

“Have You Ever Heard of a School for Presidents?” Ambitions, Distinction and Modernity in Kampala’s Public Radio Debates

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The paper is based on ethnographic and sociological research conducted on Ugandan public talk shows called “*ebimeeza*”, or “round tables” in luganda. Before they were banned by the government in the aftermath of the riots in Kampala in September 2009, these open air political debates used to gather hundreds of people in public spaces and were broadcasted live on private radio stations. In theory, anyone could come and give her/his opinion on the political topical issue of the week.

I intend to present a sample of the orators of these debates and through their profile, discourses, practices and trajectories to understand better the nature and the latest evolutions of the Museveni regime. The *bimeeza* are intertwined in conflicts between the central government and the powerful kingdom of Buganda, integrated in the strategies and practices of mobilization of the opposition political parties, the transformations of the ruling party the National Resistance Movement and the government’s political communication apparatus, its increasing reliance on coercion in order to maintain its hegemony. The analysis of these orators and their profiles also helps us to seize fundamental social evolutions of the Ugandan society, especially repertoires of discourse and political action under the growing influence of the Buganda kingdom and the place of the University and education at large in the imaginaries of the self, of democracy and legitimacy. Lastly a close analysis of these trajectories helps us seize the day to day ways of life and ambitions of an “intermediary” political class, the educated under-employed urban youth.

Eventually, through their practices of distinction and the content of their speeches, these orators stage a specific model of modernity, which contravenes some of the aspects of Museveni’s “Movement” model of democracy while at the same time reinforcing the hegemonic compromise the NRM elites had passed on political criticism and citizenship.