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A CITIZENSHIP OF DISTINCTION IN THE OPEN RADIO DEBATES OF KAMPALA

Florence Brisset-Foucault

We are at Club Obligatto, a large pub in the capital city of Uganda, attending an *ekimeeza* ('round table' in Luganda), a political debate open to all and broadcast live on radio. Today's topic is the attempt, by several opposition political parties, to create a common platform to beat President Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) in the elections of 2011; one of them, the Democratic Party (DP), has refused, nevertheless, to be part of the cooperation. Seated casually in the middle of the crowd is the chairman, who moderates the discussion and calls the speakers to the microphone:

Chairman: Ladies and Gentlemen, the next speaker is Mr A. S. (*happy shouts, laughter*). Please come here and give us your contribution (*mixed acclaim and derision*).

A.S.: You are talking about bringing parties together.... A cooperation. Mr Chairman... a cooperation is very, very good. Even when a rat is fearing to cooperate with a cat (*laughter*). Because that cooperation can lead either one to grow fat (*laughter*) or another one to die... (*laughter*)... I have heard serious DP president and DP... er... guru saying: 'No, we are not ready to be eaten'.... Then I said: 'When shall you be eaten? (*Laughter*). When is the time to be eaten correctly? Because in the 1960s, KY and UPC managed to eat you. In 1980, they were supposed to announce you as President [and the elections were stolen]. ... You see my worry Mr Chairman, because DP for political reasons, DP has tentacles in the Central Region and if you want to emerge, you can't get around DP. ... Lukyamuzi [leader of another opposition party, attending today's debate] has been in politics so much. ... [Several people shout: 'Honourable!'] Honourable!!! I can even add Doctor!!! (*Loud laughter*)... I know that my important colleague Lukyamuzi has a constituency [an ironic remark, as Lukyamuzi lost his seat in the last elections], but despite that, you still need DP!!! (*Ekimeeza*, 9 August 2008)

These political talk shows have triggered a lot of controversy in Uganda. Politicians from all sides, journalists and citizens have been debating the kind of speech that should or should not be deployed in the *ebimeeza*,¹ and, more generally, how people should talk politics. I shall argue that through these meta-discourses, and through the practices and procedures one can observe in the *ebimeeza*, these actors actually discuss the conditions of the legitimacy of political speech in contemporary Uganda and produce political and moral definitions of

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¹*Ebimeeza* is the plural of *ekimeeza*.

citizenship. The aim of the article is to situate these imaginaries socially and historically, and to analyse their political significance in the present Ugandan context.

Citizenship, and the values and behaviours attached to it, are controversial matters in Uganda, as in many other African settings (Dorman *et al.* 2007). In Uganda, conceptions of who is a member of the political community and how to participate in politics were affected by Museveni's 'Movement Democracy' model, which was installed after he took over power in 1986 and which associated a 'no-party democracy' (strong restrictions on parties' activities) with participatory 'Resistance Councils' (Mugaju and Oloka-Onyango 2000). In the Central Region of the country, how to be a citizen has very often to be weighed with how to be a subject to the King of Buganda, the Kabaka. The Buganda Kingdom, located in the centre of Uganda (where Kampala is), is one of the most powerful political entities in the history of the Great Lakes region (Médard 2007). Under the Protectorate, it benefited from a certain form of autonomy (Apter 1961) and emerged from colonization much more developed than the other regions of Uganda. A few years after independence, the kingdoms were suppressed. They were only restored in 1993, by Museveni (Karlström 1999; Mayiga 2009). Today, even if the Kingdom is constitutionally banned from meddling in 'party politics', Buganda has been described as a 'quasi-state' (Englebert 2001). It has a Cabinet, a Parliament, numerous development and cultural programmes, and a radio station.

The idea behind this research is that the analysis of how people come together to talk about politics – and how different actors, especially the state, try to shape these voices – gives us information on the practices and the imaginaries of citizenship (Agulhon 1977). The article is inspired by reflections on the public sphere inviting us to consider it as a 'mosaic' (François and Neveu 1999), each of its components having its specific procedures and functioning which reflect the historical, political and social conditions in which they emerged (Farge 1992; Fraser 2005; Calhoun 1992). The article also adopts Habermas's historical insight as a research programme: in any sphere of discussion specific normative models of polity, socio-political order, and thus citizenship, are produced, that need to be deciphered (see Chakrabarty 2000). In that sense, in the field of African studies, it follows works that encourage us to decrypt local debates on civic virtue (Lonsdale 1992) as well as an approach initiated by Bloch (1975) and Barber (1997), who encourage the empirically grounded analysis of phenomena of assembly and of the kinds of audiences – and thus imaginaries of the polity – created through different forms of intentional address.

Empirically speaking, the article draws on observations and interviews gathered over a period of six months in six different Kampala *ebimeeza*. All present general and similar patterns but we will highlight some important nuances when necessary.

'PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENTS' IN UGANDA'S MEDIASCAPE

Between 2001 and 2009 *ebimeeza*, also called 'people's parliaments', were taking place every weekend in pubs, gardens or courtyards and were broadcast live on private radio stations. Hundreds of people used to gather and discuss the political

issue of the day. There were ten in Kampala: almost every radio station in the capital city had to have its own, from CBS, owned by Buganda, to Bukedde, which is attached to the government. There were not nearly as many up-country, concentrated in Masaka (in the centre of the country) and Gulu (in the north). Most of them were held in vernacular languages (Luganda or Luo); one of them was in English.

All followed a similar pattern: voluntary speakers registered on a list before the debate and were called to the microphone by a speaker or a chairman, usually appointed by the radio station organizing the show. Each orator gave his/her opinion on the issue of the day for three minutes. The audience was very active and the speakers had to cope with hecklers and numerous comments and interruptions. All the *ebimeeza* lasted between one and two hours. The venues were open to anyone. It was free apart from one where you had to buy a soda (800 shillings, approximately £0.20) to enter. The three main *ebimeeza* in Kampala gathered between 200 and 600 people every weekend. Others were smaller, with 20 to 30 people attending. As we will see below, the audiences were mainly composed of men, of all ages – the majority in their thirties and forties.

Topics were picked by the stations' staff. Usually participants debated the main political controversy of the week, what had made the current headlines in the national press. Thus discussions focused on the attitudes and aptitudes of national leaders, their legitimacy as rulers, the effectiveness of public policies, the conflicts inside the ruling class, and the principles or strategies that guided decision making. Typical *ebimeeza* stated a topic and asked a question. 'President Museveni's 11 points agenda: what are his chances of success?' 'The arrest of the Buganda Kingdom officials: what are the implications for the rule of law and lessons for Buganda?' 'The Supreme Court election petition ruling: how do we bring about everlasting political and electoral reforms?' 'The northern war: how can both sides ensure that this time, the peace process holds?'

