

Lauren Leigh Hinthorne
Department of Politics
University of York

*Democratic Crisis or Crisis of Confidence?
What local perspective frames tell us about Madagascar's 2009 Political Crisis*

**Paper prepared for the LUCAS *Democratisation in Africa* Conference
Leeds, December 2009**

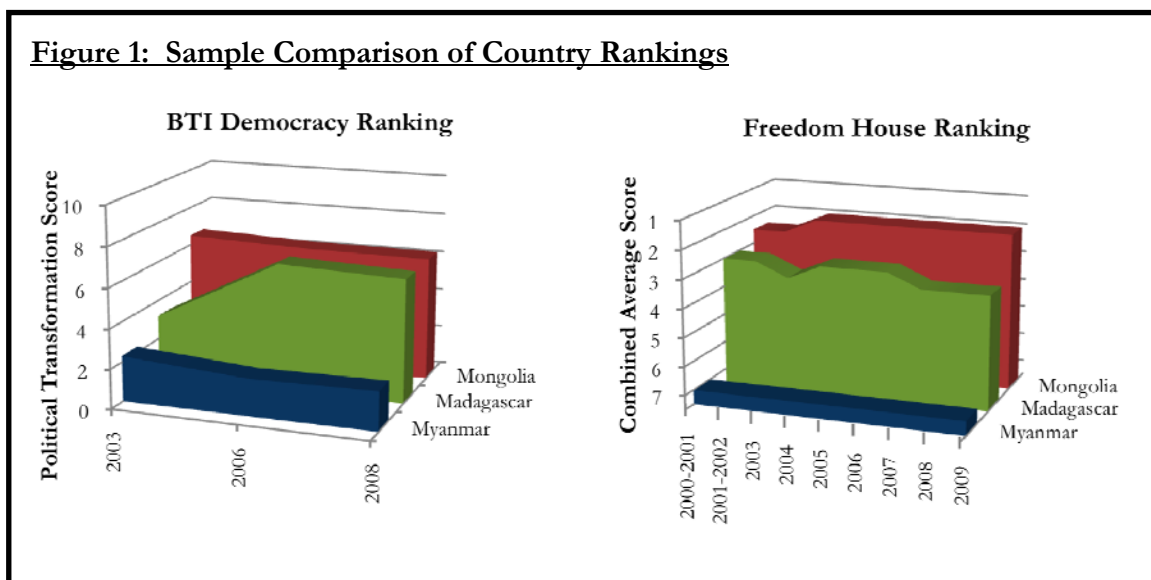
Madagascar has been variously caricatured as one of the world's "living Eden's," an "island of ghosts" and the "siren of the Indian Ocean" (Feeley-Harnik 2001: 31-33). Today, most people associate this, the fourth largest island in the world, with a popular animated film and the lemurs it made famous (Darnell and McGrath 2005). On more substantial matters – issues of development, for example – Madagascar is often quite literally 'off the map' (Lambek 2001, Sharp 2002, Vanhanen 1992 *cover*). Consequently, when Malagasy citizens take to the street in political protest, outside observers can have difficulty placing the unrest in context. The dogged demands of a 24-hour news cycle condition journalists to call "coup" and move on to the next (no doubt similarly truncated) news item. This paper aims to transcend commonplace caricatures such as these, offering instead an indication of how ordinary people living in the eastern coastal region of Madagascar understand their political world. In doing so it will raise questions about the international response to Madagascar's most recent political crisis and, more generally, how we as outsiders come to "know" developing countries.

A careful reading of the political crisis that erupted in Madagascar at the beginning of this year highlights how "undemocratic" behaviour – a "coup" even – can have roots in democratic desires that have little to do with elections. I begin with a brief overview of Madagascar's recent political history, including the country's meteoric rise to the status of poster child for democratic development. I then suggest an alternative approach to analysing Malagasy politics, arguing that the concept of interpretive frames has considerable explanatory power regarding what might otherwise be labelled "deviant" behaviour in unconsolidated or hybrid democracies. Next, I identify and describe key perceptive lenses and the subsequent frames through which local Malagasy view their political system using qualitative data collected in the months immediately preceding the 2009 political crisis. The paper concludes that long term prospects for deepening democracy in Africa and elsewhere depend in part on how – and how well – democracy promoters engage with the communities they propose to reform.

A Shining Beacon of Democracy, Dimmed

Madagascar is one of the poorest, least developed countries in the world. The population remains largely rural, literacy rates outside of urban centres are low, and industrialisation to date has been minimal. Approximately 85% of people live on less than \$2 per day (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2007: 2). Despite these conditions, Madagascar has consistently scored relatively well on

a number of democracy indices. According to the rules proffered by (once) prominent theories of democratic development, however, economic growth should precede democratic experiments (Apter 1965, Bates 2001, Huntington 1968, Inglehart and Welzel 2005). In this view, one would reasonably expect that countries with higher per capita GDPs would also rank higher on democracy indices.¹ As Figure 1 demonstrates, however, Madagascar defies this expectation. Madagascar's GDP per capita (2007) hovers around US\$375, roughly on par with that of Myanmar (approximately US\$380). Mongolia, by contrast, has a per capita GDP of US\$1480, nearly four times higher than that of Madagascar. And yet, Madagascar ranks alongside Mongolia on various democracy indices.² This suggests that even poor, 'underdeveloped' countries are capable of realising an approximation of democratic governance.³



¹ Although GDP per capita alone gives only a partial account of a country's economic development, it is generally accepted as a rough approximation. The Human Development Index gives a slightly more nuanced indication of a country's level of development. Once again, Madagascar (ranked 145 in 2009), is identified as having achieved a level of development closer to that of Myanmar (ranked 138) than Mongolia (ranked 115). All of these countries are considered to have attained "medium human development."

