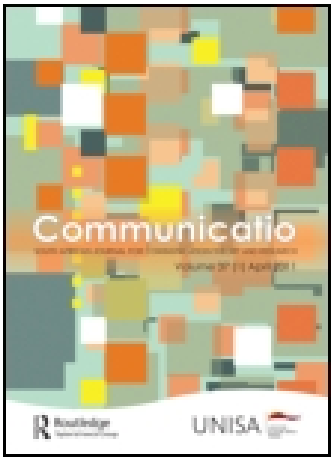

Communicatio: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcsa20

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Published online: 09 Jan 2008.

To cite this article: Monica Chibita & Pieter J. Fourie (2007) A socio-history of the media and participation in Uganda, Communicatio: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research, 33:1, 1-25, DOI: 10.1080/02500160701398938

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02500160701398938

UNISA university of south africa PRESS
Routledge Taylor & Francis Group
COMMUNICATIO Volume 33(1) 2007 pp. 1–25
© Unisa Press ISSN: Print 0250-0167/Online 1753-5379
DOI: 10.1080/02500160701398938

A socio-history of the media and participation in Uganda

Monica Chibita and Pieter J. Fourie

Abstract

This article is based on research done for a doctoral thesis titled *Indigenous language programming and citizen participation in Ugandan broadcasting: An exploratory study* (Chibita, 2006). The purpose of the thesis was to investigate and show the importance of first-language media for the participation of citizens in democratic processes. The thesis covered a wide range of topics including linguistic perspectives on language and participation, the history, structure and operation of the media in Uganda, the regulatory environment for linguistic diversity in Uganda's broadcast media, debates about indigenous language broadcasting in Uganda, and policy recommendations. In this article, the emphasis is on one of the topics dealt with in the thesis, namely key political, economic and cultural factors in Uganda's history and how these factors, including the right to the use of indigenous languages, have had an important impact on citizens' capacity to participate in public debate through the media (especially broadcasting). It is argued that the opportunities for Ugandans to participate in their governance through critiquing and making an input in government policy have been limited by a number of factors. These include bad colonial and postcolonial policies on the media and language, poverty, low levels of education, and lack of basic access to the means of participation. They have also been limited by governments which have proscribed freedom of expression and association by varying means and to different degrees since the early twentieth century.

Key words: Diversity, history, media, participation, politics, Uganda

INTRODUCTION

This article is based on research done for a doctoral thesis, titled *Indigenous language programming and citizen participation in Ugandan broadcasting: An exploratory study* (Chibita, 2006). The purpose of the thesis was to investigate and show the importance of first-language media in and for the participation of citizens in democratic processes. The thesis explored key social, political and economic factors surrounding policy on indigenous language broadcasting in Uganda and how these factors impact on diversity and participation. The thesis concluded with recommendations for the inclusion and protection of first languages in Ugandan broadcasting, given the linguistic diversity of Uganda.[1]

The point of departure in the study, and for this article, is that the essence of citizens' participation lies in involving citizens in activities which enable them to communicate their preferences, demands, interests, needs, collective problems and aspirations, and to seek redress from those in charge of public policy (Mwesige 2004, 7, 10, 22–23; cf. Conway 1985, 10; UNDP 2002, 52). Mediated participation is at least as important as

Monica Chibita is a senior lecturer in and former head of the Department of Mass Communication at Makerere University, Uganda. E-mail: monica@masscom.mak.ac.ug.
Pieter J. Fourie is a professor in Communication Science at the University of South Africa.

other types of participation like electoral and associational participation, and it is important to examine the two side by side.

For Mwesige (2004, 23), participation is important because through participating in the political process, citizens can decide who forms government and how they are governed. They can have their voice heard and their interests represented in public life. Participation facilitates accountability as well as communication between the governors and the governed. Finally, participation is important as an end in itself.

However, Mwesige cautions that participation should go hand in hand with genuine political competition as participation on its own is vulnerable to manipulation. Depending on the factors in the socio-political environment, there can be 'actual' or 'illusory' participation. For Pateman (1970, 71), the most important aspect of participation is that it should take place in the context of other political freedoms, notably freedom of expression and association. Only then can participation be linked to an upward flow of influence to shape public policy.

Furthermore, the right to use one's first language (indigenous language) is essential for full political participation. In a multilingual environment like Uganda's, the availability of media content in indigenous languages is an integral part of a healthy atmosphere for participation in the democratic process by the majority of citizens.

Given the above, and taking into account that different matters related to the media and participation have been explored in the thesis (and will be explored in forthcoming articles), the emphasis in this article is on key political, economic and cultural factors in Uganda's history and how these factors, including the right to the use of indigenous languages, have had an important impact on citizens' capacity to participate in public debate through the media (especially broadcasting).

A HISTORY OF PARTICIPATION IN UGANDA[2]

The opportunities for Ugandans to participate in their governance through critiquing and making an input in government policy have been limited by a number of factors, including bad colonial and postcolonial policies on the media and language, poverty, low levels of education, and lack of basic access to the means of participation. They have also been limited by governments which have proscribed freedom of expression and association by varying means and to different degrees since the early twentieth century.

For the purposes of this discussion, the political history of Uganda is viewed within the following periodic framework:

- participation in precolonial Ugandan societies (up to 1894)
- colonialism, indirect rule and participation (1894–1962)

- early postindependence and the foundation for participatory democracy at national level (1962–1967)
- consolidation of dictatorship (1967–1986)
- the rebirth of participatory politics in Uganda and its mixed fortunes (1986–present)

Below we briefly examine each of these periods in relation to participation and to the role of the media.

Participation in precolonial Ugandan societies (up to 1894)

Both Karugire (1980, 15) and Kabwegyere (1995, 20–45) agree that many societies in present-day Uganda had relatively simple political organisational structures before the advent of colonialism. The ruling ethos was communal rather than individualistic. Up to the coming of colonial rule, the clan continued to be the most effective unit of political and economic association.

Most societies that were later brought together under colonial rule to constitute Uganda had limited political goals and relatively simple political structures. Personal relations were central to political structures (Karugire 1980, 16). Kabwegyere (1995, 19–20) adds that the precolonial period was characterised by diversity in social scale and organisation. The powerful kingdoms such as Buganda and Bunyoro had standing armies and were involved in military exploits against each other and their neighbours. Then there were other kingdoms that were amalgamated to form Nkore and the principalities that came to form Busoga. Finally, there was the Kingdom of Tooro which had seceded from Bunyoro around 1830 (cf. Karugire 1980, 42). The rest of Uganda's societies were organised in small, segmentary communities.

By the time colonialism reached this region of East Africa, Buganda was seen by the British as the largest and strongest kingdom of all its neighbours. The king of Buganda reigned supreme. Buganda had a strong culture of patronage based on land. Conquest gave the king a free hand in appointments, and, together with the chiefs he appointed, he controlled all land in the kingdom (Karugire 1980, 21–23; Kabwegyere 1995, 21–22; cf. Mamdani 1997). Bunyoro, Buganda's major political rival, also had a centralised political organisation similar to Buganda's. Other kingdoms such as Nkore had looser systems of administration, while in Northern Uganda power was vested in the elders.