Some precedents of interactive radio can be traced in the history of the Ugandan media (Mwesige 2004; Kirevu and Ngabirano 2001), but these shows were an innovation. Through repressive measures, the regime defined what it considered to be a 'legitimate' form of political speech in the media as early as 1986 (Tabaire 2007; Stremlau 2008). Since then, journalists and regime elites have engaged in 'negotiations' or mutual – and of course unequal – adjustments (which could take a violent turn against the former) around what can and what can't be said in the media, reaching 'compromises' (in Gramsci's sense)² that were constantly renegotiated according to the political conjuncture, as well as the sweeping socio-economic and technological changes in the media field over the last 25 years, one of the most dramatic being the advent of private broadcast media in 1993.

Up to 1992–3, media speech was limited to journalists' voices in the print or state media, and reached a limited audience. The distribution of newspapers hardly reached beyond the main urban centres; the vernacular press was weak;

²According to Gramsci, 'Undoubtedly the fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed – in other words, that the leading group should make sacrifices ...'. See Gramsci 1930–2:161. This doesn't mean that violence is not involved in the 'negotiation' process.

and the market was dominated by publications attached to the government. Change came in 1992, with the launching of what is today Uganda's main private newspaper, *The Monitor*,³ and in 1993 the airwaves were liberalized. Private media political speech could now reach a different kind of audience: wider, poorer, less educated, rural and vernacular-speaking. The emergence of interactive political talk shows on these private stations, in the second half of the 1990s, represented yet another challenge to the regime's expectations regarding the nature of media speech, as 'non-professionals' were encouraged to comment on national politics in spheres that were not controlled by the state.

ELITE REPERTOIRES OF POLITICS AND PRACTICES OF SOCIABILITY

The *ebimeeza* are not only a media product. The first one to be launched, in 2001, extended practices of discussion and sociability already in force in a specific social environment: the Ganda bourgeoisie of Kampala. It was the initiative of a radio owner who decided to broadcast discussions that were already taking place within a circle of friends in Club Obligatto.

Club Obligatto aimed at a well-off clientele of a certain age. It was famous for attracting the *crème* of Kampala's political and business class. When the club was launched, the owners, wealthy Ganda businessmen and professionals (lawyers, a medical doctor, landowners) in their fifties with links to the NRM establishment and the Buganda Kingdom, offered lunch to their friends on Saturdays. They used to gather there and discuss politics, in English. A number of them had known each other at King's College Budo, Uganda's oldest and most prestigious school (McGregor 2006). The bar was the cradle of a masculine sociability, where men came without their families, and where relations were relatively equalized, compared to when someone is receiving at home, or to other social gatherings such as clan meetings, funerals or wedding ceremonies.⁴

The political discussions between these high-profile friends were characteristic of their vision of politics. All supported Museveni, but discreetly, and not because of his leftist revolutionary ideology but because of his positive action on the business environment. The owner of the Club admits he 'campaigns' for the NRM by 'talking in private circles' (P. W., Kampala). He has access to the closest acquaintances of the President, even if he also says that he is 'not interested in politics'. For these people, the suitable way of 'doing politics' is to have private conversations and to support the NRM financially, in a discreet manner. For them, the discussions at Club Obligatto could not be compared to the Resistance Councils, the NRM's popular spheres of deliberation.

This conception of the 'suitable way' of doing politics explains why some of the original members opposed the idea of broadcasting the discussions put forward

³There were numerous private newspapers before, but they were very small compared to the *New Vision* and *Monitor*. In addition, the *Monitor* journalists came from a Movementist background, whereas the other publications were often very hostile to the new political order, which made the *Monitor's* critique much more powerful. See Stremmler 2008.

⁴In that sense the gatherings at Club Obligatto echo what Atieno Odhiambo and Cohen say of the bomas of Kenya (see Atieno Odhiambo and Cohen 1992).

by Maria Kiwanuka, also an eminent member of Kampala's business community and owner of a radio station. In the heated context of the 2001 electoral campaign, she wanted to launch a new media product. For the owners of the bar, it was a commercial opportunity, which prevailed over the desire to preserve the exclusive and distinguished character of the discussions.

After they were broadcast, more people came to attend the discussions, especially students, who were from another generation (mainly born in the 1970s) and who were sometimes openly attached to political parties. Opposition parties' members found that the show was a good opportunity to campaign and touch people easily despite the 'no party democracy' system (Carbone 2008). Young MPs from remote constituencies began to frequent the *ekimeeza* in order to have cheap and easy media time as well as access to citizens. Rapidly, other radio stations launched their own, this time in the vernacular rather than in English.

In both the *ekimeeza* in English and the ones in Luganda, the overwhelming majority of the people in the audience were men: the few women who did attend (generally less than 10, sometimes only one or two) were experienced political activists. The average age of the people I interviewed was 30. In the *ekimeeza* in English, the ethnic composition was balanced, with a large number of people coming from northern and eastern Uganda. On the contrary and not surprisingly, in the ones in Luganda the Baganda represented a very large majority. An analysis conducted on the basis of a sample of 276 members of the audiences of three different *ebimeeza* showed that one member out of two in the *ekimeeza* in English, and one out of four in the *ebimeeza* in Luganda, had a University degree. This shows a difference in terms of education level according to the language in which the debates were organized; nevertheless, the fact that in both cases the majority of the members of the audience had attended at least secondary school and that most of them lived in Kampala goes against the often stated assumption that the *ebimeeza* in Luganda were for 'peasants' and the 'lowest classes'.

EBIMEEZA CODES AND CLASS DISTINCTION

Officially, according to the 'Code of conduct' of one of the *ebimeeza*, 'any member of the civil society in Uganda' was authorized to take the floor. Nevertheless, the ambiguity of the term 'civil' (Elias 2000; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999) and its links with the idea of a specific behaviour and gentility are here fully deployed: while officially organizers were not allowed to discriminate and the places where the shows took place were, objectively, open to anyone, nevertheless the founders, the organizers (orators and journalists) as well as the speakers wanted to preserve a certain 'civility' in the discussions. There was a tension between this and a general discourse around their supposed 'openness' and the idea that they were 'representative' of 'public opinion'.

There was an important separation between a minority of orators and a majority of spectators. For example, in the *ekimeeza* of the Buganda Kingdom's station, only 39 per cent of the respondents had ever taken the floor. Theoretically, anyone could register to participate. But compared to spectators, orators were more educated. Even if they were still a very small minority, women were more present amongst the orators compared to their proportion in the audience, because the moderators of the debates favoured them.

The founders and orators did not resent the inequalities the procedures created: they saw them as a way to protect the *ebimeeza* from what was perceived as a social and moral degradation. This is illustrated by the discourses the founders and a lot of orators hold around the fact that one of the *ebimeeza* was in English: they praise the use of English not because it is the vehicle of a multi-ethnic citizenship, but because it carries a form of exclusive citizenship, which is supposed to be limited to educated, 'rational' and suitable people who don't engage in 'tribal sentiments', as one of the founders (a lawyer) explained to me:

Q: Why did you do decide to debate in English?

