpret democracy as freedom of speech seem unlikely to agree with the characterisation of the current impasse as a democratic crisis or be placated for long by the internationally mediated solution of a unity government and pending elections. In their eyes, the political sphere prior to 2009 was dominated by an autocratic regime that limited free speech, suppressed supporters of the opposition, and undermined fair electoral procedures. In short, there was no democracy to preserve. Moreover, democracy has often been achieved through struggle: "it is something to be taken, not given" (Barber 1996: 144-145). Writing about the Latin American context, Dagnino similarly affirms: "the struggle for rights, for the right to have rights, had to be a political struggle" (2007: 551). While not all research participants who associated democracy with freedom of expression told TAT stories depicting political struggle, their frustration signals a churning desire to take control of their own political future. It would seem that the widespread legitimacy of mediation efforts relies at least in part on addressing the grievances of this political culture group; precisely how that might be accomplished, however, is beyond the scope of this thesis.

On a more technical point, there are few indications that concerns about electoral fraud will be addressed or that substantive safeguards will be instituted to protect free speech for supporters of opposition candidates prior to the organisation of new elections. Research participants who I suspect see their world through the tedious and dissident perceptual lenses voiced serious concerns about the ability of opposition parties to organise, let alone campaign openly (see Chapter Five). Under these conditions, elections do not provide voters with genuine choice nor, for that matter, should their results be taken at face value as a sign of political legitimacy (Ng 1997: 22). Holding elections at the earliest possible opportunity, therefore, might increase the legitimacy of Madagascar's political leadership in the eyes of some – and the international community in particular (Lough 2009c, Lough 2009d) – but are unlikely to address the very real concerns of disgruntled would-be democrats.

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information available, this concept would seem to apply reasonably well to the protesters in the early days of the unrest before it exploded into a full-blown crisis. Protesters exploited the rift between Rajoelina and Ravalomanana while exposing the latter's hypocrisy on free speech rights. In other words, they used their participatory rights to challenge the legitimacy of a particular political elite, *not* the political system itself. Determining just how far the concept of rightful resistance applies to this case would, however, require substantial additional research.

Persistent socio-political inequality was also a latent theme of many TAT stories. The real issue here, however, is not economic but political: are state resources distributed equitably? TAT stories often revealed a pragmatic outlook that recognised and accepted the established social hierarchy. Some research participants indicated, for instance, that they remain resigned to social inequality and identified a paternalistic role for the governing elite, sometimes literally equating the government to a parent. Others, however, voiced frustration that their lives were not getting any better despite new mining ventures exploiting the country's vast mineral wealth. The land deal that President Ravalomanana brokered with the South Korean firm Daewoo Logistics is just the most blatant example of an agreement made by his regime on behalf of the country but not perceived by all to be in the country's best interests (Bearak 2009b, Dyer 2009, Jung-a, Oliver, and Burgis 2008, Mahr 2009). Indeed, rescinding this deal was one of the first things Rajoelina did as head of the High Transitional Authority (Dyer 2009). It is the unchecked behaviour of elected political elites, rather that economic stagnation alone, that leads to increased disenchantment with formal democratic regimes (Diamond 2008a: 165, Mattes and Bratton 2007: 198-201, Zakaria 2003: 14).

Continued failure to meaningfully address the hopelessly fractured party system and safeguard arenas for genuine political debate may lead to increased disenchantment with the promise of democracy, while failing to break the cycle of unrest and suppression that has characterised much of Madagascar's post-independence political history (Marcus and Ratsimbaharison 2005). Instead of interpreting the events of early 2009 as a democratic crisis with an abominable coup at its apex, the analysis of local conceptualisations of democracy above suggests that it might be more instructive to interpret them as a crisis of confidence in both existing political elites and institutions – elections included – that some people do not perceive as democratic. "Democracy is an experiment," Menand reminds us, "And it is in the nature of experiments sometimes to fail" (2001: 433). The political turmoil in and of itself need not be a disaster. Just as a failed scientific experiment can lead to new knowledge, better understanding, and even future success, so too can political upheaval. The real crisis will result if international experts and domestic political elites do not identify the underlying causes of political unrest and learn to meaningfully address them.

**Strategy vs. Doctrine: Finding A New Way Forward**

When angry hordes took to the streets of Antananarivo in the early months of 2009, outside observers struggled to contextualise the scenes of unrest. The sudden eruption of mass public demonstrations seemed incongruous with the relative strength and stability attested to by democracy assessment indices, public opinion data, and the expert assessment of international financial institutions. International concern deepened when, in March 2009, President Ravalomanana resigned and power was unconstitutionally transferred to his young rival, Rajoelina.

It is hardly surprising that journalists covering the political upheaval in 2009 succumbed to the dogged demands of a 24-hour news cycle, called 'coup' and swiftly moved on to the next (no doubt similarly truncated) news item. More worrying has been the unequivocal response of the international community to this perceived democratic crisis. Despite the rapid organization of a High Transitional Authority and the promise of elections by October 2010,[117] Rajoelina has been almost universally shunned on the international stage. Development assistance has dried up, and fledgling civil society organizations grapple ill-equipped with the crucial task of devising a national peace and reconciliation process. A tentative agreement on the construction of a unity government was reached through internationally mediated talks in early November 2009. This agreement was never fully implemented, however, and all indications suggest that prospects for the inception of an effective interim power-sharing agreement remain slim.

When the position of the international community is added to the analysis of local conceptualisations of democracy above, two contradictory interpretations of the current political stalemate begin to emerge. The international community has observed a democratic crisis, an assessment most likely shared by those Malagasy who likewise interpret democracy as rules-based. Setting Madagascar back on a course to democratic development will require the adoption of a new constitution closely followed by free and fair elections. The perspective of some research participants that democracy cannot exist without freedom of expression coupled with the dogged protests that eventually led to President Ravalomanana's sudden

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[117] Presidential elections have been scheduled for 26 November 2010 (Iloniaina, Richard and Ireland 2010).

resignation alternatively suggests that a significant portion of the Malagasy population may harbour entrenched uncertainties about past electoral procedure and perceived restrictions on free speech rights. Internationally brokered mediation efforts to date have completely overlooked these very real concerns.

It is in the very nature of policy development that opposing parties vie over definitions of the problem and control of the cure (Schön and Rein 1994: 29). In the context of democratic development, however, the debate is almost always lopsided; both the 'problem' and what should be done about it are defined almost exclusively by international experts rather than local actors (Quigley 1997: 566). Having demonstrated the interconnectedness of actors, interests, and worldviews (i.e. political cultures), it stands to reason that approaches to resolving Madagascar's ongoing stalemate that do not recognise the distinct worldviews of different stakeholder groups are unlikely to provide lasting stability. Likewise, if we accept that democratic development depends on an amalgamation of international and domestic support, then it seems that we need to reconsider the importance of local contexts and conditions, including the conceptualisations of democracy supported by local actors (Almond 1996: 9-10, Andrews 2008: 399, Hyden 2010: 11, Quigley 1997: 566, Whitehead 2001: 24). In short, there must be a transformation in the way the global democracy assistance industry and international experts relate to the citizens in developing countries whose vested interests may stand at odds with standardised projects and proposals (Diamond 2008a: 315).

The differentiation between doctrine and strategy made by Kilcullen in the context of response to counterinsurgency also applies to democracy assistance policy (Wolf 2009). The almost formulaic reliance of international actors on rapid 'free-and-fair' elections and the creation of power sharing agreements or unity governments in recent years represents a rigid, doctrinal approach to addressing the complex, context-specific problems that have destabilised Madagascar (BBC News 2009b, Iloniaina 2009b, Lough 2009d).[118] In March 2010, the International Crisis Group published new policy recommendations for ending the political crisis in Madagascar that notably dismiss the potential of a establishing an interim power-sharing

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[118] Power-sharing unity governments have also been endorsed in recent years as solutions to political crises in other polities, including Zimbabwe, Iraq and the Palestinian territories.

agreement. Despite calling for a change of direction, however, the report nevertheless concludes that a new constitution followed by elections represents the "only realistic option" for brokering a settlement among competing political elites (International Crisis Group 2010, Kroslak and Larbuisson 2010). This patently un-original solution blindly ignores the pent-up frustration and explosive agency of non-elite stakeholders whose street protests have not only undermined but actually unseated elected officials in the past.

The realization of more than illusory results requires that we untangle strategy from doctrine, at which point it becomes possible to approach challenges to democracy on a contextual basis and according to local standards (de Lange 2010: 23, Hope 2009: 82). Distinguishing doctrine from strategy with regards to democracy assistance policy would require substantial, additional research and goes some way beyond the purview of this thesis. Therefore, in this section I will just briefly outline the key differences between doctrine and strategy before suggesting in broad strokes how a more strategic approach to democracy assistance could meaningfully incorporate conceptualisations of democracy and expectations for political engagement ensconced in local political cultures.

*Doctrine*

The word "doctrine" has several discrete definitions with varying connotations. Taken together, however, they neatly typify the predominant policy approaches adopted by the global democracy assistance industry. According to the Merriam-Webster's dictionary, "doctrine" can be: a) something taught; b) a position or set of principles contained in a knowledge or belief system, a dogma; c) a legal principle established by previous decisions; d) a fundamental government policy, particularly in the area of international relations; e) a set of military strategies. Common to all of these meanings is the connotation of a default position; an established point of departure upon which future decisions are based.

