

Symbolism in Stone: Creators, Meanings and Social Memory of Public Monuments in Kisoro Municipality

Bosco Mubangizi¹; William Kayamba²

¹*Kabale University, P. O. Box 317, Kabale, Uganda

²Department of Applied Design and Fine Art, Kabale University, P. O. Box 317, Kabale, Uganda

¹ORCID ID; <https://orcid.org/0009-7220-474X>

Publication Date: 2026/09/23

Abstract:

➤ Purpose:

This study sought to establish the role of public monuments in promoting cultural identity and social memory in Kisoro Municipality. Specifically, the research identified public monuments in the Municipality, established who made them and where they were made, and assessed the symbolism, meanings and contributions of monuments to memory.

➤ Methodology:

The study adopted a qualitative research design. In the process of critical documentary review, field observation and interviews were done to discover monuments' stories. The research selected monuments, municipal authorities, cultural leaders, monument makers and community members through purposive sampling. The analysis of qualitative information followed thematic analysis, while secondary literature on public monuments, cultural heritage, symbolism and collective memory provided the theoretical framework for the research.

➤ Findings:

The research found that monuments represent local history, culture, heroes, and community belonging in Kisoro Municipality. The monuments' symbolism revealed the themes of cultural identity, memory, and community belonging. Moreover, the study discovered that the meaning of monuments and their stories can change over time depending on the audience and that public places provide a venue for negotiating shared understandings of the past and cultural values.

➤ Limitations:

The research focused on public monuments in Kisoro Municipality and therefore its findings may not be generalizable to other Ugandan Municipalities in understanding the roles played by monuments and their meanings.

➤ Contribution:

This article provides a benchmark on Public Monuments in Ugandan Society by establishing monuments as carriers of cultural values through which communities transmit, negotiate and remember social memory. Additionally, the study contributes to debates on cultural heritage by providing data on monuments' symbolism, meanings and memory functions.

Keywords: Public Monuments; Symbolism; Cultural Identity; Social Memory; Community Belonging.

How to Cite: Bosco Mubangizi; William Kayamba (2026) Symbolism in Stone: Creators, Meanings and Social Memory of Public Monuments in Kisoro Municipality. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 11(9), 986-996. <https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26sep496>

I. INTRODUCTION

Public monuments hold a peculiar place in contemporary heritages as they actualize historical experience in spatial and material form. Monuments are

objects, but their very nature is not exhausted by their materiality. One can be made of concrete, granite, wood, or any other material, but their cultural significance is determined by the particular histories, values, identities, and memories that are invested in them and actualized through

them. The recent African scholarship problematizes the notion of monuments as fixed objects because of their ability to “store” histories (Sanni and Phiri, 2024). This perspective is particularly interesting because it implies that a monument can be more than an artifact, a creative expression, or a medium for storing information it can be viewed as a document, a political statement, and a stage for engaging with history and reconciling with the past. Put differently, the physical form of the monument in many ways determines its role as a facilitator of collective memory.

Monuments, public space, and cultural heritage present a unique configuration for studying the relationships between people and history. This is because any public space is a mediator of discourse, which means that the placement and visibility of a monument shape the historical message that it conveys. The recent South African research highlights the importance of such considerations as the visibility of monuments and their accessibility to the public (Mukwidigwi et al., 2023). For example, a monument in the center of the city will have a different history-preserving function compared to a monument in the temple precinct, the market, or the university. Thus, monuments are documents of history not only in the content of their meaning but also in their spatial context.

At the same time, African monuments have been the subject of extensive theoretical debate in recent years. The reason for this is the very specific role of monuments in colonial and post-colonial histories, which are inextricably linked with the discourse of decolonization. Sanni and Phiri (2024) argue that African monuments are living archives that need to be read as texts because their histories are intertwined with the colonial and post-colonial politics of power. This research has shown that these objects often combine multiple functions, from storing historical information to shaping the colonial landscape. According to Labadi (2023), African colonial statues therefore have multiple layers of heritage value because their history is related to both colonial and post-colonial society, and their meanings change depending on the discourse in which they are discussed. In other words, African monuments are complex cultural-historical constructs that need to be contextualized when studying memory.

Contextualization is key to understanding these objects today because in many African societies, monuments have historically been linked to local identity and memory. Colonial governments invested heavily in developing a colonial cultural-historical consciousness through such means as erecting statues and naming cities and towns after colonial leaders. Therefore, the study of monuments and their impact on memory in post-colonial societies is inherently linked with the politicization of history. The current research on monuments in Southern Africa highlights the growing public awareness of the role of monuments in shaping memory and the ensuing debates about identity and belonging (Fubah et al., 2024; Magadzike, 2024). This implies that these objects are now part of a larger historical discourse that must be better understood.

While colonial statues and public monuments certainly deserve attention, it is important not to overlook the local and national histories reflected in the objects. Indeed, a focus on grand structures and national ideas can overshadow the existence of local monuments that have their own histories, values, and meanings. Cruz’s (2022) research on the local and national heritage of Nwadjahane in southern Mozambique is an illustration of the fact that communities can be united around local cultural-historical values. This study demonstrated how the residents of the district identified with local heritage, negotiated its meanings, and expressed this memory as a unique cultural tradition. This is a compelling example of the importance of researching local monuments since these objects and their associated cultural practices ground people in their history and connect them to a place. Thus, it is important to study both local and national monuments, as each has its role in shaping the cultural memory of a region and a community.

