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## **Modern Kenyan Identity: Crafting a Nation Through Monuments**

**Abstract:** To define the identity of a modern African country, within the Eurocentric interpretive framework, imposes creative limits. Therefore, this is an insider's perspective of Kenyan identity. It begins with a summary of modernism as the underpinning philosophy of various cultural expressions. While pointing out the danger of assigning expressions of cultural identity to a *state* as opposed to a *nation*, the article surveys monuments in Nairobi. And it is with qualified confidence that *modernist*-looking monuments are considered cultural expressions of Kenya; they are simply symbols that try to gather the peoples into a modern collective – with (un)certain success.

The colonial authority assembled various monuments in an effort to imprint British identity; these are not in the style of *modernism*, though they were erected when Europe was experiencing the culture of *modernism*. The epitome is the statue of King George V. Post-colonial monuments, seeking to wipe off colonial identity, are also more *classical* and less *modernist*, bringing to the fore the paradox of a modern culture that does not employ a *modernist* style. Jomo Kenyatta's statue in Nairobi's City Square is the epitome of post-colonial monuments. Its mounting was the gesture *par excellence* of overthrowing British dominion. The only *modernist* monuments are those affiliated to President Daniel Moi. His regime had to fight to unite the citizens. A parallel is drawn between this political effort and the artistic style of choice.

A discussion of the non-prevalence of the *modernist* style in articulating modern identity follows. And, in conclusion, the article points out that though both colonial and post-colonial monuments are fabricated out of modern materials and techniques, they cannot be termed *modernist* works of art. *Modernism*, as a style that bespeaks a culture, is unavoidably underpinned on western cultures (European and American) of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Keywords:** modern national identity; modernism; post colonial identity; monuments.

### **The Modernist philosophy**

Modernism, as a philosophy with various cultural manifestations, flowered as a consequence of the social upheavals of the industrial revolution. It took place in Europe and North America beginning at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the

20<sup>th</sup>. Rebellious against the preceding Romantic movement, rebellious against the realistic expressions of art and ornate baroque architecture, modernism was just that – a revolt. And it was a revolt, not just against traditional forms of art, but also against traditional moral norms. It was an embrace of the overwhelming promise of the new technological advances.

And technological advances were not wanting: the automobile, the airplane, the telephone, radio, television and Hollywood's talking pictures not only reduced distances but packaged cultural mores to be televised far and wide. The early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed manifold technological advances. And it is no wonder that progressive modernists believed in the perfectibility of humankind.

Enlightenment through reason and truth was expected to free individuals from religious and secular authorities. Further, virtually everything could be submitted to human reason: traditions, customs, morals, even art. Moderns feel that the truth revealed through the reasoning process can be applied in the political and social spheres to correct problems and improve the socio-political condition of humankind. Modernism's goal is to create a new and better society.

Modernism, as an approach to life, work, and thought, believes in the seemingly absolute necessity of innovation. It is seen as post-traditional or post-medieval when society was emancipated from the hegemony of Christianity. As an intellectual approach, modernism is hostile to religion. It is, however, difficult to define philosophical modernism because it was never distilled and published. It is instead a pervasive current of thought asserting the non-existence of objective revelation from God. Faith (in God) is just a motion of the heart and all creeds, being mere opinions, are to be tolerated. Modernism introduces a radical division between faith and science; reason is bound to phenomena, faith to sentiment. The latest answer to philosophical modernism was given by Benedict XVI in his Regensburg address.

Modernism's intellectual underpinnings, both as a historical process and cultural phenomenon, emerged during the Renaissance period when the humanists revived the notion that man, rather than God, is the measure of all things. This developed into the modernist confidence in the potential of humans to shape their own individual destinies and the future of the world: not a misplaced belief seemingly, given the industrial revolution and the consequent urbanization and mass culture. Both produced the consumer society, with a shift in values where one is rated according to what one can buy rather than what he can produce.

The background to this shift in values was the 'higher criticism' of the Bible, Einstein's theory of relativity in physics, Freud's subconscious psychology and Darwin's evolutionary biology. Relativity in physics morphed into moral relativism. Freud's psychology shook the age-old understanding of the nature of human beings while evolutionary biology evolved into social Darwinism (the theoretical rationale for European imperialism).

