6.1 Political oratory evoking kama muta

In his 1961 inaugural address, Kennedy was loudly applauded when he said, “We shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and success of liberty” (cited in Atkinson 1984:37). Kennedy’s address invoked themes of challenges that had to be met by uniting. Having listed the crisis of the cold war, he proposed that they could be overcome by international cooperation.

All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand days; nor in the life of this Administration; nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin.

In your hands, my fellow citizens, more than mine, will rest the final success or failure of our course. Since this country was founded, each generation of Americans has been summoned to give testimony to its national loyalty. The graves of young Americans who answered the call to service surround the globe.

Now the trumpet summons us again—not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need—not as a call to battle, though embattled we are—but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in and year out, “rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation,” a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself.

Can we forge against these enemies a grand and global alliance, North and South, East and West, that can assure a more fruitful life for all mankind? Will you join in that historic effort?

In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility—I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it. And the glow from that fire can truly light the world.

(John F. Kenney Presidential Library


It’s difficult to determine the impact of Kennedy’s speech on American resolution to support the cold war, civil rights, and poverty programs, but it certainly helped rally his supporters.
Similarly, in a 1971 election campaign, James Callaghan said,

There’s work for a Labour Government for the next five years, as long as there’s a family without a home, as long as there’s a patient waiting in a queue for a hospital bed, as long as there’s a man or a woman without a job, someone who suffers from discrimination because of their colour; so long will our work as a labour movement not be done. We go forward in that spirit, with that resolve. (Quoted in Atkinson 1984:38).

Adolf Hitler’s oratory was based on evoking CS by invoking hatred of an enemy, then rallying the audience to unite in defiant solidarity.

Hitler acquired an appreciation of the personal isolation created by the disappearance of historic, stable institutions in Bavaria. He learned from the revolutionaries to paint vividly the horrors abounding on all sides, thus further deepening this sense of crisis and isolation. The [1918-1919 Munich] Revolution, in fact, facilitated his task. This crisis psychology, in turn, created a desperate desire to believe and identify. (Fishman 1964:250)

With old creeds doubted or discredited, deep anxieties aroused, a common scapegoat found, the assembled crowd would hunger for purification, a new faith, a new belief. The moment would be ripe for the fanatic prophet to pound his fist and project his voice, feasting on the frustration of the throng and driving them to frenzy. He would provide them with new belief, new belonging. (Fishman 1964:252)

We have Hitler’s own account of the effect of the mass meeting in the beer hall and the will of the beer hall orator on the individual:

If he steps for the first time out of his small workshop or out of the big enterprise, in which he feels very small, into the mass meeting and is now surrounded by thousands and thousands of people with the same conviction, if while looking around he is carried away by the powerful effect of the suggestive intoxication and the enthusiasm of three or four thousand others, if the visible success and approval of thousands confirm the correctness of the new doctrine in his mind and waken for the first time the doubt about the truth of his previous conviction—then he himself succumbs to the magic influence of what we call mass suggestion. . . . The man who comes to such a meeting, doubting and hesitating, leaves it
confirmed in his mind: he has become a member of a community.
(Fishman 1964:253, quoting Hitler's 1939 Mein Kampf, pp. 715–716; ellipses in Fishman)

The mass meeting is necessary, if only for the reason that in it the individual, who in becoming an adherent of a new movement feels lonely and is easily seized with the fear of being alone, receives for the first time the picture of a greater community, something that has a strengthening and encouraging effect on most people. (Hitler 1939:715, quoted in Fishman 1964:256)

Would Hitler have led the Nazis to power if he had not so skillfully evoked kama muta?

This strategy was by no means limited to Hitler. Moving political speeches often invoke a threatening enemy or ideology that the speaker and listeners must mobilize to collectively defend against or attack; audiences consistently applaud such attack lines (Heritage & Greatbatch 1986). One of the most applause-evoking speech forms in contemporary political English is the verbal contrast between what is evil/threatening/other and what is good/compassionate/we' (Atkinson 1984, Heritage & Greatbatch 1986). Consider Winston Churchill’s wartime speeches, such as that of 4 June 1940, which included the famous passage,

We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.
(Churchill 1940)

This speech is widely acknowledged as having rallied the British, and indeed the English-speaking world, at a crucial time. One again, kama muta moved history.
6.2 Applause that communicates the audience’s kama muta