Uganda, as a country with a wide range of natural, cultural, and historical resources, has a rich array of objects of historical and cultural value. The country has developed an integrated approach to preserving its natural, cultural, and historical assets under the Museums and Monuments Act, 2023, which emphasizes the importance of research, documentation, and dissemination. In particular, this law requires taking into account local cultures when studying and preserving Uganda’s cultural and historical heritage. It also underscores the importance of promoting and sharing knowledge about cultural heritage values and ensuring public access to cultural and natural resources and their study for posterity (Republic of Uganda, 2023). It follows that local monuments are not only important but their study and documentation can serve to promote and preserve local cultural values and historical memory.

Kisoro Municipality is located in the southwestern part of the country and is known for its cultural and historical heritage. It is a territory where different peoples and cultures live side by side, and where cultural memory is formed within the framework of local history as well as through interactions with other cultures, such as religion and tourism. The city of Kisoro is part of this cultural region as well as the natural one, as there are many reserves and natural landmarks in this territory. The most famous of them is Lake Mutanda, which is part of the Virunga ecosystem, while the monument complex known as Ruganzu’s Footsteps, which is also part of Uganda’s heritage, is located in the Kisoro district (Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, 2015). Finally, there are local cultural-historical treasures connected with the history of the Batwa people, who have suffered from deforestation but preserved their cultural memory in their music and oral history (Labadi, 2023). So, when viewed from a local historical and cultural studies perspective, Kisoro District offers many interesting topics for investigation.

The study of monuments as objects helps to understand the history and culture of the region, as well as its inhabitants’ local memory. Moreover, every monument is a unique object that reflects not only the history and memory of the people but also their present. Different authors have various

approaches to studying monuments, while emphasizing their role in preserving historical and cultural values. Today, African monuments are actively discussed in connection with colonial history, which shapes the discourse of decolonization and influences people's perceptions of their history and themselves. This phenomenon is not specific to Uganda, as evidenced by the fact that the study of monuments and their impact on memory is becoming an important topic not only in Uganda but also in other African countries. Such research can be useful in many ways, as monuments play a major role in historical and cultural studies. However, until recently, local monuments were not widely discussed in either general academic or local public discourse.

Therefore, the current study examines monuments as objects that reflect the cultural and historical values and local memory of the people. Thus, this article focuses on understanding monuments as reflections of culture and history and their importance for the identity of the local community. More specifically, this article attempts to answer the following question: How do monuments reflect and shape local memory?

Thus, the problem of this study is the lack of documented information on local monuments, their historical significance, and the impact of local memory on them. The purpose of this study is to examine public monuments in Kisoro by identifying their creators and locations, analyzing the meaning and symbolism, and determining the significance of monuments for the cultural identity and local memory of the community. The author hopes that this research can become the basis for further studies of local cultural and historical values and contribute to a broader cultural and historical discourse on the local level.

This research focuses on examining monuments in Kisoro as reflections of local memory and cultural-historical values. Therefore, this article will attempt to answer the following questions: Who created monuments? Where are monuments located? What messages did the creators want to convey? What symbolism is used? What do the locals see in these objects? What role do these objects play in cultural memory?

➤ *Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical basis of this study is formed by the claim that monuments are material-spatial-social constructs through which communities write the past into the present. Being a place of cultural identity, Kisoro Municipality provides a habitat for cultural heritages that are determined by the interaction of place, history, community, and urbanity. This implies that monuments are materialisations of memory that articulate the relationships between people and place. Therefore, this study is guided by theoretical perspectives that focus on memory, particularly collective memory, and cultural memory.

Collective Memory Theory provides an analytical framework for understanding how and why monuments are made and used in society. The main idea of this theory is that memory is a social phenomenon that emerges through

interactions between individuals and is negotiated and institutionalised in social relationships. Contemporary studies of collective memory have revealed its role in shaping social identities and the sense of belonging, as well as its potential to motivate individuals and communities to action (Bluck et al., 2022). For this study, Collective Memory Theory is useful in understanding the role of monuments in society. The theory's basic premise is that memory is not a personal and internal state but a social and relational process. This means that to understand the role of a monument, one should study the social relationships in which it is embedded. For example, a monument only becomes a carrier of memory when people attribute certain meanings to it. Therefore, the analysis of monuments should focus on social memories and how they are negotiated, institutionalised, performed, and remembered in society.

This approach is especially relevant to the study of monuments in Kisoro Municipality because their meanings can be negotiated and reinterpreted through conversations, oral history, commemorative practices, family histories, and other cultural practices. This implies that while a monument's materiality can provide some clues about its meaning, its memory function always depends on social factors. For example, the same object can serve as a reminder of a particular historical event for some people while being of little significance to others. At the same time, a relatively insignificant object can become an important part of social memory if it is endowed with symbolic meaning. Therefore, when studying monuments, one should pay attention to their role in social memory and ask what social memories they articulate, how these memories are performed, and what roles monuments play in these performances.

The African Memory Studies literature provides a useful basis for understanding the role of monuments in Kisoro Municipality. Mwambari's (2021) analysis of memory practices in Northern Uganda is a useful starting point for understanding how and why monuments are used in society. This study reveals memory's complexity and multiplicity, as well as the various roles that memory markers can play in society. This implies that when examining monuments, one should pay attention to the specificities of local memory cultures and ask how the memories embodied in monuments relate to local histories and identities. Similarly, Mwambari (2021) shows that in post-conflict societies such as Northern Uganda, memory is negotiated in multiple arenas at different levels. This suggests that to understand the role of monuments in Kisoro Municipality, one should study the social relationships in which they are embedded at multiple levels and analyse how these relationships shape the meaning of these objects.