European imperialism, in turn, introduced cultural modernism into Africa. And it would appear that the unstated assumption (or a question) of the present symposium is: has modernism achieved its goal by bettering life on the African continent?

## Challenges in analyzing modernism in Africa

A historicist approach to the phenomenon of modernism does little service to Africa. The continent had not lived through European Romanticism, or the Enlightenment, or the Christian hegemony. Africa was governed by different social norms and beliefs. And it was in the midst of these separate world views that European civilization burst onto the African continent. Not having experienced traditional European life, Africa could not rebel against it – the essence of modernism. Instead, African modernism has meant ‘westernization’, embracing European culture, beliefs, institutions and even art forms. It is perceptibly different. A discourse about modernism and the African landscape carries its own challenges.

In order to broaden the context of Euro-American modernism, other studies suggest an approach referred to as alternative modernities. These seek to mitigate the unqualified application of Eurocentric modernism. However, the discourses continue to mediate non-western contexts as secondary locations for the unfolding of the Eurocentric modernist drama. Africa is hardly allowed any agency in its own ‘modern’ history.

I will consider the evolution of national identity under the new modern state that was created by European imperialism. Nairobi, Kenya’s capital, is the case study: the justification being that the African city is an important site and symbol of social change. And because the spatial symbols with which we choose to identify ourselves are important in expressing the values we hold, examining Nairobi’s official symbolic space – its City Square – may help make meaning of this city and perhaps shed light on what influence (if any) modernism has had in its contemporary society.

‘Crafting a modern nation through monuments’ is a more apt title for this work. The nation is Kenya, and it is modern.<sup>1</sup> We can look at its formation either historically or culturally. Here I emphasize the cultural process: what is modern Kenyan identity and how is it expressed through the various arts? What codes have been embedded into the public monuments that line Nairobi’s foremost public space? Indeed, what values or messages are given voice through these works of art? These are the questions that lead to the formulation, ‘crafting a modern identity through monuments.’ Yet collective identity can be disturbingly imprecise!

## An insider’s perspective of national identity

The ethnic differentiation that persists in Kenya, 50 years after independence, the perceived lack of nationhood, is surprising to many. Yet the concern with social cohesion and collective identity is not unique to Kenya; it is a major feature of post-colonial discourses following the denigration suffered under the imperial management of divide-and-rule.

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<sup>1</sup> Here modern refers to the contemporary and not the cultural phenomenon that was experienced in Europe and North America.

National identity is anything but a precise term; it means different things to different people. To an outsider, grappling with a community he does not form part of, the term may be required to connote a democratic, transparent and clearly enunciated position of the community – fact you know, not fiction!

Perhaps this is because of the continued cultural hegemony of the imperial powers. For whether by design or default, the Eurocentric view continues to act as the universal canon, the touchstone of taste and value, the guarantor of academic worth. This would shift the focus to national identity within the Eurocentric interpretive framework, with all the weight of that continent's documented antiquity brought to bear. I consider this the outsider's perception. And while it would be foolhardy to gainsay its usefulness one must also acknowledge the creative limits imposed by this approach.

The insider's perspective is different; he has his own understanding of himself and of his people albeit couched in dearly held assumptions and prejudices. Whether these make his position false or are just part of who he is, is another problematic aspect of the term. This second sort of identity (the insider's view of himself) is a first-hand and lived experience, an ongoing process that acknowledges the sporadic, heroic and epic action while embracing the monotonous minutiae of day-to-day life. Monuments, in this framework, are sporadic and heroic.

This second view of identity can be careless of crystal clear definitions, of unambiguous historical starts-and-stops that can be so accurate as to verge on the hypothetical. Suffice it to say the insider view lacks careful manicuring; the weeding out of opinions while sifting facts, the aura bestowing exercise that confers terms like 'authenticity', 'corroborated research' and accepted 'historical narrative'. What it does not lack, however, is vibrancy.

In this presentation, I attempt an insider's perspective of Kenyan identity: a spontaneous autobiography as opposed to the more detached and balanced biography. Mine is a story within the realm of popular culture. And I have chosen public monuments, a broad-brush approach notwithstanding, to re-construct the national identity of modern Kenya.