² According to the World Bank Governance assessment, Madagascar has hovered around the 50th percentile on indicators of both political stability and voice and accountability between 1996 and 2008. During the same period, Myanmar struggled to reach the 25th percentile on these indicators and Mongolia generally scored somewhere between the 50th and 75th percentiles. The Economist Intelligence Unit has only published two democracy indices; they do, however, broadly confirm this trend. In 2006, Madagascar ranked 85th of 167 countries, Myanmar ranked 163rd and Mongolia ranked 56th. In 2008, Madagascar ranked 90th of 167 countries, Myanmar again ranked 163rd, and Mongolia ranked 58th. It is worth noting that only Madagascar's "political culture" score changed between 2006 and 2008, falling from 6.88 (out of 10) to 5.63. All of Myanmar and Mongolia's scores stayed exactly the same, raising suspicions about how this particular index is tabulated.

³ Madagascar is not alone in this category. Other countries plagued by endemic poverty that have nonetheless taken convincing strides toward democracy include Benin, Mali and Malawi (Diamond 2008: 27).

Survey data collected by Afrobarometer throughout the first decade of the 21st century similarly indicates reasonable citizen support for democracy in Madagascar. The 2005 Afrobarometer survey found, for instance, that 65.8% of urban Malagasy supported democracy; that figure rises to 88.8% among people who had completed secondary school (Afrobarometer 2005). 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 democracy works in their country. The most recent survey results, compiled in 2008, are slightly less optimistic, finding 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 didn’t know (Afrobarometer 2009). That Malagasy citizens are generally open to the idea of democracy would not surprise some Madagascar experts; a leading Malagasy historian, for example, asserts that “there exists in Madagascar a history of political and popular democratic culture. The struggles against the colonial regime, for example, were inspired by democratic ideals such as social justice, equal rights, and so on” (Randrianja 1999: 185). The proliferation of media outlets in recent years has likewise been interpreted as an indicator of democratic change that has played a positive role in improving governmental accountability (Andriantsoa et al. 2005).

Not only have assessments of Madagascar’s path toward good (or at least better) governance and democracy demonstrated slow but consistent progress, the international community had 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 launched in April 2005 with the announcement that Madagascar would be the first country to receive development assistance from the new Millennium Challenge Corporation (Millennium Challenge Corporation 2005). Both the World Bank and IMF likewise heralded Ravalomanana as a “good guy” in recognition of his stated political agenda of fostering democratic participation alongside economic reforms (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2007: 22).

So when angry hordes took to the streets of Antananarivo in the early months of 2009 calling for the President’s resignation, it came as a surprise to many external observers. International concern deepened when, in March 2009, Ravalomanana resigned and power was unconstitutionally – and somewhat unexpectedly⁴ – transferred to his rival, Andry Rajoelina. Despite the rapid organisation of a High Transitional Authority and the promise of elections by October 2010, Rajoelina has been almost universally shunned on the international stage. Development assistance has dried up, and fledgling civil society groups 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

⁴ I have been told, for instance, that when Ravalomanana resigned and handed power to the military, he anticipated that military leaders would reinstate him, thereby granting him new legitimacy.

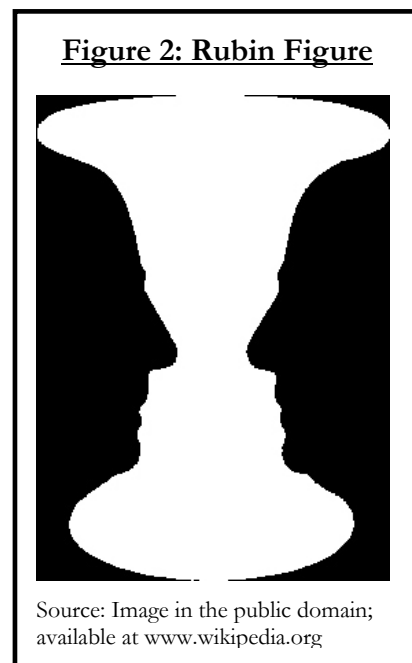
early November 2009. However, whether this agreement will hold and carry the country through to new elections next year remains to be seen.

An Alternative Lens

The account of Madagascar’s democratic development and most recent political crisis above conforms to standard knowledge of this country’s contemporary political history and prevailing assessments of its democratic trajectory made by the international community. The remainder of this paper will attempt to demonstrate not that this view is inaccurate, but that it would be a mistake to accept its conclusions as impartial truth. Ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the eastern coastal region of Madagascar in the months immediately preceding the most recent political crisis revealed that stories told by a significant proportion of the population about their own political experience bears little resemblance to those published by foreign observers. Neither of these interpretations is wrong *per se*. Each represents a true account of Malagasy political life when viewed from an entirely different angle – from a particular *frame*.

Analytical Framework

In the process of going about our daily business, we each make innumerable tacit conclusions that enable us to coherently and meaningfully comprehend the events we experience and the places we live. In other words, we are habituated to “select[ing] for attention a few salient features and relations from what would otherwise be an overwhelmingly complex reality” (Schön and Rein 1994: 26). This habituation can, however, blind us to the vast plurality of other equally correct conclusions. Is the famous Rubin Figure, for instance, an image of a chalice or two people facing each other (See Figure 2)? The answer depends entirely on how you look at it. While many people can eventually see both images in the Rubin Figure, our ability to fully realize the multiple possible realities in most contexts is much more restricted. Vickers (1995) describes the combined, unconscious judgments that we make in order to understand our environment as an interpretive screen. Throughout the remainder of this paper, I will refer to this limited way of seeing and comprehending using the *frame* concept developed by Schön and Rein (1994). It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully explore the notion of perception. The conceptualisation of frames here, therefore, 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.



As I suggested above, most of the time we take the frame through which we view the world for granted (Schön and Rein 1994: 23, Vickers 1995: 82). 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 in a particular way. Most of the time, however, most people do not make this sort of conscious decision or distinction. Instead, interpretations of quotidian situations are based on learned beliefs and perceptions that allow us to make sense of current phenomena based on past experience.⁵ Frames tacitly influence the way an individual (or organisation) interprets a situation by determining the very facts of the case (Schön and Rein 1994: 23, Vickers 1995: 187).⁶ This is what I meant above when I said that although interpretations of the political sphere offered by local Malagasy and foreign observers are contradictory neither is wrong; each community has deduced different facts from the same situation. Finally, frames allow us to recognise the scope and appropriateness of our own agency within a particular context; for Schön and Rein, “this sense of the obviousness of what is wrong and what needs fixing is the hallmark of ... frames” (1994: 28). In the following analysis, this paper will demonstrate that what is obviously wrong to the international community differs substantially from what many local Malagasy believe needs fixing in their political system. While it may seem from this brief description that the influence of frames has been unduly exaggerated, it should be remembered that without them “we could not see or value or respond to anything” (Vickers 1995: 83).