A: First of all, most of us are relatively educated, we are intellectuals, we wanted intellectual arguments. We didn't want rumour. . . . So, if you're an intellectual you say what you are saying much better, you would like to stick to the facts, analyse them and then come to a conclusion. . . . You see that other *ebimeeza* which have developed since had arguments which were not intellectual. They were based on rumour, they were based on some tribal sentiments, they were based on certain bias. (A. Shonubi, Kampala)

Actually, in all the *ebimeeza*, not only the one in English, grammar, pronunciation or vocabulary errors were systematically noticed and mocked. In all cases, spectators encouraged a severe implementation of the rules and codes of conduct, and made ironic comments when an intervention was deemed boring or 'emotional'. The topics of the debates were always complex national issues and their wording encouraged analysis. The majority of the spectators and the journalists expected the speeches to be based on research, to bring knowledge to the audience. They wanted to maintain the idea that the *ebimeeza* were a battle of wits, not an angry crowd.

These injunctions to adopt an 'intellectual' attitude were opposed, in the codes of conduct, to 'emotional outbursts', 'personal attacks', or criticism based on ethnicity and religion. Generally, academic knowledge was considered a barrier against irrationality, anarchy and tribalism, echoing Museveni's modernity model, which aimed to 'go beyond ethnicity', defined as a 'short-term problem' that could be 'solved' with development and education (Museveni 1997: 188). The procedures of the Kingdom's radio *ebimeeza* were different in the sense that they reflected this attachment to intellectualism as a shield against 'emotions' but also contained an imperative of loyalty towards the King, and respected some of the etiquette in force in his domain. Some speeches celebrated the greatness of the Kingdom. The following extract from an intervention of a woman orator illustrates this:

Let me tell you all, God loves Buganda. . . . Buganda has gone through many trials and we have survived. You remember in the Bible there were different tribes, here we also have tribes. But Buganda will remain Buganda (*handclaps*) this is an anointed nation of Buganda. . . . If you are a Muganda, love Buganda. If you are a Munyoro love Bunyoro. We must know there is a way God wants this nation to be. Therefore these people who do not want Baganda to talk about land. . . . Land is the biggest asset that we have, it will be and it shall be. Buganda will become victorious (*time keeper's bell rings*). According to God, Buganda has been here and was put here by God and so Buganda is here to stay (*handclapping*). (Mambo Bado Programme, 16 August 2008)

Several shows had codes of conduct (see [Figures 1 and 2](#)). Disciplinary measures, like being expelled, were sometimes taken when a member committed a felony. Over the years, one could witness a growing process of bureaucratization

EKIMEEZA

THE PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT

OBJECT: To provide a casual, convenient and easily accessible atmosphere for Participants to air out their views in a civil, non-combative, non-confrontational atmosphere.

MEMBERS: Any members of civil Society in Uganda

RULES:

1. All persons choosing to participate in Ekimeeza are hereby bound to observe the Ekimeeza's Rules of Conduct.
2. EKIMEEZA IS A FORUM FOR DISCUSSION OF ISSUES AND POLICIES, NOT INDIVIDUAL PERSONS OR PERSONALITIES.
3. Each speaker is given a maximum of 5 minutes to speak on topic of the day. The speakers are requested to write down their names and contacts on the list provided.
4. The Chairman may, at his/her discretion, extend or decrease the time allowed for the speaker.
5. The Chairman will, cut short a speaker who diverges from the topic or uses language or signs which (in the Chairman's opinion) defamatory to individuals, groups or other entities under discussion.
6. The Chairman may ask a person who physically engages another, or is verbally abusive or disruptive to immediately leave the venue.
7. Points of order and information are allowed but must be short and strictly related to information or order of procedure.
8. The Chairman may impose fines of up to Uganda shillings 5000/= on any person who is disorderly in his opinion or who interrupts, heckles or disturbs a speaker.

ALL PARTICIPANTS AND OBSERVERS ARE REMINDED THAT EKIMEEZA IS SUBJECT TO UGANDAN LAWS OF SLANDER AND DEFAMATION.

FIGURE 1 *Ekimeeza* code of conduct

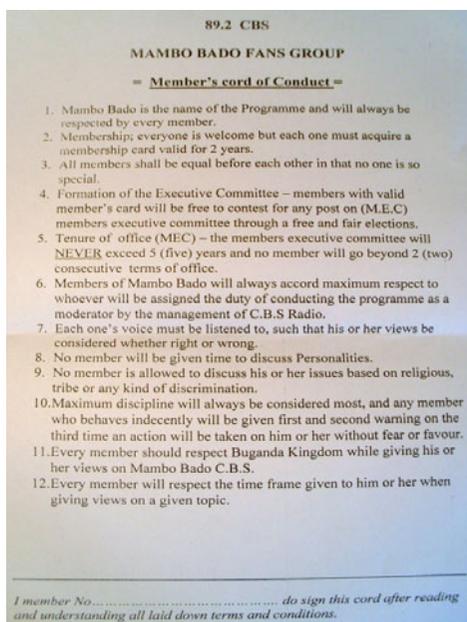


FIGURE 2 Mambo Bado code of conduct

of the *ebimeeza*, with the creation of powerful executive committees in response both to an injunction from the state, which considered they were a potential source of disorder, and initiatives from the journalists and the orators, whose concern was not just that the government might ban the *ebimeeza*, but also to preserve the quality of the shows. Generally, there was a high coincidence between the visions of the state, the radio producers and the orators around the kind of speech that should be deployed.

The *ebimeeza* codes were directly drawn from media deontology codes (H. Booza, Kampala). They reflected the way journalism was defined as a profession from the 1980s up to today and the ‘compromises’, mentioned above, between journalists and the state. Generally, journalists kept a tight control of the debates in the *ebimeeza*: the state required that ‘professionals’ (as defined in the 1995 Press Act) should host them; stations controlled the choice of the topic and sometimes distributed ‘Issues to consider’ before the debate, in order to guide the orators. One of the most important rules was that orators were not supposed to discuss ‘personalities’ but stick to ‘issues’, which echoes old controversies between state authorities and journalists around the legitimacy of the naming and shaming of corrupt politicians.