This presentation is one person's partial view, an interpretive reconstruction that is therefore open to contestation and revision. It has no pretensions to being representative or absolute.

### **National, not state identity**

Public monuments showcase people's identity. They are used to reflect 'common-union' or community. And in choosing what to commemorate – in these monuments – the community delineates a collective actual and remembered experience; monuments are part and parcel of any collective's articulation. But do they articulate a national or state identity? Thin, indeed, is the dividing line between a *state* and a *nation*.

In demonstrating the distinction between these two, Pope John Paul II, a Polish national who lived through the annihilation of the Polish state had this to say:

nation designates a community based in a given territory and distinguished from others by its culture [...] the nation cannot be replaced by the state, even though the nation tends to establish itself as a state [...] still less is it possible to identify the nation with so-called democratic society [...] The nation is the ground on which the state is born [...].<sup>2</sup>

For an entity to qualify as a nation, that which is territorially circumscribed needs to be animated by a collective human experience aimed at a common goal. Only then does it denote a style and substance of life that depicts the heart of that nation. Territorial circumscription, important though it be, cannot comprise the sole defining characteristic; culture is significant. And it is what enables the nurturing of society and its identity. For Kenya to embrace or experience the culture of modernism, it needs to first be a nation; nations have cultures, while states are mere legal and institutional concepts.

The Kenyan state (not nation) was created in the infamous 1884–85 Berlin Conference, where haphazard boundaries were drawn over Africa. By administering a geographical boundary, the authorities loosely bound together 43 different ethnic communities, each with distinct social-linguistic traditions and a variety of material cultural artefacts. Tethering them to a common boundary, legally or otherwise, did not fuse them into one: nation, unlike state, is a more complex and shifting terrain, making it tricky to apply the cultural term *modernism* to Kenya. It is with qualified confidence that we consider modernist-looking monuments as cultural expressions of Kenyans. Perhaps they are better seen as symbols that attempt to gather disparate people into a nation. By equating modernism to *westernization*, this paper explores monuments in Nairobi that first molded a colonial then post-colonial Kenyan identity.

### **CBD: The heart of national identity**

In unraveling the identity of Kenya, monuments located in Nairobi's Central Business District (CBD) are singled out. CBD is the central or official public space in Nairobi – and by extension in Kenya. Why single out CBD? one may wonder. The answer necessitates disentangling the terms *place* and *space*; deciding whether they are identical, and if not, which between them is elemental to a people's identity.

SPACE is envisaged as the ubiquitous context – the *whereness* of reality – while a three-pronged attribute makes up PLACE: unique locale, its physicality, its assigned meaning and value. And it is this assigned meaning that transforms undifferentiated SPACE into PLACE-of-belonging or place of identity. Nairobi CBD forms the spatial context of the monuments. These, in turn, are part of the place-making process, constituting – though not exclusively – the meaning and value assigned to CBD.

Social constructs, like the nation-state of Kenya, are not contrived out of spatial vacuums; a society with its consequent identity and culture, is woven into spatial

<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millennium* (Rizzoli International Publications, 2005).

references. It is anchored on either mediate or immediate space. So to constitute PLACE, to establish association, affiliation, or identity, SPACE is indispensable. Living culture is nurtured and developed with reference to specific *whereness*.<sup>3</sup> CBD is the space where national identity i.e., meaning, value, and relation, are worked out. It is the repository of artefacts that enunciate national identity. The discourse of place and displacement is here located; a valid sense of national self is here sought, and recovery of vision and self-image is here hoped for.

### Establishing imperial PLACE: Colonial monuments

The colonial authority assembled various monuments together; those with a weightier message were placed closer to the heart of CBD – the city’s square. This square was designed – on paper at least – in the 1948 master plan for a colonial capital.<sup>4</sup> But it was actually laid out in 1935 when the High Court (now Supreme Court) and City Hall were built. Both buildings are colonial power in its imperial dimension and as the proximate local authority; the court, representing *Law and Order*, that rallying cry of *Pax Britannica*, while City Hall stands for immediate local government.