The discussion of democracy assistance and assessment criteria in Chapter One established electoral procedure, freedom of expression and rule of law as key elements of most contemporary democracy assistance agendas. This was further substantiated by the brief account of MISONGA project priorities, above. In this section, I will demonstrate these democracy assistance criteria have taken on

doctrinal status within the industry. As previously noted, regardless of location or context, "democracy on the instalment plan" characterises many if not most democracy assistance programs. Indeed, it has been revealed that funding debates amongst policymakers at DFID are regularly dominated by talk of which prerequisites to prioritise instead of which countries could benefit most from particular types of aid (Youngs 2008: 16).

This preoccupation with prioritisation is not entirely surprising when one considers that the criteria for democratic development are (a) widely taught and discussed in the literature on democratic development. As outlined in Chapter One, these indicators espouse (b) a set of principles (e.g. political participation, political representation, political accountability) that dogmatically constrain the realm of reasonable policy objectives. Although neither electoral process nor freedom of expression is itself a legal principle, the regularity with which they are included in democracy assistance projects nevertheless suggests (c) the institutionalisation of certain practices and expectations both within particular agencies and across the field more generally. While the rallying cry "democracy!" may have been replaced in recent years by "good governance!" the establishment of free and fair elections supplemented by freedom of expression and enshrined in rule of law are (d) fundamental policy priorities of both international and bi-lateral democracy assistance programmes supplemented by vocal commitments from leaders of developing countries with respect to their domestic agendas. Finally, while these criteria in and of themselves are not (e) military strategies, it is not unheard of for democracy to be promoted at gunpoint; the muddled agendas tasked with establishing electoral democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq immediately spring to mind. The above analysis based on a five-pronged definition of "doctrine" compellingly suggests that electoral process, freedom of expression and rule of law currently espoused by the global democracy assistance industry have taken on a doctrinal character (also see Whitehead 2001: 451). This position is further supported when contrasted with a similarly detailed examination of "strategy," below.

*Strategy*

In stark contrast to the dogmatic nature of doctrine, strategy is – by definition – creative and flexible, adaptable to the nuances of particular situations. My starting point is once again the multi-layered definition provided by Merriam-

Webster; to paraphrase that dictionary "strategy" is: a) the science and art of employing resources to their maximum effect in supporting policies of peace or war; b) a careful plan; c) the art of creating and implementing plans in pursuit of a goal; d) an adaptation or set of adaptations conducive to evolutionary success. One feature that immediately differentiates "strategy" from "doctrine" is the notion that strategy is an art – a creative and interpretive process – whereas doctrine tends to be rigidly and historically entrenched. This characteristic inventiveness similarly crops up in the literature on social-strategy (Paquette 2002) and management (Mintzberg 2000, Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel 2009), both of which have policy-making and planning dimensions.

It is, moreover, crucial to differentiate between indoctrination – characterised by blind adherence to a given philosophy – and learning, which promotes critical inquiry and debate. This distinction is important because genuine learning "inevitably plays a key role, if not *the* key role, in the development of all strategies that are novel" (Mintzberg 2000: 227, emphasis original). Indoctrination, meanwhile, could be said to lead to the recycling of tired and tried ideas in ways that might look bright and shiny or have fancy new labels but are, nevertheless, no longer fit for purpose. Accordingly, I argue here that good governance and democracy promotion projects like MISONGA have been handicapped by blind adherence to doctrine. On the upside, it stands to reason that policy makers and practitioners open to serendipitous discovery and capable of appreciating the distinct nuance of individual country contexts can make inroads in what has been an often frustrating endeavour.

The notion that democracy assistance would benefit from an approach that recognises the uniqueness of individual countries is not new (Barber 1996: 144). Nor, for that matter does it necessarily insinuate a shift away from studying democratic development in comparative context. Instead, it proposes that we suspend our prejudices, forget what we know about what democracy is supposed to look like, and allow for the possibility that in order to achieve substantive results the system might need to look somewhat different. There is ample evidence if one looks across Africa, Asia, and Latin America that the transfer of democratic institutions has not yielded a uniform approach to democratic governance (Grugel 2002: 123). The rationality of a "standardised blueprint" (Collier 2007: 149, Rakner, Menocal, and Fritz 2007: 4) is irreconcilable with the idea that "it is the citizens of a society themselves" who must

determine what their democracy will look like (Price 2009: 170). In this vein, Joseph (1997: 365) and Saward (1998: 57) both attempt to define democracy without reference to elections while O'Donnell distinguishes between rule of law and "a reasonable application of what the rule of law is supposed to be" (2004: 34). Perhaps more importantly, there appears to be growing acceptance of the need for a more strategic approach within the democracy assistance industry, briefly discussed in the following section.

While, for the sake of argument, the above discussion starkly differentiates between strategy and doctrine, Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel use the example of the 'little black dress' (i.e. LBD) to illustrate how it is possible for the best of strategies to endure for decades, essentially establishing a doctrine of basic principles in the long-term. If this is the case, then the little black dress might be able to offer some useful pointers for future democracy assistance policies. Coco Chanel designed the original little black dress in the 1920s. Variations on her timeless classic are, however, still found across a wide spectrum of women's fashion retailers today. According to Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel, policy strategies designed following the "LBD model" would "eschew the faddish, and focus instead on basic elements of an enduring nature, incorporating a versatility and openness that invited their 'wearers' to add the adornments that [*sic*] saw fit to the occasion at hand." They go on to say:

> Perhaps most importantly, they would make us feel better about ourselves when we worked with them. And not in an insincere, preachy kind of 'call-to-greatness' way, but in a quiet way that emphasised our positives while acknowledging our flaws, all in the service of offering us hope for a better/thinner tomorrow. (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel 2009: 29)

In other words, it is possible to remain consistent in what you are creating (i.e. a little black dress, democratic governance) while experimenting with different approaches in how you go about constructing it (Carothers 2009b). As the next section illustrates, effective policies rely on both sound doctrine and adept strategy, the essential trick lies in finding a balance between learning from experience and context appropriate innovation.

*Toward a New Strategy for Democratic Development*

Having ballooned into a multi-billion dollar industry, a "real consensus" has now emerged that sustainable development – democratic or economic – requires

more than simply "throwing money and external knowledge at problems" (Hope 2009: 82). This is not to say that money and external knowledge are not useful; they are, and should be applied prudently. Nor is it enough, however, to merely understand how democratic politics is conceptualised locally. Rather, I propose that one guiding objective of a more strategic approach to democracy assistance must be to generate insights from local understanding that clarify how external assistance (whether money, knowledge, or both) can enhance indigenous trajectories of democratic change (Dryzek and Holmes 2002: ix, Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith: 2005: 220, Kaplan 2008b: 156). As Pritchett and Woolcock note, "one size does not fit all" does not mean that "any size fits any" or "anything goes" (2003: 193). In other words, in advocating a more pluralistic vision of democratic development we must not lose sight of democracy's central tenant, namely citizen control over government; that "some interpretations of democracy may be better than others" still stands (Lawson 2000: 82-83). Political culture(s) can, however, provide an indication of "which size fits which," giving professionals engaged in policy formation and implementation a better idea of local factors that will likely influence what works (Andrews 2008: 397).

Indeed, support for a more strategic approach to democracy assistance has already started to emerge from established academic (Andrews 2008: 397. Barber 1996: 145, Bradley 2005: 409, Browne 2001: 149, Burnell 2000: 25, Diamond 2008b: 48, Shapiro 2003: 147) and policy circles (Carothers 2009b, Hope 2009, Kaplan 2008a, Pritchett and Woolcock 2003, UNDP 2010b). Moreover, there appears to be growing consensus that democracy and good governance rely not only on institutional capacity, but on human commitment as well (Dietz et al. 2009: 20, Hope 2009: 79). For instance, Hyden persuasively argues that African politicians must be "allowed to 'live' their own rules" even as countries grapple with democratic reform. Binding African politicians in "Western institutional straightjackets," he speculates, is more likely to further frustrate democratic progress than facilitate it (Hyden 2010: 2). In other words, commitment to democratic reform may improve with recognition of local customs and behaviour patterns that make sense to and, crucially, address the needs of local people (Pritchett and Woolcock 2003).

Similar emphasis has been placed on grassroots initiatives that go to the heart of democratic participation (Price 2009: 169, Rakner, Menocal, and Fritz 2007: 5).

The potential of supplementing (or even substituting) institutional and technocratic development assistance with initiatives that bolster human capacity and "indigenous assets" to solve problems locally is another avenue that has yet to be fully explored (Kaplan 2008a, Raab 2008). Despite the increasing popularity of democracy initiatives that 'make sense' locally, Grugel warns that we should remain cautiously optimistic until we know whether this approach generates new sets of problems (2002: 137). She has a point; the scrap heap of technocratic projects that have failed to deliver suggests, however, that blind adherence to doctrine does not provide the way forward.