Having accepted the theoretical premise that divergent, though not by definition mutually exclusive, interpretive frames exist, we are faced with the inevitable methodological problem of identifying other people’s tacit point(s) of view. While this may initially seem an insurmountable barrier to empirical research, Dryzek’s reputable work on reconstructive democratic theory sets a helpful precedent. Reconstructive democratic theory “is rooted in the way people ‘out there’ really do think about democracy, about themselves, and about how they do or can act politically” (Dryzek and Berejikian 1993: 59). Although Dryzek does not describe his work as exploring various ‘frames’ or ‘interpretive screens’, that is essentially what he sets out to do by contrasting implicit “democratic software” (i.e. what people think they are doing) with explicit “democratic hardware” (i.e. institutional prescriptions) (Dryzek and Holmes 2002: 4). By emphasising the competences and dispositions of individuals – what they deem possible and appropriate action or response⁷ – he demonstrates that it is possible to research the frames that

⁵ 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 previously.

⁶ Vickers prefers to talk about ‘judgments’ because ‘facts’ cannot be proven correct or incorrect, only approved as right or condemned as wrong by an alternative interpretive screen (1995: 86).

⁷ Competences include knowledge and beliefs about one’s abilities and access, for example, to power or information. They are known facts and agencies. Dispositions, in contrast, are attitudes, inclinations, and

other people use to interpret politics and democracy without being hopelessly hampered by one's own interpretive perspective.

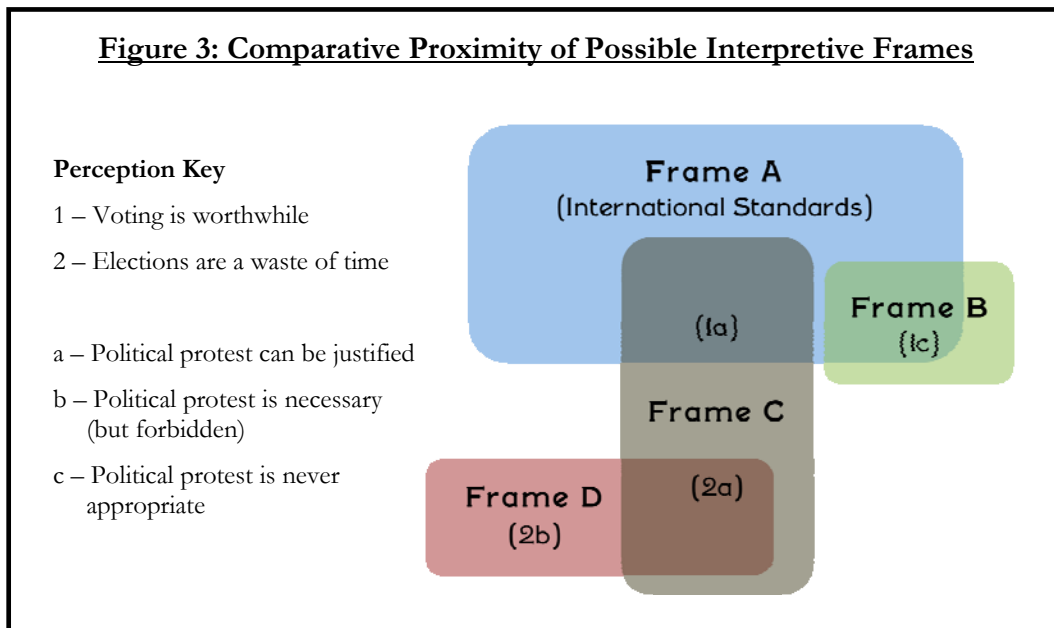
Methodology: A Modified Thematic Apperception Test

While I find Dryzek's conceptual tools (i.e. competences and dispositions) useful, I did not adopt his Q methodology to gather the data analysed below. Instead, I adapted a methodology relatively unknown to the social sciences: the Thematic Apperception Test (Murray 1943). Originally pioneered at the Harvard Psychological Clinic in the run-up to World War II, the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) is a method of personality assessment based on the belief that projection is "the best way of learning about somebody next to his being aware and anxious to tell you" (Anderson 1999: 26). Although TATs are relatively new to social science research, the method has been widely adopted – and adapted – within psychology and similar methods (e.g. rapid rural appraisals, FotoDialogo) are well established in the social sciences (Aronow, Weiss, and Reznikoff 2001, Dana 1999, McClelland 1999). Additionally, the TAT has previously been adapted for social science research projects in both the Philippines (Nazarea et al. 1998) and Madagascar (Farnworth 2007). Therefore, although the TAT is still an underdeveloped – and underappreciated – tool available to social science researchers, one would be mistaken to dismiss it out of hand as experimental.

In brief, the TAT relies on apperception: the process whereby a subject naturally constructs a narrative derived from his own personality traits and unique experience when asked to tell a story about an abstract image (Aronow, Weiss, and Reznikoff 2001: 32). In other words, the TAT aims to elicit the subject's unconscious interpretation of his environment (Bellak 1975). The process of *apperception* described here actually bears a striking resemblance to the concept of *appreciation* used by Schön and Rein (1994) in their definition of frames and by Vickers (1995) in his account of interpretive screens.⁸ The TAT is, therefore, an empirical tool well suited to identifying tacit frames; I have discussed my adoption and modification of this method elsewhere (Hinthorne 2009). The TAT stories that I collected in eastern Madagascar were transcribed and analysed for competences and dispositions in the spirit of reconstructive democratic theory, discussed above. Competences and dispositions included in TAT stories were finally sorted into cohesive themes using thematic networks (Attride-Stirling 2001). These themes suggest the

tendencies. As such, they are more emotive than competences and are only indirectly linked to actions. The advantage of this model is that it bridges what people think with how they behave, making connections between attitudes and actions. Moreover, it does so in a manner conducive to identifying the logic that local people use when observing or performing particular actions (Barth 2000: 20).

