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Was Musaazi a Hero or Not? : *An Empirical Assessment of Institutional and Public Perceptions of Ignatius Kangave Musaazi, Founder of Uganda's First Political Party*

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Abstract

This study empirically investigates whether Ignatius Kangave Musaazi (1905–1990), founder of Uganda's first political party, the Uganda National Congress (UNC), warrants recognition as a national hero, despite his expulsion from the very party he founded and his subsequent decades of relative obscurity. Using a mixed-methods design, the study combined quantitative survey data from institutional respondents foreign diplomatic missions (United States, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, and the United Kingdom) and political party structures (UPC and CP) with qualitative interview data from religious leaders, Buganda traditional leaders, and school administrators. The analysis was grounded in three theoretical lenses: Halbwachs' Collective Memory Theory, Moscovici's Social Representations Theory, and Carlyle's Great Man Theory. Findings show an overall affirmation rate of 67.9% (76 of 112 respondents) recognising Musaazi as a hero, with unanimous affirmation among the British embassy, the Conservative Party, Protestant leaders, and Buganda traditional leaders, but weaker and more contested affirmation among Catholic leaders and a marked generational divide among school administrators, with older respondents affirming his legacy and younger ones largely unfamiliar with him. The study concludes that Musaazi's status as a hero is real but institutionally and generationally uneven, shaped more by collective memory within specific communities than by uniform national consensus, and calls for stronger integration of his legacy into school curricula to address the generational memory gap.

Keywords: *Musaazi; Uganda National Congress; national hero; collective memory; social representations; Buganda; institutional perception*

1. Introduction

Ignatius Kangave Musaazi (1905–1990) occupies a contested but central place in Uganda's political history as the founder of the Uganda National Congress (UNC), the first modern political party in the country, established on 2 March 1952. While official commemoration treats Musaazi as a national hero, buried at the Kololo Independence Grounds alongside other distinguished Ugandans, his own political career ended in expulsion from the very party he founded, and his later life was marked by relative obscurity. This article investigates a simple but contested question: was Musaazi a hero, or not? It does so empirically, combining a quantitative survey of institutional respondents (foreign embassies and political party

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structures) with qualitative interviews of religious leaders, traditional leaders, and school administrators.

2. Historical Background

Musaazi was born in 1905 in Timuna village near Wobulenzi, into a family connected to the Buganda kingdom's chieftaincy structures. He was educated at King's College Budo and later studied divinity in the United Kingdom, subsequently leaving the priesthood over racial discrimination within the Church of Uganda.

His political career grew out of economic activism. In 1947 he formed the Uganda African Farmers Union (UAFU) to advocate for African cotton farmers against colonial price controls and Asian commercial dominance over ginning. The UAFU was blamed for the 1949 Buganda riots and subsequently banned, after which Musaazi formed the Federation of Partnerships of Uganda African Farmers (FPUAF). He travelled to London in 1950 to lobby the British Parliament, gaining the support of figures such as Fenner Brockway and academics at the London School of Economics.

On 2 March 1952, Musaazi and Abubaker Kakyama Mayanja founded the Uganda National Congress at a house near the Lubiri in Mengo, with Musaazi as its first president and Mayanja as secretary-general. The UNC laid the groundwork for Uganda's eventual independence in 1962, though it later fractured into factions that produced the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) and contributed to the broader multiparty landscape that included the Democratic Party (DP).

Musaazi's leadership was not without controversy. In January 1959 he was expelled as UNC president following internal disputes over the party's alignment with Pan-African nationalism, and was replaced by Apollo Milton Obote. Musaazi was also detained by the colonial administration on more than one occasion during the 1950s for his political agitation. Following his expulsion, he withdrew substantially from active party politics, and his profile in national affairs diminished markedly through the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, a period marked by successive political upheavals in Uganda under Obote, Idi Amin, and the return of Obote. Musaazi died in 1990 and was accorded burial at the Kololo Independence Grounds, the same site reserved for Uganda's most distinguished nationalist figures — an act of official commemoration that stands in some tension with his marginal position in national political life over the preceding three decades.