Another important aspect of Collective Memory Theory is its focus on the role of monuments in shaping social identities. Collective memory is selective in that it focuses on certain events, people, and aspects of history while ignoring others. This implies that monuments are not neutral markers of history but memory selectors that highlight specific events and people while excluding others. Therefore, when analysing monuments, one should pay attention to the role

they play in shaping collective identities and ask whose memory is embedded in monuments and what roles these memories play in collective identity formation. This perspective is useful in analysing the role of monuments in Kisoro Municipality because it highlights the importance of studying not only what is remembered but also what is forgotten and the role of such memories and forgetting in identity formation. The memory studies literature shows that forgetting plays an important role in collective memory formation, and African studies scholars have demonstrated that the politics of memory are especially salient in African postcolonial societies (Sanni & Phiri, 2024). Therefore, the study of monuments in Kisoro Municipality should also focus on unmarked memories, that is, memories that are not articulated through monuments.

The second theoretical framework that guides this study is Cultural Memory Theory. This theory helps understand how memory is stored, retrieved, and represented in society. Assmann's (2010) distinction between communicative and cultural memory is especially informative in this regard. According to this distinction, communicative memory is negotiated and institutionalised in the present while cultural memory is stored and retrieved through cultural representations such as texts, materialisations, rituals, and symbols. Therefore, cultural memory helps society navigate its history and shape its sense of self by storing and representing past memories in the present. This theory is useful in analysing monuments because it highlights their role in representing and storing cultural memories. In other words, monuments serve as storage sites for cultural memories, and their analysis can provide insights into what memories are deemed worthy of being stored and represented by a society. This perspective is especially relevant to the study of monuments in Kisoro Municipality because it focuses on their role in cultural memory formation.

African Memory Studies scholars have demonstrated that cultural memory is negotiated and represented in diverse ways in African societies. For example, Temple's (2021) analysis of Africana cultural-memory practices highlights the importance of cultural forms in shaping African cultural memory. This study shows that African cultural memory is dynamic and negotiated through various forms such as discourse, performance, and material culture. Similarly, Amponsah's (2023) analysis of shared cultural memory shows that it plays an important role in collective identity formation. This study highlights the role of community members in negotiating cultural memories and representing them through various cultural forms. Therefore, when analysing monuments, one should pay attention to the role they play in representing cultural memories and ask what cultural memories are embedded in these objects and how these memories are represented.

Cultural Memory Theory also helps analyse monuments' role in collective identity formation. The analysis of monuments as memory selectors shows that they play an important role in shaping collective identities by representing specific cultural memories. Therefore, when analysing monuments, one should pay attention to the role

they play in collective identity formation. This perspective is especially relevant to the analysis of monuments in Kisoro Municipality because it focuses on their role in collective identity formation and highlights the importance of studying local memory practices. Such practices can provide valuable insights into the ways in which local communities negotiate their identities through monuments. For example, local residents may interpret the same monument in different ways, articulating diverse cultural memories through it. Therefore, the study of monuments in Kisoro Municipality should focus on the analysis of their role in collective identity formation and pay attention to the diverse ways in which local residents engage with these objects.

African Memory Studies literature provides an important basis for analysing monuments' role in shaping place-conscious memories. For example, Lloyd's (2022) analysis of sites of memory in post-apartheid South Africa shows that these sites are negotiated in diverse ways in local communities. This study demonstrates that when analysing monuments, one should pay attention to the diverse ways in which local residents engage with them. This perspective is useful in analysing monuments in Kisoro Municipality because it highlights the importance of studying these objects in their local contexts and analysing the diverse roles they play in local communities. For example, the same monument can serve as a reminder of a particular historical event for some residents while being of little significance to others. At the same time, monuments can serve as sites of memory for local residents, accumulating cultural memories in a particular place. Therefore, when analysing monuments, one should pay attention to their role in shaping place-conscious memories and study these objects in their local contexts.

The analysis of monuments as sites of memory negotiation can also reveal the ways in which these objects participate in local power struggles. For example, different groups may compete to inscribe their memories on a particular monument or employ diverse strategies to undermine the significance of a monument that promotes the memories of a particular group. This perspective is useful in analysing monuments in Kisoro Municipality because it focuses on the ways in which these objects are used to negotiate power between different groups. For example, local residents may use monuments to negotiate their relationships with each other, articulating diverse memories through these objects. Therefore, the study of monuments in Kisoro Municipality should focus on analysing these objects as sites of memory negotiation and pay attention to the diverse ways in which local residents engage with them.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design to understand public monuments as material, symbolic, and socially constructed cultural heritages in Kisoro Municipality. The choice of a qualitative approach was determined by the research questions seeking to establish not only what and where the monuments are but also how their creators, forms, symbols, histories, and meanings were interpreted by various groups of people who interacted with

them. Qualitative research is considered appropriate when the objective is to explore phenomena that are difficult to quantify (Knott et al., 2022). This study set out to explain cultural heritages rather than measure them. Recent literature on qualitative methodologies highlights the ability of this approach better reflect participants' views within their social contexts (Knott et al., 2022). Therefore, the qualitative design was considered appropriate to understand monuments' meanings and the social realities around them.

The study was designed as a qualitative case study of Kisoro Municipality. The choice of a case study design was determined by the objectives of investigating the monuments within the wider society in which they existed rather than attempt to generalize findings to a larger population. Monuments are placed in their cultural and spatial settings to generate findings that are contextualized and therefore more informative for understanding what and how monuments are in Kisoro Municipality. African cultural heritages are recognized as existing in relationship with particular communities as well as the wider environment (Oladeji et al., 2022). Therefore, using a case study design enabled investigation of the connections between monuments and the communities in which they existed as well as focus on the unique characteristics of this setting.

The study used a combination of methods in its conduct including critical document review, field observation, and semi-structured interviews. The decision to combine different methods was informed by the need to produce richer findings that address the research questions from varying perspectives. The methods complemented each other in generating findings on monuments' meanings, histories, and settings. Document review enabled exploration of the documentary evidence on monuments while field observation supplemented this information with visual data. Interviews then helped interpret the reviewed documents and observed realities by eliciting participants' views and experiences. In qualitative research, the use of multiple methods enhances reliability by clarifying concepts and providing extensive details on the phenomenon under investigation (Schwandt et al., 2023). Therefore, the combination of documents, observations, and interviews enabled an in-depth investigation of monuments as cultural heritages.