While we note the variety in political organisation among these societies, it is significant to observe that on the whole each community was bound by a common language and culture and that kinship and dialogue played a key role in the politics of precolonial Uganda. Most communities were self-sufficient and there was little interaction with other communities. There were also few opportunities for commodity exchange until the advent of Arabic and European traders and the introduction of a cash economy in the late

nineteenth century. Thus, for most precolonial Ugandan societies, the system of governance revolved around elders and chiefs and was essentially top-down in character. The ordinary people had little say in their governance (Mamdani 1997, 42).

Colonialism, indirect rule and participation

The reasons for Britain's occupation of Uganda (like other African countries) were more strategic than philanthropic as the British needed access to the coast and ultimately to India from neighbouring Congo and the Sudan where they had developed significant economic interests. It has been argued that this motivation invariably had a bearing on the political systems that the British established in Uganda (Karugire 1980, 52–53; Karugire 1988,7–18; Kabwegyere 1995, 49–67; Mamdani 1997, 37–39).

Local historians are agreed that the arrival of Catholic and Protestant missionaries between 1877 and 1879 marked the start of the colonisation of Uganda (Karugire 1980, 62, 1988, 8–13; Kabwegyere 1995, 49–50). Once the missionaries moved in, a new set of dynamics involving trade, religion and power came into play. The Baganda traditional rulers, who had the first contact with the missionaries, became valuable allies both in terms of increasing the number of converts for the various religious denominations and for the lucrative trade in arms that was taking place in the East-African region at the time.[3] This complicated the politics of the region immensely.

The period between 1860 and 1900 was characterised by religious wars and shifts in the balance of power, particularly between the Catholics and the Protestants. The tensions among the French and the British abroad played themselves out in local politics as the French backed the Catholics and the British the Protestants, and each tried to win as many converts as possible and secure their place in key administrative posts. In order to establish a political base and secure their future work in Buganda, the missionaries laid strategies for influencing appointments to key political positions to the exclusion of traditional leaders (Karugire 1980, 66–67).

Although the missionaries had English and French (and to a limited extent Kiswahili) to promote, the indigenous languages were a crucial tool for them in communicating their message. They thus embarked on an aggressive campaign to translate the Bible into the local languages to better reach their target groups, the majority of whom were illiterate. They reasoned that through religious conversion, it would be easier to secure the local people's political allegiance. The Christian missionaries shunned Kiswahili which, though it was taking root as the *lingua franca* in Kenya and Tanzania, was closely associated with the rival Islamic faith as it was said to have strong roots in Arabic (Kabwegyere 1995, 188–197).

Religious wars in the 1880s and 1890s pitted Muslims against Christians, with either group using local leaders as pawns (Karugire 1980, 68–69). The wars were not aimed at merely preserving one faith or the other, but also at gaining political control of Buganda

(Kabwegyere (1995, 67). These wars, which saw kings deposed and puppets installed, weakened Buganda and rendered it vulnerable to manipulation by colonial interests. The status quo further demonstrated that religious affiliation would be foundational to political organisation in Uganda (Karugire 1980, 70; Kabwegyere 1995, 67–68). On this period in Uganda's history, Karugire has this to say:

> It is from this period that one can date the preponderance of opportunism over principle in the management of public affairs in Uganda – a preponderance that is still with us today (Karugire 1980, 71; cf. Mamdani 1997, 56–57).

The Berlin Conference and the colonisation of Uganda

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, interest in Africa had grown among the imperial powers and the potential for conflict over territory was increasing. Against this background, the major imperial powers of the time – Britain, France and Germany – held the Berlin Conference in 1884–1885 to demarcate for themselves spheres of influence. This was followed by the establishment of British rule through a combination of economic manoeuvres via the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) headed by William Mackinnon (cf. Karugire 1980, 72; Kabwegyere 1995, 59–61). Buganda was declared a British Protectorate in 1894. Subsequently, the British succeeded in signing 'agreements' with the leaderships of all parts of 'Uganda' by a variety of tactics including negotiation, propping up embattled leaders against local adversaries and then extracting concessions from them (Tooro), and protracted battles (Bunyoro) (Karugire 1980, 76; Mutibwa 1992, 2–5).

It is important to note here that the advent of British rule in Uganda had a far-reaching impact on the structure and functioning of Ugandan governance structures. The French and British missionaries jostling for power and influence, particularly in Buganda, had weakened Buganda's political leadership. The resultant shifts in balance of power sometimes led to political vacuums that the agents of colonialism utilised to sign agreements that disenfranchised the locals and weakened the traditional leaders (Karugire 1980, 81; Kabwegyere 1995, 67). Of significance here is the fact that many of the deals cut between the British and the Ugandan people did not involve any participation from the ordinary Ugandan. They were settled between the British agents and 'cooperative' local leaders.

By the time the British concretised their control of Buganda, all religious converts belonged not just to a faith, but an accompanying political conviction. However, Karugire (1980, 101) argues that, deep down, the basis for political association remained the clan, and religion was just the 'official excuse'. It is also important to note that while the British publicly downplayed the ethnic factor and sought to link political affiliation to religious affiliation, ethnicity was at least as prominent as religion in the period leading up to Uganda's independence. This became evident towards 1961 as people like Ignatius

Musaazi[4] were shunned by their fellow Baganda for trying to establish a national- rather than ethnic-based party (see Karugire 1980, 195).

The character of indirect rule and implications for participation

Perhaps the most significant pre-independence agreement in the history of Uganda was the Buganda Agreement of 1900 signed between the British and Buganda's Kabaka Chwa, who was four years old at the time. The Agreement reduced the power of the locals over their own affairs to a minimum, and maximised the power of the British. It is instructive to note that the English version of the agreement, not the Luganda one, would be binding on both parties even though none of the Baganda signatories to the agreement understood English (Karugire 1980, 102–105; Kabwegyere 1995, 75–79; Mamdani 1997, 141–142). The latter scenario was a typical tactic employed during this period to enable the British to spread their rule in Uganda. In the process of establishing their administrative system known as indirect rule over the rest of Uganda, the British did not hesitate to use their Baganda allies to fight or to apply brute force to suppress resistance wherever it arose (Karugire 1980, 109–116; Kabwegyere 1995, 61–67).

Participation of the locals in their governance was not a priority for the British colonial administrators at this point. Instead they signed the Native Authority Ordinance (1919) for the purpose of demarcating powers, duties and privileges of African chiefs in all areas of the colony except Buganda, thus legitimising indirect rule. Furthermore, they appointed Baganda chiefs to administer parts of Uganda outside Buganda territory, largely under the supervision of Chief Semei Kakungulu. Kakungulu's appointment was contrary to tradition as chiefs were normally natives of the areas which they administered and were appointed by local authorities. Even more significantly, wherever Kakungulu and his agents went, they not only introduced the centralised Ganda model of administration which the British considered expedient, but they also launched a vigorous campaign to sell the Luganda language using the school system (cf. Mamdani 1997, 109–137 for a comprehensive treatment of the establishment of indirect rule in Uganda).