Respecting the codes of conduct also echoes earliest representations of legitimacy and honour in Buganda, where politeness has been an important criterion to judge leaders’ fitness to rule, even if the manners at stake have evolved over time (on the 1940s and 1950s see Summers 2006a). There have been major ruptures with ancient patterns of politeness, especially in terms of respect for age, nobility and relations between genders (Richards 1964; Hanson 2003). But in the 1990s, M. Karlström and R. Banégas showed how in Buganda ‘democracy’ was often ordinarily defined as a society where leaders and subjects respect rules of civility (Karlström 1996: 490; Banégas 1998). In the last decade, it seems that the political importance of civility and politeness was reflected in the *ebimeeza*, and that local imaginations of the ‘good polity’ rely on procedural rather than equitarian representations of legitimacy. This is revealed in the way orators talk about how they would like the rules to be better implemented:

Ekimeeza council is supposed to create discipline, sanity and order, like in any good society. But unfortunately society being political at *ekimeeza*, it over raided the *ekimeeza* council, in that for instance if somebody is undisciplined but people love him the way it is, then that person could not yet be disciplined. . . . For matters of civilization, it is my humble wish that probably the council [should] be there, because we really believe in the law, because it is a Nation where tomorrow these characters they are contributing. (A. L., Kampala)

ESTABLISHING REPUTATION AND MORALITY THROUGH EDUCATION

Analysing the biographies of members of the audience and orators enables one to point to the different backgrounds of those who acquire an ability to talk in public and master the procedural challenges: some of the best orators combine their involvement in the *ebimeeza* with preaching (especially in born-again churches) and acting as masters of ceremony at weddings or graduation parties. These experiences, they say, helped them learn how to manage big crowds and address people (F. A., K. M., Kampala).

The Resistance Councils (today Local Councils or LC1s), the participatory institutions created by Museveni, had an ambivalent relationship with the *ebimeeza*. LC1s remain one of the most important spheres of political socialization and oratory experience (Banégas 1998). But the *ebimeeza* were not, contrary to what the name 'people's parliaments' may convey, an avatar of the LC system outside of the state's realm. The biographies of the orators as well as the analysis of the forms of talk do not support the establishment of a direct filiation between the two. Even if they supported the Movement system, the participatory dimension of the management of local affairs was minor in the political ideals of the founder members of the first *ekimeeza* (P. W. and Shonubi, Kampala). All orators I interviewed considered the two to be very different things. The *ebimeeza* were born out of the attachment to intellectual elite debate rather than radical democracy. In all the *ebimeeza*, orators had many previous or parallel political experiences, but most of them had not participated in the LC1s with great frequency. Many rarely attended the meetings and were not interested in 'local politics'.

LC1s are open to anyone above 18 in a given village or zone. They have administrative and socio-political mobilization mandates. Since the bush war and the constitutional consultation process of the 1990s, they have been largely bureaucratized (Ddungu 1994). Today, LC1 councillors help solve neighbourhood and domestic conflicts and act as a channel of communication with the higher government levels. They monitor the arrival of newcomers in their area and deliver letters of recommendation. Meetings usually take place once a month, and people discuss local problems and how to resolve them. Sometimes they are addressed by a higher leader who 'sensitizes them' or consults them on an issue.

It is very possible that even if—unlike the Church for example—LC1s don't emerge in the interviews as a training ground, they had an influence on the *ebimeeza*: the attachment to procedural politics is visible in both. Several regular orators did have important experience in LC1s, but to be successful in the *ebimeeza*, this had to be combined with an involvement in other venues of political and oratory training, particularly debating societies and political parties. The oratory and cognitive competences required are different: some LC1 chairmen and councillors I did meet in *ebimeeza*—and they were, interestingly, spectators and not orators—explained that addressing an LC1 was easier because the audience is 'captive' (R. O., Kampala). Moreover, the LC system promotes a consensual model of deliberation, whereas the *ebimeeza* are competitions. LC1 chairmen tend to shy away from discussing national politics and to invoke party etiquette during councils (Chairman Lule, Kampala). The leaders with whom the citizens interact in the LCs are local leaders, whereas in the *ebimeeza* one can see national leaders from all over the country. Moreover, as we will see in greater detail later, it is the very role envisaged and performed by individuals in the LC1s that differs from the one moulded by the *ebimeeza* (for a discussion on similar issues in the Kenyan context, see Haugerud 1995).

Ebimeeza speeches can be recognized easily: they are usually slightly pompous and jumbled, funny, and educational in tone; they target national leaders and are full of intellectual and factual references:

Orator: Thank you chairman, er The name is N. F. (*pause*), er . . . we are looking at the arrest of Buganda Kingdom officials, and you are asking what are the implications

... for the rule of law, and lessons for Buganda. (*Pause*) And ladies and gentlemen, I would like to tell you that after, I don't know where we are going with this country. (*Hum of interest, followed by pause.*) Because (*pause*) the current scenario now it indicates dictatorship. There is no rule of law! As you can see. Because if the Constitution, say... which is the supreme law, and you violate it. We have the rule of law... We don't have! You look at the way... the police arrests the officials or the people from Parliament or in Bulange, even we ordinary people, how, how, how does the police arrest? Anyway I need also to ask... Who can arrest? Can the police arrest?...

Chairman: I will answer that. You too can arrest [someone] actually... (*Small ripple of laughter*).

Orator: Definitely. Thank you (*subdued laughter*). Even the magistrate can arrest, if you read the Trial Indictment Act and the Police Act. Ladies and gentlemen, when you look at these arrests, the law says that these people must use reasonable force. But do they really use reasonable force? (*Pause*) And what is reasonable force? We need also to ask... You see... (*subdued laughter*) so... Someone who is arresting someone who doesn't have a gun! You see, I don't have a gun, you come, you jet me, even you slap, you take [me], you put me on the truck... Is that reasonable force? (*Ekimeeza, 26 July 2008*)

One of the most striking characteristics of the *ebimeeza*, in English or in other languages, is their similarity to forms of talk associated universally with the Westminster Parliament. People attending are called 'members', 'members of the House' or 'Honorable members', the speeches are addressed to 'Mr Speaker' or to 'Mr Chairman'. The language used is formal ('Allow me to proceed...'), the topics are sometimes called 'motions'. This similarity is not the result of mere mimesis. It reflects the integration and reinvestment of habits acquired in school through the numerous debating societies one finds in Uganda, which are inspired by British debating societies (Cheney 2004; Ceadel 1979; Graham 2005).

When they were created in Britain and in the Empire, debating societies were supposed to encourage students to engage in a 'civil' form of politics, and to train some of them for parliamentary careers. They were considered a domesticated means to produce reputation and to canalize competition between students (Engel 1980). The procedures that the *ebimeeza* follow are openly inspired by the codes of conduct of the debating clubs, as one of the founders of the *ekimeeza* in Club Obligatto, who was also the secretary of King's College Budo debating society in the 1970s, told me (E. K., Kampala). This association between *ebimeeza* and school debating competitions was renewed, generation after generation. Some orators engaged in debating competitions at the district and national levels. Debating societies ask for a lot of involvement and work from children: they usually debate once per week, prepare the topics, learn the codes, diversify their vocabulary, learn proverbs and oratory tricks, and correct their grammatical mistakes. In this way, individuals acquire reflexes and forms of talk that are reinvested in the *ebimeeza*.