Atkinson and colleagues characterize applause and similar responses (Amen! Hear, hear! Say it! shouts or whistles of approbation) as affiliative and, in the extreme, “rapturous.” They also cite news stories that describe enthusiastic applause as “rapturous” (Atkinson 1984:13, Heritage & Greatbatch 1986). Applause is a performative or illocutionary ‘speech act’: by applauding, the audience commends, supports, and joins the speaker. There is also the practice of the speaker inviting people to applaud to convey their gratitude, appreciation, approval, or good-wishes to a third person such as a guest speaker (Atkinson 1984: 34–37). Atkinson, Heritage, and their collaborators demonstrate that applause to English-language political oration is ritualized and predictable. In certain settings with certain participants the two illocutionary forms they identify in political oration, along with another less common ones, reliably generate 7-9 seconds of applause whose onset can be predicted to the fraction of a second. An audience of even thousands of listeners simultaneously begins to applaud together, and all stop together. This is a result of implicit knowledge and motivation to respond to certain tropes, and also of the strong motivation to applaud in unison; it is rare for an individual or small number of people to applaud if others don’t immediately join in, and uncommon for a person to fail to applaud while others are applauding (Atkinson 1984:18).

Clapping may enhance CS because of the simultaneity of common action, and this effect may be much stronger when clapping become synchronous so that participants’ hands moving in unison makes them feel as one body, a form of consubstantial assimilation (Fiske 2004, Fiske & L. Schubert 2012). But even when asynchronous, everyone’s clapping merges into the sound of the whole in which participation as such is salient, while the individuality of each one’s contribution disappears, indistinguishable in the whole. The CS solidarity-enhancing effect of applause is mediated in part by common knowledge: everyone knows that everyone knows that everyone knows. . . that everyone is joining in the affirmation, and with what degree of enthusiasm. Collective applause signals and evokes the audience’s regard or affection for the person on stage: affirmation and commitment to their common cause, voiced by a speaker; or the communion evoked by the audience with musicians or other performers. This may make the person on stage suddenly feel a deepened sense of union with her audience. In 1909, when David Lloyd George was running for re-election, he spoke of his desire to instill in Britain the spirit of Cromwell, and of his identity as a Welshman and ‘a man of the mountain.’ At the tumultuously warm cheers of his audience, “Lloyd George broke down in tears, hardly able to complete his speech, and choking on his words as he expressed his thanks to the assembled people” (Dixon 2015:206). The stolidly chauvinistic British press reported that this is what one would expect from a Welshman.

While applause may often be purely formal, it is sometimes felt. When it is felt, it often seems to index kama muta.
6.3 Oratorical charisma

Jackson introduced Rosa Parks, then spoke of how a black delegation had been locked out of the convention only 24 years before, invoked the names of the martyrs of the civil rights movement, including Martin Luther King, Jr., and then spoke about struggling together to overcome common challenges, and painted his vision of unity.

When I look out at this convention, I see the face of America, red, yellow, brown, black and white. . . . The real rainbow coalition. . . . We sit here together, a rainbow, a coalition—the sons and daughters of slave masters and the sons and daughters of slaves sitting together around a common table to decide the direction of our party and our country.

Left wing, right wing. . . It take two wings to fly.

America’s not a blanket woven from one thread, one color, one cloth. When I was a child growing up in Greensville, S.C., and grandmother could not afford a blanket, she didn’t complain and we did not freeze. Instead, she took pieces of old cloth—patches, wool, silk, gabardine, crockersack on the patches—barely good enough to wipe off your shoes with. . . . With sturdy hands and strong cord, she sewed them into a quilt, a thing of beauty and power and culture. Now, democrats, we must build such a quilt. (Quoted in Shamir, Arthur, & House 1994:33-34; ellipses in Shamir et al)

And Jackson declares that he is not a person set apart from or above the audience or viewers:

I have a story. . . . I understand. I know abandonment and people being mean to you and saying you’re nothing and nobody and can never be anything. I understand. Jesse Jackson is my third name. I’m adopted. . . I understand when nobody knows your name. I understand when you have no name. I understand. . .