Thus the seeds of dictatorship, sown during precolonial times, were watered by indirect rule. The colonial chiefs, selected by the colonial administrators, were given wide-ranging powers in maintaining law and order, preventing crimes, arresting offenders, prohibiting the carrying of arms by Africans, and conscripting free labour for public projects. On the whole, the local chiefs imposed by the British ruled with an iron hand and politics at the grassroots at this time in Uganda's history was anything but participatory. With time, resentment of both the administrative system and the Luganda language which they were forced to learn developed among the locals. All the above, as well as the fused power of the chiefs, fuelled resistance to the colonial administration and demands for greater participation in the political process (Karugire 1980, 124–125; Mamdani 1997, 59–61).

British rule and the ethnic factor in Uganda's political history

The notion of participation under British rule was complicated by Uganda's complex ethnic dynamics. By 1918 the Uganda 'protectorate' had taken shape and by 1921 all areas of Uganda were under colonial administration. However, as Karugire (1980, 121) observes, even as the boundaries of Uganda were defined, 'the societies which made up Uganda were nowhere near becoming homogenous' (cf. Kabwegyere 1995, 86).

Kabwegyere (1995, 144–145) observes that the British exploited Uganda's ethnic heterogeneity to establish an administrative system which engendered competition rather than cooperation among the different regions and ethnic groups of Uganda. Because of the different ways in which the British had negotiated or forced their way into the different parts of Uganda, they failed to establish a common policy for administering the different districts that they created as administrative units. This, according to Kabwegyere (1995, 190–197), gave rise to mutual suspicion, uneven development and a tendency for the different districts to defend a separate autonomy. The emphasis was placed on each district's vertical relationship with the centre rather than with horizontal relationships among the districts. This phenomenon, it has been argued, is at the heart of the role of ethnicity in Uganda's political history, and has featured prominently in what is known as the 'language debate' in Uganda and the preoccupation with finding a 'unifying language'. It is possible that this preoccupation, which has undergirded Uganda's postindependence language policy, has also hampered efforts to address the issue of harnessing Uganda's linguistic diversity for democracy.

Apart from the fact that Buganda was already well endowed with fertile land at the time of British occupation, scholars have argued that the position of Buganda as agents of British colonial administration enabled them to acquire wealth which they reinvested in Buganda. Social services and the physical infrastructure in Buganda were (and still are) superior to those of all other regions. Entebbe, the seat of the colonial government, and Kampala, which rapidly developed into a city, were both located in Buganda. All this gave rise to a certain degree of resentment in the other districts.

Buganda's privilege has come up repeatedly in political discourse and as Luganda (the language of Buganda) has repeatedly been proposed as a possible national language or *lingua franca,* it has been rejected by non-Baganda as symbolic of the Baganda's 'superiority complex'. Important to note here is that other languages which are at least as numerically strong as Luganda (such as the mutually intelligible Runyoro, Rutooro, Runyankore and Rukiga) have never featured prominently in public discourse as possible choices for national language or *lingua franca.*

Uganda's failure to coalesce around a strong unit such as Buganda has made the local (and therefore ethnic) rather than national level the legitimate forum for political expression and identity. This loyalty to the District (the local administrative unit), which often coincided with the ethnic group, has been enhanced by a number of other factors, namely:

- The localisation of social service provision,[5] which intensified feelings of 'them' against 'us', a sentiment rooted in what Mamdani has called 'politically enforced ethnic pluralism' (1997, 7), and which ensured that each ethnic group in the colony developed as a separate unit; and
- the different ethnic units' preoccupation with what the Baganda have termed '*ebyaffe*' (our things).[6]

It is instructive to note that the issue of separate development versus developing together as a nation has surfaced each time the national language has been debated in the public domain in Uganda. Whereas indirect rule was ideally supposed to allow local institutions to evolve along their inherited traditions, the reality was that it uprooted the very foundation of these societies. For instance, as Karugire (1980, 117–118) argues, in establishing a deliberative *Lukiiko* in Buganda, and a class of land owners not dependent on the Kabaka, indirect rule ate away at the Kabaka's traditional powers. But as Karugire notes, in order for colonial rule to be effective, it had to subvert the existing indigenous centres of authority and governance rather than enhance them. Little wonder that Uganda's language policy since precolonial times has remained ambivalent on how to treat the country's linguistic diversity.

Karugire (1980, 127) has argued that the promulgation of the Local Government Act of 1949 to contain dissent marked the beginning of tribally based administration in Uganda. The ordinance, among other things, empowered the British Governor to establish a district council in any part of the colony by proclamation and delimit their powers and functions.

Care had been taken in drawing up boundaries to limit the population in each district to one tribe. This was successful in most districts except West-Nile, Bukedi and Kigezi, which were already ethnically heterogeneous. District councils were also tribally based. Each district functioned independently and, for the most part, oblivious of other units. As Karugire (1980, 28) observes,

> [T]his reluctance to foster the growth of territorial or national organs of government and the promotion of parochial ones does not seem to have been wholly accidental on the part of the colonial administration (cf. Kabwegyere 1995, 139–169; Mamdani 1997, 7; 16–18).

Separation of the African communities was integral to the consolidation of British rule. Efforts of district leaders to meet with fellow district leaders from other areas were therefore regularly squelched (Ibingira 1973, 27; Karugire 1980, 128; Mamdani 1996, 16–18).

Curtailing participation through language policy

In the period leading up to Uganda's independence, ethnicity was a determining factor in who could participate in important political discourse and at what level. Talk of an East

African federation had begun as early as the 1930s and language was at the centre of this talk. At that time, there was a move to promote Kiswahili as the East African *lingua franca* for economic and administrative expediency. According to Kabwegyere (1995, 190–191) a high premium was placed on knowledge of Kiswahili, which was linked both to appointment and promotion in the civil service.

The British were wary of Kiswahili not only because it was linked to Islam and therefore contrary to the Anglicisation project, but also because it had the potential to aid the spread of the *Mau Mau* rebellion that was gaining ground in neighbouring Kenya. The colonialists thus argued that from a strategic point of view, it was not desirable or conceivable that Uganda's *lingua franca* be Kiswahili, Luganda, or any of the vernaculars (Kabwegyere 1995, 191). It had to be English. It is important to note that this kind of direct intervention in language policy by the British administration was bound not only to have ramifications for the nature of participation at important moments – such as during the struggle for independence – but also to reflect on the level of participation and representativeness of the postindependence agenda.

By making English the de facto national language the British were able to proscribe national debate. English served to unify the emerging elite and the colonialists in addition to serving administrative purposes, but was inaccessible to the majority of Ugandans. While the majority of Ugandans at grassroots level remained separated by the language barrier, there was intense Anglicisation at the elite level (cf. Kabwegyere 1995, 192). It should be noted that none of the indigenous Ugandan languages was accorded any special status. Rather, all the languages were left to continue serving their respective ethnic communities. This arrangement has in fact also contributed to the growth of insular nationalism.

