

The Career of Ignatius Kangave Musazi

by Yoga Adhola

Although he did not feature prominently in the independence governments, Ignatius Kangave Musazi played a very significant role in the anti-colonial struggles. In fact the history of the anti-colonial struggles cannot be complete without the mention of Musazi. This article will review the career of Ignatius Musazi from the 1930s to the late 50s.

The 1930s was a period of relative economic decline throughout the colonies of Africa and this had major political consequences because the economic recession led to protests which constituted the beginnings of modern anti-colonial movements. The depression pinched even harder because it occurred in the context of rising expectations based on the relative prosperity of the first two decades of the century, when the terms of trade were relatively favorable to Africa, and peasants and traders had profited. As a result of the depressed level of the economy and the resulting curtailment of the colonial services, disillusionment set in.

Two sets of different but related developments made this disillusionment particularly explosive. Not only had the representatives of pre-colonial polities - the chiefs and kings been absorbed into the colonial hierarchy as its most loyal collaborators, but the newly educated elite, far from seeking to return to pre-colonial structures, sought to share in the administration of the new order.

Among those educated people were men like Dr. J.B. Danquah of Gold Coast (later Ghana), Chief Obafemi Awolowo of Nigeria, and Ignatius Musazi of Uganda. These were "the western-educated elite, who having reached and in some cases surpassed the intellectual attainment of their colonial administrators, on the administrators' own terms, began to demand for participation in the administration. It is this class of people who led the criticism of the colonial structures throughout Africa in the late 1930s.

While in other African colonies such as Nigeria and Ghana, this situation constituted the anvil upon which the nascent country-wide national movement was forged, this was not the case in Uganda. Both the uneven nature of colonial development which made Buganda a more developed enclave even politically then and the rubric of "indirect rule" which carved out a separate political arena in Buganda conditioned "an ambivalent nationalism not entirely divorced from parochialism" to develop alongside Buganda separatism.

As a result, political agitation in Uganda during this period was not only limited to issues affecting Buganda but also geographically restricted to the kingdom. The main channel for this agitation was an organization variously called "Sons of Kintu" "the Grandsons of Kintu" or "the Descendants of Kintu" formed on May 28, 1938. The chief organizer and Secretary of the organization was Ignatius Kangave Musazi.

Ganda neo-traditionalist in ideology, the organization had two main objectives: to direct the complaints of the farmers and merchants into channels where they would be heard; and to get rid of the government of Buganda then headed by Martin Luther Nsibirwa as Katikiro. Although the organization failed to attain most of its objectives, it succeeded first in mobilizing people in the countryside to a level which had never been attained in the colony before, and, secondly, in propelling Musazi into a long political career.

Second World War

The following year the Second World War broke out. Although the colonial system looked impregnable at the beginning of the war, it did not take long for the war to take so heavy a toll on it so that in a sense the war became a major turning point in the liberation of Africa from colonial rule.

The war brought "about demonstrable changes in the attitudes of the colonial powers towards the way in which they had administered their African subjects and placed them on the defensive about empire, the war also wrought major changes in the consciousness of the colonized peoples."

A major factor to put the colonial powers on the defensive was the rise to world leadership of both the United States and the Soviet Union, something which was largely conditioned by the war itself. As the war progressed, there might have arisen an impasse or the Germans might have won had the two powers not tipped the balance. This was to make the two powers very powerful.

The two new superpowers were, for totally different reasons, to oppose colonialism and add voice to the internal opposition in Britain. The war also provided conditions for greater internal opposition to colonialism in Britain: the Labor Party, for instance, gained immense strength when its leader, Clement Attlee, became deputy Prime Minister in a coalition government.

Apart from the effect the war had on the international context of colonialism, the war also triggered major changes in the domestic conditions of colonialism in Uganda. The medium for the war to cause far-reaching social transformations in Uganda was the participation of Africans in the war.

Africans were not only enlisted to fight the war, but Africa was a major source of supplies. The total number of Africans who participated directly in the war is estimated at 533,084 of whom 76,166 were from Uganda. To most of these recruits who had lived in isolated villages hardly affected by the colonial government, common military service had the effect of propelling the recruit to transcend former ethnic barriers.