⁸ *Appreciation* here involves ascertaining the 'facts' of a situation by making "mutually related judgments [of] reality and value" (Vickers 1995: 82).



contours of the perceptive lenses and subsequent frames through which different social groups view the political sphere.

In the following section, I briefly describe five perceptive lenses that emerged from TAT stories about electoral participation and political protest. These perceptive lenses suggest three distinct frames through which Malagasy citizens interpret their political world (See Figure 3).⁹ Only one of these bears reasonable resemblance to the perspective of the international community described at the beginning of this paper, referred to as Frame A from this point forward.

Identifying Local Perceptions of Democracy

I commissioned five TAT images depicting various scenes in order to stimulate stories reflective of interviewees’ views on politics or democracy; two of these are discussed here.¹⁰ First, in order to prompt TAT stories indicative of people’s attitudes toward voting and their expectations for electoral processes, I commissioned a TAT image depicting a scene inside an election venue (See Figure 4, Image 1). The stories told by interviewees about this image provide unique insight into how people in eastern Madagascar internalise elections and interpret their role in the electoral process. TAT interviews revealed a clear dichotomy between people who hold a generally positive view of voting (*Perception 1*) and those who are more pessimistic about electoral processes in Madagascar (*Perception 2*).

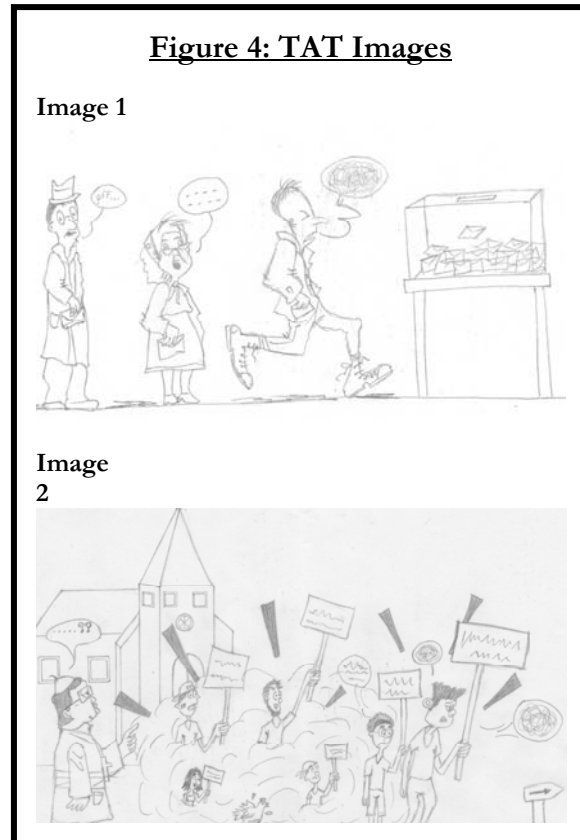
⁹ You may want to dog-ear this page as I refer to the diagram again at the end of this paper.

¹⁰ The other three images depicted (i) a man speaking in front of an audience, (ii) a man speaking with a policeman, and (iii) someone selling newspapers.

Additionally, aware of the large-scale public protests, blockades, and strikes that characterised the 2001-2002 political crisis that brought Ravalomanana to power, I was also interested to find out how a random sample of regular people interpreted the image of a protest (See Figure 4, Image 2). Would they think that the cartoon depiction of a demonstration was politically motivated? And, if so, would they approve? TAT stories told about this image revealed that most people did interpret the protest as being in some way political. Even so, they suggested three distinct perceptions of such an event. The majority of people interviewed told TAT stories that were somewhat ambivalent about protests, often saying that strikes or demonstrations, while not desirable, are sometimes necessary. Furthermore, they associated political protest with perceived social – particularly religious – divisions (*Perception a*). A significant proportion of TAT stories alternatively explained that protesting is the only way to bring about change, although these interviewees were often also acutely aware of barriers to free speech (*Perception b*). Finally, A small minority of interviewees, predominantly rural women, strongly indicated that protests are wrong and that people should resolve their disputes through dialogue (*Perception c*).

Perception 1: Voting is worthwhile

The prevalent disposition that people are generally happy to vote characterises *Perception 1*. In their TAT stories, these interviewees 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 most people are confident in the electoral process.



Some TAT stories provided additional evidence to suggest that people perceive elections as transparent and voting as a genuinely free choice. These people are not only confident about their role as voters, but in the reliability of electoral results as well. One interviewee, known to be a staunch supporter of President Ravalomanana, spoke with enthusiasm: “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.” 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. 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, 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, *Perception 1* is somewhat less encouraging.

It was relatively common for people telling predominantly positive TAT stories about elections to also describe voting as a duty, sometimes suggesting that voters harbour feelings of apathy and voter fatigue. The connotation of the word “duty,” however, was sometimes difficult to ascertain; occasionally interviewees oscillated between describing voting as a right and an obligation. Reflecting a typical partial response in this vein, an urban priest explained: “People have to vote, it is how they fulfil their duty as citizens.” Many interviewees, for instance, singled out one person in the voting queue depicted in TAT Image 1 as less enthusiastic than the others. A high school student, for example, told a TAT story in which the woman (second in the queue) was very interested in voting while the man wearing a hat behind her thinks that voting is not very important. Likewise, the man at the front of the queue was described in some of these TAT stories as excited to vote and in others as not taking his responsibility seriously. 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 the TAT Image provoked these descriptions.