Because of the colonial language policy and the general policy of separate development, every ethnic grouping in the period immediately preceding Uganda's independence deliberated singly, addressing its own narrow needs. Communication flowed vertically from the District Councils to the colonial government and to the Colonial Office in London (Karugire 1980, 145). In this context, there was little chance for the formation of political parties with a national character (cf. Mutibwa 1992, 11). People in their separate ethnic groupings were contented with this kind of power arrangement at the district level, and the absence of an external national threat. Little wonder that the first parties that were formed in the run-up to the first national elections in 1961, such as the Bataka Party (BP), the Uganda African Farmers' Union (UAFU), The Democratic Party (DP) and the Kabaka Yekka (KY) (meaning the King Alone) were characterised by a parochial outlook based on ethnic origin, religion or a combination of these. To date, this situation has made the formation of genuinely national parties and the realisation of a Ugandan public sphere difficult.

Socio-economic inequalities as constraints on participation under British rule

British rule cultivated social inequalities between Uganda's various ethnic groups through selective allocation of essential services like transportation and education, as well as deliberate disparities in infrastructural development. For example, by concentrating the major industries in the central part of the country, British rule created migrant wage labour in other parts of the country (like Kigezi and West-Nile) (1980, 128–130). This led to a highly multilingual Buganda, a situation that still obtains today. Hence, throughout the colonial period, Northern Uganda remained a source of wage labour and recruitment for the army (Kabwegyere 1995, 157–159; Mutibwa 1992, 9; Karugire 1980, 140–141). Similarly, in Ankole in Western Uganda, the British picked on the Bahima (pastoralists) to be favoured with education opportunities that were linked to employment and promotion – in the much coveted civil service. Thus by the 1940s, the majority Bairu (agriculturalists) of Ankole constituted yet another disgruntled group (Karugire 1980, 139).

It is significant to note that even as opportunities began to open up for Ugandans to participate in their governance, especially in the period leading up to the first elections in 1961, the majority of Ugandans who did not possess a Western education were relegated to the position of spectators rather than active participants and competence in English was central to this relegation (Karugire 1980, 144; Kabwegyere 1995, 157–159).

Yet another level of socio-economic inequality was perpetuated along religious lines. Whereas most training for leadership during colonial times was in Protestant schools, Catholic and Muslim children had limited opportunities for being enrolled there. This educational system largely determined who was most likely to be appointed to key positions in local government. Many Muslims, for instance, became butchers and taxi drivers for lack of alternatives. To date some of these inequalities have not been fully redressed.

Apart from the Northerners, the lower classes in the various ethnic groups, the traders and the Catholics and the Muslims, other disgruntled groups included the *Bataka* (traditional Baganda chiefs who had lost their land rights and the accompanying influence to new colonial chiefs) (Karugire 1980, 134, 137–138, 222; Mutibwa 1992, 12–13).

The impact of Western cultural values on participation

British rule introduced some cultural changes that upset the political equilibrium in the period leading up to Uganda's independence. The introduction of formal education, for instance, created a gap between those who were able to access it and those who were not. All leaders of the political parties which were formed in the 1950s in preparation for the first national elections were people with a Western education. A number of traditionalists were also unhappy about the way new religions seemed to be luring young people away

from their traditional beliefs and ways of life. Conversion often came with opportunities for formal Western education, which lent the converts even more courage to challenge traditional authority.

At the political level, Karugire describes the impact of the gap between the 'educated' and the 'uneducated' thus:

> The introduction of Western education and values had effectively disenfranchised those who, for one reason or another, did not get that education so that the uneducated populace – something in the region of 80% or so of the population – were largely spectators rather than active participants in the events leading to the granting of independence. (1980, 144.)

The disgruntlement of these different sections of Ugandan society played itself out in repeated cases of civil disturbance between the 1940s and the 1960s.

The significance of the Buganda factor for citizen participation in the preindependence period

Buganda remained a key factor in Uganda's political history in the period leading up to the first national elections of 1961. Buganda's objection to the establishment of an East African Federation, which Buganda saw as a further loss of autonomy, led to the British exiling Kabaka Mutesa II in 1953. This triggered a combination of violent protests, boycotts and heated negotiations for the Kabaka's return and for the fortification of Buganda's political position in Uganda. Notable among Buganda's demands was that Luganda be elevated to the same level as English, that is, as an official language (Karugire 1980, 154). Buganda refused to participate in any further plans for Uganda's independence until the Kabaka was returned and its other conditions met. Though the Kabaka was returned to Buganda in 1955, it was with reduced powers and on condition that the *Lukiiko* be made more participatory.

In the run-up to the elections in 1962, Buganda and the British were involved in a series of negotiations undergirded by Buganda's effort to secure a place for the Luganda language, keep the Mengo administration powerful and discourage the formation of any political party with a national character (Karugire 1980, 165). Buganda was by this time intent on securing her independence from the British before the rest of Uganda was declared independent, and resorted to a variety of subversive activities to make its point. The colonial administration in turn abandoned dialogue and banned any political organisation which it considered disruptive of the 'public peace'. The British were eventually forced to make some concessions to Buganda, thereby further consolidating their already dominant position. Thus, as Karugire puts it, as Uganda approached independence in 1962, it was 'a house divided against itself' (1980, 169). This, one could argue, laid the foundations for persistent tensions between the Buganda government and the central government after

independence. It also made central governments insecure about according Ugandans too many freedoms as this could weaken the position of the central government.

The media's role in participation in colonial Uganda

According to Gariyo (1992, 51), the print media in Uganda predates the broadcast media by half a century. The early press in Uganda played a key democratic role as it addressed inequalities related to land privileges and the role of Europeans and Asians in the local economy (Gariyo 1992, 2). In the 1930s, Ugandans' escalating demands for participation in the economy and in the political affairs of their country were channelled through newspapers like *Gambuuze, Baana ba Kintu, Uganda Eyogera, Uganda Voice,* and *Matalisi*, most of which were in Luganda. These contributed to the political consciousness and action of the 1940s and 1950s that culminated in the formation of the first national party (the Uganda National Congress (UNC)) and finally Uganda's independence on 9th October, 1962. As tensions between the British and the locals grew, the local press continued to publicise the views of their political backers and to highlight perceived colonial injustices using the indigenous languages. This consciousness was further catalysed by the exposure of thousands of Ugandans to the outside world during their participation in the Second World War in defence of their British colonial masters.

The local press played a key role in amplifying the views of Ugandans as they intensified their bid for independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Even though there have always been several newspapers in the local languages in Uganda since colonial times, the relationship between the press and the state has mostly been a tense one, with periods where dissenting opinion in the press was all but outlawed. The print media have also been associated with a relatively small number of elites that either can read English or afford a newspaper. What needs to be noted here is that by the 1950s the indigenous language press was still largely concentrated in Buganda and that it had not succeeded in adopting a national outlook (see Gariyo 1992, 43). However, the churches in particular saw the indigenous language media and the education system as crucial in shaping political thought. The Catholic Church used the publications that the church leadership controlled or had influence over to mobilise followers (Gariyo 1992, 51).