The documentary review included a search of publicly available documents, both printed and digital, to identify all materials relevant to the topic. Relevant documents included reports, articles, books, meeting records, advertisements, plaques, and monuments' records. The review aimed to locate materials that shed light on the monuments' histories, contexts, and meanings. However, documents were not used as definitive answers or sources of absolute truth but rather as a resource for interpreting the findings in the broader historical and cultural contexts. Monuments' documents were often biased, subjective, or simply incomplete descriptions of their intended meanings and historical settings. Therefore, documents served as one source of evidence that was supplemented by other lines of inquiry including observation and interviews to build a comprehensive picture of monuments as cultural heritages.

Field observation focused on publicly accessible monuments to generate insights into their forms, materials, inscriptions, imagery, spatial settings, and other characteristics. Visual inspection of the monuments aimed to note their spatial relations, accessibilities, visibility, conditions, and roles in the landscape and the communities in which they existed. Particular attention was paid to the relationships between monuments and their settings since these aspects contributed to the meaning of the monuments. Observation notes were used to record observations and questions that arose during field visits. The methodology of using field notes enabled the investigation to be both descriptive and analytical. While the researcher could record factual observations, they could also pursue ideas and concerns that arose during the inspections. Documenting both the obvious and tentative thoughts was critical for analyzing monuments as cultural heritages since their meanings and significance were often interpreted differently by different people.

The final method used in the study was semi-structured interviews. Interviews were the primary source of data since the study sought to investigate how various groups of people interpreted monuments. The study used a purposive sampling strategy to select participants based on their role in relation to the monuments, the knowledge they possessed about them, and the information they could provide regarding their meanings, contexts, and histories. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because the study did not have the capacity to interview everyone in the larger population who qualified. Therefore, the selection criteria focused on factors such as the research questions, the population of interest, and the study's objectives. This approach is typical of qualitative research, which often uses purposive sampling to ensure that the selected participants will be able to contribute significantly to addressing the research questions by virtue of their expertise, involvement, or personal experiences. In recent years, qualitative researchers have been emphasizing the need for purposive sampling to generate findings that are informative and meaningful to a specific target population (Schwandt et al., 2023).

The interviews followed a semi-structured format that enabled flexibility while still maintaining a general focus. A semi-structured format was considered appropriate because it allowed participants to provide a wide range of responses depending on their backgrounds and experiences. The flexibility was critical for exploring topics that could not always be predicted in advance. The interviews included open-ended questions asking participants to describe their backgrounds, level of involvement with the monuments, their interpretations of the monuments' meanings and significance, and the importance of their preservation. Within this general structure, participants were able to offer unique insights depending on their areas of specialization, cultural backgrounds, and personal experiences. This approach enabled the investigation to capture the different perspectives that various groups of people brought to the discussion of the monuments as cultural heritages.

The questions also prompted participants to describe the changes they had witnessed in monuments' meanings over time. This information was useful for examining the dynamic nature of cultural heritages and the factors that contributed to these transformations. Finally, participants provided their views and recommendations on advancing monuments' significance to contemporary society. This information was helpful in determining the potential ways in which monuments could be leveraged to promote cultural heritage values. Overall, the study aimed to elicit participants' interpretations of the monuments as cultural heritages while still allowing them to pursue their own ideas.

Wherever possible, the interviews were conducted in local languages to ensure that the participants felt comfortable communicating their views. However, every effort was made to maintain the meaning of particular phrases and concepts during the translation process. Notably, some indigenous terms could not always be captured by their translations. Therefore, some nuances might have been lost in the interpretation process. Nevertheless, the investigator was able to clarify the meanings of certain terms and ensure that the concepts were understood correctly.

The qualitative data collected through interviews were analyzed thematically. The initial step in data analysis involved familiarization with the data and the identification of initial themes. This involved reading through the transcripts and notes several times before engaging in coding by highlighting, tagging, or labeling the information with thematic labels. In the first stages, themes were developed by identifying patterns and recurring topics in the data. However, later coding emphasized conceptual analysis, which involved interpreting the information in terms of its meaning and significance to the research questions.

The codebook included such themes as creators, commemoration, symbolism, histories, locations, identity, belonging, memory, and intergenerational transmission, among others. Related themes were then grouped together to form more comprehensive topics that could be used to analyze the data. Thematic analysis was appropriate for this study since it enabled the examination of qualitative data in terms of patterns that emerged naturally from the information rather than imposing categories from the start. The final set of themes was informed by a consideration of each piece of data in terms of its contribution to the research questions. Contemporary approaches to thematic analysis emphasize the need for transparent and reflexive practices that enable researchers to engage critically with their data to highlight the findings that are both meaningful and relevant to their investigations (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The investigator combined both deductive and inductive approaches to thematic analysis. The deductive approach was informed by the existing theoretical background and the research questions that the study sought to respond to. The inductive approach, on the other hand, was used to allow themes to emerge from the data. This combination enabled a balance between the investigator's theoretical background and the data to generate themes that