Surprisingly, very few people who told TAT stories about people who thought positively about voting suggested that elections are interesting. One possible explanation this could be that people don’t have the information required to make an informed choice. Although many people are positive about voting, there remains the distinct possibility that they may simply be going through practiced motions when showing up at the polls. A roadside bicycle repairman explained in his TAT story that the last man in the voting queue was trying to decide what to do by watching the other voters. This speculation that some voters may not be able to make an informed choice is shared by a Malagasy political observer who notes that “voting is like flipping a coin for most people” (Raharizatovo 2008: 10). It would seem that some 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 emphasises on the act of taking part (e.g. showing up at the polls) than any eventual outcome (e.g. which candidate gets elected). This theory seems to account rather well for the dominant competences and dispositions discussed above that demonstrate a clear understanding of voting procedures and affinity for the process, yet seem to betray a lack of knowledge about candidates and a certain disregard for the results. Indeed, only one person brought up the announcement of election results in his TAT story. That said, the political crisis that erupted in response to controversial election results in December 2001 casts some doubt on how widespread *Perception 1* might be across the country as a whole. Alternatively, it is also possible that this perception yields to more dominant frames in times of uncertainty when more aggrieved emotions and patterns of behaviour become prevalent.

Perception 2: Elections are a waste of time

That voting is tedious and election results untrustworthy are the defining dispositions of *Perception 2*. Whereas *Perception 1* was identified rather narrowly by the common disposition that people are generally agreeable toward voting, *Perception 2* is identified by a greater plurality of interrelated themes. First, TAT stories representative of *Perception 2* characteristically depict voting as a tedious exercise. One factor contributing significantly to this theme is the common notion in these TAT stories that voting is an obligation, generally accompanied by an expression of extreme voter fatigue. Indeed, the dispositions most often attributed by these interviewees to one or more people in TAT Image 1 are weariness and discouragement. “It isn’t in their heart [to vote],” an accountant confided, “because they know that the results will be changed by the party in power.” The sentiment expressed in these TAT stories contrasts starkly with the more positive dispositions characteristic of *Perception 1*, discussed above.

Second, for many interviewees whose TAT stories suggest that they may see the political landscape through this lens, the tedium of voting is augmented by a clear conviction that elections in their country are neither free nor fair. Several competences and dispositions common to many of the TAT stories analysed here support this conclusion. Most blatantly, both the competence of cheating and the disposition that elections don’t present voters with a real choice were present in most of these TAT stories. Interviewees often described rigged elections, regularly citing the denial of voter registration cards to known opposition supporters. Indeed, a handful of people I interviewed said that they personally do not vote for precisely this reason. 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 interviewees register to vote, they insist that either they never receive their registration card or their name doesn't show up on the electoral roll at the polling station. 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 dictatorial). Additionally, even people without such specific ideas about how elections might be rigged similarly voiced scepticism about electoral transparency and the subsequent reliability of results remarkably often. According to some of these interviewees, lack of transparency facilitates cheating that results in the party in power always winning. A female university student voiced the opinion that the final outcome of elections is always the same, "even if someone new comes to power it is always the same thing." Although new elites may occasionally win electoral contests, the insinuation of these interviewees is that politicians always resort to the same old tricks. When viewed through this lens, the contribution that elections make to democratic governance is severely muted.

Finally, the common conviction that elections are *not* free and fair was often further accentuated by the disposition that since voting doesn't change anything it is not worth the trouble. Many interviewees whose TAT stories included this theme described the people depicted in Image 1 as unconvinced or as having doubts about the elections. These dispositions contribute to the conclusion that voting, though sometimes perceived as required, is not really worth the trouble. Moreover, going to the polling place takes time out from the working day, something that people barely scraping together a subsistence living can ill-afford and are unlikely to value when casting a ballot will do nothing to improve their lives. One distinctly sceptical interviewee, an urban shopkeeper, concluded his story by saying: "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." Notably, interviewees whose stories reflect the themes discussed here often attributed these 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.

The predominant competences and dispositions of *Perception 2* raise the distinct possibility that voting has little or nothing to do with the prospect of change in the minds of many people. They believe that electoral outcomes are pre-determined by the party in power and that their vote, if they are able to vote, can't make a difference. This raises concerns about the public legitimacy of even elected regimes. Madagascar's December 2006 presidential elections, for example, were deemed free and fair by international observers. The international community believed, consequently, that incumbent President Ravalomanana had received a clear mandate

from the people when he won the election with approximately 55% of the vote. The 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 appears to have severe repercussions for how these interviewees perceive and experience democracy. A middle-aged bureaucrat working in the President's anti-corruption office, BIANCO, explained: "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." Not only does this cast significant doubt on the prospect that democracy assistance efforts in Madagascar to date have succeeded in fostering meaningful outlets for political participation, it raises concerns that a sizable proportion of the population remains disenfranchised. The TAT stories told by these interviewees cast a shade of doubt over the reliability of external democracy assessments; although, lacking comparable data from other regions of the country, it is impossible to know with any certainty. While increased civic education efforts could be one way of adjusting people's perspective lenses from *Perception 2* to *Perception 1*, restrictions on freedom of expression make such initiatives difficult, as I explain below.

Perception a: Political protest can be justified

For those who see the world through this perceptive lens, public protest can be justified under some circumstances but is not always appropriate or warranted. These interviewees were also more likely than others to interpret demonstrations or public protest as evidence of social and religious divisions. One disposition common amongst a plurality of these TAT stories is division between Catholics and Protestants, sometimes directed at the presence of the priest/pastor in the lower left-hand corner of Image 2. Interviewees would often go on to explain that "the church" is active in politics. Religion has historically been an important influence on Malagasy society and this political worldview still perceives the church as highly influential, in contrast to *Perception b* below. Although past 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). Not all interviewees who thought that strikes or demonstrations were sometimes justified linked this approval with the message of the church, however. Some people who attributed the demonstration depicted in TAT Image 2 to socio-religious tension were sceptical that the priest/pastor would condone it. A relatively small proportion of people whose TAT stories contained competences and dispositions suggestive of *Perception a* explicitly stated that the protest was against the president, which could also be interpreted as a sign of religious division. Although they were hesitant to say so when the recorder was running, more than a few of these interviewees resented that a Protestant Merina was President. The

geographical location of my fieldwork inevitably meant that my interviewees were likely to be *côtier* and Catholic.