Following consumer boycotts in 1959, an action triggered by local protest against Asian control of the economy, the British tightened their grip on the African media. Within this hostile environment characterised by government persecution and coupled with a noncontributing readership, several local papers failed to sustain themselves and collapsed on the eve of Uganda's independence[7] (Gariyo 1992, 49–50, 71–76). All this significantly weakened the local press. The weakening was exacerbated by the fact that once the independence struggle was over, many local papers no longer saw a reason for their existence.

In a bid to stem the upsurge of anticolonial nationalism in the country, the British government set up the first radio service (the Uganda Broadcasting Service (UBS)) in 1953. The UBS was set up with the express objective of serving as the state broadcaster. This would help to effectively compete with the nationalists and local media in informing and influencing public opinion. It should be noted that the weakening of the local print media around the time of independence created a *lacuna* which postindependence governments in Uganda took full advantage of by using the state broadcaster. The state broadcaster was used to limit ordinary Ugandans' participation in debate on issues of governance to only those who toed the government line.

It is difficult to establish to what extent the colonial government was successful in curtailing the democratic activities of civil society prior to Uganda's independence. What is clear is that the forces of traditional political organisation, the press and indirect rule combined to create the impetus for Uganda's independence and for ordinary citizens in Uganda to begin participating actively in debating their governance. Because of the way the colonial administrative machinery was organised, ethnicity was poised to remain an important factor in any future debate about the ordinary Ugandans' participation in their governance.

2.3 Early postindependence and the foundation for participatory democracy at national level (1962–1967)

At the time of independence, Uganda was polarised along political, ethnic, racial, religious and economic lines. These divisions were reflected in the nature of political parties and alliances that were formed, in recruitment to the civil service and the military, in the control of the economy and in unequal access to social services. The period between 1962 and 1967 was characterised by frantic but largely futile attempts by Uganda's first postcolonial government to mobilise Ugandans into one nation. Karugire (1980, 1988) and Kabwegyere (1995) have argued that the absence of a common language was basic to Uganda's national integration problems after independence. It could also be argued that it is the complex dynamics of Uganda's socio-political history that have made the rise of any of the indigenous languages to official or national status difficult, hence complicating the development of a national public sphere. Karugire (1988, 49, 52) elaborates this point:

> . . . Uganda was an artificial country in more than one sense. Possessing no common language, the people of Uganda also possessed nothing in common since even their history throughout the colonial period did not appear to be a shared one Parliament (after independence) was no more than a gathering of local government delegations to bargain for their respective regions (cf. Kabwegyere 1995, 139–153; Mutibwa 1992, 11; Mamdani 1997, 7).

Between 1964 and 1967 tensions in Uganda's national politics intensified. Not only did politics continue to be played along ethnic lines as alliances were made and broken, but the army, which increasingly became a key player in politics, was similarly polarised.

Tensions between the national government and the Mengo government came to a climax in 1966 in what has been called the 'Buganda crisis'. The sum total of this crisis was that the national army besieged the Buganda palace and took over the premises of key institutions of theBuganda government, the Kabaka was sent into exile in London and the Prime Minister (Dr. Apollo Milton Obote) suspended and later abrogated the constitution. A new constitution – the 'pigeon-hole' constitution[8] – was put in place. This constitution made Obote president (replacing the Kabaka who had played a ceremonial role as president since independence), abolished the kingdoms (including Buganda) and declared Uganda a republic (Karugire 1988, 58; Kabwegyere 1995, 210–214). With the help of laws like the Preventive Detention Act, Obote proceeded to silence dissent first in Buganda and later in the rest of the country. All this was justified as necessary for 'national consolidation'.

After the 'Buganda crisis' of 1966/67 there was a significant reduction in the civil rights enshrined in the independence constitution of 1962. The 'state of emergency' which was declared in Buganda in 1966 opened the way for arbitrary arrests and imprisonment without trial in the 'national interest'. Not only did Obote declare Uganda a one-party state, but the independence of key institutions like the public service, the judiciary, the police and the army was systematically eroded. Many experienced functionaries left the civil service to serve in less sensitive sectors, such as business. Nepotism dominated appointments at local government level.

Because of the government's growing dictatorial stance, the level of participation in the political process that had characterised the preindependence period waned as people began to fear for their safety. Karugire (1988, 68) explains that the electoral system became 'a meaningless charade in which nobody had any confidence whatsoever, and it ceased to be the basis of selecting popular government at all levels.' A large number of Ugandans became apathetic about the value of participation in their governance as this was obviously not a priority of the 'nation-builders'. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that at this point Ugandans did not have much of a political history of democracy or participation to draw on.

The role of Uganda's media in participation after independence

The print media after independence became increasingly dominated by the state under the guise of national consolidation. In the process, the private media were systematically weakened (Gariyo 1993, 29–32). The media thus operated under strict state supervision from 1966 to 1971, when Obote was deposed by Idi Amin in a military *coup détat*. In the meantime, government put the *Uganda Broadcasting Service* (later to become *Radio Uganda* and *Uganda Television*, and then the *Uganda Broadcasting Corporation* (*UBC*)) to maximum use as government mouthpieces during this period.

2.4 Consolidation of dictatorship (1967–1986)

The period between 1967 and 1986 in Uganda saw the rapid waning of any hopes of nurturing a culture of participation in public debate about governance. Obote was keen to downsize Buganda further and promote 'national cohesion' through obliterating ethnic differences and 'de-tribalising' Uganda's politics (Karugire 1980, 58–59; cf. Kabwegyere 1995, 211–214). Under Obote, factional loyalties were to be de-emphasised and a unifying language was seen as a key tool in this effort. To this end, camps were established in which courses in English, Luganda, Kiswahili and Lingala (a *lingua franca* in neighbouring Congo where Uganda had strategic interests) would be taught (Kabwegyere 1995, 213–215).

While Uganda's leaders once again looked to language as a possible means of forging national unity, the role Buganda had played as an agent of indirect rule made it difficult for Luganda to emerge as a unifying language. The indigenous languages had fallen victim to the colonial philosophy of separate development and, apart from Luganda, had a minimal role to play outside their individual ethnic confines. The implications of all this for public debate on issues of governance was that the chances of political conversation between people at grassroots level, who predominantly spoke the indigenous languages, and those functioning at the national level, where English (the language of the colonisers) and to a limited extent Luganda were minimised.

At this crucial stage in Uganda's history, the first parliament, which should have provided the forum for a national conversation about the future of Uganda was, for historical reasons, weak. As Karugire succinctly puts it,

> . . . [A]side from a handful of secondary school teachers and, to a far less extent, a few professionals like lawyers and doctors, Uganda's first parliament was full of people who were barely literate, possessing little understanding of the management of complex public affairs (Karugire 1988, 53).