The fact that the *ebimeeza* attracted a lot of people is linked to the intensity of university politics in Uganda. There are Guild elections every year and many positions to fill in every university in the country. There are thus a great many young people wanting to get elected. Ambitious students are encouraged by the Guild leaders to go and practise politics in the *ebimeeza* and thus train in public

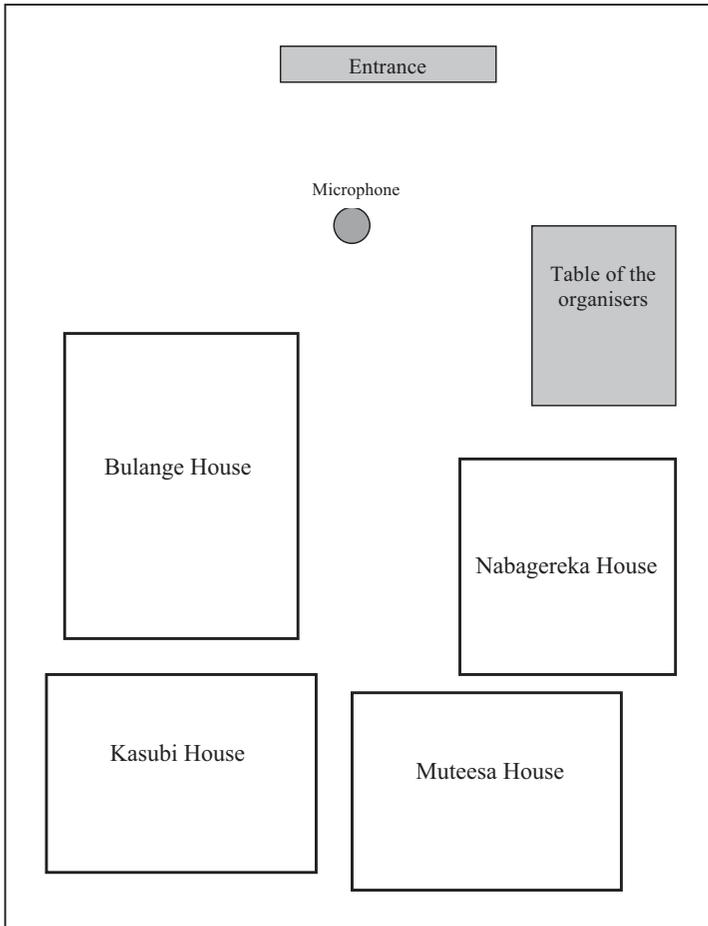


FIGURE 3 Houses system – *ekimeeza* of the Buganda Kingdom

speaking (E. Kintu, Kampala). This connection was reflected in the questionnaires I distributed: in the *ekimeeza* in English, for example, 91 per cent of the respondents said they had occupied a position in the students' leadership when they were at school. Two former Makerere guild presidents were coming regularly. In the Guild Representative Council sessions I observed at Makerere, the similarity between the procedures used in the national Parliament, and thus in the *ebimeeza*, was striking.

In the Buganda Kingdom's *ekimeeza*, the imaginary of the school-initiated heritage of the debating competitions was central to procedures. Between 2002 and 2006, the competition was based on what participants called 'the houses system'. The audience was divided into four 'houses'. Each gathered about 100 people, seated in a bloc (see Figure 3). Each 'house leader' (supposedly elected) had to choose people in his 'house' whom he thought were good speakers and give

their names to the executive committee of the show. Each house was competing against the other, and each orator was presented as coming from one of these houses.

This system was derived from the education system, where student boarding establishments are called ‘houses’ and are the basis for sports competitions inside schools. According to historians, the houses were created in Ugandan schools explicitly to break ethnic loyalties and create ‘citizens of the world’ (Summers 2006b: 107). They are still regarded as cradles of friendships which overcome ethnic solidarities, thus allowing for a sane competition inside the school (E. Kayondo, Kampala). The system allowed a partisan scheme of political competition between debaters to be avoided. It followed the legislation against party politics but also reflected ancient representations of politics and political competition. Several authors have shown that many Baganda used to view political parties negatively years before the arrival of the NRM, seeing them as a source of violence and degradation for the Kingdom, as they displaced political competition away from the axis of the King and divided Baganda (Karlström 1999). This historical hostility is still visible in this *ekimeeza*: ‘As people of the Kabaka (King), we must sit together’, the moderator told me.

‘ENLIGHTEN THE MASSES’: *EBIMEEZA* AS SCHOOLS OF LEADERSHIP

We have beliefs within us that if you want to speak in *ekimeeza*, first of all you have to be very, very strong, you shouldn’t be shy. You have to be a very strong speaker. You are not supposed to show any kind of shyness. Secondly, you are supposed to be a researcher. You are supposed to be knowledgeable enough in any kind of field, political, social, economic, so that whatever question that is asked to you, you may be able to answer it. You are supposed to be of a noble character. If you are known of some bad behaviour like stealing, people cannot pay attention to you. . . .

Q: And who can participate at *ekimeeza*?

A: Anyone. Anyone as long as you register and you think you are capable. Anyone. Anyone.

Q: But you still have to have those qualities. . . .

A: If you don’t have those qualities, you can debate just once and the next time the moderator may be not interested in calling you when there are other sharp debaters. . . .

Q: So it’s not anyone

A: In quotes, anyone (*laughs*). (P. S., Kampala)

As the extract above illustrates, the legitimacy to take the floor in an *ekimeeza* is not based on an equalitarian ideal. Much depends on certain moral and social qualities: it’s only anyone ‘in quotes’ who can take the floor. The *ebimeeza* thus become an opportunity to analyse the repertoires through which processes

of distinction operate in urban contemporary Uganda (Bourdieu 1978; for an African example, Fumanti 2007). Even if the university and the old figure of the *évolué* have lost momentum in Africa since the academic qualifications don't fulfil the promises with which they were once identified (Banégas and Warnier 2001), people who have invested in education still have to find places where their qualities can be of social and political value: the *ebimeeza* are such places. They reflect the distress of 'alienated intellectuals' (Curtis 1962; Chartier 1982) who suffer from the gap existing between their expectations and the objective probability of ever reaching the positions to which they aspire.

The trajectories and discourses of members illustrate this quest for recognition. P. S., for example, was born in 1979 in the Central Region to a Ganda family with an agricultural background. He speaks English and Luganda. Helped by a rich uncle, he went to school in Kampala where he headed the debating society. He then went to Makerere University to study finance. Even after graduating, he spends most of his time on campus, using the students' sociability spaces in order to make acquaintances and look for employment. He lives on short-term contracts with NGOs and considers he is being under-employed. He is regularly out of money. In parallel, he was elected vice-chairman of the LCI of his village in 2002. After beginning to frequent the *ebimeeza* in 2003, he entered the Democratic Party. A year later he was nominated as a member of the Buganda Kingdom Youth Council; according to him, this was thanks to the *ebimeeza*, where he goes three or four times a week. He was always seated in the front rows and registered almost every time to speak. He expressed his frustration in an interview:

Q: What do you do? How do you make a living?

