

MEMORY OF THE WORLD INTERNATIONAL REGISTER

THE KABARY (Madagascar)

2012-62

1.0 Summary

As a country of oral tradition, Madagascar has a very rich oral literary heritage where each item is a genuine verbal work of art.

As one of the most famous and appreciated items of this undying heritage, Kabary was initially a means of passing on information about politics and royal administration to the nation. Later on, it was used to mark different aspects of life such as weddings, funerals and other ceremonies and family events.

Kabary is a very poetic discourse full of imagery which calls upon imagination. It is very structured and mainly contains proverbs, rhetorical figures and word plays. Also note that the Malagasy language offers its own genius and a particular sonority. Kabary is still very used in the contemporary society.

It remains regulated by the rules and standards which have existed from its origin until today. This traditional literary genre does not contain anachronisms. Therefore, it deserves to appear in the International Register of the Memory of the World Programme.

2.0 Nominator

2.1 Name of nominator :

Ministry of Culture and Heritage. Heritage Department.

2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage:

Manager, Curator, Promoter of the Documentary Heritage

2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination):

Ms Director of Heritage

2.4 Name and contact details:

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3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the item being nominated

Kabary, a discourse pronounced during major events in Madagascar, shows great ability in the pictorial use of the national idiom. Each region has its own specificity (e.g., the Sokela for the Betsileo and the Rasavolana for the Sihanaka and the Betsimisaraka). This cultural diversity reveals its richness.

3.4 History/provenance

Kabary dates back to King Andriandranolava, son of Andrianamboniravina who reigned in Fanongoavana from 1360 to 1380 (Andrianamboniravina had two sons, Andriamoraony, the oldest, and Andriandranolava, the youngest). It is said that the people named Vazimba at that time asked Andriamoraony: « What is Kabary ? » and King Andriamoraony would have answered them: « I didn't create it, Andriandranolava did ». Therefore, Andriandranolava was the one who founded Kabary.

Later on, between 1575 and 1610, when Ralambo, King of Alasora and Ambohidrabiby, forced his older son Andriantompokoindrindra who lived in Ambohimalaza to submit, Kabary was already established as a tradition for the Merina people as the King had declared to Andrianjaka, his youngest son who became his successor: “When you pronounce a Kabary, Andriantompokoindrindra will answer you”. Thus, Kabary became a discourse phrased by the sovereign, master of words, to which we will answer by another Kabary, the mpanoa, the subject or subordinate. Logically, the oldest son of a family is supposed to be the master of words or the spokesperson. But in the case of the Kingdom of Madagascar, the King is given this mission, whatever his rank in the family.

Between 1675 and 1710, reign of Andriamasinavalona

Andriantsimitoviaminandriandehibe, another King of Imerina, had two sons. His oldest son, Razakatsitakatrandriana reigned in Antananarivo, and Andriamasinavalona reigned in Alasora. After his death, the oldest son oppressed the people whereas the youngest one was wiser and appreciated. Andriamampandry, a soothsayer of the King, asked the people to choose among the two brothers to succeed their father. He did so through Kabary. So, Kabary was used to ask for the consent of the people.

Between 1787 and 1810, reign of Andrianampoinimerina

Andriamamilaza, oratory and visitor passing through Antananarivo, had the unpleasant surprise to discover that he lost some of his personal items. He noted that the Kingdom was not properly ruled. He found Ramboasalama in Ambohimanga, who later became Andrianampoinimerina, and predicted that the latter would be the King.

During the reign of the various sovereigns that followed, Kabary was always used as a means of communication and information between the sovereign and the people.

For example, the King gave a Kabary to have the work carried out (e.g. collecting firewood in the forest, etc.), announce his orders, organize chores, recruit troops and judge.

The King also summoned the people so that they asked for his opinion and explored with him a specific situation; this is what was called the royal speeches or Kabary.

