

Nkrumaism in Sculptural Archetypes of Nkrumah

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Abstract

This paper explores the art-historical contexts cum political ramifications of Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's preachment on his honorific sculptural archetypes produced by both foreign and local sculptors; and draw renewed attention to the iconic freestanding imperial portraits and reliefs of Nkrumah. It also attempts to explore the use of coinage and other sculptural imageries in constructing and signaling politico-cultural nationalism and identity of Nkrumah.

Keywords: Nkrumaism, sculptural imageries, coinage iconography, dress culture, identity

1. Introduction

The scenographic backdrop of African Ghanaian ethnic sculptural art reveals art traditions full of symbolic formal conventions, conceptualizations, disproportions and functional essence (Fosu, 2009). After 83 years of British colonial rule and its resultant formal school education, these ethnic sculptural ideational renditions were not wiped out completely but resulted in blended transcultural techniques and styles that produced fresh dynamic creations of representational and non-representational imageries. Realistic sculptural portraiture production of Ghanaian heroes is a product of formal education. In effect, sculptures of Ghanaian heroes began to surface with realistic tendencies. One of such monuments of significance to Africa is the imperial portraits of Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah.

As an African memorable positive polemicist, he articulated scientific socialism ideals imbued with full spectrum of critical constructive thinking necessary to devour all aspects of colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism that was and still continues to plague Africa. These consistent ideological policies contained in his public orations, theoretical writings, stated ideas and principles before, during and after his preempted rule in Ghana became known as 'Nkrumaism' (Nkrumah, 1962a). Nkrumah's preachment imparted on the methodological positions, thematic construct and visual cultural sense that helped in shaping the historical trajectory of contemporary Ghanaian sculptural art. For nothing at all, the pioneering giants of post-colonial arts (Fosu, 2009) from which forerunner art educators and professional practicing Ghanaian artists emerged were Nkrumaistic proselytes. Kofi Antubam, for instance, became a nationalist state artist credited with the creation of the parliamentary mace, the presidential seat, and besides, was the foremost artist to integrate adinkra motif design in Ghanaian sculptural art.

This paper explores the art-historical contexts cum political ramifications of Nkrumah's preachment on his honorific sculptural archetypes produced by both foreign and local sculptors; and draw renewed attention to the iconic freestanding imperial portraits of Nkrumah and his coinage iconography in constructing and signaling politico-cultural nationalism and identity.



Plate 1: Detail of Nkrumah's statue. Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, Accra. 2013.
Photographed by author. It was unveiled in July 1 1992 by Former President J. J. Rawlings.

2. Iconographic Search

Many historians have theorized on the role of tangible visual symbolic artefacts in popularizing and signifying national historic culture, nation-building and absolute socio-political independence. Some of the sculpted visual artefacts used in pursuing that agenda include images on coins, figurines, murals, statues, architectural sculpture and effigies. In Africa, most of the then newly independent states were troubled with problem of unifying (Fuller, 2008) the pluralistic ethnic populace formerly ruled by kings (that were reduced to chiefs so as to lessen their supremacy for the parochial interest of the colonialists). Nkrumah faced the problem of popularizing Ghana, a country of over ninety multi-ethno-linguistic groups to the world (Ghana Statistical Service, 2009). But he courageously approached the problem by dealing with the indigenous contrasting maternities – he took the

traditional positive cultural democracy and blended them with material and modernists development-oriented ideology. There was a massive African cultural resurgence as a result of the non-statutory and statutory cultural policies he advanced in combating intellectual colonization and promoting cultural liberation. Nkrumah's cultural policies impacted on the cultural institutions including the National Theater Movement concept, the Arts Council of Ghana and the Institute of Arts and Culture (Botwe-Asamoah, 2005) and provided intellectual guideline for the Institute of African Studies. For instance, the establishment of the Institute of African Studies in the University of Ghana sought to the "re-interpretation and a new assessment of the factors" which constituted Africa's past, and develop essential progressive dynamic African society rather than subordinating African history as "minor and marginal theme within the framework of imperial history" (Nkrumah, 1963, p.2) and invigorate the search and publication of African arts and cultural historicity.