3. Statement of the Problem

Musaazi's historical record presents an unresolved interpretive tension. On one hand, he is credited with founding Uganda's first political party and laying important groundwork for the independence movement, and is formally honoured through burial at Kololo alongside other national heroes. On the other hand, his expulsion from the very party he founded, his subsequent decades of political marginalisation, and the limited attention given to him in school curricula and public commemoration relative to later independence-era leaders raise the question of whether “hero” status, as popularly and officially applied to him, reflects a genuine, broad-based consensus or a narrower, unevenly distributed judgement concentrated in particular institutional, religious, generational, or cultural communities. Existing accounts of

Musaazi are predominantly historical and narrative in character; none, to the researcher's knowledge, has empirically tested how differently positioned groups — diplomatic missions, political parties, religious bodies, traditional authorities, and educators — actually judge his legacy today. This study addresses that gap by treating the question "was Musaazi a hero?" as an empirical, measurable proposition rather than a settled historical verdict.

4. Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in three complementary theoretical traditions that together explain why perceptions of a single historical figure can vary systematically across institutional, religious, generational, and cultural groups.

4.1 Collective Memory Theory (Halbwachs)

Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective memory holds that individuals do not remember the past in isolation; rather, memory is socially constructed and sustained through the frameworks of the groups to which a person belongs: family, religious community, profession, nation. Applied to this study, Halbwachs' theory predicts that how a respondent judges Musaazi will be shaped less by objective historical fact than by the collective memory frameworks of their group: a traditional leader in Buganda inherits a communal memory of Musaazi as a local son and independence figure, while a young school administrator, standing outside any group with a living memory of the 1950s independence struggle, has weaker access to that memory and is less able to render a confident judgement.

4.2 Social Representations Theory (Moscovici)

Serge Moscovici's theory of social representations explains how groups convert unfamiliar or contested historical figures into shared, communicable understandings through anchoring (relating the figure to familiar categories) and objectification (turning abstract history into concrete symbols, such as burial at Kololo or annual independence ceremonies). This theory helps explain the divergence found among religious leaders: Protestant leaders anchor Musaazi within their own religious lineage, given his training for the priesthood, producing a strongly positive representation, while Catholic leaders, standing outside that lineage, construct a more distant and less uniformly positive representation of the same historical facts.

4.3 Great Man / Heroic Leadership Theory (Carlyle)

Thomas Carlyle's Great Man theory of leadership holds that history is substantially shaped by exceptional individuals whose personal will, sacrifice, and vision alter the course of events, independent of broader social or economic forces. This framework underpins the study's use of a binary hero / not-a-hero measure: respondents were, in effect, being asked to evaluate Musaazi against a heroic-leadership standard — personal risk, sacrifice (his reported repeated imprisonment), and singular initiative in founding the UNC — rather than against his later, more contested institutional record after his 1959 expulsion.

5. Conceptual Framework

Drawing on the three theories above, the study conceptualises the perception of Musaazi's heroism as a dependent variable shaped by four independent, group-level factors: (i)

institutional affiliation (embassy, political party, religious body); (ii) cultural or geographic proximity to Musaazi's own history (Buganda-based respondents versus others); (iii) generational cohort (older versus younger respondents, particularly among school administrators); and (iv) historical relationship to the UNC's own internal split (parties and factions descended from the pro- or anti-Musaazi sides of the 1959 expulsion). These factors are understood to operate through two mediating mechanisms identified in the theoretical framework: collective memory transmission (how strongly a group's inherited memory of Musaazi is sustained) and social representation (how a group anchors and symbolically encodes Musaazi's historical role). The conceptual model can be summarised as: Independent variables (institutional affiliation, cultural proximity, generational cohort, historical UNC relationship) leading through mediating mechanisms (collective memory transmission, social representation) to the dependent variable (perception of Musaazi as hero or not). This model guided both the choice of respondent categories sampled and the interpretation of divergence between categories in the analysis that follows.

6. Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods design. Structured questionnaires seeking a binary judgement (hero / not a hero) were administered to selected foreign diplomatic missions in Uganda and to the leadership structures of three political parties: the Uganda People's Congress (UPC), the Democratic Party (DP), and the Conservative Party (CP). Semi-structured interviews, recorded and analysed verbatim, were conducted with religious leaders (Catholic, Muslim, and Protestant), traditional leaders of the Buganda kingdom, and school administrators. Local council leaders were also targeted as a respondent category, though usable data was not returned in time for this analysis and is noted as a limitation below.

7. Quantitative Analysis

7.1 Diplomatic Missions (Embassies)

Questionnaires were administered to the embassies of the United States, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, the United Kingdom, China, and Canada.

Embassy	Sampled	Said “Hero”	% of sample
United States	20	11	55.0%
Nigeria	10	7	70.0%
Kenya	20	12	60.0%
Tanzania	20	13	65.0%
United Kingdom	7	7	100.0%
China	N/A	0	No response
Canada	N/A	0	No response

Among embassies for which a sample size is known, 50 of 77 respondents (64.9%) affirmed that Musaazi was a hero. The British embassy returned a full response rate with unanimous affirmation (7 of 7), consistent with Musaazi's documented engagement with the British

Parliament and colonial administration. The Chinese and Canadian embassies did not respond, which limits the geographic and diplomatic breadth of this category and should be read as a gap rather than a negative judgement.

7.2 Political Party Chairpersons

Party	Sampled	Said "Hero"	% of sample
UPC	10	6	60.0%
DP	N/A	0	No response
CP	5	5	100.0%

Overall, 11 of 15 party respondents with known sample sizes (73.3%) affirmed Musaazi's heroism. The CP returned unanimous affirmation. The UPC — the party that effectively absorbed Musaazi's UNC faction after his 1959 expulsion — showed majority but not unanimous affirmation (6 of 10), which may reflect the historically complicated relationship between Musaazi and the Obote-led faction that succeeded him. The DP did not respond, which is itself notable given DP's rival origins in the same era of party formation.

7.3 Religious Leaders

Religious group	Interviewed	Said "Hero"	% of sample
Catholic	5	2	40.0%
Muslim	5	3	60.0%
Protestant	5	5	100.0%

Across the three religious groups, 10 of 15 leaders interviewed (66.7%) affirmed Musaazi's heroism. Protestant leaders were unanimous, plausibly reflecting Musaazi's own background training for the Anglican priesthood. Catholic leaders showed the lowest affirmation rate of any group in the study (40%), and Muslim leaders were more evenly split (60%).

7.4 Traditional Leaders (Buganda Kingdom)

Respondent group	Interviewed	Said "Hero"	% of sample
Buganda traditional leaders	5	5	100.0%

Traditional leaders in the Buganda kingdom, Musaazi's own cultural home, were unanimous in affirming his heroism — the highest and most consistent endorsement recorded among the interview-based categories.

7.5 Combined Quantitative Summary

Combining all categories for which numerical data was returned — embassies, party chairpersons, religious leaders, and traditional leaders — 76 of 112 respondents (67.9%)

affirmed that Musaazi was a hero. A clear majority across every institutional category examined regarded Musaazi as a hero, though affirmation was not unanimous in any category except the British embassy, the CP, Protestant leaders, and traditional leaders.

8. Qualitative Analysis

8.1 Traditional Leaders: Living Memory and Pride

Interviews with Buganda traditional leaders produced the strongest and most emotionally resonant affirmations in the study. One traditional leader from Luwero, recalling personal proximity to Musaazi, offered the following account:

> *"I used to accompany Musaazi at Kololo on Independence Day celebrations. He struggled for the acquisition of it; we are proud of him." — Traditional leader, Luwero*

This testimony reflects a theme of lived, first-hand memory rather than abstracted historical judgement — the respondent frames Musaazi's heroism in terms of personal witness to his role in the independence struggle and continued commemorative practice.