A: That is a good question! (*he laughs*). They usually call me on short-time jobs, they call me and tell me you are due to do some capacity building, you go there and they take you, they can give you some work for two weeks, then you save the money. . . . Sometimes we give them our CVs, academic qualifications, and tell them that if there's anything available, please inform us. I'm trying now to get some permanent job. Because I have one degree, my first degree was here in Makerere University, and I majored in Finance. But getting a permanent job today is not very easy. . . . I worked hard for the mayor of Kampala, I worked so hard, he could always call us, 'I want you because you're a speaker of *ekimeeza* please campaign for me, after debating at the conclusion you say people vote, you tell people to vote for me,' but when you go through, their phones are always off and when you tell them to meet you they give you an appointment and when you reach there the secretary tells you, 'He's very busy wait, wait.' And for us, I went to school, I have my degree and I want to get a second one, I don't have time to be used. (P. S., Kampala)

Another orator, who was born in 1984 and graduated from Makerere in economics in 2006, told me:

We tried to sell the idea of an East African Federation to the opposition political parties. They never welcomed it. They tried to put us at the periphery. We did not like that. We are University students; we must be put on board. We are a tank of ideas. (A. L., Kampala)

Ebimeeza are also places where people keep bragging about their supposed popularity, especially among those who are sometimes contemptuously called the ‘villagers’, the ‘ordinary people’ or the ‘local people’. As P. S. told me:

On *ekimeeza* you become so popular. I’m so popular. . . . If you walk with me in town, and you see the people talk to me in town this other language because of *ekimeeza*. If you go to the village, every weekend, they tune in to see who’s debating. When I’m introducing myself I introduce myself, my name, and I don’t introduce the area here in town, I introduce the area I come from in the village so that they know so and so is there representing us. (P. S., Kampala)

Orators justify their participation by saying their intellectual qualities need to be shared for the common good, because they have the capacity to ‘represent’, or ‘enlighten’ the ‘masses’ and the ‘rural folks’, and they need to ‘educate’ the ‘public’ out of their ‘ignorance’ and ‘backwardness’ (several orators, Kampala). A lot of them say they want to become MPs. Some of them do try to engage in political careers and sometimes are candidates in an election. Most of the time, they are not elected. But the *ebimeeza* are, like debating societies in Britain or in the Empire (Durrill 2000), places where one can try to build one’s political reputation and get noticed by a ‘mentor’, especially when one doesn’t have access to other venues of political advancement such as powerful kin. *Ebimeeza* are integrated in – both nurturing and modifying – networks of recognition, political promotion and mentoring.

These ambitions are nourished by the fact that some politicians frequently participate in *ebimeeza* and present their rise as a result of that involvement. Among these, many were recruited by the Office of the President as advisers. It is readily noted that they had other assets – speaking in *ebimeeza* needs to be associated with other practices of networking and reputation building, especially in terms of University diplomas and University students’ mobilizations – but the *ebimeeza* did help them to be noticed (F. Tumwebaze, Kampala). They are considered as a ‘school for presidents’, a place where you can train to become a leader:

You know political science was part of the course I was doing, for my Bachelor. I am somebody who’s interested in politics. . . . These places [the *ebimeeza*] make a very good start for us. . . . When you’ve been attending this class frequently, it gives actually a start to go, to get the confidence. . . . Here you learn a lot, from when the leaders are coming around, interact, make a connection. Then when you go to search any post in your area, it becomes a little bit easier. (V. J., Kampala)

In the *ekimeeza*, whether in English or in Luganda, orators extensively use the repertoire of academic knowledge to prove their political value. This is particularly clear in the extract quoted below. The orator is a member of the executive of a small opposition political party and was a parliamentary candidate in 2006. Aged 30 and former Guild president at Makerere, he is a regular at Club Obligatto:

Mr Chairman. . . . I requested to speak quite early because I want to set the level of debate (*laughter*). It’s deliberate Mr Chairman. And Mr Chairman . . . you know wisdom is like a goat’s skin, everybody carries its own (*laughter*). Mr Chairman . . . there is a lot of assumption . . . mixing issues . . . misinformation and misrepresentation . . . which in my

view I don't think it's inadvertent. It is deliberate... I'm trying to understand the concept of the people, the perception of the people, with regard to the term cooperation... And I'm not going to go into semantics, Mr Chairman, those who want semantics are free to engage in it, I will leave matters of definition to those who pretend to be academicians (*laughter*)... When you look at this document, and of course I want to appeal to people to read it. Because, Mr Chairman, you would rather be ignorant for a second and be informed for the rest of your life (*laughter*). People should read this document [he is holding a bunch of papers]. When they read it perhaps their debate will change. Because some people are likely to come here and submit from a point of ignorance (*laughter*). And as I've always said, ignorance is not bad... if you use it as a resource to learn! (*prolonged laughter*). (*Ekimeeza*, Radio One, 9 August 2008)

In all the *ebimeeza*, orators seek to distinguish themselves from people they call the *bakopi*, the 'common men' in Luganda, an expression that conveys contempt for vulgarity and peasant manners. Until the 1960s, a *mukopi* used to be a 'common man' as opposed to a chief or a royal (Apter 1961: 200–1). Now, it is mostly someone who is ill-mannered. Sometimes this counter-model is also incarnated in ethnic stereotypes, especially against northerners, who historically have been despised politically and considered brutal. One never hears that on air, but contemptuous words such as those sampled below are not uncommon in day-to-day conversations with orators:

Some say you guys who engage in *ekimeeza* you are very petty, you engage in petty issues... At one time a very, very senior lady – she works in the corporate world – she said... She was tribal. She said that now it is for northerners, those who come from the northern Uganda... She meant that it has tribalized, those who are dominating are from the north, and... also meaning that... people are so petty. People are so personal. People don't bring out substance. (A. L., Kampala)

This desire to claim one's sophistication and to position oneself with modernity and the elite is comparable to the aspirations of Ghana's literature society members in the 1930s (Newell 2000: 55) and Nigeria's theatre actors (Barber 1997: 352).

REPRESSION AND THE STATE MODEL OF CITIZENSHIP

In September 2009, violence erupted in Kampala, with an intensity rarely seen in the south of the country since 1986. The repression of what are usually called 'the Buganda riots' left at least 40 people dead and dozens injured (HRW 2009). The violence erupted after the ban on the King's visit to Kayunga, a contested area of the Kingdom.