Meanwhile, the depoliticisation of civil society (particularly trade unions and co-operatives) that had begun in the colonial times to contain dissent continued because postindependence leaders lacked the mandate to feel secure in their positions (see Bazaara 2000, 17–18; cf. Okoth 1996; Oloka-Onyango and Barya 1997; Bazaara and Barya 1999 for a detailed discussion of the depoliticisation of civil society in Uganda). Thus national leadership gradually became dominated by rejects who had little impact on solving postcolonial political problems. Uganda's politics in this period were therefore characterised by manipulation, opportunism, intrigue and in-fighting.

In the regions, conflicts in local government intensified. These conflicts were often related to the fact that Government had tampered with the independence of appointment boards and corruption and nepotism had become institutionalised. As a result, chiefs became inept, and lacked the respect derived from their traditional institutions (Karugire 1988,

61–63; cf. Golooba-Mutebi 2004[9]). With political parties having been banned in 1967 and all other forms of association being closely monitored, it became difficult for a strong civil society to develop. Consequently, it was difficult for any sphere of public debate on issues of governance to emerge in Uganda.

As part of the UPC government's effort to contain dissent, the Law was brought in line with the new, dictatorial stance following the abrogation of the constitution in 1966. Hence the Penal Code (Amendment) Bill (1966 sec. 29) provided for a life sentence for incitement against (government-appointed) chiefs. There was increased police and army involvement in day-to-day administration. The executive interfered freely to secure support for itself at the District level. Urban authorities were no longer elected but appointed by the Minister. In light of these developments, public confidence in these institutions was greatly undermined and since the avenues for participation in governance had for the most part been closed, apathy set in as most public bodies began to collapse (Karugire 1988, 64).

As part of the colonial legacy in Uganda, the military had become dominated by people from one region (the North) and was largely illiterate due to the inequitable distribution of education opportunities during the colonial era. This made the army easy to manipulate to prop up an increasingly unpopular regime (Karugire 1988, 67), especially given that the top leadership of the UPC came from Northern Uganda. Hence, under Obote, the military too became a key factor in Uganda's politics.

By 1971 there was no discernible culture of ordinary Ugandans participating in debate relating to governance through the media as the private print media were severely constrained and the state broadcast media were dominated by elite pro-UPC government functionaries.

Obote's government eventually fell to Major General Idi Amin, the army commander he had groomed, on 25th January, 1971. Thus, as Karugire puts it,

> . . . [T]he government of Uganda had in a very short space of time made the problem of governing Uganda much worse than did the colonialists in seventy years. And in the process, national unity had receded even beyond the political rhetoric of [our] rulers (1988, 74).

Participation in a collapsed state (1979–1986)

Under Idi Amin, there were no pretences towards democracy. The Suspension of Political Activities Act (1971) summarises the extent to which participation in any form of political debate was proscribed during Amin's reign. The Act prohibited the organisation of, or participation in, any public meeting or procession for propagating or imparting political ideas or information, formation of political parties, wearing, uttering or displaying any party name, symbols or other paraphernalia.

While there were some 'rules' against engaging in public debate, these remained unwritten until 1972. However, following an attempt to oust him in a military take-over, Amin abolished parliament as well as district and urban councils, two bodies through which ordinary Ugandans were still able to participate in their governance – albeit through representatives. Thenceforth, Amin made himself the executive, legislature and judiciary. He reorganised local government and, at the regional level, appointed Governors who were mostly military men. Local chiefs were mostly chosen from military ranks.

Amin's regime was furthermore characterised by tensions between the police and the army arising from, among other things, perceptions of inequitable treatment of the different ethnic groups that peopled these forces (Karugire 1985, 81). Extrajudicial killings were rampant. As civil servants were not sure when they would be declared dissidents and dismissed 'in the public interest', imprisoned or murdered, many left their jobs and either went into exile, retreated to their rural homes or joined rebel groups. The integrity of the judiciary was eroded further as security organisations attended court proceedings. The economy too continued to decline, especially following the summary expulsion of the Asian community in 1972.[10] Amin was toppled in 1979 by an army of Ugandan exiles with the help of the Tanzanian People's Defence Forces (TPDF) and fled into exile, leaving behind him a shattered nation.

Karugire (1985, 86–95) provides a compelling account of the post-Amin period in Uganda's history. Amin's policies had devastated the economy and the political instability that set in following his departure ensured that economic hardship would continue for some time to come. Between 1979 and 1985, three governments came and went in quick succession. The last of them consisted of a Military Commission, an organ of the Ugandan National Liberation (UNLF)[11] which ostensibly worked under a Presidential Commission of three eminent civilians. The Military Commission, headed by Paulo Muwanga, organised presidential and parliamentary elections in 1980 and engineered the return to power of Obote.

Obote's second attempt at the presidency (known as 'Obote II'), however, was constrained by guerrilla movements which, due to widespread dissatisfaction with the status quo, had started operating around the capital city. The Obote II government's response to increasing dissent was not dialogue, but violent suppression. It was considered risky to engage in any political party activity. The NRM/A (one of the guerrilla movements) mostly operated in the Buganda and Western regions, and constituted a major threat to the sitting governments between 1981 and 1986. To contain these activities, government unleashed state-instigated terror on areas where rebels were suspected to be operating. Again, this violence was targeted at specific ethnic groups that were associated with the guerrilla movement (Karugire 1985, 90–91). All official armed groups were given a free reign in suppressing 'bandits'. This intensified the chaos, cruelty, looting, rape and murder as these armed groups sometimes victimised people to settle personal scores or in order to loot

their property. The weakening of central administrative control, decimation of civil society, weakening of the judiciary and the economy, and fears of spying and counterspying continued under the Obote II regime. Disillusioned, more Ugandans began to abandon their town jobs, homes and property for the safety of the rural areas (Karugire 1985, 93; Mutibwa 1992, 110–114).

Obote, in an attempt to contain the chaotic situation, made a series of tactical blunders, most of which were prompted by the need to punish one ethnic group and placate another. This state of affairs culminated in a mutiny that saw Obote's overthrow in 1985. The military junta led by Gen. Tito Okello Lutwa that took over from Obote presided over a year of chaos as numerous rebel groups terrorised the population in their attempt to take over power. This was the situation when Museveni's NRA/NRM took over from Okello's government in January 1986.

Uganda's media under military rule in Uganda

In 1972, one year after taking over power, Amin's government had enacted the infamous Newspapers and Publications Decree of 1972 (Uganda. Newspapers and Publications Act (Amendment) Decree 1972) (Gariyo 1993, 33–34). This gave the minister in charge of information sweeping powers to prohibit the publication of a newspaper for a specified or indefinite period. This Act, combined with the increasing state-inspired insecurity in the country, compelled the 'independent' press to resort to doing public relations on behalf of the state rather than journalism. Most media were rendered inactive except for the government broadcaster and a few innocuous magazines covering mostly sports. The only programmes remaining on the state broadcaster where the ordinary person was able to participate were agriculture, sports and music programmes, because these were considered politically neutral. *Radio Uganda* and its sister the *Uganda Television* (the state media then) were the only two players in the broadcast sector. All independent print media were banned. During the worst phases of this military regime, even being caught listening to a foreign radio station like the BBC was criminalised.