Kenya-Uganda sprung into being in 1895 with the official declaration of protectorate status. Kenya was later delineated from Uganda, to become a single entity known as Kenya Colony, in 1920. Previously, the country’s 43 ethnicities had not regarded themselves as one. They had no monuments – visual, performative or textual – to speak collectively for them. The new status marked not only the beginning of British rule, but also that of imprinting British identity – a task that was to last more than 50 years (c. 1900–1963). One of the tools for accomplishing imperial identity was the raising of monuments to monarchs and their achievements.

**Table 1:** Classification of the Colonial Monuments. The artistic style is indicated.

| Regime & Date |           | Monuments in CBD     | Year erected | Style<br>(Figurative or Abstract) |
|---------------|-----------|----------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| Colonial Era  | 1895–1963 | Queen Victoria       | 1906         | figurative                        |
|               |           | African War Memorial | 1928         | figurative                        |
|               |           | Lord Delamere        | 1946         | figurative                        |
|               |           | King George V        | 1945         | figurative                        |
|               |           | King George VI       | 1956         | figurative                        |

<sup>3</sup> Lydia Waithira Muthuma, “Political Identity in Nairobi’s CBD A Visual Exploration of Kenya’s capital city,” 2013, <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01206586>.

<sup>4</sup> Leonard William Thornton White, Leo Silberman, and Peter Ronald Anderson, *Nairobi, Master Plan for a Colonial Capital: A Report Prepared For the Municipal Council of Nairobi* (London: HM Stationery Office, 1948).

According to Table 1 above, Queen Victoria's was the first monument to a British monarch and was succeeded by that of George V. In 1910, George V (1865–1936) became king, gaining public respect during World War One. In 1935 he celebrated his silver jubilee, an occasion of great public rejoicing in the Empire. To mark this jubilee, his statue was installed in front of the Law Courts in Kenya Colony. The building was completed that same year. This statue, however, was pulled down and returned to Oxford, as independence (1963) drew close.

In 1936, George VI (1895–1952) ascended the throne unexpectedly following the abdication of his brother Edward VIII. He was emotionally drained by the political and economic hardships of the post Second World War Empire. WWII marked the beginning of the end of this vast Empire; it signaled the de-colonization of Africa. In 1952, *Mau Mau* activities forced the colonial government in Kenya to declare a state of emergency. The colony had started on the road to political independence.

According to *The Standard* newspaper George VI's fountain, bearing a commemorative plaque, was erected in 1956. The same newspaper suggests that this was in acknowledgment of having raised the municipality of Nairobi to city status. It further alleges that the plaque helped reassure the settler community amid the panic caused by the *Mau Mau*. Fearing possible vandalism, as independence (1963) drew close, the colonial government saw to it that the plaque was pulled down. The fountain was otherwise left intact.

An earlier statue of the African War Memorial or *Carrier Corps* had been put up in 1928. This was to commemorate the First World War from which the Empire emerged victorious. The exercise of raising war memorials was an empire-wide undertaking with no special focus on Kenya; Nairobi was just one more far-flung site for these war *askaris* (soldiers). Considering itself victorious in the First World War, Britain felt the need for an empire-wide celebration: erecting *askari* monuments was one way of acknowledging the colonies' efforts towards this victory. Kenya got its share of *askaris* in the *Carrier Corps* monument. These *carriers* were located in CBD not far from George V's statue.

Lord Delamere, the main colonizer in Kenya, was placed not in the middle of City Square but along its edge. He is a peer, not a monarch. So the hierarchy, in terms of location, is not surprising. Delamere had a lot to do with the day-to-day running of Kenya Colony. His statue was a present from his widow while she was mayor of Nairobi.

Queen Victoria, in Jeevanjee gardens, had been erected much earlier, in 1906, long before City Square was designed. Her memorial statue was a gift from Alibhai Jeevanjee, an Indian settler, who was active in the politics of the Colony. This statue is a little way from City Square, about a kilometer due north (see Figure 3 at the end of the article). And perhaps being a gift from an Indian merchant, or because of its position away from City Square, it was not pulled down at the moment of independence like the other two monarchs. Some attribute its survival to the fact that it resembled a religious representation of Mary the mother of God. Whatever the reason, the statue is still extant but has since been vandalized and removed (August 2015).