Call you outcast, low down, you can’t make it, you’re from nobody, subclass, underclass—when you see Jesse Jackson, when you see my name goes in nomination, your name goes in nomination. (Quoted in Shamir, Arthur, & House 1994:35)

Much of his speech is about overcoming adversity and righting injustice by pulling together to embody our shared moral values.
Wherever you are tonight. I challenge you to hope and to dream. Don’t submerge your dreams. . . . even on drugs, dream of the day you’re drug free. Even in the gutter, dream of the day that you’ll be on your feet again. You must never stop dreaming. . . . dream of things as they ought to be. (Quoted in Shamir, Arthur, & House 1994:36)

And then, for our children, young America, hold your head high now. We can win. We must not lose you to drugs and violence, premature pregnancy, suicide, cynicism, pessimism and despair. We can win. . . . Wherever you are tonight you can make it. Hold your head high, stick your chest out. You can make it. It gets dark sometimes but the morning comes. Don’t you surrender. Suffering breeds character. Character breeds faith. In the end faith will not disappoint. (Quoted in Shamir, Arthur, & House 1994:37; ellipses in Shamir et al)

Jesse Jackson was not selected at the Democratic nominee, but he moved the party.

Anthropological research on political oratory has often revealed speakers’ rhetorical aims to evoke feelings of solidarity (Thornton & Hope 2014). Rhetorical devices employed include the use of inclusive ‘we’ pronouns, extremely indirect and veiled speech to avoid offensive confrontation, and references to common ancestry or lineage continuity (Keenan 1975, Strathern 1975, Atkinson 1984, Rosaldo 1984). The most ‘charismatic’ political oratory is that which, by swiftly sweeping people into a common identity, evokes kama muta. Shroedel, Bligh, Merolla, and Gonzalez (2013) review theory and research on how charismatic rhetoric works, showing that charismatic leaders’ rhetoric is characterized by eight features. In our theoretical framework, all eight of these features aim at the rhetorical construction of a communal sharing relationship among the listeners, and between speaker and listeners.

1. Charismatic leaders stress a “collective focus [that] builds consensus and trust around a group’s goals and shared identity”; their “inclusive language affirms and highlights followers’ social identity. . . .”

2. “Charismatic leaders create a positive sense of follower’s worth through communicating confidence in followers and enhancing their collective efficacy. . . . Together, this type of rhetoric fosters efficacy that followers are both deserving of a better future and able to achieve it through collective effort.”

3. “Similarity to followers is typically achieved by the leader stressing his or her shared values and experiences as a representative of the collective. For instance, a political leader may attempt to gain voters’ trust by emphasizing
his or her status as a member of the in-group... as well as his or her representativeness or 'fit'...."

4. "Action oriented rhetoric... Creating a sense of urgency, movement, and momentum is critical to a leader's ability to create a sense of shared efficacy that his or her vision is attainable..."

5. "Adversity is rhetoric associated with a leader's ability to articulate why action is necessary and, in some cases inevitable, due to the strong forces or enemies dedicated to maintaining the status quo."

6. "Temporal orientation is rhetoric that references the continuity between the past and the present, ... In addition, a leader's ability to link both past and future values to his or her vision highlights the group's collective identity within a larger historical context. ..."

7. "Tangibility concerns rhetoric that references intangible future goals and deemphasizes concrete, tangible outcomes. ..."

8. "Values and moral justifications concerns rhetoric that makes frequent references to universally endorsed values and moral justifications. ... For instance, rhetoric that emphasizes religious terms and inspiration tends to focus attention on the morality of the leader's cause and draws on broad traditional themes in an attempt to incite followers to identify with the moral integrity of the leader's vision of the future." (Shroedel, Bligh, Merolla, and Gonzalez 2013:107–109; italics in original)

Through these rhetorical devices a charismatic speech can suddenly intensify the CS relationship among the listeners and between listeners and speaker, thus evoking kama muta that motivates the speakers to join together in support of the leader. In the 2008 presidential campaign, candidates employed all eight of these devices; the candidates spoke of similarity to followers nearly three times more frequently than the next most frequent trope (Shroedel, Bligh, Merolla, and Gonzalez 2013). Bligh and Kohles (2009) point out that Barack Obama was particularly effective in utilizing these tropes:

I think we all know America is going through tough times right now. The policies of the last eight years and — and Washington's unwillingness to tackle the tough problems for decades has left us in the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. And that's why the biggest risk we could take right now is to adopt the same failed policies and the same failed politics that we've seen over the last
eight years and somehow expect a different result. We need fundamental change in this country, and that’s what I’d like to bring. You know, over the last 20 months, you’ve invited me into your homes. You’ve shared your stories with me. And you’ve confirmed once again the fundamental decency and generosity of the American people. And that’s why I’m sure that our brighter days are still ahead. But it’s not going to be easy. It’s not going to be quick. It is going to be requiring all of us — Democrats, Republicans, independents — to come together and to renew a spirit of sacrifice and service and responsibility. I’m absolutely convinced we can do it. I would ask for your vote, and I promise you that if you give me the extraordinary honor of serving as your president, I will work every single day, tirelessly, on your behalf and on the behalf of the future of our children. (Barack Obama, 10/15/08, quoted by Bligh and Kohles 2009:486)

Such speeches were a significant factor in the election of Barak Obama.

But charisma is not simply a political device: “Charismatic leadership has been linked to organizational effectiveness, perceptions of leader effectiveness, and increased effort, satisfaction, and performance on the part of followers who are exposed to a charismatic leader” (Bligh, Kohlesb & Meindl 2004:213). Bligh et al (2004) show that even President George W. Bush’s rhetoric immediately became much more charismatic after September 11, 2001—and was so represented in the media. Bush’s approval ratings shot up.
Rarely are we met with a challenge, not to our growth or abundance, or our welfare or our security, but rather to the values, and the purposes, and the meaning of our beloved nation.

The issue of equal rights for American Negroes is such an issue. . . .

Every American citizen must have an equal right to vote. . . .

A century has passed, more than a hundred years, since equality was promised. And yet the Negro is not equal. . . .

Now let none of us in any section look with prideful righteousness on the troubles in another section, or the problems of our neighbors. There’s really no part of America where the promise of equality has been fully kept. In Buffalo as well as in Birmingham, in Philadelphia as well as Selma, Americans are struggling for the fruits of freedom. This is one nation. What happens in Selma or in Cincinnati is a matter of legitimate concern to every American. But let each of us look within our own hearts and our own communities, and let each of us put our shoulder to the wheel to root out injustice wherever it exists.

As we meet here in this peaceful, historic chamber tonight, men from the South, some of whom were at Iwo Jima, men from the North who have carried Old Glory to far corners of the world and brought it back without a stain on it, men from the East and from the West, are all fighting together without regard to religion, or color, or region, in Vietnam. Men from every region fought for us across the world twenty years ago.

And now in these common dangers and these common sacrifices, the South made its contribution of honor and gallantry no less than any other region in the Great Republic—and in some instances, a great many of them, more.

And I have not the slightest doubt that good men from everywhere in this country, from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, from the Golden Gate to the harbors along the Atlantic, will rally now together in this cause to vindicate the freedom of all Americans. . . .

I want to be the President who helped to end hatred among his fellow men, and who promoted love among the people of all races and all regions and all parties.
I want to be the President who helped to end war among the brothers of this earth. (American Rhetoric.com)

What Johnson said is that the national was founded on a dedication to equality, and we fought the Civil War to assure racial equality. But that goal has not been achieved. Soldiers from all over the nation have fought and sacrificed to protect, the nation, and continue to do so in Vietnam. Johnson’s authority, along with God’s power, can move us toward equality. But ultimately, he said, equality can only be achieved by the kind of dedication to national unity that our soldier paragons have set the precedent for. Let us conform to their patriotic prototype, he declared.
6.5 The “Moving China” Award

In 2008 the award honored all of the people of China for their “tenacity, bravery and wisdom during 2008.” The awards ceremony presenter said,

The Chinese people showed to the world the touching heartfelt power of the nation to withstand snowstorms, ensure earthquake relief, host the Olympics and Paralympics and successfully complete the Shenzhou 7 mission.

Zhu Bo, the producer of the awards, added,

It was hard to decide on one winner for this special award. We finally decided to present this award to all Chinese people, because each of us is the witness, the victim and the rescuer of the major events of 2008. Those who can touch China are you and me, everyday people going about their everyday lives.

Also in 2008 a list of animals was also added to the award:

A finch who stayed by the side of her mate for hours after he was killed in traffic.