The period of total involvement with and dependency on an agency of the state had the effect of also inculcating in the recruit a new culture in which the state was from then on to play a major role. The war was also to greatly politicize the African soldiers. What caused them to get politicized was the necessity for the colonial powers to provide a stake which would serve to mobilize them to war.

This had the effect, particularly in cases where outright concessions were made, to demonstrate to the

colonized peoples that colonialism was not as invincible as they had previously thought. Further, by causing the movement of Africans to distant places such as India the war exposed the combatants to a range of experiences much broader and inspiring in the anti-colonial struggles than they had encountered at home.

Those who served in India, for instance, got first hand experience of the double standard of Britain. While being told that they were fighting to preserve freedom and democracy, in India, the combatants witnessed fellow colonial subjects being prevented from protesting British restriction on political freedom in India. Such experiences were to ignite a resolve in the combatants to wage struggles against colonialism when they returned home.

While this constituted the major immediate impetus to the evolution of countrywide nationalist movements in all other African colonies, this was not the case in Uganda. In Uganda these, conditions which were so favorable to mobilization, instead fueled two tendencies: the move towards Ganda separatism, and the evolution of an ambivalent nationalism.

Of these two forces, both of which had emerged in the 1930s, the first to organize itself was Ganda neo-traditionalism and separatism. It organized as the Bataka Party founded in 1946. Those who were to constitute the leadership of the Bataka Party had been at the leadership of the political struggles which culminated in the riots that broke out in January 1945.

James Miti, the senior mutaka who was involved in these 1945 struggles, assumed the leadership of the Bataka Party and became the torchbearer of Buganda "nationalism". Much as the term mutaka has a distinct meaning, it was conveniently redefined to encompass every Muganda. "Every Muganda is a mutaka" was the slogan opportunistically coined to exploit the fact that to be a citizen of Buganda one had to first belong to a clan.

The party was extremely reactionary, and ideologically committed to the purity of Ganda traditions and institutions. A large number of landlords were members of the party. A major point of contention for the Bataka party was the democratization of the Lukiiko. They believed elective chieftaincy would serve to place their members in the Lukiiko. "As a form of social and political organization, it claimed allegiance on the basis of nationalism and support of Buganda . . ."

A number of units of the party and some leading members were of the view that clan identification with the Kabaka and Kiganda chauvinism could break all other forms of social stratification and affiliations. The party openly sought to preserve the more backward and negative aspects of Ganda culture. Thus, for instance, it attacked missionaries for having reduced the population of Buganda by introducing monogamous marriage.

Simultaneously, as Ganda neo-traditionalism was organizing itself into the Bataka Party, a Janus-headed nationalism under the leadership of Musazi was also evolving. Although rather ambivalent, this was a direct response to the changed political conditions ushered in by the end of the war.

In his speech opening the new parliament in November 1946, King George VI had declared: "In the territories for which my government is responsible, they will seek actively to promote the welfare of my peoples, to develop the economic life of the territories and to give my people all practical guidance in their march to self-government."

In line with this pronouncement, the colonial administration in Uganda carried out a number of reforms intended to prepare Uganda for independence. Of all these moves, the one which was to have the greatest impact in stimulating the people of Uganda politically to organize themselves, and later lead to the formation of UNC was the encouragement of the formation of cooperative societies.

Farmer's Union

It not only led to the formation of the Uganda African Farmers Union (UAFU), but through the UAFU it laid a basis from which an anti-colonial movement was to be formed five years later. The issue around which the politically charged UAFU got organized was the marketing of cotton.

The evolution of the marketing of cotton into a political issue arose from the way Britain had used its control of marketing structure to relate the prices paid to the growers to the low price paid for Uganda cotton by the British Ministry of Supply through its bulk-purchase agreements. The meagerness of the proceeds the growers received was further aggravated by the operation of a fund intended to stabilize the economy.