3. Coinage Iconography

Sculptural art was one of the ways through which he battled with the problem. He commissioned sculptors to execute symbolic sculptural images of himself to resound and create an indelible impression of the historical independence of the state. To him, using powerful sculptural imagery was the best option in demonstrating to the many Ghanaians who could not read and write at the time (Nkrumah, 1957) that Ghana was really an independent state. A poignant iconographic relief of Nkrumah (plate 2) in profile circumscribed with the Latin inscription *Civitatis Ghanensis Conditor* that translate 'Founder of the State of Ghana' appeared on coinage that intensify the silent proclamatory propaganda of Ghana's symbolic nationalism and true independence from the shackles of colonialism. National currencies, according to Helleiner (1998), are powerful nationalist imagery that construct a sense of collective memory and tradition; is an efficient communal social communicative tool that contributes to notions of popular sovereignty and create a sense of communal national belongingness. Nkrumah's monetary coinage imagery was to signify total monetary independence and a way to eliminate the image of the British Monarch on the nation's currency.



Plate 2: Coinage showing reliefs of Nkrumah in 1958, 1965 and 1960. These are coinage he used in signifying that the "black man is of managing his own affairs". The introduction of his image on the coinage replaced that of the British Monarch on the nation's currency.



Plate 3: Facial details of Nkrumah's statue.
Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, Accra. 2013. Photographed by author

On July 19 1965, his administration introduced the decimal currency, cedis and pesewas as replacement of the then British pounds, shillings and pence. He was panting for social and economic independence succinctly captured in his independence phraseology in 1957 that 'the black man is capable of managing his own affairs'. The complete redenomination of Ghana's currency in 1958 created a problematical duo: his detractors accused him of a self-imposing messianic dominance, portraying himself as the only founder of the nation; and also generated what Fuller (2008, p. 528) described as "syntactical misunderstanding about the wording on the new currency" a problem that forced the Bank of Ghana on 25th July 1958 to issue a press release convincing the nationals to accept the currency as a legal statutory tender in payment of any amount. To explore the rationale behind the use of the Latin syntax on a currency used by a people of a handful literate at the time is beyond the scope of this paper, however the July 2007 redenomination of the Ghana's currency by Kuffour's administration, though did not introduce any Latin syntax still creates transactional problems for a section of both literate and illiterate Ghanaian nationals.

Nkrumah's overthrow in 1966 led to the removal of his minted head imagery on the nation's coinage on February 17 1967 by General J. A. Ankrah, the leader of the then military regime. Since then, there has been monetary iconographic politics of uncertainties in representing Nkrumah's imagery on Ghana's coinage till now. In 2002 his image reappeared together with the 'Big Six' on the nation's highest banknote denomination (GH¢ 50) and other subsequent banknotes during the Kuffour administration, perhaps as a way to justify to some extent that other sons of the nation also joined in the fight to the road to independence. Anyimah-Ackah (2010, p.29) says Ghana should not "prostitute and devalue his worthy name in our overzealous desire to accord him with honours" since heaps of honours have been accorded him over other meritorious compatriots. The 2008 Atta-Mills led National Democratic Congress (NDC) administration who took over power from the Kuffour led New Patriotic Party (NPP) reconstructed a pure Nkrumaistic monetary iconographic policy on the newly introduced Two Ghana cedis (GH¢ 2) banknote. This, among other things, was to reaffirm their dedication and extra-corporal significance to walking the Nkrumaistic monetary iconographic path and to demonstrate their belief in the social democratic principles of Nkrumaism.

4. Statue Iconography

Facing the rising sun and the direction of Ghana's Independence Square is probably the most outstanding polysemous iconographic statue of Nkrumah (plate 1) rendered in a vigorous marching pose with a fully stretched hand in forward movement above the shoulder pointing to his proposed glorious dreamland of African political unification where there is a common African currency, market, citizenship, central bank, inter-states African communication and transportation linkage — through airways, roadways and waterways. In his inaugural speech as the first chancellor of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology on 29th November 1961, he resounded this vision saying "All Africa is moving closer and closer together. Doubtless it