Enduring social division between the Merina, who live in the highlands around the capital Antananarivo, and the *côtier*, a catchall term that literally translates to “coastal people,”¹¹ has long influenced politics in Madagascar (Marcus and Ratsimbaharison 2005, Sharp 2002). In addition to its ethnic connotations, this fracture between the Merina and *côtier* has overtones of economic competition (Covell 1987: 13) and can be characterised as a “conflict over access to modernity” (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2007: 13). The principle adversaries in the 2001-2002 political crisis neatly fit this mould: Ratsiraka, the incumbent, is a *côtier* from the strategically important port city of Toamasina while Ravalomanana, his challenger, is a Merina self-made millionaire and former mayor of the capital, Antananarivo.¹² The 2009 political crisis, by contrast, defies this sort of ethnic categorisation; both Ravalomanana and his rival Rajoelina are ethnic Merina. It would be mistaken to presume, however, that ethnic tension had nothing to do with Ravalomanana’s downfall. Although continued correspondence with key interviewees suggests that people may not know what to make of Rajoelina, some TAT stories demonstrated considerable animosity toward Ravalomanana.

The ambiguity of this perceptive lens – that demonstrations are *sometimes* ok – suggests at least two possible interpretations. On one hand, the people who told these TAT stories are distinctly aware of religious, social, and political division and indicated that they are of a generally positive disposition toward freedom of expression so far as it supports their point of view. They are more sceptical, however, when their opponents invoke those same liberties. Alternatively, despite being preoccupied by entrenched social divisions, these TAT stories nonetheless may indicate the existence of a pluralistic and relatively vibrant society. While the first interpretation may apply to certain individuals, the second is more reflective of the overall tone in which these TAT stories were told. In either case, the overriding theme to emerge from these TAT stories is one of social and religious division. While this perceptive lens by no means entirely explains the political crisis that erupted in February and March of 2009, I will argue in the conclusion that it does make these events somewhat less surprising.

Perception b: Political protest is necessary (but forbidden)

People who observe the world through *Perception b* are inclined to interpret public protest – revolt even – as a way of instigating change. This dominant disposition contributes to the broader theme that people want to improve their lives. While this desire was also common

¹¹ In reality, many *côtier* live nowhere near the coast.

¹² Antananarivo is not only the capital of the contemporary state of Madagascar; it was also the capital of the Merina Empire and has long been associated with Merina domination.

among interviewees whose TAT stories were more inclined toward *Perception 1* above, it is distinguished here by the supporting belief that public protest and open revolt are reasonable methods of bringing about that change. A retired schoolteacher offered the explanation that “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.” A smaller proportion of people whose TAT stories suggested this perceptive lens said specifically, and with intense emotion, that the protestors were demonstrating against the political establishment. Such heated emotion, though relatively common among this group of interviewees, was not characteristic of all TAT stories told about this image, as demonstrated above in the analysis of *Perception a*. This striking differentiation of tone provides supporting evidence for the likely presence of multiple perceptive lenses, each conducive to a unique interpretation of the reasonable and available avenues for personal expression and political voice.

Despite clearly approving of (political) protest, many people whose TAT stories reflect this perception had clear worries about barriers to freedom of speech and expression. Censorship was the most common concern, although some people were also worried about politically motivated imprisonment for saying the wrong thing or speaking out too strongly against the regime. Indeed, a small number of people who told TAT stories suggestive of *Perception b* said during their TAT interviews that they were afraid to speak openly for fear of being overheard; many more voiced similar concerns after the recorder had been switched off. A few of these interviewees also pointed out that strikes and demonstrations, though effective, are forbidden anyway. Through this perceptive lens, people clearly see a political landscape in which freedom of expression exists only on the surface. Under the surface, however, newspapers and radio stations are stifled by censorship. Interviewees also demonstrated an instinctual tendency toward self-censorship and were sometimes visibly afraid of speaking their minds. The National Coordinator of KMF-CNOE, an indigenous NGO that focuses on election monitoring and improved civic education, further substantiated that this fear is a rational response to the prevailing political climate. He explained that people have to be very cautious when they talk about politics in public, which makes the work of organisations advocating civic education and political reform even more difficult. Whether the fear that prompts people to self-censor is actually justified or not, the fact remains that a significant proportion of the people I interviewed interpret their political environment through a lens tinted by fear, which has direct bearing on their behaviour. These TAT stories 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.

Finally, although TAT stories suggestive of *Perception a* above indicate that religion has a strong hold on society, there is also reason to believe that the influence of the church might be waning. The people had turned their backs on the church, some of these interviewees explained, before reiterating that the influence of the church had always been very strong in the past. Though rarely described in any detail, this interpretation of religion and religious influence is clearly at odds with the socio-political worldview evoked by *Perception a*.

Perception c: Political protest is never appropriate

Perception c stands out as the only perceptive lens discussed here that depicts strikes and demonstrations as unconditionally wrong or bad. Although relatively few people I interviewed told TAT stories indicative of this worldview, the distinct features of these stories made it illogical to include them in either of the two perceptions already discussed above. Consequently, they indicate the likely presence of a third distinct point of view regarding free speech and political protest. In addition to stating that demonstrations and protests are inappropriate, these TAT stories were prone to the disposition that the church is influential. In contrast to *Perception a* and its interpretation of religion as socially divisive, however, people whose TAT stories demonstrated signs of *Perception c* believe that religion is a moderating force. These interviewees, for example, sometimes interpreted the priest/pastor in Image 2 as intervening to stop the strike and successfully dispersing the crowd. In this view, the church and religious leaders encourage people to show restraint and work out their problems peacefully.

Apart from indicating that public demonstrations or strikes are bad, the TAT stories included here reveal little about how these interviewees think about individual free speech. One reason for this may be that free speech is not a pressing or volatile issue for these interviewees. 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 meaningfully participate in the discussion of locally relevant concerns (e.g. village security, primary education). This does not seem to be at all the case, by contrast, for urban dwellers who feel voiceless and have grievances of a different nature, such as the perceived suppression of opposition parties and constitutional rights. To conclude, the general trend for *Perception c* is that people value discussion, but that their vigour is tempered by religious influence. Interest in primarily local affairs also indicates that they may be able to resolve disputes on a personal or community level.