When Idi Amin was overthrown in 1979 there had been a brief recovery in the media sector. However, government clamped down on the media again after the hotly disputed 1980 elections which brought Obote and his UPC back to power. Paulo Muwanga who became Vice-President and Minister of Defence in the Obote II government used his new position to ban many publications that the government considered hostile. These included *Citizen*, *The Economy* and *Ngabo.* Thus during the UPC regime of 1980 to 1985, any vestiges of press freedom were simply discarded (Gariyo 1993, 35–36).

Thus between 1971 and 1986, the capacity of Ugandans to participate in public debate on their governance was eroded by the absence of protections not just of freedom of expression and association, but more fundamentally of life. According to Mwesige (2004, 51), citizen participation during this period was reduced to attending meetings called by

government representatives. There were few avenues for initiating a conversation about governance at the national level, and even less motivation. As had been the case in the past, the only option left for the majority of Ugandans was to associate at as local a level as possible, that is, within the individual's ethnic group. Except for the urban areas, where less than 20% of the population lived, this often meant that the ethnic group remained the locus of political discourse because there one was assured of a relative level of trust and commonality of experience. This still did not rule out infiltration from within by state agents. Being highly proscribed, the media could no longer be depended upon as a forum for exercising free public deliberation.

2.5 The rebirth of participatory politics in Uganda and its mixed fortunes (1986–2007)

When the NRM government took over power in 1986, it instituted sweeping reforms with regard to opportunities for citizens to participate in their governance. Under a unique brand of 'no-party democracy' known as the Movement System, the NRM introduced popular participation as a key part of all its policies (Mamdani, 1997, 215–217; cf. Golooba-Mutebi 2004). It further introduced a system of popularly elected Local Councils (LCs) (initially called Resistance Councils (RCs)). These allowed all adults to participate in their governance. The NRM made special provisions to include previously marginalised groups like women, the youth and the disabled in the political process. The system consisted of five tiers (from RC1 to RC5). For the first time in Uganda's history, communities at village level were given powers not only to choose but also to recall their representatives if the latter did not perform to their satisfaction (Mamdani 1997, 216; Mwesige 2004, 54; cf. Bazaara and Barya 1999, Kasfir 1999; Golooba-Mutebi 2004).

However, as Mamdani (1997, 216–217) observes, the RC system had its shortcomings. For instance, he notes, it did not take due cognisance of entrenched socio-economic differences in its organisation. Eligibility for public office was based on 'individual merit' and residence, but not on differentiated working conditions. The system thus tended not to build capacity among those classes that were genuinely interested in reform but rather to provide opportunities for the socially well-placed to consolidate their positions through dominating these positions of leadership. Thus the system came to be dominated (at the local level) by the more prosperous members of rural communities.

The NRM government, to placate the multiple political forces at play both at grassroots and national levels, established a broad-based government at the national level.[12] At the same time, being fearful of endangering the NRM's hold on power by allowing politicians at the national level to access potential voters at the village level, the NRM limited direct elections to the RC1 (the lowest level). All subsequent elections up to the District level

were by Electoral College. This, in a way, diluted the participatory nature of the RC system.

In the meantime pressure mounted from the side of both local politicians and the international community for the NRM to restore 'real' participation. Mamdani (1997, 216–217) argues that it is the growing danger of elite multiparty-oriented politicians breaking through to Museveni's rural constituency[13] that pushed him to restore the traditional kingdoms which Obote had abolished in 1967.

According to Mamdani, in restoring the kingdoms, the NRM had made a pact with the Mengo establishment to keep multiparty politics out of their territory. The Kabaka was to be a cultural head but not to engage in political mobilisation. This pact, however, did not last as the Baganda wanted real power to appoint local chiefs (a role that had now been usurped by central government through the RC system), collect taxes, control their social institutions and influence their local governance. Failure to agree on these issues remains a source of continual tension between the Buganda government and the central government.

Since 2004, the NRM government has opened up the political space, allowing parties to register and to operate. At first this was limited to the national level. Under pressure from the 'opposition' and the international community the NRM government allowed rival political actors to also mobilise at grassroots level and publicly embraced multiparty politics.

The fact that parties were until 2004 proscribed under the NRM government system remains for many a blight on an otherwise promising record. It threatens to blur the distinction between the Museveni regime and previous ones with regard to allowing real as opposed to illusory participation. Moreover, the judiciary and the legislature have of late both come under the direct influence of the executive. One of the most recent manifestations of the contradictions in Museveni's democratic reforms has been his engineering of the amendment of the constitution to lift presidential term limits enshrined in the 1995 constitution. This has been accompanied by other amendments, the gist of which amount to weakening the legislature and the judiciary while giving more powers to the presidency. Most recently the NRM government has deliberately blocked the opposition in their attempts to associate freely and to mobilise nationwide. The government has also been accused of intimidating key opposition figures and making it difficult for the opposition to function normally.

The media under the NRM government (1986–2007)

Following the capture of state power by the (NRM) of Yoweri Museveni, private newspapers like *Mulengera, Ngabo, Weekly Topic, The Economy, The Star, Saba Saba* and *The Champion*, all of which had been banned by the previous government, resumed publication. For a while, they were able to critique and challenge the actions and policies

of the new government with apparent impunity. Furthermore, the NRM government presided over the promulgation of the 1995 constitution (Uganda 1995) which, among other things, guarantees freedom of speech and the press (Uganda 1995 sec 29). They passed the Press and Journalists Statute which implicitly outlaws the banning of newspapers (Uganda 2000b sec 2.2). These actions secured some important guarantees for freedom of expression.

While no newspaper has been banned since the enactment of the Press and Journalists Statute, relations between the state and the print media remain tense. There have been instances of editors being imprisoned and the operations of newspapers being suspended for days or weeks pending 'investigations' because they were seen to pose a threat to national security. Government in 1993 slapped an advertising ban on the critical *The Monitor* newspaper on account of perceived 'negative reporting' about government. The ban held until 1997. The NRM government has also on several occasions threatened to close down *The Monitor* newspaper for critical reporting about the actions of the state (cf. Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ 2005)). Most recently, government has moved to consolidate its control of *The New Vision* by appointing a serving senior army officer Board Chairman and effecting changes in the top editorial staff. Journalists have repeatedly been dragged to court on charges ranging from sedition to 'incitement of sectarian tendencies'.

While many hail the positive changes under the NRM as the long awaited break for Uganda's media, others dispute the sincerity of the NRM's liberal attitude towards the media. Gariyo (1993, 36), for instance, argues,

> . . . the NRM knows that these numerous publications do not circulate beyond certain areas and that both their significance as a forum for public debate (and) influence on matters of national significance remains limited.