## Discourse of colonialism

Going by site and size, the epitome of colonial monuments was the statue of George V. It was located right in the middle of City Square. It was the centre-piece thanks to the visual distance and compelling focal point. Spectators from different vantage points found themselves gazing at this statue. George V was the focal point of City Square, just as he was the Empire's focal point. The square was designed to awe, to be a spectacle. The statue of George V was also designed to awe and to be a spectacle. It wouldn't be off the mark to attribute to it words employed in another corner of the Empire (Sydney, Australia) some 28 years earlier, to Queen Victoria, his mother:

[Her statue, like his, was] a celebration in song and spectacle [...] It was not only the Queen's longevity they were celebrating, not only remarkable progress of Western technology and science [...] but also, and most importantly, the spread of the British Empire itself to the point where it now subsumed one-quarter of the world's entire population [...].<sup>5</sup>

Although this statue, like the other four colonial monuments, is not rendered in the style of *modernism*, it was erected when Europe was experiencing the culture of *modernism*. Whether it contributed to fashioning the peoples of Kenya into a modern nation is debatable. What is less in doubt is that it brought imperial power – visibly – into Kenya, serving to assimilate the new territory into a conventional relationship with Britain.

Laragh Larsen<sup>6</sup> arguing, quite convincingly, that colonial monuments served to link the [minority] British settlers to their homeland, makes no comment about the Africans. For the indigenous African – the vast majority – these monuments expressed, no less eloquently, their colonized state. They signified the ushering in of *westernization* into Kenya.

Colonial monuments are the symbols that declared Kenya a 'modern' adjunct of the British Empire. How deep modern culture seeped into the peoples of Kenya is not a question to be answered in this paper. What is apparent is that they declared the arrival of modern culture into the land of Kenya regardless of their artistic style.

Looking at Figure 4, it is clear that colonial monuments were not crafted in a *modernist* style. They were more figurative than abstract, and from a Eurocentric approach would probably be referred to as *classical*. However, since they referenced another culture (not the majority African population) their stylistic niche becomes insignificant; whether *classical* or *modernist*, is a matter indifferent to the indigenous African – the vast majority. This stylistic nuance is perhaps useful to an 'outsider' perspective of national identity; to an insider, all European styles are simply seen as western or modern. And worn out as the debate may seem, it depicts an actual

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Slemon, "Monuments of empire: allegory/counter-discourse/post-colonial writing," *Kunapipi* 9, 3 (1987): 1–16.

<sup>6</sup> Laragh Larsen, "Re-placing imperial landscapes: colonial monuments and the transition to independence in Kenya," *Journal of Historical Geography* 38, 1 (2012): 45–56.



historical era encased in its ideas and expressions. What is of relevance is that subsequent post-colonial monuments were executed in the same style, as if to sustain the political dialogue by using the same artistic shorthand. Perhaps it is no accident that Jomo Kenyatta’s statue, which supplanted George V’s, is just as figurative and as classical. The sculptor of Kenyatta’s statue was British – born, bred, and educated.

Not surprisingly, colonial identity has been wiped off the grounds of Nairobi by removing all colonial monuments. The only exception is the African War Memorial or *Carrier Corps*.<sup>7</sup> The disappearance of colonial monuments can be likened to the symbolic lowering of the Union Jack; up goes the Kenyan flag and City Square gets a change of monuments, like getting a new suit of clothes.

**Table 2:** Classification of post-colonial monuments. The artistic style is indicated.

| Regime & Date                             |           | Monuments in CBD                 | Year erected | Style<br>(Figurative or Abstract) |
|---|-----------|----------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| Post-colonial 1<br>Jomo Kenyatta’s<br>Era | 1963-1978 | Jomo Kenyatta                    | 1964         | figurative                        |
|   |           | Jomo Kenyatta                    | 1973         | figurative                        |
|   |           | Kimathi (rejected)               | 1971         | figurative / stylised             |
|   |           |                                  |              |                                   |
| Post-colonial 2<br>Daniel Moi’s Era       | 1978-2002 | Peace, Love, Unity               | 1983         | abstract                          |
|   |           | *Uhuru monument<br>(outside CBD) | 1983         | abstract                          |
|   |           | Nyayo monument                   | 1988         | abstract                          |
| Post-colonial 3<br>Mwai Kibakis’s Era     | 2002-2013 | Dedan Kimathi                    | 2007         | figurative                        |
|   |           | Tom Mboya                        | 2011         | figurative                        |
|   |           |                                  |              |                                   |