In Chapter One I criticised democracy assessment indices as over reliant on external, often Western assessments. While the producers of popular indices like Freedom House and the Economist Intelligence Unit show no signs of overhauling their monitoring procedures, Erkkilä and Piironen (2009b) identify a shift away from this sort of composite index towards more disaggregated measurements of democratic development. Representative of this shift, International IDEA has spent the past several years developing a country-led democracy assessment framework based on the principles of popular control and political equality (Beetham et al. 2001: 13). In addition to raising public awareness of democracy and democratic reform, the State of Democracy Assessment Methodology aims to provide systematic evidence of citizens' concerns and perceptions (Beetham et al. 2008). UNDP has developed a similar procedure for country-led democracy assessments that support countries in "undertaking a reflective and systematic evaluation" of domestic governance (2009: 8).[119] In contrast to mainstream indices that aggregate several indicators into a single score, these audit procedures provide citizens with a disaggregated evaluation of their country's democracy that defines areas of both strength and weakness (Beetham 1994b: 34).

The wider recognition of democracy assessment procedures such as these could have important ramifications for future democracy assistance policy.

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[119] International IDEA and UNDP have joined forces in support of Chile's country-led democracy assessment. This project has a clearly stated objective of "developing a democracy assessment framework through a national collective and inclusive reflection process," and definitively "*does not* intend to identify how democratic democracy is in Chile *in comparison* with other countries, *or* with an externally defined normative ideal" (UNDP 2010a).

Assessments that are embedded in local context could be used, for example, to better determine different needs from country to country. In this vein, Price suggests that an annual assessment of global democracy modelled after the US State Department's annual country reports could provide an additional tool useful to policy developers (2009: 168). I maintain, however, that a qualitative assessment like that proposed by Price must not fall into the all-to-common pattern of overreliance on expert assessments, but should instead encourage the wider employment of country-led techniques like those pioneered by IDEA and UNDP. Moreover, country-led democracy assessments have added value in stimulating domestic dialogue about democracy and what democratic development should look like locally in addition to producing an assessment of use to international actors. While country-based assessments are not immune to prejudice and abuse, they are more likely than traditional indices to capture political cultural trends and, therefore, represent a step in the right direction.

One visible sign of a shift in favour of more grounded policies is the turn toward distinctly "participatory" and "evidence-based" approaches to policy development (Dietz et al. 2009, Olken 2010, Pretty 1995, Pritchett and Woolcock 2003, UNDP 2010b; for a critique, see Lazarus 2008). Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) ostensibly advocate taking a more participatory and local approach to policy formulation. However, the capacity and willingness of the PRSP process to meaningfully engage traditionally disenfranchised groups has come under attack (Cheru 2006, Craig and Porter 2003, Lazarus 2008). Pretty, for instance, notes that emphasis on "participation" often results in people being "dragged into" exercises of little or no interest to them (1995: 1251). Cheru (2006) likewise sites lack of government commitment and the resistance of donors to cede control as serious challenges to genuine participation of local stakeholders (also see Hellinger 1992).

Public opinion surveys have also grown in popularity. Indeed MISONGA project organisers budgeted $50,000 for an anti-corruption baseline survey to identify common perceptions of corruption in Madagascar (Pact Inc. and Catholic Relief Services-Madagascar 2004: 17). Unfortunately, use of this particular survey appears to have been limited to identifying project indicators, and it is unclear to what extent MISONGA organisers sought genuine citizen participation in defining either the problem or possible solutions. While projects that are not comprehensible or

accessible to local people run the real risk of alienating them, adherence to local standards requires local knowledge. As evidenced by criticism of PRSPs, this is where context specific strategy making begins to encounter technical difficulties. How can outsiders become intimately aware of local needs and perceptions?

Kilcullen addresses this dilemma by acknowledging that there is a trade-off between effectiveness and control. Development assistance organisations may "fear" that public involvement in policymaking processes is difficult to control, but Pretty is quick to point out that "stage-managed forms of participation" will most likely result in distrust and even greater alienation (1995: 1252). Kilcullen's response to this dilemma is the verdict that "local initiatives afford less control but carry greater likelihood of success" (2009: 16). Consequently, collaborative and participatory research methods like the modified TAT have a larger roll to play in the overall approach to creating context-appropriate democracy assistance strategies. Not only does this imply studying social rolls and relations within any given society, but also a new focus on non-elites and "non-state-based frameworks" (Kilcullen 2009: 296). The people most affected by a policy should, in other words, be included in both the design and evaluation of subsequent democracy assistance programmes (Fierke 2001: 144, Light 2001: 92, UNDP 2010b). Admittedly, this may require a paradigm shift in how democracy assistance is administered, which could easily raise problems of its own.

The operationalisation of political culture as perceptual lenses identifiable by patterns of competences and dispositions emphasises the interactive and non-linear relationship between ordinary citizens and democracy. It has the additional advantage of bridging what people think with how they behave, making connections between attitudes and actions and further linking them to political structures and processes (Paquette 2002: 54). These findings are timely. There is growing recognition within the literature that democratic governance and democracy assistance initiatives are susceptible to cultural interpretation and, consequently, that local perspectives are as important as 'expert' knowledge (Armon 2007, Hellinger 1992, Kaplan 2008a, Mattes and Bratton 2007, Rakner, Menocal, and Fritz 2007, Whitehead 2002). Whether democracy will be an integral part of society or remain an externally imposed set of rules surely depends at least in part on whether the significance of local cultures gains mainstream recognition within the democracy assistance industry.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the long-term prospects for deepening democracy in places like Madagascar depend in part on how – and how well – democracy promoters engage with the communities they propose to reform. Doctrinal adherence to "democracy on the instalment plan" (di Palma 1990: 17) and "better of the same" (Pritchett and Woolcock 2003: 198) is not good enough and may, albeit unintentionally, cause increased cynicism among the public, as "misamonga" sometimes did. Instead, the democracy assistance industry must rediscover "a sense of humility" in its approach to helping the citizens of developing democracies help themselves that is open to alternative, local interpretations of both the problem and its solution (Price 2009: 169, also see Kilcullen 2009). A strategic approach to addressing democratic deficiencies, by contrast, would include procedures for identifying and resolving local grievances and, according to Kilcullen, should be developed "on a local basis and in accordance with local standards" (Wolf 2009). Whereas doctrine tends to be rigidly entrenched, strategy represents a creative and inventive process that skilfully combines specific expertise with context appropriate innovation (see, for example, Mintzberg 2000, Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel 2009, Paquette 2002).

With regard to democracy assistance efforts like MISONGA, the policy objectives (e.g. improving access to information, strengthening civil society, improving government effectiveness, and reducing corruption) have merit but the way in which outside experts went about addressing them failed to acknowledge local concerns or points of view. I admit that it would be difficult – impossible even – for any outside organization to fight censorship within another country without the consent of the people in power. Indeed, I was told more than once during my time in Madagascar that Transparency International faced just this sort of blockade under Ravalomanana's administration. However, there are creative solutions to problems like illiteracy and lack of basic knowledge about legal rights that could have an impact if given reasonable funding and support. To illustrate, KMF-CNOE, realized that the constitution would be more accessible if it was translated in a way that normal people, even those who weren't very well educated, could understand. Their solution was to commission an artist to create a comic book version of the document (KMF-

CNOE and Nova Stella 2009). Unfortunately, the initial print-run was small due to funding constraints, resulting in limited distribution.

A more strategic approach to addressing the 2009 political crisis than the proposed palliative of a unity government could have resembled that advocated by Tim Bryar (2009) with regard to Fiji. Specifically, the international community should condemn the nature of the political transition but then find opportunities for engaging with the new "transitional authority" that would hold it to account. For example, the continuation of international aid could have been used as leverage to persuade Rajoelina not to amend the constitution to lower the age at which one can legally run for President, thereby ensuring that he remain the leader of a *transitional* authority.[120] In this scenario, the ensuing 18-24 months could have been a golden opportunity for supporting civic education efforts, building a genuine political party structure, fostering an environment in which opposition parties have the right and ability to organise, and untangling problems of voter registration and disenfranchisement. Initiatives like these would build public confidence in constitutional negotiations and eventual electoral competition.

In other words, there may have been an opportunity to build democracy from the ground up without a single, dominant political figure taking advantage of an intimidated population to act without restraint. Though not a quick fix, this sort of effort could result in a resolution acceptable to hitherto ignored non-elite stakeholders unlikely to be placated by yet another round of meaningless elections. In fact, elections held prematurely despite the absence of competitive parties fielding viable candidates may further discredit electoral processes while extending the chain of uncertain regimes (Bryar 2009, Iloniaina 2009d, Schedler 2001). Democratic

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[120] In May 2010, Rajoelina publically announced that he would not be standing in the presidential election to be held later this year (Iloniaina, Lough, and Ireland 2010). At the same time, he published a timetable for new elections; a constitutional referendum on 12 August 2010 will be followed first by Parliamentary elections on 30 September 2010. The Presidential contest will take place last on 26 November 2010. Somewhat overshadowed by Rajoelina's confirmation that he will not make a bid to remain in power, it is notable that the Parliamentary poll is scheduled *before* the Presidential election. In the past, Parliamentary elections in Madagascar have often followed Presidential elections allowing loyalists of the newly crowned executive to gain control of the National Assembly on his coattails. By holding the Parliamentary contest first, political parties will have to organise and campaign for people's votes without knowing who the next President will be. In June 2010 the constitutional referendum was postponed indefinitely because the constitutional charter had not been completed (Lewis 2010).

institutions, elections included, have to earn the favour of citizens; democratic structures that do not engage and protect people are not worthy of their continued support (Diamond 2008b: 39). Prescriptive policies like those most often adopted by the international democracy assistance industry may succeed in simulating Western institutions without ever stimulating substantive democratic reform. While the African Union, United States and Norway, among others, have taken the moral high road in the short-term, the long-term consequence seems to likely be continued weakening of Madagascar's already fragile democracy.