Indeed, some have contended that this apparent liberal attitude towards the media has been used by the NRM government as a safety valve by a government which has been anything but liberal with regard to broader political freedoms, like the freedom of association.

Furthermore, it is important to note the socio-economic constraints hindering any significant role being played by the print media in enhancing participation in the democratic press, even under the NRM government, because, as Bazaara (2000, 29) has aptly observed,

> [T]he ability of journalists to raise the awareness of the public on issues of democracy or human rights is circumscribed by the fact that most papers are published in English and also have limited circulation. This means that the bulk of Ugandan society does not have the chance to read the papers either because they are illiterate or they cannot afford to buy the newspapers.

In 1993, the NRM government liberalised the broadcast sector, opening up for numerous privately owned stations to be licensed and operate in a variety of Uganda's languages, a move that could be seen as a halfway house between the NRMs 'no-party' democracy and full-fledged multiparty politics. There are currently over 140 registered radio stations, with nearly 100 of them on air. There are also 27 television stations, 14 of which are operative. Most of these stations are located in Kampala and a few of the other metropolitan centres throughout the country. The state radio broadcasts in English, Luganda, Kiswahili and a number of the country's indigenous languages. Most of the private media on the other hand either broadcast in English and/or Luganda, or one of the major, commercially viable languages from the region of Uganda that they serve.

The liberalisation and privatisation of the media sector in Uganda has unleashed a new set of ownership dynamics in the media sector that reflect a distinctly urban and commercial priority leaving the poor rural majority, mostly without a Western education, on the periphery. The geographical distribution of the media also raises questions about how inclusive the liberalised media really are. There are 65 radio stations based in the capital city, which together operate in a maximum of five of the over 30 languages and dialects of the people of Uganda.[14] Ten out of the 14 television stations on air are also based in the capital city. Many of Uganda's languages may therefore only be heard on the state broadcaster for a few minutes every week and not at all on the commercial media. In many ways Uganda Broadcasting Corporation (UBC) still operates as a state broadcaster. Programmes include news, announcements, political debate, the environment, health, agriculture, education, sports, music and other entertainment. However, there are no sufficient guarantees for UBC's financial sustainability or editorial independence (see Uganda. UBC Act 1995).

The potential for media concentration is also evident.[15] Furthermore, there has been intense resistance from commercial media owners to a proposed new policy that seeks to regulate (among other things) ownership and content which have hitherto been unregulated. The community broadcast sector is extremely weak, with no specific provisions for it in law. (cf. Wotsuna a5_radio.pdf 2006).

3 CONCLUSION

This article has presented a synopsis of the major political, economic and cultural forces in Uganda's history that have influenced the capacity of Ugandans to participate in their governance through public debate. It has also discussed the fortunes of freedom of association and political competition.

While the print media played a pivotal role in providing a forum for participation for some Ugandans, the broadcast media, especially since their liberalisation, have increased the opportunities available for a variety of voices to be heard and experiences reflected in the media. On the whole, though, the role of Uganda's media in the democratic process has

been constrained not only by restrictions on their operation imposed by both colonial and postindependence governments, but also by structural factors such as poverty, illiteracy, the logistical inaccessibility of newspapers for people in the rural areas, commercial pressures and language barriers.

The formation of a public sphere with a national character has been rendered difficult first by the nature and philosophy of indirect rule, and later by the factionalism and chaos that characterised postindependence regimes. Consequently, the ethnic community has remained an important unit and has provided a safe haven for political debate in Uganda. It has been difficult for postindependence Ugandan leaders to garner a strong enough sense of security to open up a fully participatory democratic space.

Free and diverse media have the potential to play a key role in enabling people in African countries to participate in how they are governed. In the absence of a unifying language, it becomes important for the media, and especially the broadcast media, to be organised and run in such a way that they provide opportunities for the different 'public spheres' in a country to participate in public debate in languages which they understand. In this context, the broadcast media could also serve as surrogates for participation in public debate in the absence of freely functioning political parties. This role must be exercised responsibly, though, otherwise the media deteriorate into instruments of state terror and mayhem. Access to the media using the indigenous languages can go a long way in enhancing this role of the media.

NOTES

1 English is the official language of Uganda although it is spoken fluently by less than one quarter of the population. Kiswahili, spoken by an even smaller proportion of the population, is the second official language. Luganda is the indigenous language spoken by the largest number of Ugandans, but according to the most recent census report, there are 56 other distinct ethnic groups in Uganda. Each of these has at least one corresponding indigenous language or dialect. Nine of Uganda's ethnic groups have a population of more than one million. These are the Baganda, Banyankore, Basoga, Bakiga, Iteso, Langi, Acholi, Bagisu and Lugbara (cf. Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2005:12).

2 This section relies heavily on four major works on the history of Uganda, as they were deemed to cover the most pertinent issues relating to participation and together provide an accurate and balanced picture. These are Karugire, SR. 1980. *A political history of Uganda*. Nairobi: Heinemann; Karugire, SR. 1988. *Roots of Instability in Uganda*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers; Kabwegyere, TB. 1995. *The politics of state formation and destruction in Uganda*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers and Mamdani, M. 1997. *Citizen and subject: decentralized despotism and the legacy of late colonialism*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

3 It is important to note also that from the outset Buganda, being large, internally organised, cohesive, and culturally homogenous, was in a better bargaining position than neighbouring communities vis-a-vis the foreigners.

4 The founder of the Uganda National Congress, Uganda's first national party.

5 During the colonial times, education certificates bore the name of one's home district, and ethnicity was an issue when one sought employment outside their home district. In addition, migrant workers from the same district were deliberately housed together.
6 'Ebyaffe' in Luganda means 'our things', and connotes those aspects of their politics, culture and economy that the Baganda cherish, that distinguish them from other Ugandans, and that they see no reason for sharing with the rest of Uganda.
7 It is important to note that government is the biggest advertiser in Uganda and a media organisation challenging government does so to their peril.
8 This constitution is said to have been passed with minimum input from parliament and none from ordinary Ugandans outside parliament.
9 Golooba-Mutebi 2004 discusses a similar phenomenon with the advent of Museveni's Local Council system which, he argues, overshadowed the traditional institution of the chief.
10 The Asians had been the life-blood of Uganda's economy.
11 The Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) was the political wing of the group that, with the help of the Tanzanian Peoples' Defence Forces (TPDF) drove Amin out of power in 1979.
12 This included people who were members of the NRM but also people who had previously belonged to the different political parties but were now willing to embrace the new, 'no-party democracy' philosophy espoused by the NRM.
13 Having come to power through a protracted guerrilla war, Museveni's government put a high premium on popular support at the grassroots.
14 This excludes the state radio which operates in 24 languages. State television operates mostly in English with one bulletin each in Luganda (the majority language) and Kiswahili, the regional lingua franca.
15 The Aga Khan group based in Kenya and the IPP group based in Tanzania already have interests across media types in Uganda.

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