According to Figure 8 above, post-colonial monuments, excepting those that belong to Moi’s era, are figurative. This makes them more *classical* and less *modernist*, just like their colonial antecedents. However, these monuments bespeak a modern nation-state regardless of their stylistic classification. And whether this is sufficient to brand them modern, is an open question. Just how deeply embedded a style is, into the peoples it emanates from and therefore purports to speak for, is a question for a different forum: we can have monuments, *modernist* in style, representing a culture that is unaware of and indifferent to *modernist* mores, tastes, and preferences. *Modernist* artefacts can be juxtaposed onto an immediate culture that is far removed from *modernism*. The opposite is also possible. In the case of post-colonial Kenya, the culture is modern, while the monuments are not quite *modernistic*.

<sup>7</sup> Anne-Marie Deisser, and Mugwima Njuguna, *Conservation of Natural and Cultural Heritage in Kenya* (London: UCL Press, 2016), 272.

## The era of Jomo Kenyatta: 1963–1978

Delamere Avenue was renamed Kenyatta Avenue in 1964. A statue of Jomo Kenyatta (c. 1889–1978) was erected outside the parliament in the same year. Later, in 1973, to mark ten years of independence, another statue of this ‘father of the nation’ was erected in City Square. It stands more-or-less on the site of the statue of King George V as Larsen<sup>8</sup> recounts. But this author understates the replacing of George V with Jomo Kenyatta; the poignant political and cultural overtones go unmentioned, yet this performance was as portent as lowering the Union Jack and replacing it with the Kenyan flag. It was the gesture *par excellence* of overthrowing British dominion.<sup>9</sup>

## 1978–2002: Moi’s era

Daniel Toroitich arap Moi, Kenya’s second president, assumed power in 1978 and survived an attempted coup d’état in August 1982. Although it was suppressed, disloyalty sunk deep. And what followed was an era of state repression. Not many expected Moi to be president for long; he was seen as a temporary leader – a mistaken assumption in light of his 24-year-long rule. Moi, aware of this perception and ever mindful of the failed coup, hardened his resolve to prove otherwise. He became intolerant of dissent, asserting his power and demanding that all pledge undivided loyalty and commitment to him. Thus was born his philosophy of peace, love and unity – *Nyayoism* – or ‘following in the footsteps’ (*Nyayo* is footstep in Kiswahili).

Shortly after the failed coup, in 1983 the Nyayo fountain of Peace, Love, and Unity was inaugurated in Uhuru Park. Larsen sees this as a central position, and from some perspectives it is. However, if City Square, Nairobi’s showroom, according to Nevanlinna,<sup>10</sup> is taken as the reference point, then the fountain skirts the CBD, making it somewhat periphery in reference to the official public square.

Although Larsen intimates that president Moi was more feared than respected, she falls short of citing this as the reason behind his choice of style. These monuments may be *modernistic* out of choice; political expedience dictated this choice. *Modernism* is not representational or figurative: Moi chose a *modernistic* style, perhaps fearing that mounting a likeness of himself in CBD would surely lead to vandalism from disloyal citizens. He was not the leader to rally the nation behind him; he did not carry sufficient popular support to have his figurative likeness etched either into Kenya’s symbolic space or Kenya’s collective memory.

Written testimony, in support of this opinion, would be mandatory when working within the parameters of an outsider’s approach to national identity. I can,

<sup>8</sup> Larsen, “Notions of Nation in Nairobi’s Nyayo-Era Monuments.”