In this thesis, I have sought to demonstrate the vital relevance of attitudes, values, and subjective points of view to democratic development. "Common sense" standards and solutions, no matter how basic, rarely translate exactly. The analysis in Chapter Four of local perceptions of elections and electoral competition clearly suggest that not even simple, electoral definitions of democracy are immune to contextual pathogens. Where societies put little stock in elections and the political parties vying for power, alternative definitions arise. Careful analysis of the worldviews of ordinary people in eastern Madagascar raises doubts as to the implied un-fuzzy nature of elections and other institutional indicators of democracy. It further suggests that freedom of speech and other alternative definitions, though fuzzy, may nonetheless provide useful analytical concepts for discussing democracy and democratic development in developing countries.[121]

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[121] Schedler likewise contends that fuzzy, 'essentially contested' concepts are a fact of political reality. Consequently, the insistence of some scholars to stick to the 'hard facts' can only lead to a mismatch between conceptual assumptions and empirical trends (Schedler 2001: 18).

*It never strikes us that things don't need to be fixed.*
*They really don't. This is a great illumination.*
*They need to be understood.*
*(DeMello 1992: 37)*

When I began this research, speculation was rife that democracy was in decline. This was accompanied by growing recognition that tackling the problem of hybrid regimes would require new approaches to democracy assistance (see the Introduction). Historically, democracy assistance and assessment have been predicated on a relatively narrow prescriptive understanding of critical democratic institutions. Not surprisingly key priorities espoused by the global democracy assistance industry – and the policies for tackling them – became highly formulaic. Framing the problem of persistent hybridity according to standardised objectives of democratic development results in top-down policies geared toward fixing and reforming malfunctioning institutions. Throughout this thesis, I have argued that paying greater attention to local political culture(s) provides clues conducive to bottom-up analysis of why hybrid regimes may not always function according to established international standards.

I have argued in the preceding chapters that democracy can be perceived and interpreted from a number of angles, and that one's perspective matters. The international community has adopted a particular perspective that may not be universally shared. Neville reminds us that:

> Human freedom is limitless, once you realise that any ordered world is all a brave construction, a fragile building that can be reconstructed as you wish, that identity can be consciously constructed as a mask. Though it's in the slippage between the created mask, the illusion, and the real identity (assuming of course that there is a real identity, a human community that has integrity and beauty and history) where evil enters in. (2001: 231)

This observation readily applies to the tumultuous events that unfolded in Madagascar at the end of January 2009. Indeed, one person who participated in my research lamented that *la réalité est bien masqué* – reality is well concealed. President Ravalomanana fostered – and personally embodied – a particular construction of Malagasy democracy; one that readily appealed to donors. During his tenure that was

the only political reality the outside world saw. Many of the ordinary people I met, however, had trouble reconciling their lives and experiences with the image expertly projected by the President and refracted by international assessments of the country's democratic credentials. The "slippage" between Ravalomanana's Madagascar, international democracy assistance initiatives and the experience of some sectors of Malagasy society did not occur all of a sudden; it resulted from a prolonged period of frustration. When Rajoelina took public issue with the closure of his television station, people who had previously felt powerless took advantage of a rare opportunity to reconstruct the political system so that it better reflected their democratic aspirations.

The originality of this work lies in its exploration of a highly contested concept (political culture), using an innovative visual research method (the modified TAT) in a country not often researched by (particularly Anglophone) political scientists (Madagascar). The research problem – identifying how local understandings of politics and democracy might influence a country's democratic development – dictated the formulation of concepts and choice of methods, even when this required pushing established boundaries and integrating approaches from other disciplines. Moreover, little research to date has focused on the "demand side" of democracy assistance (Burnell and Schlumberger 2010: 8, Merkel 2010: 26), although interest in local perceptions of politics and democracy appears to be growing (Hyden 2010, Leininger 2010, Rakner, Menocal and Fritz 2007). This research is also timely in that it proposes both a theoretical framework and innovative methodology for exploring how ordinary people perceive democracy in their countries and relating these perceptions to specific policy goals.

**Some Concluding Remarks**

While writing Chapter Seven, I was reminded of the famous first paragraph of *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness...it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair…" (Dickens 2003: 5). The positions expressed by research participants, particularly with regard to democracy in Madagascar, often echoed this superlative tone. For people who interpreted democracy as rules-based and supported President Ravalomanana, the period when I visited Madagascar was indeed the best of times. They had a charismatic, duly elected President who was

attracting impressive amounts of foreign investment to the island. Things were looking up. Conversely, research participants who equated democracy with freedom of expression were prone to describing Ravalomanana as an oppressive dictator who rigged elections, suppressed the opposition, and was more interested in self-enrichment than national development. In short, things were as bad as they had ever been.

The democracy assistance objectives outlined in Chapter One and political cultures identified in Chapter Seven provide evidence that *democracy* is indeed "the *name* for what we cannot cease to want" (Dunn 1979: 27, emphasis original). The ubiquitous appeal for "democracy" conceals the fact that various stakeholders may actually interpret it in starkly different ways. If it is to ultimately succeed, democracy assistance must integrate numerous (sometimes conflicting) points of view, the experience of international donors, and the ambitions of local people. "One can conceive a unicorn, describe it, destroy whole forests in a determined effort to find one, and," Kirkpatrick concludes, "still finally fail" (1981: 339). After working on this project for the past several years, it occurs to me that doctrinal democracy assistance policies that attempt to simulate established democracies elsewhere are not so different from detailed plans for catching a unicorn.

By contrast, stimulation of democratic governance responsive to locally defined needs still seems like a worthwhile pursuit, even if we do not yet know how to go about it. Overcoming complex obstacles to democratic development, protracted hybridity included, will require innovative policies and new ways of thinking about democracy that both challenge and complement existing paradigms (Kaplan 2008a: 1). I have argued here that one important aspect of critically assessing (and improving) democracy assistance policy must be finding out how the people we are trying to "assist" define their own context, expectations, and aspirations. In this regard, country-led democracy assessment initiatives are a step in the right direction.

I fully recognise that this study is not without limitations. The most restrictive of these, particularly with regard to the potential for generalising the research findings, is that I was limited to conducting research with a relatively small sample of local people in a particular location during a single field visit. I would have liked to return to the field a second time in the summer of 2009 to discuss my thematic analysis of TAT stories with research participants. This would have helped

to validate my interpretations of themes contained within TAT stories. Moreover, I would have been able to find out what research participants made of the multiple perceptual lenses I identified. Unfortunately, time and financial constraints as well as the ongoing political unrest prevented me from making a second trip to Madagascar. Even so, this research contributes to theoretical discussions of political culture and social science research methods as well as democracy assistance and assessment.

**Thesis Outputs: Meeting My Research Objectives**

The research question posed in the Introduction to this thesis was: How might local political culture(s) shape and constrain substantive democratic development? I have achieved what I set out to do to the extent that I developed a textured political culture concept and then piloted an innovative method for researching it. This empirical research has enabled me to convincingly demonstrate that the ways in which ordinary people understand their own political environment (and democracy in particular) often differ from the perspective of democracy experts. The case of MISONGA illustrated the pertinence of local political cultures to the application of democracy assistance policy. Fashionable democracy assistance objectives like improving advocacy by civil society groups and initiating e-governance platforms proved largely untenable given local competences and dispositions. That said, the political cultural predispositions identified indicated that most of the people who participated in this research do desire more responsive governance and reliable access to information. A more strategic approach to democracy assistance policy would integrate donor resources and objectives with locally defined problems.

I also demonstrated that the political culture concept developed here raises significant questions about the reliability of externally driven democracy assessment exercises. I originally chose Madagascar for my case study because the country performed so well on an array of influential democracy and good governance indices despite being one of the poorest countries in the world. Though still some way from being a full-fledged consolidated democracy, there seemed to be general agreement that Madagascar was firmly on the right track. This general assessment based on the conclusions of democracy indices helps to explain why the 2009 political crisis came as such a surprise to many outsiders. Assessments of electoral process, freedom of expression, and rule of law offered by research participants sometimes corroborated those made by the indices (i.e. the positive lens, the social divisions lens, the impartial

lens). Oftentimes, however, the experience of research participants was not accurately reflected by Madagascar's international ranking (i.e. the tedious lens, the dissident lens, the crooked lens). This more pessimistic point of view provides much-needed context for objective assessment of Rajoelina's rise to power.

In addition to answering my research question, this thesis contributes to the literature on democracy assistance and democratic development in the areas of theory, methods, and policy analysis.