In addition to repressing the demonstrations in the street, the state shut down four radio stations and required every station, including those that were still on air, to suppress all the *ebimeeza* programmes (Bareebe 2009). Today, all the stations are back on air, but the *ebimeeza* are still banned. Analysing the way the government justified its attacks on the *ebimeeza* is a way to decipher how its elites imagine a 'decent' manner of talking about politics and a 'legitimate' format for citizenship. In order to ban the programmes, the elites of the regime had to produce an explanation that could justify an apparent contradiction: the fact that a regime, having based part of its legitimacy in the creation of

a ‘grassroots democracy’, where popular political speech was granted a fundamental role, could suppress such things as ‘people’s parliaments’. They had to differentiate ‘decent’ popular speech from a degraded form, and thus to define how a ‘good’ citizen was supposed to talk.

One of the main targets of the 2009 media repression was CBS, the radio of the Kingdom, which was clearly supporting the King’s visit to Kayunga and was accused of fuelling the violence (although this was never proven and no judicial action was taken to ascertain the facts). Some speakers, including in the *ebimeeza*, were regularly saying that the Kingdom was ‘under attack’, that Baganda must ‘fight’ for it, and that some people, never openly identified, wanted to ‘chase us out of the Kingdom’. Sometimes these speakers called for boycotts on typical products of western Uganda, such as milk and beef (notes on several *ebimeeza*, 2008). For Movement officials, the *ekimeeza* of the Kingdom was a vehicle for the revival of a ‘political’ version of ethnic identity, which is considered as typically ‘backward’ and dangerous. Nevertheless, the ban was not only about this aspect of the debate on citizenship in contemporary Uganda. It must also be situated in a longer and parallel chronology of hostility towards a certain form of participatory radio debates.

Almost since their inception, for some people and particularly some important state officials, interactive radio and particularly the ‘people’s parliaments’ incarnated a degraded form of citizenship characterized by the influence of ethnicity and violence – but also alcohol, ignorance and idleness. *Ebimeeza* were described as ‘a platform for mayhem’ (Mugere 2002) and accused of encouraging tribalism, violence and ‘genocide’. Already in 2002, the Broadcasting Council, the institution regulating the airwaves (largely dominated by the government), tried to ban them, saying they were illegal (see Brisset-Foucault 2011: 434–40), but without success. Orators were accused of ‘insulting’ the President instead of ‘educating’ people. The discourse of a former cabinet minister I interviewed just after the ban in 2009 illustrates these views well:

I don’t even think *ebimeeza* should be allowed to come back as far as I’m concerned. As far as I’m concerned, they went out of hand. There were no rules, people would come and tell all sorts of rubbish, drunkards ... people who ... I mean people would come and say ‘I don’t like so and so, he’s stupid.’ You can’t allow such things in public. ... You should bring people in the studios, have political programmes that are controlled, where you have a topic and people talk, and you bring people who have the capacity to debate. But in *ebimeeza* you bring people who don’t even have a capacity on an issue, and they just make all sorts of funny statements. It’s dangerous. ...

Q: But it’s also a way for the Ugandan people to express themselves. ...

A: (*Sounds annoyed*) Nooooo! But they are not expressing themselves! Nooooo! They are abusing each other! They are not expressing themselves in the sense that they will tell you something that will help you. ... You want to express yourself, who are you? ‘Oh, I am so and so ...’ You are expressing yourself as an individual? As an expert? As somebody representing LC1? And somebody ... I mean, what is your ... What’s your take? You stand up, you’re talking about land ... you don’t know anything about land? What are you talking about? You don’t ... You’re not a tenant on land, you don’t own land. ...

Q: But they are entitled to have a position ...

A: What position? Which position? Tell me your position. You're living in a hired house. You don't know the relationship between the tenant and the landlord. . . . You don't even know the relationship.

Q: But they are Ugandan citizens

A: OK, so you're a Ugandan citizen, so what opinion are you giving? Of abusing?

Q: Not necessarily abusing

A: No, but most of them were! (*Pause*) And they are talking on issues they have no . . . they have no . . . facts about. I want somebody . . . who is a tenant, to come and say . . . I'm not happy I am a tenant. . . . Let him speak, or let somebody who knows about that speak! But these guys do not even know that

Q: But the fact that you want them to be more educated. . . . The whole point of the Movement system was to allow people to have a voice

A: Nooo. . . . No, no, no . . . don't compare the two, the two are totally different. (Former cabinet minister, Kampala)

This kind of discourse is denying *ebimeeza* speakers a significant format in which to practise citizenship: the right to talk in public about *any* topic. Their opinion is reduced to an 'insult'. According to the state and the NRM elite, citizens should limit themselves to a 'suitable' format of oratory, limited to 'development' issues, deployed in state-controlled spheres of deliberation, and limited to local issues: a citizenship based on residence, practice and experience.

Many in contemporary Uganda (as in other contexts: Lagroye 2003) make a distinction between 'good' politics and a desecrated form of politics – 'bad politics', characterized by the manipulation of sectarian feelings, authoritarianism and violence (see Karlström 1999: 282–3). According to Museveni, in order for politics to remain noble, it should be protected: thus people who are vulnerable to sectarian sentiments, because they are uneducated, should be encouraged to engage in a certain format of politics, inside state structures and largely limited to local issues framed as independent from national elite behaviour, party politics and national problematics, and usually called 'development' (Museveni 1997; Kassimir 1999; Dicklich 1998; Tripp 1998). The *ebimeeza* crisis illustrates this nuance in the NRM participatory model particularly well: only those who are able to handle it should be allowed to talk about national politics. *Per se*, this philosophy encouraged the formation of a model of a 'bifurcated' (Mamdani 1996) public sphere, characterized by the separation of the voice of the non-educated citizens and the voice of the elite. As such, the 'democratization' encouraged by the NRM was reinterpreting ancient rules of legitimacy and political participation already in place during the protectorate, which were partly based on the level of academic education (Chibita and Fourie 2007). It also echoed a widespread contempt for uneducated citizens in Uganda (Obbo 1998; Kassimir 1999). As Ibirige Ssebunya, at that time Minister for Agriculture, once said to a rural crowd:

Some of you who are wearing slippers and are making noise about [the President's] third term. Leave that to us who wear suits. You people need to work hard in your gardens, get money and buy a shoe like mine, a shirt like mine, a coat like mine, and then you can talk politics. (Kisambira 2003)

Indeed, the repression was and still is stronger on radio shows in vernacular languages and those produced in rural areas (HRW 2010). Generally, rural radios receive strong injunctions to focus on ‘development’, rather than ‘politics’, indicating the idea that participation in common affairs should play out in different formats according to the nature of the social environment.