8.2 Religious Leaders: A Divided Legacy

Qualitative patterns among religious leaders diverged more than the quantitative figures alone suggest. Protestant unanimity is consistent with Musaazi's personal religious formation and his historical alignment with mission-educated elites. Catholic leaders' comparatively low affirmation may reflect the UNC's socialist orientation and its at times strained relationship with religious establishments during the colonial period, a tension noted in historical accounts of the party's founding. Muslim leaders' mixed responses suggest an intermediate, less settled position within collective memory.

8.3 School Administrators: A Generational Divide

Interviews with school administrators revealed a marked generational split rather than a simple hero / not-a-hero binary. Most younger administrators reported limited familiarity with Musaazi, suggesting a gap in how his legacy is transmitted through the education system to newer professional cohorts. By contrast, older administrators — particularly those based in central Uganda, close to the historical centres of UNC activity — expressed clear admiration for Musaazi specifically as the founder of Uganda's first political party.

9. Discussion

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings converge on a consistent picture: a majority of respondents across nearly every category studied regard Musaazi as a hero, but the strength and uniformity of that judgement varies systematically in ways predicted by the study's theoretical framework. Affirmation was strongest and most unanimous among groups with the closest cultural or institutional proximity to Musaazi's own history — Buganda traditional leaders, the British embassy (echoing his direct engagement with the British Parliament), the Conservative Party, and Protestant religious leaders (echoing his own religious formation). Affirmation was comparatively weaker among groups with a more distant, contested, or

institutionally complicated relationship to his legacy — Catholic leaders, the UPC (the party that absorbed the faction that expelled him), and younger school administrators.

This pattern is consistent with Halbwachs' proposition that judgement of a historical figure is mediated by group-specific collective memory rather than uniform national consensus, and with Moscovici's proposition that groups anchor unfamiliar figures to their own familiar categories, producing systematically different representations of the same underlying historical record. The generational divide among school administrators is particularly notable: it suggests that Musaazi's status as a hero, however strong within communities that carry a living or inherited memory of his role, is not being reliably reproduced in the next generation through the formal education system — a finding with direct implications for curriculum and public commemoration. Read through Carlyle's Great Man framework, the data suggest that Musaazi is judged favourably chiefly on the basis of his founding act and personal sacrifice during the independence struggle, rather than on his later, more marginal institutional record after 1959, indicating that heroism in this context is being assessed against a specific historical moment rather than a full-career record.

10. Conclusion

This study set out to answer, empirically, whether Ignatius Kangave Musaazi should be regarded as a national hero. The evidence supports a qualified yes: with an overall affirmation rate of 67.9% across institutional and interview-based respondent categories, and unanimous affirmation among four distinct groups (the British embassy, the CP, Protestant leaders, and Buganda traditional leaders), Musaazi's status as a hero commands broad, though not universal, support. However, that support is unevenly distributed, concentrated among groups with closer cultural, religious, or institutional proximity to his own history, and comparatively weaker among Catholic leaders, the UPC, and — most significantly for the future of his legacy — younger school administrators. Musaazi's heroism, in other words, is real but institutionally and generationally uneven, sustained more by the collective memory of specific communities than by a settled, uniform national verdict. The study recommends stronger integration of Musaazi's role in Uganda's independence history into the school curriculum, to close the generational memory gap identified among younger educators and, by extension, the students they teach.

11. Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be borne in mind when interpreting these findings. First, the Chinese and Canadian embassies, the DP, and local council leaders did not return usable data, limiting the diplomatic, political, and grassroots-administrative breadth of the sample; their absence should be read as a gap in coverage rather than evidence of a particular judgement. Second, sample sizes within several categories (religious leaders, traditional leaders) were small (n=5 per group), which limits the statistical generalisability of within-category percentages, though the qualitative interviews help contextualise these figures. Third, the binary hero / not-a-hero measure, while analytically useful for comparison across categories, necessarily simplifies what several respondents — particularly religious and administrator interviewees — expressed as a more

nuanced, conditional judgement. Finally, the study relied on respondents' self-reported familiarity with Musaazi's history; no independent verification of respondents' underlying historical knowledge was conducted, which may affect the confidence with which some judgements were offered.

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