will finally find its existence in a union of African States... Ghana and Africa must look forward and ahead.” Parading through the edges of this brilliant African unification thought of the twentieth century, he outlined the best possible procedural pragmatic steps necessary in leading to the successful manifestation of the set goals. Among these outlines was rapid transformational education rather than the ivory tower concept of colonial education in African soils that does not necessarily meet the needs and aspiration of the African people. Embedded in Nkrumah’s productive educational policies was a kind of training that would produce for Africa the best human resource including strong minded engineers who will be able to develop revolutionary methods of transport capable to connect African cities and states; produce experts capable of constructing “modern communication networks within Ghana and across the whole continent” (Nkrumah 1961, p.14), experts who will tap and develop Africa’s unequalled potential hydraulic power; and agricultural scientists who must make Africa’s soil fertile including even the desert. All these vibrant nation-building ideas from a true-blue pan-Africanists doyen are deftly captured in statues of him that, in my mind, epitomizes the complete social, ideological and psychological intention of Nkrumah, a phenomenon that Leonardo Da Vinci (Croix, Tansey and Kirkpatrick, 1991, p. 635 - 636) admits is uneasy to achieve. The extra-terrestrial momentum with which the figure orchestrates the metaphorical military marching dance, the energetic clinched fist that hangs down detached from the body and the well-proportioned body politic leaves symbolic registers and allegorical interpretative maneuvering of the figure’s stance (plate 1). A full macroscopic reflection of the figure’s facial details (plate 3) reveals its epic monumental distant gaze and impressive depressions free from forged artificiality, typifying both superficial and hidden interpretative comfortable familiarity of Nkrumah, a most celebrated great African mind for a century and over. A unique feature of this statue is its celestial personification and multivalent credible reality of compositional coherence. The gentle opening of the mouth (plate 3) suggests his invigorative oratory fecundity, a powerful expression that engages viewers in making a thoughtful visual analysis of the figure and casts the minds back to one of his famous expressions, “We face neither east nor west, we face forward.” To him forward developmental movement is not a matter of geographical location but being among and/or ahead of developed economies in the world. “What has taken other peoples and nations centuries to achieve” he says to Ghana and the entire African continent that “we have to carry out in a decade or a generation.” (Nkrumah 1961, p.1)

Adding to the rhythmical vitality of the work, is the soft simplified voluminous folds of the seemingly toga costuming style worn over the round-neck short sleeve shirt creating fresh dynamism of unparalleled linear rays from the base of the work and obscured at the shoulder by a simulated verticality of bulky folds of the garment (plate 1). Apparently, the separation of body and decorous drapery orchestrated by the figure’s striding posture enforces its intended mood and sense of movement. Suspended in midair is the exaggerated index finger (plate 4) summing up the panoply of the figural gesticulations. In a forward direction, the index finger points out the perceived futuristic commanding height of the African continent, should innovative and productive hard work rules the life of Africans. The compositional rationale of the figure’s costume connotes the dress cultural politics Nkrumah waged in redeeming and reconstructing Africa’s Ghana cultural dress identity and nationalism. He appeared in a related costume in 1957 at Commonwealth Nations assembly in London and, on several occasions on various national platforms. Declaring Ghana’s independence with tears of joy in Accra, Nkrumah and his fellow pan-Africanist compatriots were all costumed in fugu and shirts with trousers, blending indigenous costume with contemporary fashions.



Plate 4: Detail of the index finger of Nkrumah's statue.
Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, 2013. Accra.
Photographed by author.



Plate 5: Nkrumah's statue as found at Ghana's Old Parliament House. This statue was produced by Nicola Cataudella in 1956. It was the first heroic statue of Nkrumah that signify Ghana's independence. Its duplicate is mounted at Kulungugu, where he narrowly escaped a bomb assassination attack.



Plate 6: Nkrumah's statue located at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. 2013. Photographed by author. It is found at the main entry way to the campus of the University. The statue was produced in 2010 to honour Nkrumah for his achievements.

Commissioned from Nicola Cataudella, an Italian sculptor, in 1956 (Hess, 2000), Nkrumah's first freestanding monumental statue (plate 5) originally positioned in front of Ghana's old Parliament House wears a costume which I call 'independence dress'. According to Botwe-Asamoah (2005, p.138) this costuming symbolizes a national break away from colonialism. Nkrumah explains that 'I am sure the Queen will understand that many of my people still do not believe that we are truly independent. Some of them even expect the Queen to come and crown me' (Nkrumah 1957, p.12). His statue was, therefore, a symbolic icon to preach Ghana's independence to the nationals as well as promoting the use of made in Ghana clothing. Serving as a beacon of dress cultural visual aesthetic order, his cabinet were often rooted in modernized indigenous dress styles.

Towering to an approximate height of 6.09 metres, the figure assumes a mimetic counterbalanced contraposto pose uncovering its evocative oratory masculine characteristic power and poignant anxiety (plate 5). In a solemn salutatory posture, one hand is raised above the head while the other firmly grips a walking-stick as the right foot gently steps forward. The contradictory postural rendition of the hands creates a dynamic diagonal dance resulting in a playful corresponding stylization of this scholarly activist sculpture of Nkrumah as in plate 5, 6 and 7. Adding to the exteriorization of the real messianic salvific disposition of the African political genius is the

walking-stick held in the hand that gives him a biblical shepherd appearance. No wonder the statue carries one of his saying: "Seek ye first the political kingdom and all other things shall be added unto it."