*Theoretical Advancements – A Viable Political Culture Concept*

For political culture to be a useful concept in political science, it must be shown to have demonstrable consequences (Diamond 1993: 15). Political culture has a troublesome reputation for being exceedingly difficult to define, a criticism I examined at length in Chapter Two. This has often led to either the identification of prescriptive 'democratic' cultures or truncation of the concept before it is applied analytically. However, in this thesis I have made a case for embracing political culture precisely because it is complex and messy. Human experience is complex and messy; the increased burden of grappling with a more complicated culture concept is justified by its increased interpretive power (Frank 1989: 85). I have demonstrated that competing political cultures, conceptualised as perceptual lenses identifiable by patterns of competences and dispositions, have had observable consequences for democratic development in Madagascar. Whether someone adheres to the political cultural worldview that democracy is rules-based or inseparable from free speech has direct bearings on what that person will identify as appropriate political behaviour. Indeed, the political crisis that paralysed Madagascar for much of 2009 is reflected in these competing interpretations of democracy, as I illustrated in Chapter Seven. These events further suggest that how ordinary people interpret the political sphere can have very real consequences, although the causes may not always be immediately intelligible to outsiders.

Despite a tendency for the democracy assistance industry to adopt prescriptive policies in favour of certain democratic institutions, the vast differentiation between developed democracies is proof that there is no single democratic endpoint (Dryzek and Holmes 2002: 13). Likewise, I find it difficult to accept that there is a single 'democratic culture'. All of the perceptual lenses

identified in this thesis embraced elements of democracy; although what research participants meant by 'democracy' varied, as did their assessments of Madagascar's democratic credentials. Recognising the multifaceted ways in which people interpret their political environment and define their democratic aspirations has been shown here to have considerable interpretive power with regard to why democracy assistance policies that look good on paper sometimes fail to achieve their objectives in practice.

*Methodological Developments – The Modified TAT*

When visual research methods work, you learn something new that you probably would not have by employing more traditional research techniques. It is common for researchers using visual research tools to boldly express the belief that they would not have achieved the same quality of data, or indeed the same data, by using other methods (see, for example, Banks 2007: 4, Stanczak 2007: 8). I am similarly convinced that my research in Madagascar would not have been possible using traditional interview techniques. Even if I had eventually managed to persuade people to participate, I would have remained sceptical about the reliability of any data collected. By adopting (and adapting) the modified TAT, however, I was able to talk to people about their socio-political world in a manner that was both frank and not threatening.

I consider the modified version of the TAT used for this research a pilot for how the method and similar visual research tools can be meaningfully applied to research problems. Furthermore, image-based research tools have abundant potential to supplement surveys and traditional interview techniques in the context of an integrated research design. Bearing this in mind, I have tried to be as specific – and as transparent – as possible in explaining both what I did and why. This concern for transparent disclosure applies not only to recounting how I used the modified TAT, but also how I went about analysing the data and creating thematic networks. I suspect that it would be difficult for others to replicate my research exactly; people's attitudes and points of reference will have shifted somewhat in response to the 2009 political crisis. It should be possible, however, to follow the steps I have taken here for the purposes of conducting new research in Madagascar or elsewhere. Moreover, I have tried to offer reflections in hindsight on what I would have done differently, and suggested ways in which the method might be improved.

*Policy Recommendations – Strategy vs. Doctrine*

I have argued in this thesis that democracy assistance policy has become doctrinal, relying heavily on formulaic and prescriptive initiatives that often concentrate on the performance of particular institutions. While these policies have no doubt had some positive effects on global democratic development, hybrid regimes like Madagascar seem to pose a new problem requiring a fresh solution. In the rush to fix these nascent democracies, we have failed to understand them. "How well informed are you about the reality you seek to change? How conscious are you of the perceptions of other stakeholders? What are you doing to use and improve the knowledge you have?" (Powell 2006: 520). These questions are central to strategic democracy assistance; in the case of international involvement in Madagascar, they seem to have gone largely unanswered. As the political unrest experienced by Madagascar in 2009 poignantly demonstrates, the complex social and political dynamics at work in hybrid regimes require careful analysis. The political cultures maintained by ordinary people warrant consideration, something that democracy assistance providers have historically neglected to do.

As the Obama Administration took office, Congressman David Price, Chair of the House Democracy Assistance Commission, advocated a new approach to US democracy assistance policy. At the core of his argument lies clear recognition that "it is the citizens of a country themselves who must choose their own best way" (Price 2009: 169-170). Taking this recommendation seriously, however, will require a reassessment of the doctrinal imperative of institution building. "Electoral democracy does not solve matters," Dryzek observes (2005a: 226); and yet the international community adamantly demanded the rapid organisation of new elections in response to Madagascar's political turmoil. Reflecting on Madagascar's 2002 political crisis, Marcus and Razafindrakoto concluded:

> when electoral participation…was trumped by participation through social action, the will of the people was able to overcome ossification of not-so-democratic "democratic" institutions and to give renewed hope to a citizenry that had all but given up. (2003: 46)

The same analysis applies to the most recent unrest. Strategically crafted democracy assistance policies that fully acknowledge the underlying public frustration with not-so-democratic "democratic" institutions might reduce the likelihood of history

repeating itself yet again. Something that doctrinal devotion to electoral processes has thus far failed to do.

## Where Do We Go From Here?

The theoretical, methodological, and policy innovations generated by this project have much to contribute to future research agendas. First, the political culture concept developed and tested in this research must be applied elsewhere before generalisations can be made regarding the significance of political culture to substantive democratic development. The conclusions reached by this, albeit limited, study do indicate, however, that this is an avenue worth pursuing. Moreover, the idea that political culture can be used as an analytical tool for incorporating the understandings, capabilities, and expectations of ordinary people with more grounded policy initiatives could have wide-ranging applications beyond the limited concerns of democracy assistance. Climate change immediately comes to mind as a contentious issue with numerous stakeholder groups that will need to be reconciled in order for policies to be effective. Similarly, I often wondered whether the inflammatory 'debate' over health care reform in the United States was rooted in identifiable political cultural differences. The range of issues to which this theory could be applied is virtually limitless.

Secondly, visual research methods represent an exciting opportunity to stretch the bounds of what we consider standard research techniques. Although, to my knowledge, the modified TAT has only been used a handful of times for the purposes of social science research beyond the field of psychology, it has consistently demonstrated considerable potential. More importantly, it provides researchers investigating sensitive topics with a tested alternative to surveys or (semi-)structured interviews that may be inappropriate. As noted above, I consider my use of and modifications to the TAT a pilot for how this method might be applied elsewhere.[122] With further refinement and more extensive application, I believe that this tool could gain widespread acceptance among qualitative researchers.

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[122] For instance, potential exists for integrating visual research techniques like the modified TAT with existing country-led democracy assessment procedures.

On a similar note, despite the growing number of researchers venturing to dabble with visual methods, these tools remain largely unrecognised and segregated by their disciplines. Scattered haphazardly through fields ranging from sociology to health science, anthropology to clinical psychology, an array of image-based visual research methods have evolved essentially in parallel with only limited reference to their cousins situated in other areas of research (see, for instance, Gotschi, Delve, and Freyer 2009). However, because this veritable cache of information remains disaggregated and buried deep in journal archives, visual research techniques linger like "waifs at the margins" and visual research remains unrecognised as an integrated, interdisciplinary methodology (Harper 2002: 15). Additional work is required in order to pull together the existing literature of various visual research techniques.[123] It is, perhaps, unsurprising that substantially different (i.e. image-based) research methods elicit substantively different data from their more traditional counterparts. To date, however, the fact that visual research methods do result in data sets distinct from other techniques has often remained a casual aside or subtle afterthought. More can and should be made of this fact.

One question raised by this research is whether existing democracy assessment tools and metrics are producing data that is inaccurate or merely incomplete.[124] The analysis above demonstrates that some local perceptions of democracy stand squarely at odds with the evaluations made by expert international observers and influential democracy assistance organisations. This research has not addressed, however, whether the discrepancy results from failure of democracy assessment exercises to pick up on major democratic deficits that are nevertheless recognised by local people. Or, instead, whether what matters most to local people remains undocumented because it remains 'below the radar' of international observers and organisations. Determining which of these possibilities is the case could contribute toward the future development of more accurate democracy assessment processes and criteria.

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[123] I begin this sizeable task in a forthcoming article to be published in *Field Methods*.

[124] I would like to thank Laurence Whitehead for raising this provocative point.