From Perceptions to Frames: What does democracy mean here?

While the perceptions outlined above resulting from different TAT images do not overlap perfectly, there are some very clear trends in the types of stories people were likely to tell about elections and protests. I should point out that interviewees were free to explain the images in any order they chose, negating the likelihood that the order in which they viewed or

interpreted the images influenced the sort of stories they were likely to tell. Describing the protest in Image 2 first, for example, did not necessarily lead to a story about Image 1 in which the people were either disaffected toward the election or angry about the result. Additionally, I did not ask any interviewee outright how he (or she) defined democracy or, indeed, about democracy at all. Still, many interviewees volunteered descriptions of democracy – sometimes associating it with political life in Madagascar, but more often contrasting a democratic ideal with their own (unsatisfactory) political experience. These definitions of democracy, a few of which I discuss below, correspond reasonably well with Frames B, C and D in Figure 3.¹³

First, through Frame B democracy is distinguished as a particular set of rules, a prescribed way of doing things. In the words of a middle-aged project manager for a local NGO, “In a democracy people can’t just do whatever they want. There are rules.” Dispositions characteristic of *Perceptions 1* and *c* suggest that these rules likely include: (i) citizens should vote and (ii) disputes should be settled through discussion. Indeed, everyone whose TAT story about Image 2 provided evidence of *Perception c* also told a story about Image 1 reflecting the competences and dispositions of *Perception 1*. It is rather unlikely that most interviewees whose stories indicated this particular worldview would be specifically familiar with the democratic standards set by international organisations or foreign academics. That said, the rules based definition of democracy maintained by Frame B is nevertheless largely compatible with Frame A.

As indicated above, several interviewees never stated a definitive position on either voting or political protest, instead saying that elections are *generally* worthwhile and protests are *sometimes* justified. Frame C, therefore, accounts for a rather ambivalent or uncertain take on political events. In this vein, a retired teacher suggested that for most people “democracy is a big question mark.” She was optimistic, however, that “little by little Madagascar is moving toward real democracy.” You could say that people who see the world through Frame C are wearing bifocals. Particular circumstances (e.g. who is protesting, how well elections are organised) will determine whether they look through the lens that overlaps with Frame A (*Perceptions 1 and a*) or Frame D (*Perceptions 2 and a*).

Finally, at the far end of the spectrum, people whose TAT stories strongly indicated support for political protest (*Perception b*) were also most likely to have little faith in elections (*Perception 2*). It is not surprising that democracy, when viewed through Frame D, is more abstract – and thought by many to be unattainable. According to one Catholic Priest,

The President says ‘democracy this’ and ‘democracy that’ but the reality doesn’t match. The problem is that the President goes abroad and says 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’ve never experienced it.

¹³ In case you have not already dog-eared it, Figure 3 is on page 7.

Frame D distinguishes freedoms as elemental to democracy, including the freedom to vote in a transparent election and freedom to voice opinions in opposition to the ruling party. When democracy is defined this way, appropriate behaviour may include opting not to participate in flawed electoral processes or taking part in political protests and rallies.

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 earlier this year. 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 in this paper that the tools we commonly rely on to assess democracy in developing countries are useful but insufficient. The results of my qualitative study are neither as statistically representative nor as conclusive as conventional datasets; nevertheless, they go further than democracy indices in explaining *why* events may have unfolded as they did.

As noted above, Frame B and, to a lesser extent, Frame C suggests that some people were broadly supportive of the existing political system prior to January 2009 when the first signs of social unrest became apparent. As these worldviews at least conform somewhat to international expectations of democracy, it also seems likely that these people will accept international mediation efforts and the new elections they endorse. Frame D, by contrast, indicates that a significant segment of Malagasy society was already disillusioned with Ravalomanana's promises of democracy. This malaise can be attributed to at least two distinct causes. First, some people are unconvinced by electoral processes and even less persuaded by official election results (*Perception 2*). In the eyes of these people, Ravalomanana's legitimacy had long since been called into question. Secondly, this dissatisfaction was enhanced by the conviction that the regime stifles political speech and meaningful participation through censorship and by banning political protest. It may be significant, therefore, that protests first broke out when Ravalomanana temporarily closed Rajoelina's TV station after it broadcast an interview with exiled former President Ratsiraka. Through Frame D this could have been interpreted as a final hypocritical assault on their democratic freedoms. Likewise, the protests that ensued may have been interpreted as a democratic opening, a rare opportunity to voice pent-up dissatisfaction. On a similar note, some people whose TAT stories indicated that they see the world through Frame B (*Perceptions 2 and a*) harboured deep-seated resentment against Ravalomanana. Looters specifically targeted his businesses, suggesting that, for some people, the protests may have been a bit more personal. This modest attempt to re-examine the political unrest of early 2009 does not presume to account for the motives of all protestors. What the

analysis above does point to, however, is the likelihood that some people may have reasonably interpreted these events as an unexpected opening in an otherwise closed political system.

Finally, 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 this year 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, tacitly pointing to protest as an appropriate – and now suddenly available – avenue for addressing democratic grievances against a dictatorial regime.

Crucially, people who interpret events through Frame D, and to a lesser extent Frame C, are unlikely to be placated for long by the internationally mediated solution of a unity government and pending elections. Those distrustful of Ravalomanana, for instance, will not be pleased to see him return from exile so soon. On a more technical point, there are few indications that concerns about electoral fraud will be addressed or that safeguards will be instituted to protect free speech for supporters of opposition candidates. Though not discussed in this paper, many interviewees who I suspect see their world through Frame D voiced serious concerns about the ability of opposition parties to organise, let alone campaign. 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), but are unlikely to address the very real concerns of some disgruntled would-be democrats. 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. Instead of interpreting the events of early 2009 as a democratic crisis with an abominable coup at its apex, this analysis 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 many people do not believe are democratic.