But it was not always like that. Sometimes, the King didn't consult his subjects, especially when it came to his own interests where the advice of the people was unnecessary. During Kabary for major events, the people ask about the King, bring offerings, receive and agree to his orders and promise to execute them. This is how this kind of Kabary comes to an end.

Then, the era of colonization came. Kabary remains alive and various speeches can be found:

- KABARIM-PANJAKANA: State speech where administrative, political and public affairs are discussed;
- KABARY AM-PANDEVENANA: burial speech pronounced during funerals;
- KABARY AM-PANAMBADIANA: speech pronounced during ceremonies related to weddings;
- KABARY AN-DANONANA: celebration speech pronounced during certain rituals.

Semantically speaking, “Kabary” has various meanings depending on the regions and the communities. Sometimes, the word is used to express boredom « Mahabe kabary », sometimes it refers to a State speech « Kabarin’Andriana ». In some regions, the word merely reflects familiarity. For example, « kabaronareo » means « what’s up? ».

In a way, Kabary is a ritual genre, which means it usually occurs in specific contexts of the daily life. Its goal is always to express values and thoughts which give a collective meaning to the material facts. The oratory of an authentic Kabary raises the tone of his voice.

An authentic Kabary is characterized by different features:

- It enhances and highlights an event in the society or in the family
- It always brings together two categories of people: the mpikabary and the audience among which another speaker will answer the first speech.
- It proceeds like a little theater.

Structure of Kabary: It consists of 4 steps:

- Ala sarona or preamble,
- Fialan-tsiny or preliminary apologies,
- Arahaba sy Hasina or greetings and presentations,
- Ranjan-kabary or content. This step may differ depending on the kind of Kabary.
- Famarananteny (as a conclusion)

4.0 Legal information

4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Name:

Malagasy population

Address:

4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage

Name: Malagasy population

Address:

Telephone:

Facsimile:

Email:

4.3 Legal status

Preservation and legal protection are underway.

4.4 Accessibility

Work to be completed

4.5 Copyright status

5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

5.1 Authenticity

This documentary heritage is authentic. The popular wisdom finds support to its most colorful expressions. Today, it is still relatively alive. It has been passed down from generation to generation and the source of the Malagasy wisdom is still preserved. Its identity and its provenance are reliably established as the population keeps the structure, the meaning and the goal of Kabary. No event or ceremony can take place without Kabary, which is usually considered as a form of dialog.

5.2 World significance

This heritage is unique and irreplaceable. It is the root of the Malagasy rules of life.

If it came to disappear, it would be a harmful impoverishment for the World Heritage as it constitutes one of the features of the Malagasy personality.

5.3 Comparative criteria

1. Time

Somehow, Kabary defies time. Indeed, Kabary has always existed, whatever the period. It is perfectly adapted to the circumstances and the style of governance. For example, at the time of Radama and Ranavalona, it was a royal speech at the very beginning. Therefore, Kabary was first and foremost an element of governance.

The colonial power even referred to this by pointing out that no activity (awareness, « teny midina »,) can be carried out and be efficient without Kabary.

Later on, as time and history evolved, Kabary was used during the events of individuals' lives.

2. Place

3. People

4. Subject and theme

5. Form and style

The document offers an exceptional stylistic and linguistic value. We can find the Malagasy spirit, the genius of the language and the public speaking skills.

The structure of the discourse does not change but each appropriate Kabary has its own kind of illustration and its own language full of imagery.

6. Social significance

Kabary is inseparable from the major events of life. Therefore, it is respected for being associated with people and major events. The Mpikabary must have a particular social status. No oratory is allowed to talk unless authorized to do so and even if authorized, he must apologize (miala tsiny), thus recognizing he is not perfect and showing his respect.

6.0 Contextual information

6.1 Rarity

Kabary is still alive and commonly practiced during major events.

6.2 Integrity

As regards form and substance, Kabary has not changed much. Sometimes, new proverbs are created and rhetorical techniques are used depending on the circumstances.