were both relevant and grounded in the research questions. In recent years, thematic analyses have emphasized the importance of a flexible approach that enables investigators to be responsive to the data while still remaining aware of their theoretical backgrounds and the research questions they seek to address (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Trustworthiness was ensured through various strategies including extensive fieldwork, detailed note-taking, systematic analysis of the findings, and reflexivity. Field notes, for example, enabled recording of observations and reflections that could later be used to verify findings. Analysis of the findings involved identifying patterns and themes that could be used to formulate conclusions and recommendations. Reflexivity ensured that the investigator's assumptions and worldviews were taken into account when interpreting the findings. This was particularly important in a study that involved cultural heritages and focused on the interactions between monuments and the communities. The investigator remained sensitive to the participants' voices as well as their perspectives when presenting the findings. These strategies enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative research by ensuring credibility, auditability, and confirmability of findings (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The methodology that I have selected for my study was appropriate for investigating cultural heritages because it allowed a critical exploration of this multifaceted phenomenon. The approach was also relevant for examining monuments' dual roles as objects with material presence and carriers of intangible cultural values. By focusing on people's perspectives, the study was able to emphasize the diverse ways in which monuments shaped their cultures, identities, and histories. This study's approach is similar to recent qualitative methodologies that recognize the importance of using mixed methods to generate richer findings and obtain multiple perspectives on the research questions. While my study draws from these broader approaches, it is also different in that it focuses specifically on the relationship between monuments and their cultural heritages.

III. FINDINGS

The findings can be organised according to the three objectives of the study, including identifying public monuments in the area, determining their creators and location, as well as interpreting the symbols and meanings associated with them. The analysis examines the ways in which they embody cultural identities and social memories of the community, as well as the reasons for choosing specific locations for their placement. The study considers monuments as material texts whose meaning emerges from the interplay between their form, location, history, and the perceptions of different audiences in order to better understand their role in local heritages and memory landscapes. This approach fits with the broader trends in African studies which have sought to overcome the dichotomy between "official" and "popular" understandings of heritage, promoting the need to document and study the varied practices and knowledge of local communities (Chirikure et al., 2021; Abungu & Ndoro, 2023). Uganda's

Museums and Monuments Act, 2023 also acknowledges the importance of adopting a wide perspective on heritage, encompassing both tangible and intangible elements, while ensuring the value of cultural heritage resources is determined through consultation and by taking into account cultural values and indigenous knowledge.

As this study focuses on the local monuments, the table below collates; names, creators, dates, or quotations. Indeed, the table reflect the findings from the study. This includes such information as the name of the monument, its location, creator (where known), date of creation, and symbolism (where known).

Table 1 Collates; Names, Creators, Dates, or Quotations

Monument	Location	Creator	Date	Material	Commemorated person/event	Condition
A Gorrilla monument with a juvenile	Kisoro Municipality/Entrance	Mubangizi Bosco. Kabale University Student	15/Oct/2025	Cement,stone & metal	[Municipality Symbolism]	Good
Kigezi Monument	Nyakabande Kigezi Hill	Makerere University Students	2012	Cement	Kigezi Monument first erected in 1900(Borders & Partition Site)	Poor
Gorrilla Monument	Kisoro roundabout	Dickson Tuyisenge	25 /Aug/2014	Cement	Peter Bitangaro(The first Mayor of Kisoro Town Council).Commissioned by Hon.Janet Museven	Fair
Statue of Virgin Mary	Gisoro Catholic Church.Kisoro Municipality	Local Artists	1999	Cement	Catholics venerate (Honour & Respect)	Good
Gorrilla sculpture Monument	Kisoro Travellers Junction	Dian Fossey	Unknown	Cement & Metal	Gorrilla Tourism in kisoro District	Fair
Tomb Monument	Seseme Cathedral Kisoro Municipality	Local Artists	27/Dec/2001	Cement & Terazo	Late Bishop Ernest Munyambazi Shalita	Good

The inventory highlights an essential characteristic of monumentality: Kisoro's monuments are not necessarily large-scale artefacts. The cultural significance attributed to an object depends not on its scale, age or artistic appeal but rather on the meaning bestowed on it by society and its association with specific histories, places and values. This finding aligns with contemporary African scholarship that conceptualises heritage significance in terms of social and intangible dimensions, complementing the material analyses (Mashauri, 2022). For instance, the Tanzanian study explores community engagement with rock art heritage, arguing that people's perspectives are critical in understanding how this cultural expression connects societies to the past, present and future.

The analysis of creators and institutional contexts suggests that monuments should be understood as relational artifacts. There are three interconnecting stages of this process: commissioning, creating and community reception. In the first stage, a particular entity (individual, institution or community) identifies the need to commemorate a specific history. The second step entails the creator's agency in interpreting this information and translating it into a tangible form. Finally, the community reads and reinterprets the monument, adding meaning. This finding is critical in that it problematises the assumption that a monument's significance is derived solely from the creator's intentions, which may not always resonate with the people who view it.

The finding also resonates with the African scholarship problematising the top-down approach to heritage management and interpretation. Chirikure et al. (2021) note that African heritagescape has historically been dominated by colonial archaeology and conservation ethos, limiting community agency in determining the significance of their cultural expressions (Springer). This finding adds to similar calls for more nuanced interpretations of African monuments that recognise the importance of local communities in articulating the meanings of their cultural heritages (Abungu & Ndoro, 2023). (Springer)

Indeed, the significance of the Kisoro monuments rests with their symbolism: the form and content convey cultural meanings without requiring extensive explanation. Any particular shape, pose, detail or location may serve as a point of interpretation, providing insight into the monument's significance. In effect, the object becomes a pictorial representation and a vehicle of cultural argument. For instance, the image of a human figure may be used to evoke historical values associated with leadership, heroism or sacrifice, depending on the context and accompanying elements. Similarly, an inscription may turn the monument into a proclamation of intent, with the wording dictating the message. On the other hand, the lack of inscription may prompt oral traditions or commentaries, with the monument serving as a reminder of a particular history.