Two dogs who came to their master when he was trapped in the rubble of the Wenchuan earthquake and stayed with him for eight days, barking when anyone approached the rubble.

A dog who survived being hit by a car, and, crippled, was fed by people in the neighborhood.


Blog posts indicate that while some Chinese report feeling moved (gǎn dòng) to tears by some of the awardees, many are cynical, regarding the awards as propaganda manifestly intended to mold Chinese morality. And indeed that is evidently the intended function of these elaborately publicized awards. As China has urbanized and transformed into a more anomic entrepreneurial society in which people must fend for themselves, there have been widely discussed scandals in which bystanders all failed to help or call for help for pedestrians injured by automobiles, or for other accident victims (Yan 2009). Bystanders justify ignoring injured people because scams have been widely reported in which sham victims pursue claims for damages from people who do help them, asserting that the Samaritan injured them in the first place. The courts have often found for such plaintiffs, without witnesses, reasoning that it is self-evident that the Samaritan must be the person responsible for the injury, since they would have no other reason to help the victim. This may have been part of what prompted officials and media to develop this gǎn dòng zhōng' guó to ‘move’ the Chinese people to compassionate moral responsibility for their anonymous fellow citizens. Alongside the human and animal
heroes who saved others or stood by them, most of the human awardees are people who have shown extraordinary CS altruism or made great sacrifices for the public good—just when such ideal communist CS behaviors are apparently declining. The award holds up exemplary prototypes of public compassionate responsibility, utilizing the kama muta their stories evoke to dispose viewers to follow these precedents and be more compassionately CS to fellow citizens.
6.6 The marketing campaign to promote marriage equality in Ireland

Evoking kama muta is naturally congruent with humanitarian political movements that aim to mobilize compassionate action. Here are notes by Michele Piazza, at the time an undergraduate researcher studying kama muta.

05/23/2015 – Kama Muta and politics: Marriage Equality campaign in Ireland

The Republic of Ireland just became the first country in the world to legalize same sex marriage by popular vote. A few weeks ago, I posted a video to Facebook from the Irish marriage equality online campaign because it made me feel very strong kama muta (lots of tears, a suspended feeling in the middle of my chest, lump in my throat, chills). The video is a beloved Irish TV character – Mrs. Brown – asking the Irish people to vote for marriage equality. (Mrs. Brown is a male actor, dressed in women’s clothing, playing the part of a stereotypical Irish “mammy”). Looking straight into the camera, she explains how there was once a time when people of different religious and races weren’t allowed to marry (chills!), and a time when women weren’t allowed to vote. When she says that, after these laws changed, “we all grew up a little bit” – and I feel that the “we” here creates a sense of communal, national “one-ness”. She then draws on the fictional relationship between Mrs. Brown and her gay son, Rory, saying that all she wants is for him to have the same chance at happiness as everyone else’s sons. “Rory” is also in the video, commenting from the sidelines, and I think this (fictional) CS relationship is also intensified during the video. My own love for my LGBTQ friends and family – along with my attachment to Ireland and my friends who live there – has made the entire campaign and today’s news about the voting outcome particularly resonant and “kama muta” for me.

I bring this up here because lots of people in the media are also talking about the effectiveness of Ireland’s remarkable marriage equality campaign right now... and Kama Muta seems to be at the core of almost all of it.


The video, backed with tender music, shows young people asking their loved ones to “come with” them to the voting booth. (I have watched it three times in a row and am STILL sobbing). Every time a family member is shown agreeing to go vote, there is a little intensification of a CS relationship. As the number of families shown in the video grows, it is as if all those little KM moments build on each other, and the KM (for me) grew increasingly intense. . . .
Another social media campaign called on Irish citizens living abroad to travel home to Ireland for the vote (Irish citizens are not allowed to vote from outside the country) with the hashtag #HomeToVote - http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/05/22/the-irish-heading-hometovote-for-marriage-equality.html -- and I, personally, found the photos which circulated under the hashtag (on sites like Instagram and Tumblr) of young people traveling on ferries, trains and planes with rainbow flags and balloons to be very kama muta.

There were also a number of large murals which went up in Dublin in the months leading up to the vote – the biggest and mostly reported on showing same sex couples embracing each other tenderly. Photos of murals circulated widely on social and mainstream media.