Finally, there is an urgent need for independent, objective research into country-led democracy assessment procedures. As this is still a relatively new technique to emerge from the democracy assistance industry, it is not surprising that most of the information currently available is produced by the organisations involved. Independent research across a range of initiatives in different countries could help identify best practice. It also remains to be determined exactly how the findings of country-led democracy assessments could be best used to advocate more strategic, reflexive and evidence-based democracy assistance policies.

| Pseudonym | Gender | Rural/Urban | Age | Education | Occupation | Class | Vote | KMF-CNOE | Chapter 4 | Chapter 5 | Chapter 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kotomaro | male | rural | 46-60 | none | retired (chauffeur) | lower | yes | yes | tedious local | ambivalent | crooked |
| Felana | female | rural | 31-45 | some primary | coffee shop | lower | yes | no | tedious local | passivist | --- |
| Voary | female | rural | 18-30 | some secondary | unemployed | lower | yes | no | --- | --- | crooked |
| Lucien | male | rural | 18-30 | some secondary | sand miner | lower | yes | no | tedious local | ambivalent | impartial |
| Soazy | female | rural | 46-60 | some secondary | roadside shop | lower | yes | no | tedious local | passivist | crooked |
| Setramiaina | male | rural | 46-60 | finished high school | school director | middle | yes | no | positive local | ambivalent | impartial |
| Guillaume | male | rural | 31-45 | some secondary | security guard | lower | no | yes | positive local | dissident | impartial |
| Kamisy | male | rural | 46-60 | some primary | bike repair | lower | no | no | positive local | dissident | crooked |
| Tidahy | male | rural | 18-30 | some primary | sand miner | lower | no | no | positive local | ambivalent | crooked |
| Mariamo | female | rural | 31-45 | some secondary | roadside shop | lower | yes | no | tedious local | passivist | crooked |
| Mirana | female | rural | 46-60 | some secondary | village elder | middle | yes | no | tedious | ambivalent | crooked |
| Pierre | male | urban | 60+ | finished high school | teacher (retired) | middle | yes | yes | tedious local | ambivalent | impartial |

| Pseudonym | Gender | Rural/Urban | Age | Education | Occupation | Class | Vote | KMF-CNOE | Chapter 4 | Chapter 5 | Chapter 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rose | female | urban | 31-45 | finished university | unemployed | middle | no | yes | tedious pluralist | ambivalent | crooked |
| Moravelo | male | urban | 31-45 | finished high school | police officer | middle | yes | yes | positive local | ambivalent | impartial |
| Niry | female | urban | 46-60 | some secondary | hotel manager | middle | yes | no | tedious local | passivist | impartial |
| Jo | male | urban | 31-45 | university | priest | religious | yes | yes | positive local | dissident | --- |
| Léa | female | urban | 46-60 | finished high school | secretary | middle | yes | yes | tedious pluralist | dissident | impartial |
| Lezoma | male | urban | 31-45 | finished university | mineral engineer | upper | yes | yes | tedious | ambivalent | impartial |
| Mireille | female | urban | under 18 | some secondary | high school student | middle | no | no | tedious pluralist | dissident | --- |
| Faramalala | female | urban | 18-30 | MA | human resources | upper | no | yes | positive pluralist | dissident | crooked |
| Hery | male | urban | 46-60 | finished high school | receptionist | middle | yes | yes | positive pluralist | dissident | impartial |
| Severiny | female | urban | 18-30 | some university | student | middle | no | yes | tedious local | dissident | crooked |
| Velohasina | male | urban | 31-45 | university | priest | religious | no | yes | tedious pluralist | dissident | impartial |
| Kalo | female | urban | 18-30 | some university | student | middle | yes | yes | tedious | dissident | crooked |
| Patrick | male | urban | 31-45 | some primary | pousse-pousse | lower | no | yes | tedious pluralist | ambivalent | crooked |

| Pseudonym | Gender | Rural/Urban | Age | Education | Occupation | Class | Vote | KMF-CNOE | Chapter 4 | Chapter 5 | Chapter 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lalao | female | urban | 46-60 | some secondary | hotel owner | upper | yes | no | positive pluralist | passivist | crooked |
| Ralay | male | urban | 31-45 | finished high school | waiter | middle | yes | no | tedious local | dissident | crooked |
| Stéphanie | female | urban | 18-30 | some university | student | middle | no | yes | tedious pluralist | ambivalent | crooked |
| Josoa | male | urban | 31-45 | some secondary | carpenter | lower | no | no | tedious pluralist | ambivalent | impartial |
| Rasoa | female | urban | 31-45 | finished university | secretary | middle | yes | yes | local | passivist | --- |
| Andoniaina | female | urban | 18-30 | finished university | accountant | middle | no | yes | tedious pluralist | dissident | crooked |
| Mamisoa | male | urban | 31-45 | finished university | priest | religious | no | yes | tedious pluralist | dissident | --- |
| Nathalie | female | urban | 31-45 | finished high school | secretary | middle | no | no | tedious local | ambivalent | impartial |
| Stéphane | male | urban | 18-30 | some secondary | carpenter | lower | no | no | tedious pluralist | ambivalent | impartial |
| Telovavy | female | urban | 31-45 | finished high school | nun | religious | no | yes | positive pluralist | passivist | impartial |
| Daniel | male | urban | under 18 | some secondary | student | middle | no | no | positive local | ambivalent | impartial |
| Mahefa | male | urban | 18-30 | some university | student | middle | yes | yes | tedious pluralist | ambivalent | crooked |
| Julie | female | urban | 46-60 | finished university | pastor | religious | yes | yes | positive local | ambivalent | --- |

| Pseudonym | Gender | Rural/ Urban | Age | Education | Occupation | Class | Vote | KMF-CNOE | Chapter 4 | Chapter 5 | Chapter 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Herilaza** | male | urban | 18-30 | some university | student | middle | yes | yes | positive pluralist | ambivalent | crooked |
| **Serge** | male | urban | 31-45 | finished high school | receptionist | middle | yes | yes | positive local | ambivalent | impartial |
| **Botozaza** | male | urban | 31-45 | MSc | bureaucrat | upper | yes | yes | tedious local | dissident | crooked |
| **Julien** | male | urban | 46-60 | some university | shopkeeper | middle | no | yes | tedious local | dissident | crooked |
| **Volatiana** | female | urban | 31-45 | MA | intern | upper | yes | yes | positive local | ambivalent | impartial |
| **Sthella** | female | urban | 31-45 | some secondary | secretary | middle | yes | yes | tedious local | dissident | crooked |
| **Claudia** | female | urban | 60+ | some secondary | teacher (retired) | middle | yes | yes | positive local | dissident | crooked |
| **Hantanirina** | female | urban | 31-45 | finished university | health administrator | middle | yes | no | tedious local | dissident | impartial |
| **Olivier** | male | urban | 31-45 | finished high school | receptionist | middle | no | yes | positive pluralist | dissident | crooked |
| **Amélie** | female | urban | 18-30 | some secondary | barmaid | middle | yes | no | tedious pluralist | dissident | impartial |
| **Fabrice** | male | urban | 46-60 | finished university | pharmacist | upper | yes | yes | tedious pluralist | dissident | impartial |
| **Michel** | male | urban | 46-60 | finished university | mineral engineer | upper | yes | yes | local | ambivalent | --- |
| **Todilahy** | male | urban | 31-45 | MA | project manager | upper | yes | yes | positive pluralist | passivist | impartial |

**Acronyms:**

| | |
|---|---|
| PSD | Social Democratic Party |
| AKFM | Congress Party for the Independence of Madagascar |
| UNDD | National Union for Development and Democracy |
| MMSM | *Translation of acronym not known* |
| MFM | Movement for Proletarian Power |
| RPSD | Rally for Socialism and Democracy |
| PSD | *Translation of acronym not known* |
| GRAD-Ilafo | Action and Reflection Group for the Development of Madagascar |
| CFV | Committee of Living Forces |
| CSCD | Confederation of Civil Societies for Development |
| AKFM-Fanavaozana | Congress Party for the Independence of Madagascar-Renewal |
| CSDDM | Support Group for Democracy and Development in Madagascar |
| Accord | Christian Action of Regional Cadres and Businessmen for Development |
| Farimbona | Acting Together |
| Vatomizana | Measures and Weights |
| PMDM | Militant Party for the Development of Madagascar |
| LEADER-Fanilo | Economic Liberalism and Democratic Action for Recovery |
| Fivoarana | Progress |
| FAMINA | Association of United Malagasy |
| AREMA | Vanguard of the Malagasy Revolution |
| AVI | Judged by Your Work |
| AFFA | Action, Truth, Development, and Harmony |
| TIM | I Love Madagascar |
| FP | National Union |

Note: Elections held between 1977 and 1989 are considered non-competitive because all participants were required to be part of a single socialist coalition, the National Front for the Defence of the Revolution (FNDR).