Materials also play a role in conveying the intended meanings. By their nature and location, monuments may suggest permanence and endurance, reinforcing the idea that the commemorated history is valuable and needs to be remembered. In effect, bronze, concrete or any other durable material may act as a symbol of resistance against the passage of time. At the same time, the objects' physical nature may hinder community engagement with their meanings. This finding connects to the Ugandan heritage legislation, which mandates conservation authorities to consider cultural heritage's significance to communities in terms of intangible aspects, including indigenous knowledge, research and documentation needs, and broader community interests (ULII). In other words, the monuments' conservation will benefit from documenting and interpreting the meanings attributed to them by communities.

The analysis of location and spatiality produced another significant finding related to the monuments' ability to shape their contexts. When placed in a particular setting, they acquire additional meanings, interact with their environments and, consequently, transform them. In effect, the monument's location shapes the extent to which it will influence the space in terms of promoting specific values and ideas. This finding aligns with the South African study that also identified the spatial variable as connected to the opportunities for interaction and, by extension, the potential for creating shared meaning (Mukwidigwi et al., 2023). In Kisoro, contextualising the monuments' locations is key to understanding their significance. For example, a monument in a public space may serve a different purpose compared to a similar object in an urban setting. The former may help promote collective citizenship, whereas the latter may become an everyday part of the environment.

This finding connects to the African studies making the similar observations about the role of monuments in shaping collective memory. Particularly, the Tanzanian research notes that the residents' connections to their cultural heritage are derived from continuous engagement with it, which informs their values, attitudes and actions (Mashauri, 2022). In other words, the Kisoro monuments contribute to memory-making in exactly the same way, with their significance being intertwined with the stories and values that individuals attribute to them.

Finally, the study offers critical insights into the role of the monuments in reflecting the gaps in memory. In particular, the analysis indicates that these structures provide valuable commentary on which histories, people and events are remembered and which ones are overlooked. The evidence suggests that a municipal heritagescape can only support memory-making in that it highlights the specific figures, occurrences and values commemorated by these objects. As such, the analysis must be built around the discussion of what is remembered, as well as the ways in which the monuments support this aspect of cultural heritage.

The implications of these findings align with the African studies noting the challenges of engaging with the colonial legacy that continues to shape the continent's

approaches to cultural heritage. Chirikure et al. (2021) note that African heritagescape has been dominated by archaeology and conservation, with limited roles for local communities in defining the significance of their cultural expressions (Springer). This observation applies to the Kisoro monuments in that they reflect the colonial history of Uganda, with the government playing a key role in designating them as worthy of being remembered. In effect, the analysis of these artefacts offers a vital perspective on the ways in which African societies interact with their cultural heritage.

The evidence also highlights the importance of community involvement in cultural heritage management, which is particularly pertinent in the discussion of monuments' significance. Abungu & Ndoro (2023) note that African scholarship has begun to shift its focus from conservation to recognition of communities' roles in understanding the meanings of cultural heritagescape (Springer). In effect, the study of Kisoro monuments demonstrates how community knowledge enhances the interpretation of these artefacts and ensures that their importance is acknowledged by all population groups. This finding can be used to argue for a similar approach involving Ugandan communities in the discussion of public monuments as vital components of their cultural heritage.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that public monuments should be conceptualised in terms of their ability to serve as cultural texts and memory anchors. The analysis highlights their varied significance: while these artefacts enable individuals and communities to connect to specific histories, spaces and values, their role in culture transmission is complicated by the tendency to ignore them. Below is an example of how this evidence can be integrated into the discussion.

IV. DISCUSSION

The Kisoro findings contribute to the discussion on collective memory in African societies by providing a concrete example of how the social production of memory operates in practice. In line with the theoretical framework provided by Halbwachs's collective memory paradigm, the study's results demonstrate that the meaning of a monument is not intrinsic to its materiality but emerges through social negotiations. In other words, Kisoro's residents do not remember the people and events depicted by the monuments; rather, they remember them through these material symbols. By reiterating the memory of a specific person, event, or idea, a respondent actualizes the mnemonic function of a monument. As such, the Kisoro case helps advance the discussion on memory by illustrating how exactly monuments participate in the social production of the past.

The discussion on memory by illustrating how exactly monuments facilitate the perpetuation of memory. The Kisoro residents' ability to recall specific historical figures and events demonstrates that the monuments' primary mnemonic significance derives from their capacity to enable continuous social remembering. By engaging in discussions about the monuments and their meanings, Kisoro's residents actualize

the memory of the past people and events. As such, the study's findings add to the discussion by demonstrating that the commemorative role of monuments is not limited to their material presence but is embedded in the very process of social remembering. The Kisoro case also aligns with the recent African studies literature that conceptualizes material heritage as a processual phenomenon (Mashauri, 2022; Mukwidigwi et al., 2023).

In addition, the study's discussion on monuments by illustrating how exactly their symbolic meaning can be leveraged to advance social change. The Kisoro findings demonstrate that the monuments enable the local community to negotiate its collective identity. By recalling specific people, events, and places, the respondents actualized the monuments' role in constructing the community's shared identity. This observation aligns with the recent African studies literature that explores the ways in which material objects can be invested with symbolic meaning to advance various social, political, and cultural agendas (Labadi, 2023; Sanni & Phiri, 2024). As such, the study's findings also contribute to the discussion on monuments by illustrating how exactly their symbolic meaning can be leveraged to advance social change.

The discussion on memory also benefits from the Kisoro findings that demonstrate how exactly monuments can facilitate intergenerational memory transmission. The study's findings reveal that the Kisoro monuments enable the local community to remember its history. By engaging in social remembering and recounting the monuments' meanings, the respondents actualized the monuments' role in sustaining cultural memory. This observation aligns with the recent African studies literature that explores the ways in which material objects can participate in memory transmission processes (Mashauri, 2022; Mukwidigwi et al., 2023). As such, the study's findings also contribute to the discussion on memory by illustrating how exactly monuments can facilitate intergenerational memory transmission.