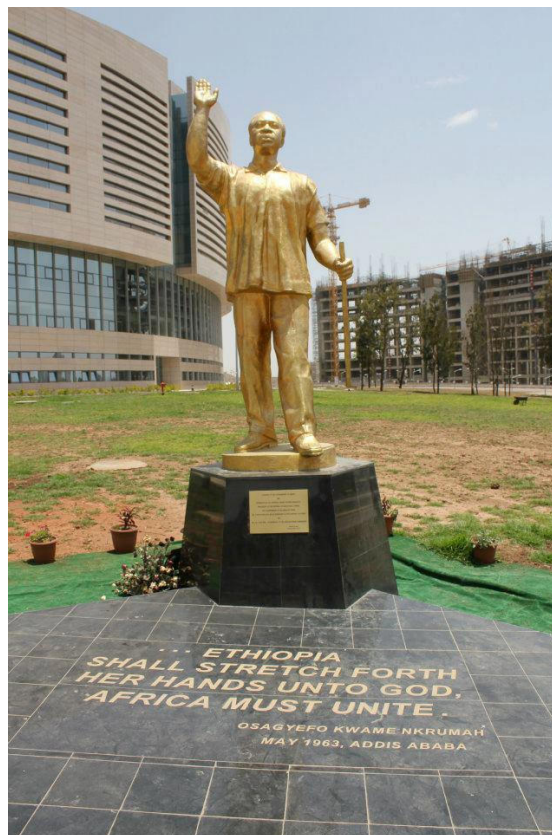


Plate 7: Nkrumah's statue found at African Union Office in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
African leaders honoured the memory of the founder and first President of Ghana, Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah, with a magnificent statue at the forecourt of the African Union (AU) building in Addis Ababa on January 28 2012.

A similar statue (plate 5) of him was mounted at Kulungugu in the Bawku West District of the Upper East region where he narrowly escaped death in a bomb assassination plotted on 11th August 1962 on his return from a visit to President Maurice Yameogo of Burkina Faso. The statue at that site serves as a memorial to that unfortunate tragic event including the demise of the innocent school child and others who lost their lives instead of Nkrumah, the targeted 'political enemy'. Cataudella's iconographic representation (plate 5) of Nkrumah at the old Parliament House in Accra clearly manifests in the expression of the same subject matter mounted in Ethiopia (plate 7). The raised head, hand with opened waving hand and rigorous left foot advanced are more pronounced than Cataudella's, perhaps showing more optimistic future. Though Agbeko (2012, p.8) critiques that copyist idea as a "pathetic copy of a once existing powerful, sculptural rendition of Nkrumah at the old parliament building in Accra", the puerile characteristics of the arms, the facial contours, the upward gaze and the cephalic orientation seen in both renditions evoke fresh reminiscence of Nkrumah's dream in making Africa a veritable paradise of abundance and satisfaction. It caution African leaders on strings attached to foreign aids since they usually retard Africa's progressive forward movement than the intended development. He cautioned that "When African states run helter skelter to outside powers for aid, they compromise their independence of thought and action... I have made it clear that as far as Ghana is concerned, we want trade not aid. But if any aid does come to us it must come on our conditions." (Nkrumah 1962b, p.19)

The Kotoka led joint military and police coup d'état on February 24 1966 while Nkrumah was on a peace mission trip to Hanoi in North Vietnam, ousted him as a president. During this coup his heroic statue (plate 5) looming over the city, was symbolically vandalized (plate 8) by the enraged multitude to mark the end of his rule. In the view of Dr. Don Arthur (pers. comm), since that statue was destroyed, it is justified to produce its postural simulacrum, hence, its duplicate model reappearance in Ethiopia. This bronze statue of Kwame

Nkrumah mounted at the forecourt of African Union (AU) edifice in Ethiopia (plate 7) was unveiled by the late President of Ghana, Evans John Atta-Mills and assisted by the then outgoing AU chairman, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, president of Congo and Dr. Jean Ping on January 28 2012. Inscribed in golden colour on a contrasting black marble cemented to the pedestal is what is believed to be the last of Nkrumah's greatest historic words: "Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands unto God, Africa must unite" (1963).