*Source*: African Elections Database

| Party | 1965 (NA) | 1975 (NA) | 1992 (P1) | 1993 (P2) | 1993 (NA) | 1996 (P1) | 1996 (P2) | 1998 (NA) | 2001 (P1) | 2002 (NA) | 2006 (P1) | 2007 (NA) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PSD | W | W | | | | | | | | | | |
| AKFM | x | x | | | | | | | | | | |
| UNDD | | | W | W | x | x | x | | | | | |
| MMSM | | | x | x | | | | | | | | |
| MFM | | | x | | | | | x | | | x | |
| RPSD | | | x | | x | | | x | | x | | |
| PSD | | | x | | | | | | | | | |
| GRAD-Ilafo | | | x | | x | x | | x | | | | |
| CFV | | | | | W | | | | | | | |
| CSCD | | | | | x | x | | x | | | | |
| AKFM-Fanavaozana | | | | | x | x | | x | | | | |
| CSDDM | | | | | x | | | | | | | |
| Accord | | | | | x | | | | | | | |
| Farimbona | | | | | x | | | | | | | |
| Vatomizana | | | | | x | | | | | | | |
| PMDM | | | | | x | | | | | | | |
| LEADER-Fanilo | | | | | x | x | | x | x | x | x | x |
| Fivoarana | | | | | x | | | | | | | |
| FAMINA | | | | | x | | | | | | | |
| AREMA | | | | | | W | W | W | x | x | | |
| AVI | | | | | | x | x | x | x | | x | |
| AFFA | | | | | | | | x | x | | | |
| TIM | | | | | | | | | W | W | W | W |
| FP | | | | | | | | | | x | | |
| Independents | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 10 | 8 | 0 | 32 | 2 | 25 | 10 | 11 [21]† |

**W** – won     **x** – participated (and won at least one seat in the case of National Assembly elections)

† 11 Independents won seats; an additional 10 seats were attributed to the category "Other"

1) Qui sont les citoyens malgaches?
   *Who are Malagasy citizens?*

2) Est-ce qu'il y a la transparence dans la domaine politique?
   *Are politics transparent?*

3) Les processus pour voter, sont-ils inclusifs?
   *Are voting processes inclusive?*

4) Est-ce que les parties politiques marchent bien?
   *Do political parties work well?*

5) Les parties politiques, sont-ils inclusifs de toutes sortes de gens?
   *Do political parties include all sorts of people?*

6) Est, ce que vous êtes confident que les homes politiques et les services sociaux ne sont pas corrompu?
   *Are you confident that politicians and social services are free from corruption?*

7) Les medias (les journaux, la radio), sont-ils représentatifs de l'opinion publique?
   *Are the media (newspapers, radio) representative of public opinion?*

8) Est ce qu'il y a les occasions pour la publique à participer dans des décisions politiques?
   *Are there opportunities for the public to participate in political decision making?*

9) En tant que citoyen, quels sont vos devoirs?
   *What are your responsibilities as a citizen?*

10) En tant que citoyen, quels sont vos droits fondamentaux ?
    *As a citizen, what are your fundamental rights?*

11) Selon vous, ces doits sont ils garantis par l'état?
    *In your opinion, are these rights guaranteed by the state?*

12) A votre avis, quelle est la démocratie?
    *What is democracy, in your opinion?*

APPENDIX 4: VINE PRÉCIS

The Visual Interpretation Narrative Exercise (VINE) is an innovative, image-based interviewing technique. Instead of posing questions directly, the researcher asks research participants to tell short stories about a series of cartoons or other abstract images. Incorporating terms and empirical tools from formerly disparate research communities, the VINE method is an eclectic approach for researching the nexus between democracy assistance objectives and the experience of ordinary citizens. Findings resulting from pilot research in Madagascar raise questions about how accurately external expert assessments of democratic development reflect local perceptions, beliefs, and expectations.

**Image-Based Research Methods**

This innovative interviewing technique sits comfortably among other image-based research methods that have consistently demonstrated 'significant untapped potential and vigor across a broad scope of disciplines'.[i] Visual research methods including photo elicitation,[ii] participatory mapping,[iii] photovoice,[iv] and FotoDialogo[v] are breaking new ground in disciplines ranging from sociology and anthropology to health science and education studies. Likewise, in addition to widespread adoption and adaptation within its native field of psychology, the Thematic Apperception Test[vi] has previously been modified for interdisciplinary research projects in both the Philippines[vii] and Madagascar.[viii]

Image-based research tools rely on the principle of projective interpretation; what we perceive in the present is invariably influenced by past perception and experience organized and stored in our memories.[ix] When research participants tell short stories about abstract images during the course of an image-based research procedure, they naturally construct narratives derived from their own personality traits and unique experience. Visual research methods are, therefore, particularly suitable for identifying the inherently subjective ways in which people tacitly 'name and frame' their (socio-political) environment.[x] Moreover, it is difficult for people to 'fake' their interpretation of an image, a known weakness of survey methods, because subjective perspectives are largely unconscious.[xi] Most importantly, the abstract

nature of the image-based research techniques can enable researchers to approach contentious or sensitive topics in a nonthreatening, roundabout way that may result in the collection of data inaccessible via more direct questioning.

Visual tools can, likewise, be particularly useful when doing research in other language cultures. The ability to 'read' a photograph or other visual image transcends educational and, to a point, linguistic barriers because it does not depend on fluency in a particular language or knowledge of grammatical rules. Feelings, opinions, and the respondent's perceptions of reality are all displaced onto the image, facilitating the discussion of complex or sensitive material.

Commonly blurring the traditional roles of interviewer and interviewee, visual research techniques are often described as collaborative and respondent-led. The image invites research participants to identify what is meaningful and important while simultaneously imposing order on the information being gathered.[xii] In other words, both participants become just two people trying to work out the meaning of an image together.[xiii] Although the researcher and research participant may initially interpret an image quite differently, over the course of the interview they should be able to reach a common understanding as 'fellow travelers' in the research process.[xiv] Indeed, the physical presence of the image can aid in developing rapport with research participants.[xv]

**The Pilot**

I developed and piloted the VINE method in Madagascar during five months of doctoral research in late 2008. My research objective was to uncover how ordinary people in Madagascar interpret democracy and their own political experience. However, due to the tense political climate at that time, traditional interview techniques and direct questioning proved unworkable. People were generally reluctant to speak candidly about overtly political topics, and were sometimes openly fearful of being overheard saying the 'wrong' thing. The Visual Interpretation Narrative Exercise is, therefore, designed to facilitate research of sensitive topics in challenging environments.

The first step in piloting the VINE technique was to commission a set of visual prompts. I discussed general themes of interest with a local artist (e.g. elections, political authority, freedom of speech, etc.) who was then at liberty to
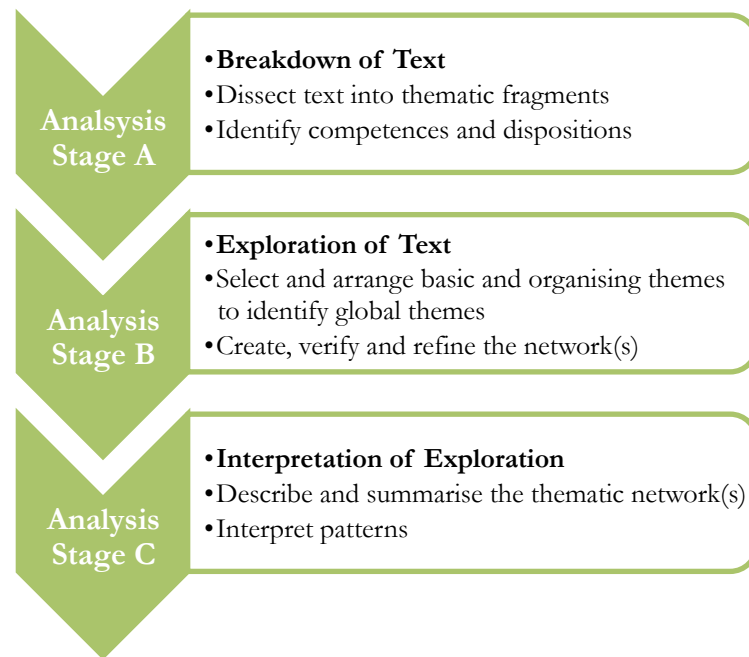
interpret these themes in a way she deemed locally appropriate. This collaborative process resulted in a set of five contextually relevant sketches that people of all socio-economic classes and educational backgrounds could interpret relatively easily.

The inherently abstract nature of the cartoons helped to disarm research participants. Most people immediately accepted that I was not going to probe into their perceptions of particular events or political figures that they remained wary of speaking about directly. The chicken depicted in Image 3 and the dog in Image 5 introduced an element of comic relief to the interview procedure; research participants often became noticeably more relaxed and communicative after spotting these animals. In fact, despite never asking research participants for definitions of democracy outright, people often volunteered their views on democracy in the context of one or more of the stories prompted by these images.

At the outset of the VINE interview procedure, research participants were handed the stack of cartoons and instructed simply to tell a short story about what they saw in each image. Research participants were then free to respond to the images in any sequence they chose, sometimes stringing stories about two or three images together. When encountering visual research methods for the first time, people commonly begin to assess an image descriptively, applying labels to the things that they most confidently recognize.[xvi] I noticed, however, that research participants often grew in confidence as the interview progressed, sometimes returning to an image at the end to expand on the original story. Interviews lasted around 30 minutes on average, with stories about each image taking approximately 5 minutes to tell.

Unlike some visual research methods in which the researcher plays the role of silent observer, I often conversed with research participants during the VINE interview. I would, for example, sometimes inquire about what had led up to the event described. At other times, I sought clarification as a means of probing for meaning. Crucially, neither my research assistants nor I ever attempted to correct or otherwise interfere with a research participant's interpretation of the images.

I used the VINE method with 51 people (27 men, 24 women) from two sites (one rural: 11 interviews, one urban: 40 interviews) in the Antsinanana region of eastern Madagascar. All research participants were non-elites of various backgrounds and professions. While some research participants were highly educated, others had

**Analsysis Stage A**
- **Breakdown of Text**
- Dissect text into thematic fragments
- Identify competences and dispositions

**Analysis Stage B**
- **Exploration of Text**
- Select and arrange basic and organising themes to identify global themes
- Create, verify and refine the network(s)

**Analysis Stage C**
- **Interpretation of Exploration**
- Describe and summarise the thematic network(s)
- Interpret patterns

received very little formal education. One advantage of the VINE method is that it is equally accessible to people of all socio-economic backgrounds; it worked just as well in the rural village as it did in the urban center. Stories were generally told and recorded in French; when a research participant preferred to tell his or her stories in the local dialect, a research assistant provided simultaneous translation to French.