Further discussion on memory by illustrating how exactly monuments can sustain cultural memory even when the memory of specific events and people is no longer immediate. The study's findings demonstrate that the Kisoro monuments enable the local community to remember its general history. By recalling the people, events, and places associated with the monuments, the respondents actualized the monuments' role in enabling continuous social remembering. This observation aligns with Assmann's (2006) notion of cultural memory and its capacity to transcend time. As such, the study's findings also contribute to the discussion on memory by illustrating how exactly monuments can facilitate intergenerational memory transmission.

The discussion on material heritage also benefits from the Kisoro findings that reveal the ways in which monuments' mnemonic roles are dependent on their spatial contexts. The study's findings demonstrate that the Kisoro monuments can only trigger memory in certain respondents. The fact that the monuments' meanings were associated with Kisoro's general

history suggests that their mnemonic roles are dependent on the audience's ability to engage in social remembering. In other words, the monuments only participate in cultural memory transmission when certain respondents (elders) engage in social remembering. As such, the study's findings add to the discussion on material heritage by illustrating how exactly monuments can facilitate intergenerational memory transmission.

The discussion on monuments further benefits from the Kisoro findings that demonstrate how exactly their symbolic meaning can be leveraged to advance social change. The study's findings demonstrate that the Kisoro monuments enable the local community to negotiate its collective identity. By recalling specific people, events, and places, the respondents actualized the monuments' role in constructing the community's shared identity. This observation aligns with the recent African studies literature that explores the ways in which material objects can be invested with symbolic meaning to advance various social, political, and cultural agendas (Labadi, 2023; Sanni & Phiri, 2024). As such, the study's findings also contribute to the discussion on monuments by illustrating how exactly their symbolic meaning can be leveraged to advance social change.

The discussion on memory also benefits from the Kisoro findings that demonstrate how exactly monuments can facilitate intergenerational memory transmission. The study's findings reveal that the Kisoro monuments enable the local community to remember its history. By engaging in social remembering and recounting the monuments' meanings, the respondents actualized the monuments' role in sustaining cultural memory. This observation aligns with the recent African studies literature that explores the ways in which material objects can participate in memory transmission processes (Mashauri, 2022; Mukwidigwi et al., 2023). As such, the study's findings also contribute to the discussion on memory by illustrating how exactly monuments can facilitate intergenerational memory transmission.

The discussion demonstrate that the Kisoro monuments enable the local community to negotiate its collective identity. By recalling specific people, events, and places, the respondents actualized the monuments' role in constructing the community's shared identity. This observation aligns with the recent African studies literature that explores the ways in which material objects can be invested with symbolic meaning to advance various social, political, and cultural agendas (Labadi, 2023; Sanni & Phiri, 2024). As such, the study's findings also contribute to the discussion on monuments by illustrating how exactly their symbolic meaning can be leveraged to advance social change.

The discussion on memory also benefits from the Kisoro findings that demonstrate how exactly monuments can facilitate intergenerational memory transmission. The study's findings reveal that the Kisoro monuments enable the local community to remember its history. By engaging in social remembering and recounting the monuments' meanings, the respondents actualized the monuments' role in sustaining cultural memory. This observation aligns with the recent

African studies literature that explores the ways in which material objects can participate in memory transmission processes (Mashauri, 2022). As such, the study's findings also contribute to the discussion on memory by illustrating how exactly monuments can facilitate intergenerational memory transmission.

The discussion on memory further benefits from the Kisoro findings that demonstrate how exactly monuments can sustain cultural memory even when the memory of specific events and people is no longer immediate. The study's findings demonstrate that the Kisoro monuments enable the local community to remember its general history. By recalling the people, events, and places associated with the monuments, the respondents actualized the monuments' role in enabling continuous social remembering. This observation aligns with Assmann's (2006) notion of cultural memory and its capacity to transcend time. As such, the study's findings also contribute to the discussion on memory by illustrating how exactly monuments can facilitate intergenerational memory transmission.

The Kisoro findings further advance the discussion on material heritage by illustrating how exactly monuments can be invested with cultural significance. The study's findings demonstrate that the Kisoro monuments serve as memory triggers for all respondents. This suggests that the monuments have the potential to participate in cultural memory transmission. At the same time, the fact that only certain respondents could recall specific people, events, and places indicates that the monuments' mnemonic roles are dependent on their spatial contexts. In other words, the monuments only participate in cultural memory transmission when certain respondents (elders) engage in social remembering. As such, the study's findings add to the discussion on material heritage by illustrating how exactly monuments can facilitate intergenerational memory transmission.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I conclude my findings by stating that public monuments are not only tools used to remember past community events. In most cases, they represent cultural texts that are produced for commemoration purposes. Additionally, it can be asserted that monuments are produced as symbols, spaces, and sites of memory, where meaning is negotiated, shared, and disputed. As such, they play a significant role in facilitating memories' visibility within a given locality, allowing individuals, groups, and communities to remember and pass on the events being commemorated. It is also essential to understand how the subjects depicted on monuments and their histories are intertwined with those of a given community, as well as how they contribute to shaping public memory. Therefore, in addition to physical preservation, monuments' cultural significance should also be maintained and enhanced over time.

I recommend that Kisoro Municipality establishes a database to store information about the monuments, including their location, authors, year of establishment, materials,

subject matter, history, and current state. The data can then be used to develop appropriate maintenance and monument conservation frameworks that will benefit the residents of Kisoro Municipality. Information boards or plaques should also be developed at each monument site to provide details about its history and significance to the local community. The monuments can also be promoted as part of responsible cultural tourism while ensuring their conservation is not compromised.

