

The Act of Reading Aloud

Performing Accountability and Dis-claiming Responsibility in the Multimodal Enactment of Indonesian Electoral Mission Statements

Aurora Donzelli
Sarah Lawrence College
adonzelli@slc.edu

The process of administrative decentralization started in Indonesia in the aftermath of President Suharto's demise has produced significant transformations in the local styles for the discursive presentation of the political self. As a result of the country's institutional rearrangement, new genres of discourse have emerged along with new notions of the illocutionary force of words.

This paper examines electoral mission statements as a new discursive genre within Indonesian political discourse.

Characterized by the application of a corporate paradigm of business-driven goals to the realm of political discourse and, as in the case of new year's resolutions, even private life, mission statements point to a foreign origin and allude to new standards of efficiency and morality. They are emblematic of the institutional and moral transformations of post-Suharto Indonesia and resonate with neoliberal models of the entrepreneurial self and with an emerging transnational ideology of transparent good governance and moral accountability.

Since the millennium this new genre has gained ground within the repertoire of Indonesian politicians. Rigorously delivered in Standard bureaucratic Indonesian, electoral mission statements have become a common requirement for prospective candidates (I: *balon* or *bakal calon*) in the Toraja highlands of Sulawesi. Learning how to master this new transnational genre meant becoming fluent in spelling out one's political goals, as well as being able to display one's commitment to a specific political agenda.

Drawing on a corpus of audiovisual data recorded in the Toraja highlands, this paper examines the local circulation of this transnational genre. I track Toraja candidates as they strive to master the new genre and acquaint themselves with the rhetoric of "transparency" (I: *transparansi*), "vision" (I: *visi*), and "mission" (I: *misi*) advocated by transnational financial institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank. I draw on Goffman's analysis of the production format of an utterance and on Silverstein and Urban's work on the fuzzy boundaries between discursive practices and formed texts to argue that in Toraja the social life of electoral mission statements results in a complex mixture of cultural adjustment and resistance.

On the one hand, Toraja candidates adjust their styles of self-presentation to the ethos of individual voluntarism, political personalism, and moral accountability. In complying with the genre's metapragmatic requirements, Toraja candidates engage the performance of highly commissive speech acts aimed at enunciating their political intentions and goals.

On the other hand, they subvert the very ethos and the metapragmatic requirements of mission statements, producing parodies and ironic performances of the new styles of moral entrepreneurialism and political personalism. In particular, I show how candidates may perform their statements in a way that allows them to disclaim real political, illocutionary, and performative responsibility while paying lip service to the new popular paradigm of entrepreneurial accountability. To realize this strategy, candidates first inscribe their mission statements within written documents and then re-animate their own words reading aloud the content of these documents and thus producing complex multimodal performances. Re-animating their statements through the affectless prosody of written texts read aloud, Toraja candidates undermine the genre's emphasis on personal intentions and reassert the impersonal fatalism underlying traditional modes of political self-presentation.