<sup>9</sup> Lydia W. Muthuma, *Nairobi in pictures: political icons 1899–2000* (Nairobi: Focus Publications Ltd, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Vivian Bickford-Smith, Anja Kervanto Nevanlinna, *Interpreting Nairobi: The Cultural Study of Built Forms* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1996): 129–60.

however, state it confidently as the *vox populi* because not every sentiment of a nation is delivered in text. Cultures that rely on oral tradition, (and Kenya is one of them) employ body language, tone of voice and other performative devices to express their identity, displaying a myriad of nuance that written text can at best gloss over. Larsen, as an outsider, felt obliged to base her interpretation solely on the written word, on what has been published concerning these monuments. This is understandable. But, in Africa what is left unsaid, especially about an incumbent president, far outweighs written documents. Reliance on official text may actually paint an inaccurate picture of the feeling on the ground. It may satisfy outsider perception while misrepresenting insider feelings and leanings.

### The era of Mwai Kibaki: 2002–2013

Kenya's third president, Mwai Kibaki, redirected the monumental conversation to the independence narrative by commissioning a statue of Dedan Kimathi (1920–1956). According to Terry Hirst<sup>11</sup> the sculpture of Kimathi, the foremost *Mau Mau* leader, was to stand outside the State Law Office in Sheria House. The then-Attorney General did not approve it, and it was never installed. This was in 1971. Another account (Standard newspaper) has it that officials of Nairobi's City Council wanted to re-assign the fountain of King George VI to a memorial of Kimathi. But protests from London, suggesting that the move was illegal, ensured that the statue was never installed.

It was not until September 2003, with the unbanning of the *Mau Mau* movement, that the president could commission a second statue of Kimathi. Annie Coombes<sup>12</sup> complains that it took over 40 years to commemorate this leader, yet he was pivotal in the drama of Kenya's independence. She alleges that despite there being a number of individuals who might merit the honor [of hero worship] the first 'hero'... selected as an icon of national importance was Dedan Kimathi. Valid as this argument may be, Coombes appears unaware of the unstated visceral feeling attached to the *Mau Mau* struggle by many Kenyans, especially the Kikuyu. Putting up a statue of Kimathi is an attempt at closure; closure of the unresolved debate about the 'Land and Freedom Army'. Those who fought for land that was 'stolen' by the colonials never got it back despite the attainment of independence. This statue acknowledges the landless who wander the urban space without any form of employment or livelihood. Kimathi's statue is not too distant from being claimed by the *Mungiki* (seen as a quasi terror group). Again, this is a level of identity that academic research may not easily uncover because it would consider the opinion uncorroborated, biased or mere tribal politics. Kimathi's second statue was installed on Kimathi Street in 2006.

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<sup>11</sup> George Ogola, *Popular Media in Kenyan History: Fiction and Newspapers as Political Actors* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Annie E. Coombes, "Monumental histories: commemorating Mau Mau with the statue of Dedan Kimathi," *African Studies* 70, 2 (2011): 202–23.

The only other statue of significance is Tom Mboya's. He was prominent in the politics of independence and was shot dead in Nairobi in 1969. As a national martyr, he is commemorated, not on Tom Mboya Street but on Moi Avenue, close to the spot where he was shot dead. His statue was installed in 2011.

It is interesting to note that monuments erected in 2002–2013 reverted to the figurative style of the colonial regime and Kenyatta's regime. It would appear that a figurative-representational style is preferred when the populace is engaged in the debate, when the discourse is about specific people and their specific contribution to 'founding Kenya'. In contrast, when the subject matter is ideological, like the case of *Nyayo* monuments, an abstract style comes in handy. Moi clearly articulated the governor's ideology to the governed; the salient feature, in his monuments, is not popular debate or discussion. What also stands out is that these non-figurative (abstract and ideological) monuments are not inside CBD. They have been erected somewhat (out in the cold) while the popular making of modern Kenya is being discussed within the confines of the CBD.

### **Conclusion: The discourse of post-colonialism**

Just as colonial monuments implanted the British Empire into Kenya, post-colonial monuments uprooted this identity. They replaced colonial status with symbols of independence, starting with the two monuments depicting Jomo Kenyatta as 'the father of the nation': one outside Parliament Buildings and the other in City Square.

The arduous task of weaving disparate ethnicities into one nation is captured in the *modernist* monuments of Daniel arap Moi: the Peace, Love and Unity fountain together with the *Nyayo* mountain. These are non-representational, abstract and ideological.

