

Spreading the Word. The Public Oral Debate of the People's Parliament in Nairobi.

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In Jeevanjee Gardens, a small park in the heart of Nairobi, the People's Parliament (Bunge la Mwananchi) meets everyday. Here, in the shade of the trees, the members discuss Kenyan politics. The forum is open to all ethnic and party affiliations and requires no formal membership. The daily debates are chaired by an esteemed member of the parliament and is referred to as "speaker", thus indicating the oral tradition of the People's Parliament.

Lately, some factions of the People's Parliament have started producing newsletters, web-pages, and written histories of the forum. The written documents challenge the fluidity and openness of the forum as they freeze and categorically define representations of the People's Parliament – at least that is what critics of the factions behind the written documents say. In the written documents the People's Parliament is described as social movement, and the people behind are actively engaged in spreading the idea of public parliaments (congresses) in Nairobi and all over the country.

The apparent conflict on how to define the People's Parliament is partly a conflict between an informal and a formal organisational structure as well as it is a question of whether and how to transform the content of a public oral debating culture into political influence and societal change. The paper will discuss how various factions of the People's Parliament make different use of the oral debating culture to seek influence and inclusion. The aim is not to show disagreements within the forum rather, it is to reveal how the dynamics of the public debates fuel different notions of political participation and political inclusion.

A central analytical focus is the relation between space and speech, between the city and the public oral debate. Evolving around the idea that public political debate is not just an act of speaking, it is also an act of doing – a de Certeau inspired approach - *debating the city* both means to debate issues concerning the city as well as it means to work on and transform the city through public political debate.