As a charismatic leader who was in the process of reconstructing and redefining indigenous Ghanaian dress styles, the coinage (plate 2) and the monumental freestanding sculptures of him made during his rule were either costumed in toga style or fugu and shirt combinations. His dress fashion campaign ambassador, Hannah Cudjoe, according to Allman (2004, 145) said "Let your fashion be in line with our Ghanaian costume." Though he occasionally wore Eastern and Western clothing styles, Nkrumah preferred to be represented in local fashion. This was not an attempt to defeat the inevitability of global dress culture but to portray Ghanaian dress culture, develop the textile industry as well as announce to the world the positive impact of Ghana's independence on the African continent. The costuming of Nkrumah's monumental sculpture mounted at the main entryway to the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology is a matter of figurative ambiguity. Even after his rule, all state sculptural monuments made to celebrate his life and works were not depicted in such a costume. However, the 5-man team of sculptors (L.Y. F. Lee Nukpe, J. K. Asare-Tettey, F. Annor Anim, K. Opoku-Bonsu, E. Bodjawah and E. Obeng Bonsoo) used costuming to achieve a modern dress culture compositional rationale that solidly acknowledges the Nkrumaistic dress politics ideology and iconic compositional pride of his era. His overseas education together with itinerary global trotting experiences placed Nkrumah in better position to choose the most appropriate dress to showcase the real Ghanaian African personality. His intentional preference in selecting indigenous costuming has justifiable grounds in pushing forward Africa's Ghana cherished dress cultural identity.



Plate 8: Remains of the 1966 vandalized bronze statue of Nkrumah.
Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, Accra. 2013. Photographed by author

Saka Acquaye, a multi-talented Ghanaian artist produced a more symbolic representational facial details of Nkrumah yet captured the semblance. He skillfully indented the temples and the nasal bridge of the face, an

expression that generates a slightly bulging forehead of the figure with a highly charged emotional quality (plate 10). The figure assumes an almost superlative pensive mood, a suggestibility of a great critical thinker. A powerful seemingly imbricated texture armours the work with figurative anatomy of anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist myth-making despite the iconographic costume ambiguity. The mouth receives subtle prominence while the eyes look straightforward adding to the figure's thoughtful appearance.

Located in Ghana National College, one of the second cycle schools in Cape Coast, is Opoku-Mensah's model of the same subject. He creates observable stylistic historical realities of the figure in amazement. Wearing a dramatic aghast facial gesture, the demeanour is depicted by its frontality of pose, wrinkled bridge of the nose, raised eyebrow and distant cursoriness (plate 11). Subjecting Opoku-Mensah's presentation to thorough scrutiny reveals characteristics of Nkrumaistic iconic dress though the facial fleshiness of the figure inhibits a more striking Nkrumaistic ideal.



Plate 9: The sepulchre guarded by the statue of Nkrumah.
Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, Accra 2013.
Photographed by author



Plate 10: Saka Acquaye's Bust of Nkrumah. (Source: Kojo Fosu, 2008).



Plate 11: Bust of Nkrumah (Front left to right: front and side view).
Ghana National College, Cape Coast. 2013. Photographed by author.
It was sculpted by Isaac Opoku-Mensah in 1999.

If the number '3' has any numerological significance on his political life, then, he received a triad burial. He was first buried in Guinea in May 1972 after his painful demise in Bucharest hospital in Romania on April 27 1972, reburied at Nkroful, his birthplace in Ghana on July 7 1972 and finally at the very spot where he declared that "the independence of Ghana is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent" on March 6 1957. Like the colossal Egyptian sphinxes, the figure (plate 1) serves as a guarding gateway that ushers visitors to the symbolical sepulchre (plate 9) where his mortal remains rest. The sepulchre is housed with a symbolic quadrupled sword-like architectural sculpture with an embossed black star superimposed at the epicentre. It was unveiled on July 1 1992 by Ex-president Rawlings in memory of Nkrumah's hard won fight over the tyrannical powers of the colonialists. Situated in Accra at the Mausoleum named after him, the mimetic physiognomy of his statue carries multifarious figurative ontological paradoxes of an action-oriented man – full deeds and words.

Delving into Nkrumah's life and speeches with a critical account, Tanzania's President Mwalimu Julius Nyerere described Nkrumah as "the greatest African whose every word was a prophecy" in a speech he delivered in Nigeria in 1992. Studying the politico-cultural philosophy and the formulated policies of Nkrumah and his obsession with African unification idea, Fuller (2008, p. 520) refers to him as 'the living personification of the Ghanaian nation-state' and stalwart of the Non-Aligned Movement. BBC listeners at the turn of the century voted him 'The African of the Millennium'.

It could be deduced from the above that both Ghanaian and foreign sculptors attempted to capture the Nkrumaistic characteristics in Nkrumah's sculpture. To achieve a real Nkrumaistic iconography, symbolic semblance and the most preferred costuming of Nkrumah when was alive are necessary as explored by some of the sculptors. Following his ideals and principles represented in iconic imageries of him, there is no doubt that he is a peerless African liberation champion.

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