Monuments affiliated to Mwai Kibaki's era, the statues of Dedan Kimathi and Tom Mboya, are as representational as the colonial ones and those of Jomo Kenyatta. They pick out individual heroes of the nation for admiration and perhaps emulation.

Post-colonial monuments are fabricated with modern materials and techniques. Their subject matter articulates the identity of modern Kenya. However – with the exception of Moi's – they cannot be termed *modernist* works of art. *Modernism*, as a cultural expression, is necessarily underpinned on EuroAmerican cultures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.





**Figure 3:** Nairobi Central Business District (CBD) showing the location of colonial monuments. CBD western boundary: pre-1950 rail line. Southern boundary: Haile Selassie Avenue and eastern: Moi Avenue. City Square is shaded purple; source: google maps redrawn by the author (public domain).



**Figure 4:** Statue of King George V. map in figure 3 above shows its location, right in the middle of City Square; source: Nairobi Railway Museum (public domain).



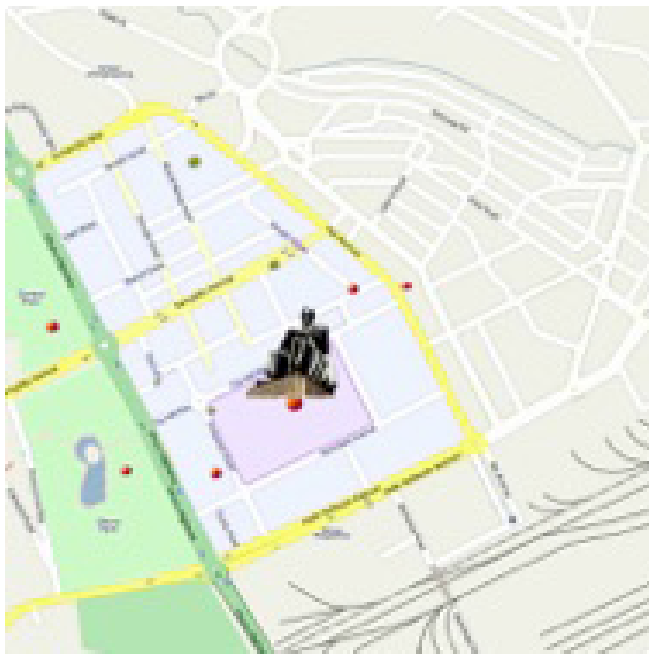
**Figure 5:** Empty fountain where a plaque (shown by the red ring) of King George VI had been mounted. Its location, shown in the map (figure 3 above) is at the edge of City Square; source: author (public domain).



**Figure 6:** Nairobi Central Business District (CBD) showing the location of post-colonial monuments. CBD western boundary: Uhuru Highway. The railway line was re-directed in 1950, expanding CBD towards the west. Southern boundary: Haile Selassie Avenue and eastern: Moi Avenue City Square is shaded purple; source: google maps redrawn by the author (public domain).



**Figure 7:** Bringing down the statue of George V. 1964; source: *East Africa Standard* newspaper (public domain).



**Figure 8:** In 1973, the statue above, Jomo Kenyatta's, replaced George V.; source: Google map redrawn by the author (public domain).





**Figure 9:** Peace, Love, and Unity monument in Uhuru Park; source: author (public domain).



**Figure 10:** Nyayo monument in Central Park; source: Google (public domain).



**Figures 11a and 11b:** Dedan Kimathi. This second statue was eventually placed on Kimathi Street in 2006. Many (e.g. Hirst) have criticized it because it was erected over 40 years after his death. Besides, the uniform on it is purported to be British military fatigues; Kimathi fought the British. The artist (inadvertently) dressed the hero in the garb of those he was fighting. Others claim that it is too small for the site it was accorded, overshadowed by the surrounding buildings; it leaves the taste of ‘too little, too late’. On the right is a man ‘celebrating’ beside this statue. He could be one of the landless or unemployed people who feel vindicated by the statue; source: *Daily Nation* newspaper (public domain).



**Figure 12:** Tom Mboya in Nairobi's CBD; source: Google (public domain).

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