Over two decades ago, Sklar concluded that “There are no reliable blueprints of developmental democracy, no models for third world development in the late twentieth century, democratic or otherwise” (1987: 714). Despite the global reach of democracy's value, the very possibility of a reliable democratic blueprint is precluded by our vast diversity. Consequently, democratic development in any society is predicated on the discovery and development of institutions uniquely suited to itself. In closing, I would just suggest that those of us interested in democratic development need to go back to the beginning and re-evaluate what we mean by

democracy. Or, better still, sneak up on the problem from an entirely different angle and ask the people we're purportedly trying to help what democracy means to them.

References

- Afrobarometer. 2005. *Briefing Paper no. 23: La démocratie à Madagascar : un soutien marqué mais un fonctionnement à améliorer*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University.
- . 2009. *Round 4 Afrobarometer Survey in Madagascar: Summary of results*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University.
- Ake, C. 1993. The unique case of African democracy. *International Affairs* 69 (2): 239-244.
- Anderson, J. W. 1999. "Henry A. Murray and the Creation of the Thematic Apperception Test," in *Evocative Images: The Thematic Apperception Test and the Art of Projection*. Edited by L. Gieser and M. I. Stein, pp. 23-38. Washington D.C. : American Psychological Association.
- Andriantsoa, P., N. Andriasendrivarivony, S. Haggblade, B. Minten, M. Rakotojaona, F. Rakotovoavy, and H. S. Razafinimanana. 2005. Media Proliferation and Democratic Transition in Africa: The Case of Madagascar. *World Development* 33 (11): 1939-1957.
- Apter, D. E. 1965. *The Politics of Modernisation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Aronow, E., K. A. Weiss, and M. Reznikoff. 2001. *A Practical Guide to the Thematic Apperception Test: The TAT in Clinical Practice*. Philadelphia, PA: Brunner-Routledge.
- Attride-Stirling, J. 2001. Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative Research* 1 (33): 385-405.
- Barth, F. 2000. "Boundaries and Connections," in *Signifying Identities*. Edited by A. P. Cohen, pp. 17-36. London: Routledge.
- Bates, R. H. 2001. *Prosperity and Violence: The Political Economy of Development*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.
- Bellak, L. 1975. *The Thematic Apperception Test, The Children's Apperception Test and The Senior Apperception Test in Clinical Use, Third Edition*. New York: Grune & Stratton.
- Bertelsmann Stiftung. 2007. *BTI 2008 - Madagascar Country Report*. Bertelsmann Stiftung.
- Bratton, M. 1998. Second Elections in Africa. *Journal of Democracy* 9 (3): 51-66.
- Bratton, M., and N. van de Walle. 1997. *Democratic Experiments in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chazan, N. 1979. African Voters at the Polls: a Re-examination of the Role of Elections in African Politics. *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 17: 136-58.
- Covell, M. 1987. *Madagascar: Politics, Economics, and Society*. London: Frances Pinter.
- Dana, R. H. 1999. "Cross-Cultural - Multicultural Use of the Thematic Apperception Test," in *Evocative Images: The Thematic Apperception Test and the Art of Projection*. Edited by L. Gieser and M. I. Stein, pp. 177-190. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Darnell, E., and T. McGrath. 2005. "Madagascar," DreamWorks SKG
- Diamond, L. 2008a. *The Spirit of Democracy*. New York: Times Books.
- Dryzek, J. S., and J. Berejikian. 1993. Reconstructive Democratic Theory. *The American Political Science Review* 87 (1): 48-60.
- Dryzek, J. S., and L. Holmes. Eds. 2002. *Post-Communist Democratization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Farnworth, C. 2007. Achieving respondent-led research in Madagascar. *Gender & Development* 15 (2): 271-285.
- Feeley-Harnik, G. 2001. Ravenala Madagascariensis Sonnerat: The Historical Ecology of a "Flagship Species" in Madagascar. *Ethnohistory* 48 (1-2): 31-86.
- Hinthorne, L. L. 2009. "How Will You Know It When You See It? Using modified Thematic Apperception Tests to measure political culture," in *Breaking Boundaries*. University of Warwick, UK.
- Huntington, S. P. 1968. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

- Inglehart, R., and C. Welzel. 2005. *Modernisation, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lambek, M. 2001. Reflections on the "Ethno-" in Malagasy Ethnohistory. *Ethnohistory* 48 (1-2): 301-308.
- Marcus, R. R., and A. M. Ratsimbaharison. 2005. Political Parties in Madagascar: Neopatrimonial Tools or Democratic Instruments? *Party Politics* 11 (4): 495-512.
- McClelland, D. C. 1999. "How the Test Lives On: Extensions of the Thematic Apperception Test Approach," in *Evocative Images: The Thematic Apperception Test and the Art of Projection*. Edited by L. Gieser and M. I. Stein, pp. 163-176. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Millennium Challenge Corporation. 2005. "Millennium Challenge Corporation Board Approves First Compact with Madagascar."
- Mukonoweshuro, E. G. 1990. State "Resilience" and Chronic Political Instability in Madagascar. *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 24 (3): 376-398.
- Murray, H. A. 1943. *Thematic Apperception Test*. Cambridge, MA: the President and Fellows of Harvard College.
- Nazarea, V., R. Rhodes, E. Bontoyan, and G. Flora. 1998. Defining indicators which make sense to local people: intra-cultural variation in perceptions of natural resources. *Human Organisation* 57 (2): 159-170.
- Raharizatovo, G. 2008. *Madagascar 2002: Genese et Silences d'une Crise*. Antananarivo, Madagascar: Imprimerie Catholique Antanimena.
- Randrianja, S. 1999. "The Endless Quest of Caliban," in *African Democracy in the Era of Globalisation*. Edited by J. Hyslop, pp. 181-299. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Schön, D. A., and M. Rein. 1994. *Frame Reflection*. New York: Basic Books.
- Sharp, L. A. 2002. *The Sacrificed Generation: Youth, History, and the Colonised Mind in Madagascar*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sklar, R. L. 1987. Developmental Democracy. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29 (4): 686-714.
- Vanhanen, T. Ed. 1992. *Strategies of Democratization*. London: Crane Russak.
- Vickers, Sir G. 1995. *The Art of Judgement*. London: SAGE Publications, Inc.