Further research can be done in other Ugandan municipalities to generate comparative data at the level of gender, memory, and identity. It would also be interesting to digitize the documentation and photographs of monuments for ease of access and archival purposes.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Abungu, G. O., & Ndoro, W. (2023). *Cultural heritage management in Africa: The heritage of the colonized*. Routledge.
- [2]. Adu-Gyamfi, S. (2022). The politics of shared heritage: Contested histories and participatory memory work in the post-colonial urban landscape. In *The politics of shared heritage* (pp. 139–150). Springer.
- [3]. Amponsah, E.-L. (2023). Towards a Black cultural memory: Black consciousness and connectivity in the online-offline continuum. *African Diaspora*, 15(1), 75–99. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18725465-bja10034>
- [4]. Bluck, S., Alea, N., & Habermas, T. (2022). Collective memory and the social creation of identities: Linking the past with the present and future. In *Progress in brain research* (Vol. 274, pp. 167–176). Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.pbr.2022.07.002>
- [5]. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). Can I use TA? Should I use TA? Should I not use TA? Comparing reflexive thematic analysis and other pattern-based qualitative analytic approaches. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 21(1), 37–47. <https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12360>
- [6]. Chen, G., & Suneta, V. (2024). Design transformations in monuments and memorials as monumental buildings: New perspectives on the place-making model. *npj Heritage Science*, 12, Article 325. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s40494-024-01446-4>
- [7]. Cruz, M. D. (2022). Fractured landscapes and the politics of space: Remembrance and memory in Nwadjahane (Southern Mozambique). *Museum Anthropology*, 45(1), 57–71. <https://doi.org/10.1111/muan.12244>
- [8]. Fubah, M. A., Kuanda, C. J., & Ndinda, C. (2024). Decolonising the cultural landscape: Preserving historical statues in Tshwane, South Africa. *African Studies*, 82(3–4).
- [9]. Kiger, M. E., & Varpio, L. (2020). Thematic analysis of qualitative data: AMEE Guide No. 131. *Medical Teacher*, 42(8), 846–854. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2020.1755030>
- [10]. Knott, E., Rao, A. H., Summers, K., & Teeger, C. (2022). Interviews in the social sciences. *Nature*

- Reviews Methods Primers*, 2, Article 73. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43586-022-00150-6>
- [11]. Labadi, S. (2023). Colonial statues in post-colonial Africa: A multidimensional heritage. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 30(3), 318–331. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2023.2294738>
- [12]. Labadi, S. (2023). Colonial statues in post-colonial Africa: A multidimensional heritage. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 30(3), 318–331. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2023.2294738>
- [13]. Lloyd, J. (2022). Monuments and the sited struggles of memorialisation. *Space and Culture*, 25(2), 341–344. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331221990947>
- [14]. Mashauri, V. (2022). The philosophical dilemma of conserving the African heritage: A case study of the treatment of the Kondo Rock Art World Heritage Site in Tanzania. *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites*, 23(5–6), 373–390. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13505033.2022.2160074>
- [15]. Mashauri, V. (2022). The philosophical dilemma of conserving the African heritage: A case study of the treatment of the Kondo Rock Art World Heritage Site in Tanzania. *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites*, 23(5–6). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13505033.2022.2160074>
- [16]. Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities. (2015). *Uganda's cultural and heritage sites*. Government of Uganda
- [17]. Mukwidigwi, T., Naidu, M., Govender, S., & Membele, G. (2023). The spatial nexus of monuments, memorability and identity formation in Chatsworth and Durban Central, South Africa. *GeoJournal*, 88, 5643–5660. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-023-10934-2>
- [18]. Mwambari, D. (2021). Transcultural memory in post-conflict Northern Uganda war commemorations. *Africa Development*, 46(4). <https://doi.org/10.57054/ad.v46i4.1441>
- [19]. Oladeji, S. O., Grace, O., & Ayodeji, A. A. (2022). Community participation in conservation and management of cultural heritage resources in Yoruba ethnic group of South Western Nigeria. *SAGE Open*, 12(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221130987>
- [20]. Republic of Uganda. (2023). *Museums and Monuments Act, 2023*. Government of Uganda.
- [21]. Sacko, O. (2021). The involvement of local communities in the conservation process of earthen architecture in the Sahel-Sahara region: The case of Djenné, Mali. *Built Heritage*, 5, Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43238-021-00040-y>
- [22]. Sanni, J. S. (2020). The destruction of historical monuments and the danger of sanitising history. *Philosophia*, 49(3), 1187–1200.
- [23]. Sanni, J. S., & Phiri, M. Z. (Eds.). (2024). *Monuments and memory in Africa: Reflections on coloniality and decoloniality*. Routledge.
- [24]. Schwandt, H. M., McDougal, L., Thomas, J. C., & others. (2023). Analyzing fast and slow: Combining traditional and rapid qualitative analysis to meet multiple objectives of a complex transnational study. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 8, Article 961202. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2023.961202>
- [25]. Temple, C. N. (2021). Africana cultural memory in the Afro-European context. *Journal of Black Studies*, 52(4), 418–440. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934721999296>
- [26]. Viebach, J. (2020). Mediating ‘absence-presence’ at Rwanda's genocide memorials: Of care-taking, memory and proximity to the dead. *Critical African Studies*, 12(2), 237–269.
- [27]. Wutich, A., Beresford, M., SturtzSreetharan, C., Brewis, A., Trainer, S., Hardin, J., & others. (2021). Metatheme analysis: A qualitative method for cross-cultural research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211019907>
- [28]. Young, A. P. (2022). Dark tourism and Rwandan media industries: Promoting nation and the mythology of memory. *Tourist Studies*, 22(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687976221129643>