Facing these attacks, *ebimeeza* members tried to distinguish themselves from this degraded form of citizenship and insisted on their suitability, underlining their belonging to an educated elite. In that sense, the justification of repression, and the state’s objectives of control, coincided with the ideals of civility mentioned earlier. As we have seen, the codes of conduct, the executive committees, are there to ensure that discipline is maintained, that personalities are not attacked and ‘insulted’, that ‘*ekimeeza* is a forum for intellectual debate and not unqualified emotional outbursts’ (‘Issues to consider’, distributed at Club Obligatto). All orators I interviewed agreed with the necessity to create a ‘leadership system’ to ‘control’ people and most agreed on what the government officials criticizing the *ebimeeza* thought a ‘good speech’ was (based on research, academic credentials, expertise and manners). The adoption of rules to frame lay political speech was not seen as a constraint. In the *ebimeeza* in Luganda, the executive committee regularly took disciplinary measures against unruly orators, even suspending some of them, as ‘Letters of apology’ found in the archives of one of the *ebimeeza* illustrate (see Figure 4).

This relative coincidence of views concerning the mode of speech to adopt didn’t stop the ban. The 2009 violence acted as a trigger for a longer and subdued hostility towards lay speech on the radio. No matter how hard orators tried and wanted to be recognized as rightful intellectuals, the state did not recognize *ebimeeza* as elite and intellectual debates. Nor would they trust the executive committees of the *ebimeeza* and the journalists to control them.

In contrast with the 2002 ban attempt, this time media owners agreed with the move, mainly because the banning of four stations by the government encouraged them to be conciliatory and protect their businesses. Maria Kiwanuka’s promotion to Minister of Finance, which happened two years after the ban, doesn’t seem to have a direct link with this episode but is symptomatic of relationships between business *milieux*, media owners and the NRM government elite: repression and threat oscillate with a process of ‘reciprocal assimilation’ and accommodation.

Today there are still no *ebimeeza* in Kampala. Some prominent orators are sometimes invited *inside* the studios by talk show hosts, but the fundamental organizational principle of the *ebimeeza*, the idea of a debate being held in an open venue, in front of an audience, with a microphone theoretically accessible to anyone who wishes it, was suppressed. Generally, orators followed their political and career plans. I shall give two examples: F. A. continued his career as spokesperson of the NRM in one of the divisions in Kampala and became, in 2011, the spokesperson of one of the NRM parliamentary candidates in the capital city. He was also acting as master of ceremonies in NRM rallies during the campaign. P. S. was again a parliamentary candidate in 2011 in his constituency of origin in rural Buganda, this time with backing from the Democratic Party; but, once again, he lost.

Interestingly, some up-country radio stations have reinstated open radio debates; nevertheless, these programmes depend heavily on donor funding and

[REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]
 P.O. BOX [REDACTED]
 KAMPALA -
 26/11/2008

SPEAKER OF SIMBAWO AKATI PROGRAMME
 RADIO SIMBA, EMPOLONGOMA JENJENBER,
 KAMPALA, UGANDA.

Dear sir,

RE: APOLGAY FOR MISTAKE

I here by, apologise for dishonouring you as the speaker of Simbawo akati awo, when I exchanged hot words with you which resulted into my suspension. I would have exercised some diplomacy. I am truly sorry and I promise to behave once I am allowed to participate in the programme again.

Your response will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

[REDACTED]

RECEIVED
 26/11/2008
 [Signature]

FIGURE 4 Letter of apology from a suspended orator in Simbawo Akatii

are limited to topics like HIV-Aids prevention or agricultural techniques; radio producers are very vigilant not to create a link between these topics (which potentially could be highly politicized) and the decision-making process at the national level or the behaviour of national elites (M. Kisenyi, Kampala).

CONCLUSION

The *ebimeeza* emerged in a mass media and commercial context, which has been criticized by Habermas as the opposite of a certain ideal of the public sphere. They are based on the celebration of an elitist and sometimes neotraditional model and they celebrate a heritage of political speech and citizenship that goes against participatory ideals often endorsed today. Nevertheless, they can tell us

much about a society and a political system, and present some striking similarities with other ideals of polity elsewhere in the world (Habermas 1991; Chakrabarty 2000: 180–213; Bertrand 2008).

Ebimeeza are places where how to be a citizen is a controversial matter. However, the different actors involved agree on a common ground: the importance of education, as well as of certain social, moral and behavioural qualities which are supposed to come with it, in the definition of a suitable and legitimate way to talk about politics. Despite Museveni's revolutionary rhetoric and his emphasis on a 'grassroots democracy' arrangement, where citizens have a say through participatory councils, the model of citizenship promoted by the regime has been characterized by a fundamental separation between the citizenship of the educated elite, which is entitled to be 'political', and the citizenship of the uneducated, which is encouraged to be local, 'developmental', and to be deployed in state-controlled environments. Interestingly, this conception of a 'bifurcated' citizenship reinterprets tendencies in the definition of political participation that were already in force under the regime of the protectorate (Chibita and Fourie 2007). Following that conception, *ebimeeza* orators don't want to prove that common citizens are capable of handling political speech: they want to prove that they are no 'ordinary citizens' but intellectuals capable of leading others, a status which the state was not ready to accord them.

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates practices of speech and sociability in open radio debates in Kampala to decipher imaginaries of citizenship in contemporary Uganda. In these *ebimeeza* ('round tables' in Luganda, also called 'people's parliaments') orators are engaged in practices of social distinction when compared to those they call the 'common men'. These spaces of discussion reflect the importance of education in local representations of legitimacy and morality, whether in Buganda 'neotraditional' mobilizations or Museveni's modernist vision of politics. The *ebimeeza* and the government ban imposed on them in 2009 reveal

the entrenchment of the vision of a 'bifurcated' public sphere, the separation of a sphere of 'development' and a sphere of 'politics', the latter being only accessible to educated 'enlightened' individuals – despite the revolutionary discourse and the institutionalization of the Movementist 'grassroots democracy' model in 1986.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article traite de pratiques de prise de parole et de sociabilité observées dans les débats radiophoniques en plein air de Kampala afin de déchiffrer des imaginaires de la citoyenneté en vigueur dans l'Ouganda contemporain. Dans ces *ebimeeza* (tables rondes en luganda, également appelées parlements du peuple), les orateurs sont engagés dans des pratiques de distinction par rapport à ceux qu'ils appellent les 'hommes du commun'. Ces espaces de discussion reflètent l'importance de l'éducation dans les représentations locales de la légitimité et la moralité, que ce soit au sein des mobilisations 'néo-traditionnelles' du Buganda ou de la vision moderniste du politique selon Museveni. Les *ebimeeza* et leur interdiction en 2009 révèlent l'importance de l'idée d'un espace public 'bifide', de la séparation imaginaire mais aux effets bien concrets entre un espace du 'développement' et un espace du 'politique', ce dernier étant seulement accessible aux individus éduqués et 'éclairés', cela, malgré le discours révolutionnaire et l'institutionnalisation du modèle mouvementiste de la 'démocratie du terroir' en 1986.