The operation of these two factors had the effect of seriously depressing the proceeds reaching the producers. Between 1930 and 1938, the growers received an average of 60% of the proceeds from cotton exports, in the 1941-42 season they earned 45% and in the three following seasons their share ranged from 28% to 38%.

Furthermore this, growers were by this time bearing the full brunt of the tax on cotton exports as both exporters and ginnerers were no longer making a contribution to this source of government revenue. This was quite burdensome given that the cost of living had more than doubled.

In response to these depressing economic conditions, people began to put pressure for greater returns from and greater share in the marketing of the basic export of the colony. There were two types of people putting pressure: the prosperous aspiring African entrepreneur, and also the more populist demand for participation through cooperative organization.

It was this populist aspiration which provided the basis for the formation of the Uganda African Farmers Union (UAFU) led by Musazi in 1947. The formation of the UAFU was a very significant step in the political development of Uganda, especially the national movement. With its formation, the national movement had reached the level of development which Hodgkin called associations which "provide the cells around which a nation-wide political organization can be constructed."

However, these positive contributions notwithstanding, the UAFU carried with it the Achilles heel that

had bedeviled the earlier attempt at a national movement in 1938. Much as the grievances about the marketing and ginning of cotton - the aspiration informing the UAFU was nation-wide, there was no attempt to broaden the union beyond Buganda so as to encompass the whole country.

The channels that the Union sought to utilize, not only to organize itself but also voice its grievance, were traditional Ganda institutions, something which tended to exclude or repel the non-Ganda. From the very beginning, for instance, there was a curious overlapping between UAFU and the Bataka Party.

There was also the curious coincidence of both organizations having trails going back to the " Sons of Kintu " movement of 1938. Further, Musazi is reported to have used Bataka units as the initial organizational base. Finally, much as the two organizations agitated separately, there was no doubt that from time to time they did overlap.

By 1949 the desire of the people of Uganda to have a say in the marketing of cotton - whether by cooperative organizations or prosperous enterprising entrepreneurs, and the concomitant agitation for the same had reached crisis proportions. As part of the agitation, the peasants in Buganda responded to a call from their leadership to boycott the sale of their cotton: instead of selling the cotton, they stored it up in their huts.

In this crisis, Musazi, through the Uganda Farmers' Union was leading the more progressive of the forces, and the Bataka Party was the vehicle for those imbued with unbridled Ganda neo-traditionalism. Simultaneously, the political struggles which had erupted in 1945 between the old establishments of the Ganda ruling class formed at the turn of the century, on the one hand, and the new aspiring elements consisting of the rising traders and the emerging educated class, on the other hand, had attained a new peak level.

The "new men" did not only feel the leadership in Buganda was heavily influenced by the British colonial authorities, but, being Ganda neo-traditionalist, they also wanted to put a break on what they saw as the erosion of Ganda culture and institutions. They also wanted some degree of democratization. With the intensification of the political crisis in the colony, different as the Bataka Party and Farmers Union were, they became "thoroughly mixed together."

UAFU banned

As the principal organizers of both forces were Baganda and so the bulk of the people participating, the focus of attention inevitably shifted to the Kabaka and the political institutions of Buganda. The day before the first Lukiiko session of 1949, one of the leaders of Bataka Party warned the Kabaka that the Lukiiko would not sit unless the number of elected members was increased to 60 and certain chiefs were dismissed. The man was immediately arrested, hastily tried and imprisoned for two years.

The following day crowds gathered for the opening session of the Lukiiko and the Bataka threatened to obstruct the proceedings if their claims were not attended to. The Kabaka, accorded them audience, and promised to look into the matter of chiefs. Thereafter, for the next two months there was much public

debate, with both Bataka and Farmers Union addressing rallies. Finally, the Bataka leaders decided to petition the Kabaka directly and to make representation in person.

To this effect a pamphlet telling people to come to Mengo was distributed, and the people came in large numbers. A delegation of eight representatives of the Bataka Party was admitted to the audience of the Kabaka, but while they were presenting their demands, the crowd became restless and the police was called.