The abstract nature of the VINE technique enabled me to approach contentious political themes in a way that was acceptable to research participants. Though guided by my broad research themes, the data collected accurately reflects local perceptions of democracy and the genuine concerns people harbored about their country's political future.

**<u>Data Analysis</u>**

My primary objective in analyzing the stories was to build a schematic framework or model capable of accurately describing local political logic and how this logic might become manifest in political behavior. This was achieved using a three-stage analysis strategy entailing: (1) systematic deconstruction of VINE stories into thematic text segments (i.e. data extrapolation); (2) exploration of pervasive themes and theme clusters; and (3) interpretation and analysis of the information. This process facilitated the identification and examination of concepts that ordinary people actually use to interpret their political environment. It also shed light on how

concepts commonly associated with democracy (e.g. elections, political competition) are re-appropriated in new settings.

First, the 244 short stories collected using the VINE method were transcribed and analyzed for competences and dispositions in the spirit of reconstructive democratic theory. *Competences* include knowledge of and access to the political sphere. They also include beliefs or convictions about one's ability to act in particular circumstances and what those actions signify. They are known facts and available actions. *Dispositions*, by contrast, include feelings in addition to attitudes, inclinations, and tendencies. They are more emotive than competences and are only indirectly linked to action or agency.

The classification of a word or phrase as a competence or disposition was not arbitrary, but rather reflects the context of this particular theme within the VINE story. I distinguished, for example, between whether research participants indicated that they could do something (i.e. a competence) or that they wanted to do it (i.e. a disposition). For example, saying that people *can* take part in protests (i.e. a competence) is not the same as indicating that people *want* to protest (i.e. a disposition) but are not actually able to. The competences and dispositions then became codes for first order themes. In an effort to remain true to the original stories for as long as possible, I completed initial data organization and analysis in French, switching to English only after themes had been identified.

Next, competences and dispositions included in stories told by research participants were analyzed for more abstract meanings using thematic networks.[xvii] Thematic networks, which emphasize the interactive and non-linear aspects of themes, are useful for organizing discrete competences and dispositions into a visual blueprint that transparently links the language used by research participants to more abstract analytical ideas. Though analytical constructs, thematic networks nevertheless approximate the contours of the lenses through which different social groups likely view the political sphere. Furthermore, in the process of creating thematic networks I was able to identify clusters of people who interpret their political environment in similar ways.

The story told by thematic networks is, however, more than a simple aggregation of individual points of view. This method of data analysis achieves a

balance between description and interpretation by creating a web of interconnected themes of varying orders of abstraction. Additionally, first order themes (i.e. competences and dispositions) can be displayed in proportion to their frequency,[xviii] suggesting how variations among individual points of view relate to shared interpretations. As a result, thematic networks created using VINE data provide new depth of insight into how the familiar ideas and language commonly associated with democracy can be re-appropriated by local actors. Instead of relying solely on the researcher's own theoretical and linguistic traditions, this model emphasizes indigenous concepts and codes of meaning.

## Conclusions

The expectations laid down by democratic institutions, whether implicit or explicit, are neither neutral nor universal. Likewise, how individuals construct and interpret their political reality has direct bearing on 'the roles they think they can, do, and should play in relation to that reality'.[xix] During research in Madagascar, the VINE method proved to be an invaluable research tool, both for learning how ordinary people interpret commonplace socio-political situations and for creating an environment in which they felt safe to speak openly. Moreover, careful analysis of VINE data provided additional context for the political turmoil that unseated President Ravolamanana in the spring of 2009, much to the surprise of international observers.

Visual Interpretation Narrative Exercises provide a rigorous tool for investigating whether policy makers and non-elite stakeholders perceive problems in the same way and, indeed, if they perceive the same problems. This method could be applied alongside traditional research techniques in order to gain a more nuanced appreciation of how people in developing democracies interpret and understand their own political context. The VINE method could, for instance, be meaningfully integrated into country-led democracy assessment exercises like those encouraged by UNDP and International IDEA. It could also be incorporated into the development of democracy assistance policies that are grounded in local needs.

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[i] Gregory C. Stanczak, ed. *Visual Research Methods: Image, society, and representation* (London: SAGE Publications, 2007): 3.

ii See, for example, Marcus Banks, *Using Visual Data in Qualitative Research* (London: SAGE Publications, 2007); Marisol Clark-Ibáñez, 'Inner-City Children in Sharper Focus: Sociology of Childhood and Photo Elicitation Interviews', in *Visual Research Methods: Image, Society and Representation*, ed. Gregory C. Stanczak (London: SAGE Publications, 2007); Douglas Harper, 'Talking About Pictures: A Case for Photo Elicitation', *Visual Studies* 17, no. 1 (2002): 13-26; Jeffrey Samuels, 'Breaking the Ethnographer's Frames: Reflections on the Use of Photo Elicitation in Understanding Sri Lankan Monastic Culture', *American Behavioral Scientist* 47, no.12 (2004): 1528-1550.

iii See, for example, Susan Maman, et. al., 'Using Participatory Mapping to Inform a Community-Randomized Trial of HIV Counseling and Testing', *Field Methods* 21, no. 4 (2009): 368-387; Eric Margolis, 'Visual Ethnography: Tools for Mapping the AIDS Epidemic', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 19, no. 3 (1990): 370-391; Kimberley E. Medley and Humphrey W. Kalibo, 'An Ecological Framework for Participatory Ethnobotanical Research at Mt. Kasigau, Kenya', *Field Methods* 17, no. 3 (2005): 302-314.

iv Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris, 'Photovoice: Concept, Methodology, and Use for Participatory Needs Assessment', *Health Education and Behaviour* 24, no. 3 (1997): 369-387; Caroline C. Wang, et. al., 'Flint Photovoice: Community Building Among Youths, Adults, and Policymakers', *American Journal of Public Health* 94, no. 6 (2004): 911-913.

v Flavia S. Ramos, 'Imaginary pictures, real life stories: the FotoDialogo method', *International Journal of Qualitative Studeis in Education* 20, no. 2 (2007): 191-224; Flavia S. Ramos, 'The FotoDialogo Method: Using Pictures and Storytelling as Learning Tools' (Washington D.C.: World Bank Group: Adult Outreach Education, 1999).

vi Henry A. Murray, *Thematic Apperception Test* (Cambridge, MA: the President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1943).

vii Virginia Nazarea et. al., 'Defining Indicators Which Make Sense to Local People: Intra-Cultural Variation in Perceptions of Natural Resources', *Human Organisation* 57, no. 2 (1998): 159-70.

viii Cathy Farnworth, 'Achieving Respondent-Led Research in Madagascar', *Gender & Development* 15, no. 2 (2007): 271-85.

ix Karl Eggert, 'Malagasy Commentary', *Ethnohistory* 48, no. 1-2 (2001): 309-18, 310; Robert E. Pittenger, Charles F. Hockett, and John J. Danehy, *The First Five Minutes: A Sample of Microscopic Interview Analysis* (Ithica, New York: Paul Martineau, 1960).

x Donald A. Schön and Martin Rein, *Frame Reflection* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 26.

xi David J. Elkins and Richard E. B. Simeon, 'A Cause in Search of Its Effect, or What Does Political Culture Explain?' *Comparative Politics* 11, no. 2 (1979): 137.

xii Harper, *Talking About Pictures*, 20.

xiii Banks, *Using Visual Data*, 70; John Collier and Malcolm Collier, *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 105.

xiv James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an age of diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 23.

xv Steven J. Gold, 'Using Photography in Studies of Immigrant Communities: Reflecting Across Projects and Populations', in *Visual Research Methods: Image, Society, and Representation*, ed. Gregory C. Stanczak (London: SAGE Publications, 2007): 145; Jeffrey Samuels, 'When Words are Not Enough: Eliciting Children's Experiences of Buddhist Monastic Life Through Photographs', in *Visual Research Methods: Image, Society, and Representation*, ed. Gregory C. Stanczak (London: SAGE Publications, 2007).

[xvi] Marcus Banks, *Visual Data in Social Research* (London: SAGE Publications, 2001), 3.

[xvii] Jennifer Attride-Stirling, 'Thematic Networks: An Analytic Tool for Qualitative Research', *Qualitative Research* 1, no. 33 (2001): 385-405.

[xviii] Wordle (www. wordle.net) is a free, web-based tool for creating "word clouds" from a text. Words that appear more frequently in the text are displayed proportionally larger than words cited less often. Using Wordle Advanced, I entered competences and dispositions weighted for their frequency into the programme. I then cut the re-sized competences from the resultant word cloud and pasted them into the thematic networks. This is similar to the notion of 'groundedness' in standard coding procedures, including Atlas.ti., whereby a code is considered more or less grounded depending on the number of quotations it applies to.

[xix] John S. Dryzek and Jeffrey Berejikian, 'Reconstructive Democratic Theory', *The American Political Science Review* 87, no. 1 (1993): 50.

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