As the police was attempting to arrest certain leaders, there was resistance touching off violence and rioting ensued. Buildings in Mengo were set on fire, and houses of certain unpopular chiefs also got burned in the rural areas. Normal governance broke down; and the situation went out of control. A state of emergency was declared, and both the Bataka Party and Farmers Union were banned.

Following the ban of Uganda African Farmers Union in 1949, Musazi next organized the Federation of Partnerships of Uganda African Farmers (F.P.U.A.F.) in 1950. The "partners" registered at the Registry of Companies and Business Names were twenty men described as farmers. These included I.K. Musazi, Peter Sonko, George Lwanga, Erieza Bwete and others who had been prominent in the 1949 riots, Bataka Party or UAFU.

The Federation had links with Fenner Brockaway, the British Labor Party liberal M.P. and enjoyed the warm support of the Congress of the Peoples against Imperialism. Unlike its predecessor, the UAFU, which was virtually limited to Buganda, the Federation was spread in most parts of eastern and northern Uganda.

The Federation received immense technical assistance from foreign co-operators, and volunteers suggested by Brockaway were active in Uganda working for F.P.U.A.F. Among such volunteers was an American, Dr. George Shepherd who Musazi had met in London. Dr. Shepherd was an idealist whose strong sympathy with the poor and oppressed had been shaped when, as a young boy, he lived with his missionary parents in China.

UNC formation

The arrival of Dr. Shepherd in Uganda in 1951 injected into the Federation very crucial elements in its management and eventual transformation into a political organization, the Uganda National Congress, the following year. Not only did he bring in badly needed management skills, he brought in political insight as well.

There is evidence that he was a key catalyst in getting Musazi launch the Uganda National Congress (UNC). Dr. Shepherd himself was to write: "I soon decided that it was important, both for the welfare of the people of Uganda and the co-operative movement that a political party be launched. This would take the pressure off the Federation of Farmers to be a political unit itself. And it would bring into the field an organization that would openly deal in the political issues, which after all were the decisive ones."

The other source of the germ of the formation of UNC was a group of radical political activists who discussed the idea of the formation of an anti-colonial movement with Musazi in London. One of these radicals, Fenner Brockway was to write:

"It is quite possible of course that Musazi thought of establishing Congress after the riots of 1949, but I don't think it took a very concrete form in his mind before the discussion which we had in London. I would not claim to be the author of the idea but certainly it was discussed by George Padmore, Dr. Leon Szur and myself. We urged Musazi strongly to establish a movement of this character and Dr. Szur particularly was responsible for insisting that it should be of an inter-racial nature.

"For this reason it was called the Uganda National Congress rather than Uganda African Congress. In practice, I don't think Indians or Europeans have joined but Musazi agreed that membership should not be limited to Africans in the hope of bringing in sympathizers of other races."

In the absence of sizable participation of the Asians and Europeans, the anti-colonial movement led by Musazi consisted of essentially two tendencies: the ambivalent nationalism typified and led by Musazi, and the true nationalism yet unorganized and leaderless.

In his endeavors to constitute a political organization, due to his ambivalence, Musazi first approached a respected Muganda chief whom he thought had the appropriate stature and qualities to lead the movement. When this chief refused, and not discouraged from his search for an appropriate Muganda of stature to provide leadership, Musazi next approached Kabaka Mutesa (sic) himself, who also turned him down.

Reluctance to participate in a nation-wide anti-colonial movement did not limit itself to the elites of Buganda -- it pervaded the Ganda masses as a whole. Not only did the Baganda believe their interests were being catered for within the 1900 Agreement, but given the feudal character of their society, all political leadership, thought and organization was taken to repose in the Kabaka. There was no way a true national movement would make headway in the Buganda of those days.

Dr George Shepherd did observe: "The Uganda National Congress might have died at birth if it had not been for the interest which was shown in it by several leaders from tribes other than Buganda." And so it was from leading chiefs and elders of Lango, Teso and Toro that Musazi found enthusiastic support for the formation of an anti-colonial movement, the UNC, launched on March 2, 1952.

The following year, Buganda got engulfed in a political crisis which climaxed with the deportation of Kabaka Mutesa. Although the Baganda were averse to political parties, they found no other avenue through which to channel their demands on the return of the Kabaka other than the UNC. They therefore joined the UNC in droves. At one time during this crisis the UNC membership numbered around 50,000. As a result Musazi got very active in demanding the return of the Kabaka.

Having played an important role during the Kabaka crisis, after the return of the Kabaka, UNC found itself

hamstrung by its inability to operate freely in Buganda. There was increasing enstrangement between the UNC leadership and the leadership of Buganda. While the Buganda establishment was hostile to the Legislative Council, UNC thought this was the only politically meaningful place to conduct business. While the Buganda establishment boycotted the Legislative Council, UNC took up the seats. This did not augur well with the Buganda establishment; in fact some Baganda began treating UNC as a traitor to Buganda.

After the return of the Kabaka, Musazi's political career began going downhill. The anti-colonial struggle had moved to a new phase and Musazi's abilities were not quite corresponding with this phase. As a result dissatisfaction with Musazi's leadership began to be felt. David Apter tells us one member

In 1957 there was a split over the question of Musazi's leadership and a short-lived political party called United Congress Party was formed. Those who split and formed this party were led by the younger members of the UNC who were generally more educated. These included men like Senteza Kajubi who had done post-graduate work at Chicago and Erisa Kironda who had read English and Anthropology at Cambridge.

UNC office in Cairo

Musazi's leadership was to be tested again in 1958. This was over the issue of the UNC office in Cairo. This office did propaganda work with Radio Cairo, and acted as a link between the anti-colonial movement in Uganda and the democratic forces in the anti-imperialist world. The merits of this office were disputed, and the UNC was to seriously split over this disagreement.

A section of the membership of UNC led by Musazi felt that the Cairo office was not only a means of trading "the imperialism of one country for that of another, especially a country (meaning Egypt) that had for 2500 years controlled the whole Nile Valley, but also communism."

The other section of UNC, consisting of elements younger than Musazi, but with greater exposure to the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles elsewhere, not only believed in maintaining contacts with the anti-imperialist world, but desired a more radical nationalist movement of the mobilizing type, striking firmly for a united Uganda while attacking the parochialism of the Lukiiko and Baganda.

The contention between these two political lines came to a head on January 12, 1959. The previous month three senior members of the UNC (Abu Mayanja, Jolly Joe Kiwanuka, and Dr. Kanunka) had attended the Pan-African Congress in Accra, Ghana. They had participated in passing resolutions which among other things, recommended that "those African traditional institutions whether political, social or economic which clearly have shown their reactionary character and the sordid support of colonialism be condemned."

Returning from Accra via Cairo, where they called at the controversial office, Kiwanuka defended the Cairo office and identified the real issue at stake: "Uganda cannot remain an island in a sea of Pan-African and universal nationalism. Our establishment of a national office in Cairo has marked a great era in our struggle. It has broken the chains of isolation, and focused world attention on the seriousness of

the Uganda people in our unshakable upsurge for freedom."

To Musazi, that was sacrilege which could not be tolerated in Congress. He proceeded to expel some six [J.W. Kiwanuka (Chairman), B. Kununka (Secretary-General), E. Otema Alimadi, Abu Mayanja, John Kale, and Paul Sengendo (President of Youth Organization)] of the most significant officials of the UNC who supported the Cairo office.

The response of the six and their political line did not take long to come: at the Annual Delegates Conference held on January 12, 1959, Ignatius Musazi, President of UNC, was expelled from the Congress and Apollo Milton Obote elected to replace him.

The conference also went on to endorse all the resolutions taken at the Accra Conference. The significance of these events are succinctly captured by David Apter's observation: "the old Congress ended . . . Congress had now entered the Pan-African phase of nationalism." From then on too, the non-Ganda joined UNC in large numbers; "formerly under Ganda leadership, it made little headway."

After this, Ignatius Musazi's long political career essentially ended.